

Prayer at ACU:

A practical guide for staff



A message from the Vice-Chancellor and President

As Christians why do we pray? Through prayer we connect to God. We reinforce our faith and strengthen our relationship with Christ. Prayer helps us develop wisdom and understanding. It also brings us peace and serenity.

Australian Catholic University is a faith community. When we pray together, we reinforce our collective commitment to Mission, the Catholic Christian tradition, and the University. We are also reminded that we are not alone in our endeavours, but that we have a shared purpose.

There are many occasions where formal events at ACU begin with the Acknowledgement of Country, or Welcome to Country, and then the University Prayer. However, prayer at ACU should not be reserved only for formal occasions but should instead be part of our everyday practice.

The purpose of this guide is to provide practical advice about how to lead prayer at our University.

I trust that you will find it to be both enlightening and helpful.

*Professor Zlatko Skrbis
Vice-Chancellor and President*





Prayer: part of the culture of a Catholic University

As a university proud of our Catholic traditions, ACU is called to live out and express its Catholic character in different ways: through our engagement with society, our commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, and through our relationship with God in prayer.

Prayer is a natural expression of our Christian faith. In fact, it is another aspect that sets us apart from other Australian universities. Prayer is an acknowledgment that we seek Truth. Through prayer, we give a practical demonstration of the place of faith in our daily works and activities. (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae n.39*)

For Pope Francis, prayer “*transforms us: it appeases anger, sustains love, multiplies joy, instills the strength to forgive.*” Prayer is a constant reminder that God is nearby, so “*the problems we face no longer seem to be obstacles to our happiness, but appeals from God, opportunities to encounter Him*”. (*General Audience, February 2021*)

What is prayer?

In the words of St John of Damascus, prayer is simply the raising of our mind and heart to God.¹ For St Mary of the Cross, prayer makes us strong.² It is a response to God's invitation. It is relational, hope-filled and aspirational. It is attending to what God is doing within us and in our world.

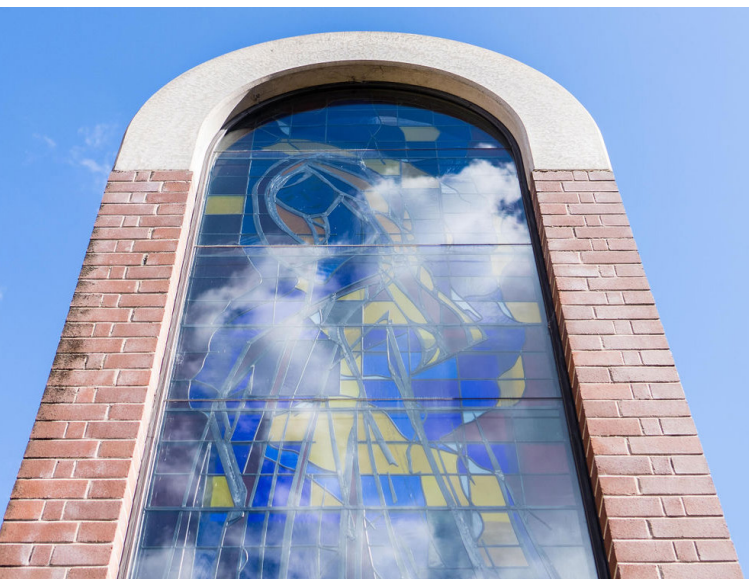
Prayer can have many dimensions, styles and levels, but at its heart, it is a conversation with God.

Our prayer doesn't need to be lengthy or complicated. Ideally, it should be simple, personal and from the heart. In prayer, we can give thanks for something received, or we may want to ask something of God. Authentic prayer is about seeking God's will in our life.

What can we ask for in prayer? As a Catholic university prayer is critical to who we are. We can pray for anything that may bring us closer to God and in the service of each other: to seek God's will concerning an important project or decision; to ask God's blessing on an endeavour; to ask God's help for a colleague or student during a time of difficulty; or simply to say thank you.

¹ St John Damascus, De Fide Orth, Book 3, Chapter 24

² <http://sosj.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/12631.pdf>





Other faith traditions

We respect the beliefs of our multi-faith community at ACU. We embrace the sacredness of Indigenous Spirituality that enriches our culture.³

If Christianity and Christian prayer is not part of your core belief you are invited to participate through respectful silence and reflection on ways you are committed to the core mission and values of our University.

³ http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia.html



Formal prayer... Informal prayer...

FORMAL PRAYER

At ACU, we have our own formal prayer: the University Prayer.

In the Catholic tradition, there are many other formal prayers that can be prayed: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be; and prayers for different times of the day.

Formal prayer is usually commenced and concluded by making the Sign of the Cross.

INFORMAL PRAYER

Informal prayer takes many forms. The best type of informal prayer is an act of joy and surrender, spontaneous communicating with God in a way that is unique, intimate and honest.

Unlike formal prayer, an informal prayer is created on the spot. This doesn't mean it doesn't have any structure. Rather, because our prayer is a conversation with God, we would normally start by addressing God. For example, we could start our prayer with something like, "Loving God", or "Good and Gracious God", or "Lord Jesus".

When praying informally, the purpose of the prayer will inform how we pray. For example, if we are praying for the whole ACU community, then we might choose to pray in the second person (eg: we could use phrases such as "we ask this", or "we praise you", or "grant us"). If our prayer is individually focussed, then it would be better to pray in the first person (eg phrases such as "help me", "I ask", or "bless me").

Types of prayer

The most common type of prayer can be divided into two categories: prayers of petition and prayers of thanksgiving.

In a prayer of petition, we are asking God to fulfil a need. For example: for reconciliation, for safe travel, for a successful meeting.

In a prayer of thanksgiving, we are thanking God for what God has given and done. For example, thanking God for a good meeting outcome, graduation, or finishing the semester.

BELOW ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL PRAYERS:

“Dear God, bless us as we meet today here at ACU. Help us to make decisions that uphold the dignity of all our staff and students, and give us the courage to always work for the common good. Amen.”

“Loving God, bless all our staff and students that are travelling today. Protect them from all harm and bring them safely home to their loved ones. Amen.”

Depending on the occasion, informal prayers don't need to take the form of a structured prayer. For example, you could read a text from scripture, a brief reflection, or perhaps a moment of silence. Anything that can help us raise our mind and heart to God.

Guidelines

The following guidelines have been provided to help you plan prayer for different occasions at ACU:

- The University Prayer should be prayed at significant formal occasions, such as award ceremonies, public lectures, a university dinner or a book launch, etc.
- The University Prayer immediately follows the Welcome or Acknowledgment to Country.
- Anyone can lead the formal prayer at ACU. It doesn't have to be a member of the clergy or a member of Campus Ministry.
- There are many occasions where informal prayer may be more appropriate. For example, at the start of a lecture or tutorial, or a university meeting (eg: Academic Board, University Research Committee, Faculty Board, or a school staff meeting, etc).

Prayer resources

There are plenty of resources around our campuses to help you plan your prayer:

- Campus Ministry staff and our Chaplains are more than happy to chat with you about types of prayer and when to use them.
- The ACU Prayer Book contains a great collection of formal and informal prayers written by past and present staff and students. Copies are available from the Office of the Vice President.
- There are many websites that contain prayers for many occasions. For example:
 - **Prayer Index:** www.jesuitresource.org
 - **Catholic prayers:** www.catholic.org
 - **Daily scripture reflections:** www.faith.nd.edu