Prayer and Liturgy Policy

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Otley

Policy owner	Luke Gilhooly
Headteacher	Luke Gilhooly
RE coordinators	Luke Gilhooly, Grace Middleton, Olivia Tremlett and Andrew Prowse
Approved by	Academy Council (September meeting)
Date adopted	September 2026
Next review	September 2028 or sooner if guidance changes

Be Kind • Show Respect • Work Hard

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Our Mission

As a family with God in our hearts, we love, laugh and learn.

Our three consistencies

Love of others • Love of self • Love of learning

The school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors to share this commitment.

Purpose and scope

This policy sets out how St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Otley provides prayer and liturgy as an integral part of its Catholic life and mission. It establishes the school's expectations for daily prayer, Celebration of the Word, liturgical celebrations, pupil leadership, inclusion, planning, monitoring and formation. It applies to pupils, staff, governors and visitors who share in the prayer life of the school.

The nature of prayer and liturgy

At St Joseph's, prayer and liturgy enable the school community to encounter God, listen to the Word of God and respond in faith and action. Celebration of the Word centres on the proclamation of Scripture and a communal response through prayer, praise, thanksgiving, reflection and a commitment to live out the Gospel.

Prayer may be personal or communal, silent or spoken, joyful or solemn. The liturgical life of the school follows the seasons and traditions of the Catholic Church and supports every pupil's spiritual and moral development.

Statement of requirement

The Academy Council recognises its responsibility to nurture and support the prayer and liturgical life of pupils and the wider school community. The school recognises that children have a natural capacity for prayer and wonder and provides age-appropriate opportunities for them to know God, reflect on experience and respond with increasing understanding and independence.

Prayer and liturgy take account of the religious and educational needs of:

- those who are part of the worshipping community of the Catholic Church
- those for whom school may be their first or only experience of Church
- those from other Christian traditions or no religious tradition
- those from other faith backgrounds

All are welcomed with dignity. No pupil is required to make a faith response that is not their own, while respectful participation and presence are expected.

Legal and ecclesial framework

The school provides a daily act of collective worship for all pupils in accordance with the Education Reform Act 1988 and, as a Catholic academy, with its funding agreement, Articles of Association and the rites, practices, disciplines and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church. Provision is guided by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Prayer and Liturgy Directory and diocesan guidance.

Parents have a legal right to request withdrawal from collective worship. Any request should be made in writing to the Headteacher. The school will discuss the request sensitively with the family and make appropriate alternative arrangements. Prayer and liturgy are distinct from curriculum time allocated to Religious Education.

Aims

Through prayer and liturgy, the school will enable pupils and staff to:

- develop a personal relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- encounter Scripture and the liturgical traditions of the Church
- reflect on spiritual and moral questions and the meaning of experience
- participate in prayer with confidence, reverence and understanding
- experience belonging, shared values and the communion of the Church
- learn and use the prayers, responses, music, symbols and gestures of the Catholic tradition
- grow progressively as planners and leaders of prayer and liturgy
- respond to the Word of God through service, witness and action
- make links between prayer, the school mission and daily life

Principles

Prayer and liturgy at St Joseph's will:

- give glory and honour to God and provide space for interior spiritual growth
- be faithful to Catholic teaching and appropriate liturgical norms
- be well planned, purposeful, inclusive and appropriate to pupils' age and capacity
- place Scripture at the heart of Celebration of the Word
- use silence, music, symbol, gesture, art and sacred space thoughtfully
- reflect the Church's liturgical year, the school's virtues and significant local or global events
- enable pupils to participate actively and to lead with increasing independence

Provision across the school

Every pupil takes part in daily prayer and liturgy. The termly plan of provision identifies whole-school, class, key-stage, sacramental and seasonal opportunities. The normal weekly pattern includes:

- whole-school Celebration of the Word led by the teaching team on a Monday at 9.00am, commonly rooted in the Sunday Gospel
- class-based prayer and Celebration of the Word, including pupil-led worship
- Celebration Assembly on Wednesday, with prayer and thanksgiving woven into the gathering
- Songs of Praise on Wednesday at 2.45 pm
- Masses, reconciliation, feast-day celebrations, Marian devotions, processions and other celebrations arranged through the year with the parish

The pattern may change in response to the liturgical calendar, the needs of the community or special events. Teachers ensure that prayer is not reduced to routine and that each gathering has a clear purpose, an appropriate pace and a prayerful atmosphere.

Forms and experiences of prayer and liturgy

- private and public prayer
- traditional prayers, intercessions and spontaneous prayer
- meditation, contemplation and stillness
- praying with Scripture, psalms, sacred art and music
- Celebration of the Word using Gather, Word, Respond and Send
- hymns, sung prayer and Songs of Praise
- processions and devotions, including Marian prayer

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- the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the celebration of Mass
- sacramental celebrations with the parish
- prayer in classrooms, shared spaces, outdoors and the prayer garden

Planning and delivery of Celebration of the Word

Celebration of the Word is planned around the proclamation of Scripture. It follows the four-part structure below while allowing creativity appropriate to the age and context of the pupils.

Element	Purpose	Examples
Gather	Prepare to meet God and become a worshipping community.	Sacred space, sign of the cross, invitation, music, silence.
Word	Listen attentively to Scripture and recognise God speaking.	Bible procession, proclamation, Gospel acclamation, reflection.
Respond	Make a prayerful response to the Word.	Intercession, silence, music, action, symbol, meditation.
Send	Carry the message into daily life.	Mission, blessing, commitment, final prayer or hymn.

Planning is responsive to the Church's seasons, Sunday Gospel, Virtues to Live By, curriculum links and events affecting the school or wider world. Staff and pupils use the school planner. The space is prepared carefully so that the focal point, Bible, cloth, candle, music and other symbols support rather than distract from prayer.

Progressive pupil leadership

All pupils receive formation and regular opportunities to prepare, lead and evaluate prayer and liturgy. Independence increases progressively, while adults retain responsibility for theological accuracy, safeguarding and the dignity of worship.

Year Group	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
EYFS	Children to be quiet and respectful during prayer times.	Children are beginning to make the sign of the cross. Children process with the bib-Children are able to say morning/evening and lunch prayer with confidence.	One child leads the sign of the cross. Children begin reflecting on their liturgy by sharing what made them feel closer to God and what they want next time to help them feel closer to God.

Year Group	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
1	Children begin to chose the liturgical colour cloth and write prayers/draw pictures that link to the theme. Children are able to evaluate worship with the guidance of an adult.	Children **choose** appropriate artefacts for the table, being able to explain why they have chosen it. Children are able to respond correctly to gospel readings.	Children are able to introduce the theme with the guidance of an adult.
2	Children are beginning to read parts of the gospel, with the guidance of an adult.	Children gain confidence in reading the gospel, with or without an adult.	Children begin to write prayers to use in their class worship.
3	Children are encouraged to write their own missions for child led worship.	Children begin to plan their own prayer & liturgy, with guidance from an adult. Children choose appropriate prayer, mission and hymns for worships, with the guidance of an adult.	Children create a prayerful atmosphere for the class worship, with the guidance of an adult.
4	Children create the ambience independently.	Children make explicit links to theme through music and artefacts. Children begin to plan 2 elements (gather and word) of CW, independently.	Children understand the 4 elements of worship and can plan these 4 elements for their own worships, with the guidance of an adult.
5	Children are able to find the correct gospel reading independently.	Children are beginning to plan all four elements of the child-led worships, independently.	Children create their own verbal evaluations about being closer to God.
6	Year 6 pupils visit children in Years 3,4 and 5 to support their worship planning and share their ideas.	Year 6 pupils plan and deliver worship inline with liturgical calendar, for example, stations of the cross, Mini Vinnies, virtues and prayer garden. Year 6, with the guidance of an adult, are able to deliver whole school worships.	

Evaluation helps pupils consider how the celebration enabled them to be present, experience, reflect and respond, and how its message will shape their choices.

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Participation and inclusion

Worship is planned so that pupils with SEND and other barriers can participate meaningfully. Reasonable adjustments may include visual prompts, symbol-supported language, sensory consideration, flexible positioning, rehearsal, communication aids or adapted leadership roles. Pupils of other faiths or no faith are treated with respect and may participate through attentive presence and actions consistent with their own conscience.

Chaplaincy parish and family partnership

The school works with Our Lady and All Saints Parish, Father Nicholas and diocesan partners to enrich prayer, liturgy and sacramental life. Clergy and other suitable adults support staff and pupils with the proclamation of Scripture, the celebration of Mass and formation. Families are invited to significant celebrations and are given access to the prayers pupils learn so that prayer can be supported at home.

Sacred spaces and resources

Prayer and liturgy are reflected in the school's budget, staff time, formation and resources. Classrooms and shared areas contain well-maintained sacred spaces that reflect the liturgical season. Bibles, cloths, crosses, candles, icons, rosaries, music and other resources are used with care. Risk assessments and school procedures govern the safe use of candles, incense and processions.

Recording evidence and evaluation

The school records its provision proportionately through the annual and termly plan of provision, calendars, planning folders, pupil planners and selected photographs or pupil responses. Evidence demonstrates quality, progression and impact without interrupting prayer or turning worship into a performance.

Monitoring considers the quality, range and frequency of provision; fidelity to Scripture and liturgical norms; pupil participation and leadership; inclusion; staff confidence; and the impact on pupils' spiritual development and action. Evidence may include learning walks, pupil voice, planner scrutiny, evaluation, staff discussion and feedback from families, clergy and governors.

Roles and responsibilities

Academy Council

- ensures that prayer and liturgy remain central to the Catholic life and mission of the school
- approves and reviews this policy and receives monitoring information
- ensures appropriate resources and budget are available
- identifies a link governor for Catholic life, prayer and liturgy

Headteacher

Luke Gilhooly, as Headteacher and spiritual leader of the school community, ensures that:

- provision is faithful to the Prayer and Liturgy Directory and diocesan guidance
- prayer and liturgy are planned, resourced, monitored and evaluated
- leaders and staff receive appropriate training and formation
- the RE coordinators are supported to carry out their responsibilities
- the school works constructively with the parish, diocese and Trust

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RE coordinators

The RE coordinators are Luke Gilhooly, Grace Middleton, Olivia Tremlett and Andrew Prowse. Working collaboratively, they:

- maintain the annual and termly plan of provision
- ensure daily prayer and liturgy are age-appropriate, varied and rooted in Scripture
- support progressive pupil participation and leadership
- provide accessible planning resources and model effective practice
- lead induction and identify staff formation needs
- monitor and evaluate provision and report findings to the Headteacher and Academy Council
- liaise with clergy, diocesan advisers, Trust colleagues and families
- use evaluation to agree and check clear improvement actions

All staff

- contribute positively to the Catholic prayer life of the school
- prepare and lead prayer and liturgy with reverence and care
- support pupils to participate, plan, lead and evaluate
- follow agreed liturgical, safeguarding and health and safety expectations
- seek guidance or formation when needed

Pupils

- participate respectfully and increasingly confidently
- help to prepare, lead and evaluate prayer and liturgy in line with their age and capacity
- treat sacred spaces, Scripture and resources with reverence
- put the Gospel message and school mission into action

Training and formation

New staff receive induction on the school's Catholic mission, expectations for prayer and liturgy, the four-part structure of Celebration of the Word and the use of Scripture and sacred space. Whole-staff formation takes place at least annually, with additional coaching and modelling where monitoring or staff feedback identifies a need.

Monitoring review and approval

The RE coordinators monitor this policy with the Headteacher. The Academy Council reviews it at least every two years, or earlier when legislation, diocesan guidance or school practice changes. Improvement priorities are recorded within Catholic life and school development planning.

Date implemented	September 2026
Next review	September 2028
Chair of Academy Council	Colleen Jackson
Faith Leader of the Academy Council	Father Nicholas Hird

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Headteacher	Luke Gilhooly
Review notes	

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Appendix 1 Celebration of the Word planner

Use this planner for staff-led or pupil-led Celebration of the Word. Scripture is the central proclamation and should not be replaced by another text.

Context	Class or group: _____ Date: _____ Leaders: _____ Liturgical season or focus: _____
Gather	How will we prepare the sacred space and gather prayerfully? _____ _____
Word	Scripture reference: _____ Who will proclaim the Word? _____ How will we help everyone listen and understand? _____ _____
Respond	How will we respond through prayer, silence, music, symbol or action? _____ _____ _____
Send	What mission or commitment will we take into daily life? _____ _____

Evaluation of the Celebration of the Word

How did this help us encounter God and listen to the Word?

_____

_____

How well did everyone participate?

_____

_____

What will we keep or improve next time?

_____

_____

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Appendix 2 Prayer experiences

Pupils encounter an increasingly rich range of prayer appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Type	Examples
Praying the psalms	Psalm 139: thanksgiving for the wonder of creation and human life.
Traditional prayer	Sign of the Cross, Glory Be, Our Father, Hail Mary.
Repetitive prayer	A short invocation repeated slowly and attentively.
Meditation	Prayerful reflection on Scripture using silence and imagination.
Bodily prayer	Standing, bowing, kneeling, raising hands or reverent movement.
Prayer of the heart	Stillness and attentive listening to God.
Contemplation	Prayerful attention to creation, an icon or sacred image.
Gesture	Sign of the Cross, sign of peace and other liturgical gestures.
Hymns and sung prayer	Traditional and contemporary Catholic music.
Music	Listening to reflective or sacred music.
Litany	Repeated responses of praise, thanksgiving or intercession.
Procession	Gospel, Marian, Corpus Christi or other suitable procession.
Sacramental and liturgical prayer	Mass, reconciliation, blessings, prayer services and devotions.

Key references

- Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Prayer and Liturgy Directory
- Education Reform Act 1988, section 70
- School Standards and Framework Act 1998
- The school's funding agreement and Articles of Association
- Diocese of Leeds guidance for Catholic schools