

Prayer in a Digital World: Using New Technology to Enhance Prayer

By Peter Bierer



Purpose:

We are often asked to silence our phones during prayer services, but what if prayer experiences could be enhanced by new media and technology? In this session participants will explore the positive and negative aspects of using technology in prayer and develop ways of utilizing technology to create relevant prayer experiences for the 21st Century. This session is best suited for group sizes of 10 – 50 participants.

Session at a Glance

7:00 PM	Welcome and Introductions
7:05 PM	Opening Prayer
7:10 PM	Prayer and Technology: Pros & Cons
7:25 PM	There's an App for That!
7:40 PM	Prayer Builder
8:10 PM	Presentations
8:25 PM	Announcements and Refreshments
8:30 PM	Good Night!

Extend the Session (1-2 hours)

Invite participants to begin building their digital prayer resource. Use the following free applications to create resources:

- **App Builder:** Mobincube www.mobincube.com
- **Website Builder:** Weebly www.weebly.com
- **Music/Audio:** GarageBand (Apple) / Audacity (Universal, download at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/>)
- **Video Creators:** www.animoto.com (online Free or subscription), iMovie (Apple)
- **Image:** Instagram, Tumblr.com, www.CreationSwap.com (for free images)

After participants have planned out their project, invite them to use these tools or any others that they may already be aware of to develop their project.

*If participants need help or want to do something beyond your skill level, instruct them to search online for video tutorials that pertain to their questions.

Note to Leader: Consider making the projects available to parishioners or community members by posting links to the finished products on your website or social media network.

Extend the Session 2: Tweet Your Petitions! (5 minutes)

Consider ending the session by inviting participants to “tweet” their prayer petitions by tagging your Twitter ID in their message. Use HootSuite’s HootFeed to display the prayers on the projector screen. To set this up, see **Resource 2 HootFeed Prayer Instructions**.

Invite participants to gather in small groups. Make sure at least one or two participants has a mobile device that can connect to Twitter, and that at least one participant has a Twitter account. Before you close the session with the Lord’s Prayer, invite groups to Tweet their petitions for the world, issues identified during the session, for one another, and any personal prayers they want to be made known. As each prayer appears on the screen, read it out loud and invite participants to respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Materials needed

- Projector, laptop/computer, screen, computer speakers
- Newsprint
- Colored Markers
- Pens
- Blank paper
- Copies of **Handouts 1 Prayer Basics** for each participant
- Copies of **Handouts 2 Prayer Builder Instructions** for each participant
- Poster Paper – one per group
- Items for the prayer table: colorful table cloth, candle, cross/crucifix, and bible.
- Nametags, sign-in sheets, etc. for registration table

Prepare in Advance:

1. Select one of the three minute retreats available through Loyola Press at the link for the site below. Prepare a young person or team of youth to read the slides and pause between slides allowing for reflection. Be sure to include the music from the retreat in the background as the slides are read.
<http://www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer.htm>
2. Familiarize yourself with the Apps, websites, and other prayer resources provided in **Resource 1**. Choose the ones you think will work best for your group or add a technology resource you find helpful in prayer. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, edit as needed.
3. If you are using **Session Extender 2** make sure you set up a Twitter account and the HootFeed in advance.
4. Invite youth to bring smartphones/tablets/etc.

5. Find out if there is an open WiFi connection available for participants to use during the session.
6. Set up the projector/computer. Rehearse the PowerPoint presentation and active internet links
7. Set up the room with tables and chairs facing the projector screen
8. Set up a prayer table near the screen with a colorful table cloth, candle, cross/crucifix, and bible.
9. Set up a registration table with nametags and a sign-in sheet
10. Set up a refreshments table

Session Outline

As participants arrive, welcome them and invite them to sign-in.

Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Once everyone has arrived, signed-in and has a nametag, make any necessary introductions. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, begin with slide # 1. Welcome the group using the following or in your own words.

Welcome, everyone! I'm so excited to see you here. Tonight we are going to spend time talking about prayer – but we are going to look at prayer in a new way. How can we pray through the use of technology like the internet, mobile devices, music, photos, videos, and so on! We'll spend the first half of our time exploring what's already out there, and the second half of our time will be spent creating our own prayer experiences through the use of technology. But first, why don't we begin with prayer!

Invite the participants to gather around the projector screen

Opening Prayer (5 Minutes)

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #2.

Gather

Leader: Begin by making the sign of the cross...

Heavenly Father,
You have made us in your image and likeness,
Giving us the ability to be creative just as you are the Creator.
May the gifts be used in our prayer and worship of you,
who live and reign forever.
Amen

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #3.

Listen & Respond

Begin the 3 Minute Retreat. Invite someone to read each slide out loud. Pause in silence after each slide has been read. When then 3 Minute Retreat is over continue with the opening prayer.

Send Forth

Leader:

Lord God,
Be with us tonight as we explore new ways of praying and connecting to you.
May we be open to the movements of your Holy Spirit and attentive to your voice within each one of us.
We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Prayer and Technology: Pros and Cons (15 minutes)

Say the following in your own words.

Our opening prayer is an example of a new resource for praying while using technology. We often think of prayer as something that needs to happen apart from modern technology. Maybe you've been asked to turn your phone off at church, or to replace your tablet for some rosary beads. The truth is Christians have been adapting new technologies for use in prayer since the beginning of our Church!

Think about it, even candles were a new technology once – now we use them at every liturgy we celebrate! The printing press made way for scripture and other spiritual writings to made available to the whole world – not just those who copied them by hand! Almost every church in our country uses a sound system – a relatively new technology (compared to the printing press!). Some churches use projectors and flat screen TVs, presiders keep their homily notes on iPads, homebound parishioners can stream Mass live on their own computers! Who says technology can't be used to enhance one's faith?

That being said, certain technologies aren't always appropriate for every occasion. Let's explore this idea together. What are the pros and cons of using new technologies in prayer? Get together in groups of 3-4 and create a list of how technology can be good for prayer (pros) and a list of how it may not be helpful (cons). When you are finished you will share your list with the large group.

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #4. When the groups have finished making their lists, invite a representative from each group to write their answers on the Pros and Cons posters. If an idea has already been added to the list, invite the participants to make a tally mark next to that item rather than write it down again.

When everyone has finished adding their answers to the posters, go through the Pros and Cons together paying special attention to the items with the most tally marks.

Invite participant to react to the list:

- What do you most agree with on these lists?
- Do you disagree with anything on these lists? Why?
- Does anything surprise you?
- Should we use technology to communicate with God?

There's an App for That! (15 Minutes)

Continue by saying the following in your own words.

Whether you agree with it or not, there are Catholic tech developers out there creating new and exciting ways to pray. Some of them are retrofitting traditional prayer forms into new technologies (like the dozens of rosary apps out there!), while others are creating entirely new ways of praying. Let's take a few minutes to look at some examples of what's out there. If you have a mobile device with you that you can connect to the internet, feel free to look up the apps, websites and other resources we explore!

Spend 10-15 minutes going through a variety of apps, internet resources, and other items from the list on **Resource 1**. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, show slides #6 through #29. Do not attempt to use every example, choose a variety that you think your group will be interested in learning about.

Prayer Builder (30 minutes)

Distribute **Handout 1 and 2 (Prayer Basics & Prayer Builder Instructions)** to each participant. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #30. Say the following in your own words.

Those were just a few examples of praying through technology. Now I want to know, what kind of prayer tool would you create? Would you create an App, or a website? Would you use music, video or some other kind of media in your prayer? Or maybe you would use social media in your prayer. In a moment you are going to get into groups of 3-4 to develop a concept for a new prayer style that uses technology. Before we do that, let's go over the instructions.

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #31.

- 1) Get into groups of 3-4
- 2) Decide what kind of prayer you want to do
- 3) Develop your idea (be creative!)
 - a. Who will use this prayer?
 - b. What platform will it be on? App, website, video, mp3, etc.
 - c. How will it work?
- 4) Develop an image/logo to market your new prayer idea
- 5) Create a poster for your idea to share with the large group

On the handout is a review of a few things about prayer that might be helpful for this project. As you prepare your new prayer, imagine you are pitching your idea to Google's new prayer development department. Your job is to convince us that your prayer technology is worth our investment because it will change the world! Are there any questions?

Each group will get 3 minutes to present their idea. You may now gather into groups.

As the groups work on their projects, make yourself available to encourage creativity, troubleshoot, or keep participants on task. When each group has had enough time to complete their project, invite the participants to return to the gathering area.

Presentations (15 minutes)

Invite groups to present their ideas. If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #32. When all of the groups have finished, say the following in your own words.

Wow! Those were fantastic ideas! I think we learned a lot tonight. One important thing –it is possible to connect with God and others through pray, even prayer that is enhanced by new forms of media and technology. However, there is a time and a place for technology in prayer. Sometimes it can be a distraction or even a hindrance to one's time spent with God. We also learned that prayer can occur in any time and place – and technology helps to make that possible!

As we go tonight, let's end by joining our hearts and hands as we give thanks to God for the gift of creativity and communication.

If you are using the PowerPoint slides, advance to slide #33.

Let us pray in the words that Jesus taught us. *Our Father...*

Announcements and Refreshments

Make any necessary announcements. If you are having refreshments, give instructions as needed.

Good night!

Resource 1

Examples of Prayer & Technology

- Apps (apple & android) Search app stores for these resources:
 - Jesuit Prayer
 - Laudate
 - Honor Your Inner Monk (Saint Meinrad Abbey)
 - The Stations of the Cross - Ave Maria Press
 - 3 minute retreat
 - Catholic Meditation Apps (Pauline Press)
 - Centering Prayer
 - Family Rosary's Mobile Rosary

- Internet Resources
 - Sacred Space
 - 3 Minute retreat
 - Daily Readings for Mass (USCCB)
 - Community Prayer Requests - Catholic Online

- Music
 - Spirit and Song.com
 - WorshipTogether.com
 - Internet Radio Stations

- Video
 - The Work of the People

- Social Media
 - Facebook: Fr. James Martin, SJ - Night Prayer (Image & text)
 - Instagram/Tumblr - Visio Divina?
 - Twitter - Prayer Requests

(All websites accessed successfully on 8/4/2014.)

Resource 2

HootFeed Prayers of Petition

Extend the Session 2

1. Set up a **Twitter Account** (If Needed) www.twitter.com
 - a. Participants with include your Twitter ID in their messages, make sure your ID (i.e. @PaxYouth) is short and represents your ministry
2. Go to <https://hootsuite.com/hootfeed> to set up the **HootFeed**
3. Choose short keywords that participants can add to their message using a hashtag (#). HootFeed will pull up all current tweet messages using that keyword on Twitter. To avoid getting unwanted messages, create an original keyword that is specific to your session (i.e. #YMAprayer, techprayer, etc.)
4. Once you have set up the HootFeed, you will be directed to a webpage with your specific feed. Display this page on the screen during your prayer. It should refresh automatically. However, you may need to refresh the page manually if tweets are not loading.
5. Instruct participants with Twitter accounts to tweet a prayer that includes your @username and the #keywords.

Handout 1

Prayer Basics

Prayer is addressed to God: “Our Father...” “Lord Jesus...” “Gracious God...”

There are five basic prayer forms:

1. Blessing & Adoration

- a. *Blessing* expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer it is an encounter between God and [humans]... The prayer of blessing is [our] response to God's gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing.” CCC 2626
- b. *Adoration* is the first attitude of [humans] acknowledging that [they are] a creature before [their] Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. CCC 2628

2. Petition

- a. “Forgiveness, the quest for the Kingdom, and every true need are objects of the prayer of petition.” CCC 2646

3. Intercession

- a. “Since Abraham, intercession - asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks "not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm.” CCC 2635

4. Thanksgiving

- a. “Every joy and suffering, every event and need can become the matter for thanksgiving which, sharing in that of Christ, should fill one's whole life: "Give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18).” CCC 2648

5. Praise

- a. “Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS.” CCC 2639

Prayer is both **communal and individual**. You may pray privately for the needs of the community, or an individual may be lifted up in communal prayer, such as during the prayers of the faithful at Mass.

Prayer can be **contemplative** (quiet, meditative, and includes listening in silence) or **active** (includes gestures, movements, sound, music, etc.), or a combination of both.



Handout 2

Prayer Builder Instructions

Instructions:

- 1) Decide what kind of prayer you want to do
- 2) Develop your idea (be creative!)
 - a. Who will use this prayer?
 - b. What platform will it be on? App, website, video, mp3, etc.
 - c. How will it work?
- 3) Create an image/logo to market your new prayer idea
- 4) Make a poster for your idea to share with the large group

What kind of prayer experience do we want people to have? Contemplative/Active/etc.

What basic prayer form do you want to use?

Who will use this prayer?

What platform will the prayer be used on?

How will it work?

What do you want to call this prayer tool?