



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

The Prayer Table and Practical Life

On a low table draped with a colored cloth, the child places a small pillow. Atop the pillow rests the most important book in the home, the Holy Bible. Beside the Bible is a small candle. The child may also place on the prayer table a prayer card, on which are carefully handwritten words from Scripture, or a statue, maybe even something from among the items in a child's bedroom that he or she is most thankful for today.

Practical Life: Preparing and Caring for the Prayer Table

A focal point in every Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium is the prayer table, it can also be a place that lives at the heart of the family home. As part of his or her work, the child may not only prepare, but also care for the prayer table. When speaking about Practical Life, practical means basic, useful, purposeful, and life means the way of living. Practical life exercises are just that, they are exercises so the child can learn how to live practical activities in a purposeful way. These simple, yet purposeful activities help to develop concentration, self-control, and also allow the child opportunities to contribute to family life.

Practical life is part of every Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium and every Montessori classroom, and can be mirrored at home. Children enjoy caring for the environment of the prayer table.

The youngest child(ren) in your family, ages two and a half to six years old, may be invited to

- dust the prayer table, *a small feather duster in a basket may be placed on a shelf near the prayer table for the child to use.*
- polish the prayer table, *serves to develop concentration and muscular action.*
- practice how to turn the pages of the Bible, *so that the youngest child becomes aware of how to be gentle with books, how to respect their environment, and reverence for the most important book in the world.*
- how to place a ribbon or bookmark in the Bible, *or to make a bookmark for the Bible. You can help the child to find their "favorite page" in the Bible, maybe the page with their favorite story, and put a bookmark into that place.*
- snuffing or extinguishing the candle, *allowing the child to get close enough to the flame to extinguish, but not close enough to touch the candle.*
- making prayer cards with words or images from the Bible, *a list of Scripture for the younger child to make prayer cards can be found [here](#). Prayer cards for the 6-12 year old child are found [here](#) and [here](#).*

- plant care, *if you have a plant on the prayer table, children may like to polish the leaves or water the plant.*

The older siblings may join in any of the work listed above, but there may be work that is just for them. The older child(ren) in your family, ages six to twelve years old, may want to:

- sew a golden cushion or pillow for the Bible,
- write prayer cards, *a list of Scripture for making prayer cards can be found [here](#).*
- songs charts, *some families have a favorite song to sing at the prayer table. It could be a song from the atrium, a response from liturgy, or another song from Mass or Holy Eucharist. The older child may want to write out the refrain of the song on poster board. The child may also want to decorate the borders of the song chart.*

Grace and Courtesy at the Prayer Table

In terms of Grace and Courtesy, we speak of grace as movements that are polite, and emphasize how the action is perceived by others. Courtesy are the actions performed. As a practice of grace and courtesy, it may be helpful to have a family meeting before you begin your prayer time. You may want to talk as a family about how to decide roles for prayer time. For example:

- who reads from the Bible today?
- who will select the prayer card?
- who places the prayer card on the prayer table?
- who decides the song(s) we will sing?
- who extinguishes the candle?
- where will each family member sit for prayer time?

I wonder if there are additional roles or questions that your family will address? Some families may want to organize a family prayer chart which lists the days of the week along with the different roles at the prayer table. This is a work that the older child may want to create. He or she may choose to decorate the chart for the family.

Points of Interest Families are cautioned not to put everything out on the prayer table all at once. Rather, keep adding points of interest for the child. Add something new to the prayer table that will peak the child's interest. It may be something simple like an image or clipping from the parish bulletin, a pretty notecard that you received in the mail, or an item found in nature. Begin to notice items that can be added to the prayer table, gather and collect them, so they are ready to add to the prayer table when the child's interest has waned.

