

Creating Holy Ground

We have places in our homes where family members sleep, eat, relax and even study. But where do we gather to pray? We may pray before a meal or listen to our children's bedtime prayers, but maybe we should give some thought to designing a space where we can go to pray, or just spend some quiet time with God.

Whether it's called our *sacred space*, *prayer corner* or *home altar*, this 'holy ground' in the home is a reminder of Christ's constant presence in our lives and that our home is indeed the domestic church. Family members can gather there for individual or family prayer, and family meetings. Throughout the year it can become an integral part of our family celebrations of special days. Using the prayer space as a family provides the opportunity for all members to learn about and share their faith as well as form and strengthen family bonds and happy memories. In this space our children can learn basic Catholic prayers and gestures, become comfortable with ritual, and gain a sense of reverence for the holy. The mere presence of sacred space in a home shows that prayer is necessary and central to the family who lives there.

The fundamental components needed for sacred space in the home are:

Altar

This surface can be any size – the corner of a kitchen counter, an open shelf on a family room bookshelf, the top of one end table in the living room. While it may be tempting to select a space in a child's room, choose an area that all family members share so that *all* family members can use and observe others using the prayer space.

Altar Cloth

Drape attractive material on the surface. A doily, scarf, pretty napkin, runner or tablecloth will do. The cloth can also be a reflection of your ethnic and cultural heritage, or the seasons of the church year – purple for Lent, gold for Easter or Christmas. But why not have the family fashion its own unique covering? Start with a piece of fabric in a favorite color and use permanent markers to add everyone's names and birthdates, then trace their handprints. Write out an inspirational message, Scripture

passage, or family motto. This altar cloth is destined to become a treasured family heirloom.

Basic Elements

Principal sacred objects to add are a cross or crucifix, an open Bible (propped on a box lid) and a candle. Lit during family prayer and symbolizing the light of Christ, children can decorate a plain pillar candle by gluing on beads or sequins and adding adhesive stickers. Allow children to snuff out the candle at the close of prayer.

Accessories

Avoid clutter to keep the space pleasing to the eye, but consider adding accessories as the space allows. Change the scene with the season. Keep a small box and slips of paper or a little notebook on the altar so prayers and intentions can be written down, read and shared. A small bowl of holy water (available in the church vestibule) reminds us of our baptism and can be used for the Sign of the Cross. Add photos of relatives, living and deceased, whom we remember in our prayers. Holy cards, a rosary and statues are lovely exhibits as are items gathered from nature – a plant, flower, pinecone or fall colored leaves. Other articles that have special religious meaning can also be placed there. Utilize adjacent space and the floor as well. A nearby CD player with calming instrumental music sets a prayerful mood. A rug, pillows or a comfy chair gives the pray-er a place to rest.

Prayer Text

A book of family prayers, blessings and rituals for special occasions is the final vital component of the sacred space. Ask Religious Education staff for suggestions (908-276-2050) or borrow one of the books available from the parish library located in the school building. Search online sources and neighborhood bookstores for some good books.

May your sacred space bring many opportunities to share your faith, give you comfort and peace, and add many beautiful memories to your family life.