

# FOSTERING PRAYER IN YOUTH GROUP

Sarah West shares the approach she has used with her youth group to help them develop a passion for praying together.

## MODELLING: KEEP IT SIMPLE

If the youth pastor and/or youth leaders are praying long and complex prayers, it can put a silent pressure on the youth to conjure up 'fancy' or 'impressive' prayers rather than feeling comfortable speaking from the heart. Instead, leaders should try and keep their prayers short and to the point, leaving out any long twisty or intellectual words. Save this for your next theology essay. *Passage to ponder: Matthew 6:5-8*

## FOCUS: ONE SENTENCE OR ONE CONCEPT

As an extension from the last point, try encouraging youth to think of one sentence or one concept/prayer point they want to express in a group prayer context. If you give the youth a moment to think about what they might like to pray and also verbally set the same 'standard' for prayer across the group, this will give them security in what is expected of them but also confidence that they *can* pray! They'll probably be thinking, '*Hey, I could do that... Maybe this whole praying thing isn't so scary after all.*' As we know, Jesus sets a simple and *straight-to-the-point* structure for prayer. Why not embrace it! *Passage to ponder: Matthew 6:9-13* Additionally, you can work some teaching in about the Lord's prayer and how it is structured. This can help guide personal prayer. I also find the ACTS acronym helpful: *Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving & Supplication.*



## STRUCTURE: SHOULDER TAPPING

In a group prayer context, there should always be a safety net for those who just feel straight up uncomfortable. These youth might be newbies, the painfully shy type or somewhere in between. For the 'shoulder tapping' method, have youth sit in a circle. Before you begin, explain clearly which direction the prayer chain will travel (clockwise or anti-clockwise) and reassure the group that if anyone does not want to pray, they can tap the shoulder of the person next to them. Have a leader (or youth if they feel comfortable) begin the prayer (using simple language as discussed above). This enables those who do not want to pray a safe 'way out' that doesn't disrupt or discourage the rest of the group i.e. by saying 'pass' or something to that effect.

## APPLICATION: LAYING HANDS

Once the youth group is comfortable with the above concepts, they could be ready to apply their new found confidence in prayer for a specific person/need. Laying hands in prayer is a biblical, powerful practice and creates a sense of unity and fellowship. In the same way the 'shoulder tapping' system works, have a group of youth stand or sit around a person they wish to pray for and outline that if anyone feels uncomfortable praying out loud, they can shoulder-tap the person next to them. Because there is a person in the middle of the circle, encourage the youth that if they don't want to pray out loud, to pray in their hearts. This will make the person in the middle feel more secure. Have the youth place one hand on the person in the middle (this keeps the other hand free to shoulder tap if they need to). *Remember to ask the person in the middle if it is okay to lay hands. If they feel uncomfortable with it, the youth can outstretch their hands towards the person without touching them.* Once again, have a leader or confident youth begin after asking the person in the middle what they would like the youth to pray for. If the explanation is long winded, it might help to summarize points to pray for before your group begins.

**RESOURCED!**  
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TRIED & TRUE RESOURCES FOR ANGLICAN YOUTH MINISTRIES IN NZ

**Fostering Prayer in Youth Group**  
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<http://www.anglicanyouth.org.nz/tools/training/fostering-prayer-in-youth-group>

