

One of the most exciting aspects of church Christmas events is the large number of newcomers who come among us. While we want every Sunday to be a good Sunday to bring friends and family so they can hear the gospel of Jesus, at Christmas time many more guests who are unfamiliar with church and the Christian faith will join us. This means those of us who lead in various ways in our services must be extra careful to use language that is inclusive and not alienating, and we need to work hard to minimise misunderstanding. This includes those who lead our prayers!

Here are 10 tips that will help us pray helpfully and in a way that commends prayer to newcomers:

Speak in plain language. This is a good discipline for any time, to work out how to communicate deep truths in accessible language! Think “the good news of Jesus” rather than “the gospel.” Replace “Jesus’ atoning sacrificial death” with “Jesus’ death in our place, taking the penalty for our sin.”

Be outward focussed. Instead of praying for our church, staff and ministries, bring before God our community, significant world needs, and people affected by current national or global issues.

Use inclusive language. Please pray for “all of us here, whether we’re familiar with Christian things or not,” rather than “people who aren’t Christian,” or “people outside the church,” etc.

Leave controversial issues for another day. It’s good for us to pray about serious and contentious issues like sexual morality, refugees, and abortion, but it’s generally not helpful to pray about these in our Christmas services where they may be a distraction for guests.

Speak generously about those outside the church. If you pray for governments, leaders, community groups or others, be courteous in the way you speak about them, ie not speaking of “ignorant governments who oppose the gospel and hate your people.”

Make your love evident. Give those who hear your prayers an insight into your heart for the community and the world. Instead of mourning “our post-Christian society,” let your thankfulness for those who serve in various ways across our community, city, and world, overflow into your prayers.

Save praying for missionaries for regular Sundays. We love our mission partners and it’s a privilege to pray for them every week when we gather. But just as we pray for them to be thoughtful and deliberate, making their ministry most effective, we want to be the same! Praying for our mission partners can sound to newcomers like we’re recruiting members to our club which will seem inconsiderate and be distracting.

Give thanks for opportunities to find out more. Everyone present has the opportunity to find out more about who Jesus is. Give thanks for that, and in doing so, commend the follow-up opportunities to everyone.

Say less, so more is heard! We pray to our Father in heaven, but we also want those gathered to hear and understand. So, pray for 2 – 3 minutes, enabling people to stay with you. Our Christmas events are full and tightly structured, so keeping each element to the expected time is one way to be considerate to our guests.

Break your prayer into short sections. It’s often a good idea to **1) Thank God for Christmas**, and the relationships, enjoyment, and refreshment it provides, remembering that for many people, Christmas is hard and highlights broken relationships, lost loved ones, etc. **2) Pray for local and global issues.** Bring before God the issues that are on people’s minds, wherever they stand before God. **3) Pray for all who are present**, that God will help us to grasp who Jesus is, and why Christmas is very, very good news.

As with our regular gatherings, it’s a really great idea to have read through your prayers a few times at home beforehand so you can lead most naturally. Arrive early to make sure you know when you’ll come up to pray, and whether you’ll be announced or unannounced, and work out how you can move quickly to the front when it’s time to lead. And thanks so much for serving in this ministry!