

Rite 13

Part I of The Journey to Adulthood program



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Durham, NC

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R13 Lessons

Self

Getting to Know You: Introducing the Rite 13 Leaders

Goal

To give the leaders a chance to introduce themselves to the group

Summary

Leaders will share some information about their lives in order to help the teens get to know them. Leaders will also provide some preview information about the year & upcoming events.

Area Covered

Self, Society

Guiding Scriptures

Deuteronomy 11:18-21

Background

In working with young people in a program of faith formation, we take on the wonderful task of entrusting to them the rich faith heritage which has been entrusted to us. We offer to them all that has been given to us – and hope God will both make it enough and give them even more.

A good way to begin this process is for the leaders to prepare a life story to tell to the young people. It may include the highlights of your faith journey and follow the chronology of your life, or it may focus on one or two events that you feel have shaped you in significant ways.

Leaders are encouraged to prepare for this meeting by spending some time considering the timeline of their lives. One way to do this is to gather (leaders only) and work through two of the lesson plans from the J2A materials: **The JoHari Window** and **My Purpose Statement**. Talk to one another, and work together to develop a way to tell the young people who you are.

Remember as you prepare, that this is not the time to tell them what it was like for you “at their age”, but rather to introduce yourself to them as adult members of the community of faith with a history and a journey.

Working as a team, you may come up with some exciting ways to run this lesson. Perhaps you could do a few skits of your life, or put together a slide show of yourself at different times in your life. Make it silly! Show them that sometimes you can be playful! This is not so much about confession as it is about storytelling.

Activity One

Gather the group and FEED THEM!

Without much fanfare, perhaps without any at all, just begin. Talk and tell the truth. Share your story. Share the gospel. As you share, remember to include the ways in which your faith has made your life richer, truer, clearer. By telling these stories to the group, you are setting a pattern of faith formation. You are affirming, by your storytelling, that God’s ways do in fact give more life than the ways of the world. Thanks be to God!

Make this an informal time, with questions and answers as they come up.

Activity Two

Pass out calendars for the year – or at least the first few months. If possible, announce the first major Social Event.

Again, leaders will need to plan this in advance. It may be a trip to the State Fair, or a Ropes Course, or an overnight Lock-In. It could even be dinner at one of the leaders' homes or plans to go bowling together after church one Sunday. It doesn't much matter WHAT you do, but do it soon & early in the year – it will make a huge difference in how quickly and how well your group bonds. Pass out a letter describing the trip, permission slips, and release forms. If time allows, bring in all the art supplies to make a poster or some other display for the classroom and the Church Bulletin Board.

Closing

Remind the young people that we are just beginning a new adventure together. God will meet us along the way. Close in prayer, using the following or a prayer of your choice.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

Getting to Know Each Other: Learning Our Names

Goal

To introduce all the members of the group and to learn their names.

Summary

We'll use a formula response to hear people's names and a fact about themselves. Then, we'll write and share a simple poem-form called a cinquain to further describe ourselves.

Area Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Isaiah 43:1-3a, 6-7

Materials Needed

- Bible or copies of the Isaiah passage
- Paper
- Pencils or Pens

Background

One of the themes of Rite 13 is to learn how important our names are. In scripture, we see that whenever God calls someone to do something, they are called specifically by name. Our names are important. In this group, it is important to remind ourselves that these young people – each one by name – are being called into a relationship with God.

Our first task as leaders is to learn their names, and begin to get to know a little about these young people as individual children of God. The verses in Isaiah are particularly poignant for us as leaders, because they remind us that we are not alone as we call the young people in our care into a new and deeper relationship with God. God's own spirit is calling them.

One possible interpretation of the call to the north and the south might be to consider that God is calling out to the culture, insisting that our young people be set free to follow God. The pull of the culture, with the promises that it makes regarding acceptance, camaraderie, "coolness," inclusion, and power are all, at the heart, a fiction which avoids God's call to come into relationship with one another.

So, at this first meeting it is important to set the tone for these new relationships by honoring one another with listening hearts. The reading reminds us to trust in God's call to us. We are known by God. We are called by name. We are given assurance that, no matter how tumultuous the journey, in this case the Journey to Adulthood, God will go with us.

Activity One: Introducing Ourselves

Read the Isaiah passage aloud.

Discuss with the group our need to know one another, and each other's names, if we are to listen together for God's call. One of the ways God calls His people is through their relationships. So we will need to know one another, and know one another well, if we are to

help one another live into all that God has for us. Using a Round Robin technique (where each member of the group speaks in turn), ask the young people to introduce themselves. Begin with your name and end with your name and in the middle tell us something about you that you want us to know about you.

Some examples (from past leaders and participants):

"My name is ----. I am a full-time student at Duke Divinity School. If all goes well, in a couple years I will be ordained to the priesthood. I also love to cook. If I hadn't heard God call me to ordination, I would have opened a catering company. My name is ----."

"My name is ----. I love music and my dog and the color blue. My name is ----."

"My name is ----. This is my first time as a youth leader. I'm a little nervous, but also excited. My name is ----."

"My name is ----, and I don't know, I just finished a really hard Outward Bound Course and I'm tired. My name is -----."

"My name is ---- (giggles) and I'm really stressed out about school. My name is ----."

Activity Two: Creating a Cinquain

A Cinquain is a five-line poetic form invented by Adelaide Crapsey, consisting of two, four, six, eight, and two syllables, respectively. The original form functions as an American equivalent to the Japanese Haiku. We will use a modified form in which the lines are prescribed by parts of speech rather than syllable counts. (For more info or examples of other forms, see: *Poetry Handbook: A Dictionary of Terms*, 4th ed. Babette Deutsch. Barnes & Noble, New York, 1974.)

Line One	ONE WORD: your first name.
Line Two	TWO WORDS: two adjectives describing you!
Line Three	THREE WORDS: three adverbs applicable to you!
Line Four	ONE VERB: an action word.
Line Five	ONE WORD: a synonym for you! or your first name again.

After everyone has written a poem, have participants read them aloud. In a group where the young people really don't know each other very well, it might be fun to have the group members "turn in" their poems, have the leaders read them aloud, and then guess who created each poem. It might also be fun to have the group work together to write a poem for Jesus.

Closing

Stand in a circle and join hands. Reread the Isaiah reading, inserting all the names into the middle of verse #1b. For Example:

Fear not, I have redeemed you, I have called you by name: Kevin, Emily, Will, Amanda, David, Jim, Linda. . . you are mine. Amen.

Images of God: Opening the Heart & Showing the Real Me

Goal

To learn about who we are and who God is.

To make images of ourselves and consider the difference between an image and the real thing

Summary

We'll trace or draw our body shapes and then decorate them with words or pictures to describe us. We'll also talk about images we hold and what they represent.

Area Covered

Self, Spirituality, Sexuality

Guiding Scriptures

Genesis 1:26 & 31

Materials Needed

- Music & Player – helps keep everyone calm & focused
- Sheets of paper large enough to trace the whole body of each member. If you don't have large rolls, be sure to bring tape to tape sheets together
- Markers & Crayons
- Pencils & Pens
- Colored Construction paper
- Extra decorations – paint, glue, glitter, yarn, buttons, etc.
- Copies of the Handout

Background

During our time in R13, we work quite a bit with looking at the images we hold of God. (For more info on this, see the first lesson in the Spirituality section – Images of God: An Introduction) We have looked to Jesus, to art, to great writings, and to Scripture. Now we want to turn to the truth that we ourselves are made in the image of God. We are able to see something of God when we see our best qualities, our true selves. The objective of this exercise is to make images of our selves. In doing so, we will be able to learn about who we are and who God is.

Each person will create an approximately life-size drawing of themselves and use this image as a way to teach the group some of who they are. This is a tried-and-true exercise. Many young people have done it in other settings, at diocesan retreats, school, camps, etc. But the thing we are trying to illustrate in this exercise is what God sees when God looks at our hearts! We are not so much interested in what we do well or poorly but rather who we are. God loves us with an everlasting love – there is nothing secret or hidden from God, and still God loves us.

There are three main ideas that we want to focus on when we discuss and process this activity with the teens:

1. The images we draw are our best attempt at showing what's true about us. We want to have open hearts, "with all desires known and no secrets hidden" (see closing prayer). But even when we try, there is so much more about us that we don't know, can't tell,

can't understand, or are afraid to share. God knows all those things about us and still loves us.

2. As far removed as the images we make are from what we really look like, so too are the images of God we see far removed from the richness and intricacy of God. We might have painted an image of ourselves worthy of a museum, but it is still just an image, just a representation of something so much more. The same is true for the Maker of the universe. No matter how we try to imagine God, it will always be woefully inadequate. God is more real, more beautiful, more powerful, more wonderful... more in every way than any image we can construct and imagine. God is more than an image – God is actively moving in our hearts to cleanse us, heal us, and bring us into God's truth through Christ Jesus.
3. God loves the real thing: you and me, not merely the images we present to the people around us, and even to God. We do not need to be afraid of being who we are and all that we are when we come together with God and God's people. In the same way, we as God's people worship and love the one true God, not merely the images of God that we have made or discovered.

Activity One

Have each member draw an outline of a body on their paper or pair up with someone else to trace the outline of their own shape onto sheets of paper. Invite each young person to draw on and color the images, using pictures and/or words to reveal things they know about themselves and things God knows about them. Ask them to help one another.

It might be worthwhile to spend a few minutes just acknowledging the qualities of the kids in your group. Have each stand in the center of the room and ask the group to say something positive about that person. If they say something like "pretty" or "handsome" or "goofy," ask them to be specific. Encourage them to think about each other's hearts and to put in words or pictures what they are really like deep down.

Remind them that they can use symbols to represent certain inner qualities. They can make the picture elaborate or simple, colorful or plain. The goal is to keep them working at it for as long as it takes to end up with fairly complex pictures of themselves. Leaders should make one for themselves as well. During the work, circle the room to help and encourage each person. Ask questions. Ask for more. Encourage them to include an image of God in their drawing. Maybe they could use some of the images from the weeks prior to this session.

Note: Leaders should be on the alert to keep this activity positive and light-hearted. We can have fun as we create images of ourselves, but make sure no one's image of self and/or God is ridiculed or criticized. Watch for that Teachable Moment! And bear in mind that an activity like this can evoke painful memories or reveal negative self-images. Adolescents are becoming more and more aware of their bodies – their definition of self, their physical being, their sexuality. These things can bring up a whole host of confusing emotions, so be sensitive to that and be gentle.

After everyone has completed a drawing, take turns sharing what they have created. Have the young people stand up and hold their images in front of themselves. Leaders should say, for

example, "This is an image of Anna." Then, moving the paper away, leaders say, "This is the person, Anna. She is more than a mere image."

Changing the words slightly with each young person, leaders will point out with each example that we are more than the image... more interesting to look at... more interesting to talk to... more and more and more.

When the leaders take their turns, they might say, "This is my image," and dropping the picture, "This is me. "

Allow time for a discussion of the difference between an image and the real thing.

Use the handout on the following page to take what we've learned about images and compare it to the images we may have about God.

Closing

Leaders may wish to write their own (or help facilitate the class writing their own!) opening and closing prayers.

The following prayer was chosen just as a reminder that the prayers we use on Sunday mornings apply to our daily lives as well. It seems a good thing to take these familiar prayers and invest them with new meaning by using them in appropriate, but new, situations.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Collect for Purity
Book of Common Prayer, p. 355*

Handout: Images of God from Scripture

Read the following Scripture passages:

Isaiah 6:1-5

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Revelation 1:10-18

I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades."

Discussion Activities

- Take a highlighter pen and go through the above passages and mark every image of God you can find.
- Are any of these consistent with your image of God? Why or why not? How are they consistent? How are they not?
- What other images of God do you have that may not be reflected in these words?
- Take a pencil or crayons or whatever you choose. Try to make a drawing that expresses your image of God.
- How did the paper image of you compare to the real you?
- How do you think our images of God – whatever they are – compare to the reality of who God is?
- Can we really "image" God?

I Am Made in God's Image: Just as I Am – I am Good!

Goal

To help young people remember they are made in the image of God, and to deepen that understanding so that all that we do will honor our Maker.

Summary

We'll use an interactive reading of the Creation Story to frame our discussion about the meaning of "And God said it was good."

Area Covered

Self, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Genesis, chapter 1 & 2:1-9

Materials Needed

- Copies of the handout of The Creation Story – enough for everyone to have one
- You may also want to have copies of the closing prayer to send home with everyone

Background

In every aspect of the program, authors, youth leaders, parents, and participants are reminded again and again that the young people we serve are treasured and valued simply because they exist. We are all called to love the young people in our care, to give to them the very best we can give, because they are made in the image of God.

It is our challenge to find appropriate ways of expressing our true nature as God's children. It is always a challenge of obedience and grace when we come to the task of trying to "live it out." Actions play an important role in any life, and consequences for actions are inevitable; but there is another level, another way we might look at ourselves and our lives.

For Christians, the bottom line is that we are loved by our maker. We are loved when we do the right thing... and we are loved when we do the wrong thing. Loved when we live into our full potential, and still loved when we are unwilling to live fully in accordance with the Gospel call.

Love is the name of our God, and the first time we see that love expressed in the Bible occurs in the first chapters of Genesis when God looks down on all creation and declares as each successive day is completed, "It is Good!"

The Creator's love sees into our hearts and our lives and announces we are good. Because God's word has power, we receive the blessing of his announcement in ways that transform and illuminate our lives. It is our privilege to participate in God's blessing words as we say to the young people in our care: you are loved; you are forgiven; you are (right now and always) made in the image of God.

Activity One

Using the handout provided, read aloud the creation story from Genesis. This telling of the well-known story uses an old tried and true technique developed by the Fisherfolk of the Community

of Celebration, where the audience provides an interactive soundtrack – inserting the following sounds at their appropriate moments.

There are four responses:

1. a hearty YES! after every creation
2. “ooh” when it is evening
3. “aah” when it is morning
4. applause, cheers, and shouts of praise when God says it is good!

After you've completed the responsive reading, discuss some of the following topics in your own words. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What does it mean to be created in God's image?
- How do we define “good”? In what ways does our definition of good match what you think scripture intended? In what ways doesn't it match?
- Say together: “I am made in the image of God and that's good.” How does that feel? What does it make you think of or wonder?
- Have you ever experienced or observed someone who is angry, telling someone they are “bad”? What kinds of words do we use for this? How do you think it feels to have someone tell you that you are bad?
- What do you think God would say to that?
- Did you ever have a teacher or a friend or relative who made you feel really bad all the time? How does that affect your behavior? Does it make you want to try harder? Or just give up altogether?
- Have you ever noticed that when someone tells you over and over that you are clumsy or stupid or just plain bad, you end up acting clumsy, stupid, and just plain bad? Why is that?

Some psychologists say that we live into people's expectations of us. People who are told they are clumsy – get clumsier! Bad...worse! Stupid...stupider! If that's true, and for most of us our experience bears it out, then we need to remind one another that we are made in God's image and God said we were good... in fact, God says that we are VERY good!

It's true that we all make mistakes or bad choices. Sometimes we may even do bad things, but that doesn't make us bad! God's words stand over time and space. We are basically good because we are made in the image of God.

In a book called *Original Blessing*, Matthew Fox calls this the blessing relationship God has with creation. Theologians have argued for centuries about the doctrine called *Original Sin*... trying to determine if we are basically good or bad, basically sinful or basically obedient.

It's a heated discussion. Lots of faithful people strongly believe things on both sides of this argument. It's an interesting topic to think about, but we're not here for an argument today.

All we want to do in this discussion is pay attention to the Old Testament reading and think about what its message might be for us today. What can we learn from these words: We are made in the image of God. God said it was good.

For today, putting aside all the theology, all the mistakes and sins, let's just believe God's word.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them....and God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

You are holy and wonderful and blessed.
You are not just good. You are VERY good.
So says the Creator of the Universe.

Closing

Stand and hold hands. Use the following blessing for your closing:

May the love and affection of heaven be yours.

May the love and affection of the saints be yours.

May the love and affection of the angels be yours.

May the love and affection of the sun be yours.

May the love and affection of the moon be yours.

Each day and night of your lives,

To keep you from haters,

To keep you from harmers,

To keep you from oppressors.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you, gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from *The Celtic Vision: Prayers and Blessings from the Outer Hebrides*, edited by Esther de Waal

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Handout: The Creation Story

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,
The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,
while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **Ooh!**
Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. **YES!**
And God saw that the light was good;
and God separated the light from the darkness.
God call the light Day and the darkness he called Night.
And there was evening... **Ooh!**
and there was morning.. **Aah!**
the first day.

And God said, "let there be a dome in the midst of the waters,
and let it separate the waters from the waters."
So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under
the dome from the waters that were above the dome. **YES!**
And it was so.
God called the dome Sky.
And there was evening.... **Ooh!**
And there was morning... **Aah!**
the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place,
and let the dry land appear."
And it was so. **YES!**
God called the dry land Earth,
and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.
And God saw that it was good. **CHEERS!!!**

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation:
plants bearing seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth
that bear fruit with the seed in it." **YES!**
And it was so.
The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seeds of every kind,
and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.
And God saw that it was good. **CHEERS!!!**
And there was evening.... **Ooh!**
And there was morning... **Aah!**
the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky
to separate the day from the night;
and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years
and let them be lights in the dome of the sky
to give light upon the earth." **YES!**
And it was so.
God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day
and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars.
God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth,
to rule over the day and over the night,
and to separate the light from the darkness.
And God saw that it was good. **CHEERS!!!**
And there was evening... **Ooh!**
and there was morning... **Aah!**
the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures,
and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."
So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves,
of every kind, with which the waters swarm,
and every winged bird of every kind.
And God saw that it was good.
God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply
and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."
And there was evening...
and there was morning...
the fifth day.

And God said," Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind:
cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind."
And it was so.
God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind,
and the cattle of every kind,
and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind.
And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air,
and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them,
"Be fruitful and multiply,
and fill the earth and subdue it;
and have dominion over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the air
and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed
that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit;
you shall have them for food.
And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air,
and to everything that creeps on the earth,
everything that has the breath of life,
I have given every green plant for food."
And it was so.
God saw everything that he had made,
and *indeed*, it was **very** good.
And there was evening...
and there was morning..
the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.
And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done,
and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.
So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it,
because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

YES!

CHEERS!!!

Ooh!

Aah!

YES!

CHEERS!!!

YES!

YES!

CHEERS!!!

Ooh!

Aah!

YES!

WILD CHEERS!!!

I Am Made in God's Image: My Gifts and Abilities

Goal

To have teens recognize and use their particular gifts are from God
To celebrate those gifts

Summary

Participants will record and think about gifts and abilities and use the Parable of the Talents to talk about how gifts are used and developed, recognizing that these are gifts of the Spirit.

Area Covered

Self, Sexuality

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 25:14-30 and/or Luke 19:12-27 – The Parable of the Talents

Materials Needed

- Copies of the Handout: Gifts & Abilities Inventory
- Copies of the Handout: The Parable of the Talents
- Pencils & Pens

Background

This exercise is designed to help us identify our gifts and abilities – our talents, if you will. First, we're going to look at a long list of things (qualities or talents) that we may or may not possess and check off those ones that we think we possess. Then we're going to look at a story that Jesus told about the importance of using these gifts. Finally, having studied the story carefully to see how it might apply to us, we're going to look at our qualities again in a slightly different manner and see which ones we'd like to work on to improve.

Activity One

In your Introduction, stress that one's gender is likewise a God-given gift. Stress also that a person's psychological makeup is something to be accepted and not lamented. Some knowledge of the Myers-Briggs personality types may be helpful here, but not essential. There is lots of online information about Myers-Briggs, but another wonderful resource is the book *Please Understand Me* by David Kerisey and Marilyn Bates, which includes a temperament quiz you may wish to use with your class at some point, perhaps on a retreat or over a series of regular meetings.

First, the participants will look at a long list of gifts and abilities (qualities or talents) that they may or may not possess and check off those that they think they possess (see list at end of Lesson Plan). Stress that it's OK if they don't have some of them; not everyone is qualified in everything. Urge them to add several that are not listed – the list is just to get them started.

Have the participants place a check mark by each item in the list below that they consider to be true for them. Tell them not to write anything on the line that follows each item; they will be coming back to this later.

Activity Two

Have participants read the Parable of the Talents (*Matthew 25:14-30* and/or *Luke 19:12-27*). You may even want to encourage the young people to develop their own dramatic version. Review the story, ask for volunteers for each role and let them do the play as it might have happened in some setting today. You might even ask two or three teams to come up with their own version to see how they compare and contrast – look at the setting they chose and how they played out the story.

Looking into the Story

At this point, the participants do some thinking about the story. This is really a guided discussion, so make it so. You may choose to record the opinions of the group on newsprint.

- How do you think each servant felt when the master returned?
- Why did the first and second servants receive the same reward? *Some suggested answers here include: They had done exactly the same amount of work. The master had only two prizes to award them. The master didn't want them to become jealous of each other. They had each done the best they could with their abilities. The master didn't want them to get a big head about doing a good job.*
- What do you think the third servant should have done with the money? *Invested it. Used it in a business. Given it to the poor.*
- Do you feel the master in the story was fair or unfair to the servants? Why? What would you have done differently if you had been the master?

My Own Story

Now, ask the participants to put themselves in the positions of the three servants.

- How would I have felt if I had been one of the three servants?
- My favorite excuses for not using my abilities are . . . (This is a crucial question and should again generate a lot of discussion.)
- Overall, I see myself as . . .
- Have you learned anything about yourself from studying this passage? What? What has it made you want to do?
- How does this relate to the Parable of the Talents?

STEWARDSHIP: This may be a good place to introduce the idea of stewardship, if you feel the participants are ready to discuss this concept. You may want to put this aside and revisit it later. There are all sorts of other places where you could branch off to have a discussion.

Gifts and Abilities Inventory Revisited

Have the participants fill in the table in their work sheets. This may be very personal for some, and should be treated as such. Give them ample time to think about it.

Then, ask them to pick *one* ability in *each* category that they want to improve this year and write it in the blank space.

When they've done this, have them go back to the first section – the Personal Inventory – and look at the qualities they have checked. Have them indicate which of these are mental (M), emotional (E), physical (PH), practical (PR) or spiritual (S) by writing the letter in the space next to each quality. When they've done that, ask them to circle the three qualities they feel are their best ones. Are there any that they feel they would like to develop in the next year? In that case, have them write them down. Again, they may share these if they wish (or not if they think it's going to be too threatening).

Handout: Relevant Bible Passages to Read & Discuss

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. **(Romans 12:6-8)**

What human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. **(1 Corinthians 2:11-15)**

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. **(1 Corinthians 12:4-13)**

Now, you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. *(1 Corinthians 12:27-31a)*

Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church. **(1 Corinthians 14:12)**

Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. **(Ephesians 4:7-13)**

Handout: Gifts & Abilities Inventory

Let's see what our gifts and abilities are. Place a check mark by each item in the list below that you consider to be true for you. Do NOT write anything on the line that follows each item; you'll come back to that later. This is just a list to get you started. You are likely to have lots of things that are not listed – write those at the end in the spaces provided. Try for as many things as you can possibly think of.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I work well with my hands ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am loyal ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can lead others ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I respond well in an emergency ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have mechanical ability ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am brave ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can teach ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I play a sport well ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I work efficiently ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am honest ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a good follower ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am sensitive to others ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a problem-solver ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am compassionate ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I persevere at tasks ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am intelligent ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a peace-maker ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a good sense of humor ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I set realistic goals ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am patient ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can play a musical instrument ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am kind ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a good photographer ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am cheerful ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am able to visualize things ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am strong ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can dance ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am neat and tidy ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like to try new things ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am enthusiastic ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can act ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am imaginative ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am creative ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I help others to feel at ease ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can draw or paint ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am easy-going ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am curious ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I can run fast ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like to cook ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy working with others ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am able to see both sides of a story | <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy solitude ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can make things with () ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am supportive ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am able to trust others ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am tactful ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can program a computer ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I have integrity ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a good listener ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I understand finances ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can perform CPR ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I know how to make money ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I meet new people easily ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I know how to run a business ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am practical ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> I am a good writer ____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am supportive ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am cautious ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I like to take care of children ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am optimistic ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I speak my mind ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pay attention to details ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am healthy ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am affectionate ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I express myself well in words ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am strong ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am willing to do thankless jobs ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am giving ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am observant ____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Handout: The Parable of the Talents

Now let's see what Jesus taught us about our gifts, especially about how we are to use them. Read Matthew 25:14-30 carefully.

Looking into the Story

Now, let's see what the story means to us. Try to think how the servants (or slaves) in the story above reacted, and try to answer the questions below:

How do you think each servant felt when the master returned?

Servant 1	_____
Servant 2	_____
Servant 3	_____

Why did the first and second servants receive the same reward?

What do you think the third servant should have done with the money?

Do you feel the master in the story was fair or unfair to the servants? Why? What would you have done differently if you had been the master?

My Own Story

To see how the story applies to you, try to put yourself in the place of each of the servants and answer the following questions:

How would I have felt if I had been one of the three servants?

Servant 1 _____
Servant 2 _____
Servant 3 _____

What are my favorite excuses for not using my abilities?

Overall, do you see yourself as the servant with five talents or the servant with one talent? Why?

How many of your abilities or talents are you using?

" closer to 100%

" closer to 50%.

" closer to 0%.

Why? Is it because you're willing to risk or afraid to fail?

Have you learned anything about yourself from studying this passage? What? What has it made you want to do? Do you see any connection between this and the story about the calling of Moses that we read earlier?

Personal Inventory Revisited

St. Paul wrote a great deal about gifts and abilities, and how these were to be used in the service of others in the Church. He emphasized that our gifts are to be used in building up the community of faith.

With this in mind, here is another list of gifts or abilities or personal qualities. We can divide them into Mental, Emotional, Physical, Practical, and Spiritual qualities. In *each* category, write your *two or three* best points. (Leaders—post newsprint with each of the five words at the top and invite the young people to brainstorm a list of possible options, just to get them started. Some are suggested below. Remind them that they can add anything they think of that fits into that category. The brainstormed list is just a starter list.)

Handout: Types of Personal Gifts

MENTAL

Intelligence, creativity, good judgment, self-confidence, common sense, determination, sense of humor, perception, comprehension, good memory, ability to ask good questions

EMOTIONAL

Warmth, sensitivity, consistency, enthusiasm, dedication, discipline, cheerfulness, dependability, loyalty, coolness.

PHYSICAL

Strong, fast, great endurance, a good eye, a strong backhand, can put shots into the hoops consistently, graceful dancer.

PRACTICAL

Piano, guitar, flute, photography, cooking, carpentry, farming, sewing, gardening, running a business, doing my job as a ____ .

SPIRITUAL

Love/compassion, joy/happiness, peace/harmony, patience, kindness, generosity, humility, self-control, hope/optimism, faith/courage.

Pick *one* ability in *each* category that you want to improve this year. Write it in the blank space.

MENTAL _____

EMOTIONAL _____

PHYSICAL _____

PRACTICAL _____

SPIRITUAL _____

When you've done this, go back to section A and look at the qualities you have checked. Indicate which of these are mental (M), emotional (E), physical (PH), practical (PR) or spiritual (S) by writing the letter in the space next to each quality. When you've done that, circle the three qualities you feel are your best ones. Are there any that you feel you'd like to develop in the next year? In that case, write them down on the other side of this paper:

I Am Made in God's Image: Let's Get Physical & Practical

Areas Covered

Self

Goal

Throughout the R-13 lesson plans, our goal is to celebrate the changes, developments, and abilities that are present in the young people. This lesson is designed as a sort of "Show and Tell" time for our most amazing physical and practical abilities.

Objectives

To celebrate the things we know how to do.

To demonstrate to one another both the silly and sublime abilities we have.

To place that celebration in the sanctuary, as a reminder that all that we are, and all that we do, we offer to God.

Scripture References

Psalm 139— "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Activity

A week in advance, ask each young person to prepare something to show and tell about, to demonstrate to the group one physical and/or practical ability that they possess.

Tell them to give it a little thought. Perhaps they can play the piano, or another musical instrument. Perhaps they can do a handstand or a cartwheel. Perhaps they have memorized a poem. Perhaps they can whistle through their teeth. Give them time to prepare, and remind them that we are working to acknowledge the abilities we have, particularly those things which we can do that we have had to work at.

Remember, in the *Gifts and Abilities* lesson plan we focused on the God-given characteristics, the qualities of our personality. This week we want to focus both on the physical capacities we possess and on the skills, the practical abilities, we have nurtured and developed.

Gather in the sanctuary. Announce to the group that we are about to offer our meager abilities, and our amazing abilities, to the Lord God of the universe.

Say the following prayer (or one similar to it)

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all the things we can do. Each of us has special gifts and special abilities, and as best we are able, we offer them all to you. Come, Lord Jesus, and be with us tonight. Rejoice with us as we offer these abilities, in your name, to the one who made us and calls us. Amen.

Call on each young person by name: "Sarah, show us all what you are able to do."

"Steven, show us all what you are able to do." After each offering, cheer, shout, clap, whistle, and give loud thanks to God.

When I have done this exercise with kids, I have used one of my more crazy abilities. I can take off my socks – with my toes – and I can pick up a pencil with my toes. There

are a lot of other things I could choose to do – I could play the guitar and sing a song I wrote – but I choose something small and sort of silly to help set the mood. At the end, I stand, spread my arms out, take a deep bow and say, "TA-DAH. Thank you God for this most amazing body!!!" That may be more than you are willing to try, but you get the idea. The goal here is to CELEBRATE these bodies!

I have worked long enough with youth to know how wild and crazy this could get! But, I also know that with an eye to respecting one another, laughing easily, and staying ever-aware that we have welcomed Jesus into our midst, this can be a most delightful and deeply moving exercise. AMH

At the end of everyone's demonstration, gather together. It may be possible to discuss how each person learned to do what they showed us. How long have they taken lessons? When did they do their first cartwheel? After some talk in which we honor the notion that, while we may be gifted at some things, there are a great many things that we do which require practice, discipline, and skill, hold hands and pray again.

Closing

Gracious God, giver of every good gift and every true ability, grant that in everything we do, in everything we say, in everything we try, we may honor you, so that by giving what we have to you and to one another, the whole Body of Christ may be strengthened for your purposes, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Recognize this: A new collect. See the five parts—address, ascription, request, consequent, and doxology. The kids should by now be able to recognize a collect, and we know that they are able to write one. This might be a good time to have the group write a new collect, asking God to strengthen them, encourage them, and prepare them to use their gifts and abilities every day of their lives.

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I Am Made in God's Image: My Special Qualities

Goal

This session is designed to get the participants thinking about themselves and their personal qualities (and hang-ups) and relating these to one of the great biblical stories. It helps them to see that God may call them to some special ministry and that it is all right to question or even argue with God's call.

Summary

Participants will read and role play the story of The Calling of Moses

Area Covered

Self, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Exodus 3:1-4:20 – The Calling of Moses

Materials Needed

- Bibles or copies of the Exodus passage
- Copies of the Handout: The Calling of Moses
- Pens or pencils

Background

Have one or two of the participants read the story of The Calling of Moses (Exodus 3:1-4:20). To really make the point, assign three participants the roles of Narrator, God and Moses in a role-play of the story. This can also be done as a chancel drama. With little effort you can create your own version of this. Review the lesson, ask for volunteers for the roles and let them act it out.

Activity One

The points to be emphasized here are:

- Why did God pick Moses specifically? Was it random or did Moses have certain gifts?
- Why does God call people generally?
- Are there any other examples in Scripture of God calling people?

You may wish to have the participants look up some of the other stories of God's calling people: Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Peter, Andrew, James & John, and Paul. Have young people find the following passages in their Bibles (a good way to learn where the various books of the Bible are!).

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10
- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Jeremiah 1:4-10
- Luke 1:26-38
- Mark 1:16-20
- Acts 9:1-19

There are all sorts of questions that arise from these readings:

- What do you imagine it must be like to have God speak to you or call you? (One participant the author can recall said it must be like the voice in *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, he will come.")
- How are the responses different?
- Did any of those called by God argue with God?
- Is it OK to argue with God?

For another example of arguing with God, see the story of Abraham pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33).

Looking into the Story

Have the participants work on the discussion questions below. Ask them to jot down their answers in the spaces provided on the handout. Try to get them to imagine that they are Moses and put themselves in his place. Stimulate discussion by throwing out suggested answers.

- How would you describe the way Moses felt about himself?
Possible answers include: "I was scared." "Please don't send me on anything special." "I don't have much confidence in my ability to convince people." "I was a failure the last time I was in Egypt." "I don't believe God can make me special."
- Why might Moses have felt the way he did? Do you think Moses had a good or a bad image of himself? Why?
His brother was always better at everything. His family made fun of him when he was a kid. His teachers called him "dummy." He didn't believe God. He thought he was imagining it.
- What kind of image of Moses did God have? Why?
God obviously thought he could do the job! God made him so God should know. But then God got frustrated with Moses' low self-esteem and finally gave the speaking part to Aaron.
- How did Moses' image of himself compare with the way God viewed him? Why?
They were poles apart – God thought he could do it and Moses didn't.
- When God and Moses got through with this conversation, do you think Moses felt better or worse about himself? Why?
The answers here are likely to be on both sides – he might have felt worse because God ended up annoyed at him or, upon reflection, he might have felt better thinking that if God chose him for this job he must be worth something.

My Own Story

The whole point of Bible study, in the author's opinion, is to have people try to apply these stories to their own experience. When the participants have talked through these points and decided about Moses' character, have them try to identify how they would have felt in the same situation by answering the following:

- How would you have felt in this situation if you had been Moses?
Possible answers include: Scared. Confident. Like an idiot. Pretty special.
- When was the last time you felt like Moses?
- How do you think God feels about you?
Angry. Okay, I guess. Not interested. Loving. God feels I'm a special person with special interests.

- Do you think your view of yourself is different from God's view of you?
- What is God's role in creating a person? How does that make you feel?
***This really is the kicker. Try to bring out examples of the loving nature of God. Possible answers include: Innocent bystander. Mad scientist. Loving creator. Assembly-line manufacturer. Ask the participants to express their personal feelings about God.*
- What two qualities do you especially like about yourself?
- Not to share with the group, but think for a minute about this question: What two qualities about yourself would you perhaps like to change?

How Do I Feel about Myself Now?

This is where Self and Spirituality meet. Have the participants read the quotations selected out loud. Try to get some discussion going:

- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
- Are both men and women made in the image of God? How does this affect how we regard each other? (We will return to this critical point in a later exercise; just introduce the concept for now.)
- What does it mean to you that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?
- What does it mean that you have the seed of God in you?
- What does it mean that this seed can grow into God?

Some of the participants may ask who some of the people quoted are. St. Augustine was one of the great teachers of the Church who lived in the waning days of the Roman Empire (354-430 A.D.). Meister Eckhart was a medieval German mystic who lived from 1260 to 1329.

After this discussion, have the participants answer the following questions. Again, try to stimulate discussion.

- Is God concerned with your physical characteristics?
- Is God concerned with your personality characteristics?
- Of the two – physical or personality characteristics – which do you think means the most to God? Why?
- Who is your best friend? Do you think God likes him or her better than you? Why or why not?
- What have you learned from reading these verses about how God feels about you? Do you feel special in any way?

Closing

Use the following prayer or one you and/or the youth compose:

Dear God: you know how klutzy we are, and how bad we feel about ourselves, and how afraid we get to even try. Keep reminding us that you love us just as we are; and help us, if we have to be klutzes, to be brave klutzes for you. In Jesus' Name we pray. *Amen.*

This collect is from the Rite 13 group at Church of the Apostles, Belchertown, MA. In addition to learning the collect format, it is also helpful to have youth learn to pray spontaneously—something Episcopalian adults are often uncomfortable doing. Modeling this and giving youth opportunities to pray aloud can help make prayer a more natural part of their lives.

Handout: The Calling of Moses

Read Exodus 3:1–4:20 and answer the questions below.

Looking Into the Story

How would you describe the way Moses felt about himself?

Why might Moses have felt the way he did?

Do you think Moses had a good or a bad image of himself? Why?

What kind of image of Moses did God have? Why?

How did Moses' image of himself compare with the way God viewed him? Why??

Same

Somewhat different

Very different

When God and Moses got through with this conversation, do you think Moses felt better or worse about himself? Why?

My Own Story

Now answer the following:

How would you have felt in this situation if you had been Moses?

When was the last time you felt like Moses?

How do you think God feels about you?

Do you think your view of yourself is different from God's view of you?

What is God's role in creating a person?

How does that make you feel?

What two qualities do you especially like about yourself?

What two qualities about yourself would you like to change?

How Do I Feel About Myself Now?

Read the following verses:

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (*Genesis 1:27*)

It was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. (*Psalms 139:13-14*)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*)

We are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (*Ephesians 2:10*)

God made me – and God don't make junk. (*Anonymous*)

O God, you have created us for yourself and our hearts are restless till we rest in you. (*St. Augustine*)

The seed of God is in us. Now, the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree and a hazel seed grows into a hazel tree; a seed of God grows into God. (*Meister Eckhart*)

Now answer the following questions:

Is God concerned with your physical characteristics?

" Yes " No " Don't know

Is God concerned with your personality characteristics?

" Yes " No " Don't know

Of the two – physical or personality characteristics – which do you think means the most to God? Why?

Who is your best friend? Does God like him or her better than you? Why?

What have you learned from reading these verses about how God feels about you? Do you feel special in any way?

I Am Made in God's Image: Who Am I? (Identity & Family)

Goal

To gain a better sense of identity within family.

To increase awareness of how the young people fit in their family story.

To identify the contributions they bring to that family.

Area Covered

Self

Guiding Scriptures

Deuteronomy 26:5— ...“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor...”

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Everyone brings baby pictures of themselves, as well as a family picture
- Post-it notes
- Felt tip marker pens
- Newsprint or large construction paper
- Markers or Crayons
- Copies of Handout: What does it mean to be a Family Member?

Background

It is said that St. Francis of Assisi used to pray, “O Lord, who are you – and who am I?” We cannot know who we are until we know what our story is. In this we need to know not only our stories as individuals, but also our story in the context of the larger family story, which itself needs to be seen in the broader context of the Gospel story.

Telling stories is important because in their telling we come to know our identity, to know in a real sense who we are. This is why when families gather – whether around the dinner table in the evening, or on birthdays and anniversaries, or at Thanksgiving or Christmas – the story is told and retold, remembered and embellished. “Do you remember when...?” is the talisman which unlocks the treasure chest of the family saga. The memories may include Grandpa’s recounting of how he had to walk to school through drifted snow, or perhaps his war experiences; Aunt Elizabeth talking about the community’s fears during the summer epidemics before the polio vaccine was invented; Mom talking about how she and Dad met, fell in love, and got married.

Bible Study

Have the youth read Deuteronomy 26:1-10. By this time, they probably ought to have dealt with the calling of Moses (Exodus 3:1–4:20) and it may help to have this in context. It will also provide you with an opportunity to tell the story about Moses’ and Aaron’s struggle with Pharaoh, the plagues of Egypt, and the eventual liberation of the children of Israel.

Note that this is the retelling of the sacred story of a people, which is remembered to this day in the questions asked by Jewish children at the *Seder* meal: “Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Activity One

Ahead of this session: Ask the young people to bring pictures of themselves as babies to the group. The leaders should also bring their baby pictures with them and be full participants in this exercise, as in all exercises. Also, *ask* if everyone has a baby picture – some adopted or foster children may not have any. If so, ask if they have one of themselves as a young child. If they don't encourage them to find a picture in a magazine that they imagine looks like themselves as a baby.

On the back of each photograph put a fairly large Post-it™ label. The photographs are then sent around the group. Each person has to write a comment about the baby. No negative comments or put-downs are permitted. Or collect the pictures in advance and copy them on the photocopier or scan and print them. This also enables you to enlarge the photos.

Once all the photographs have circulated and all the comments are gathered, the participants collect their pictures. They then read aloud the comments made about the babies and end with the remark, "This baby is me!"

Note: *Please use felt-tip markers on the Post-it™ label so as not to damage the photographs.* This is a very affirming exercise, especially for youngsters who have a poor-self image, if only because it's very hard to write rude or cutting remarks about cute little babies!

Activity Two

In this activity, the participants are asked to bring a picture of some family member or members (group photographs work well here). The participants are asked to identify all the people in the picture and tell a story about each one of them. You may consider giving prizes for the funniest story, the most improbable, the saddest, the oldest person identified, etc.

This requires some homework on the part of the young people. They may have to ask parents to identify the people in the picture. (Incidentally, encourage young people to seek out pictures of old family members – grandparents or even great-grandparents.) In asking the questions about these people, they may discover something that they never knew about themselves.

One way to make this discussion more lively is to invite the young people to create a family tree with the pictures they gathered (or with just names for the spaces where they have no pictures). Prepare a model beforehand. Draw a tree with apples or some other fruit for each generation. The following configuration is suggested

The following idea and accompanying handout were adapted from materials used by St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Fort Washington, PA which graciously offered them to our program.

MY FAMILY

Grandmother Grandfather Grandmother Grandfather

Stepmother Father Mother Stepfather

Half Brothers Brothers You Sisters Half Sisters

Other relatives or persons in familial roles who live with you

If you know (or even suspect) that you have youth who are adopted, you may want to add birth mother and birth father to the second line. Be aware that there is a wide range of “normal” family configurations, and encourage the youth to create a family tree that reflects their reality, rather than trying to make it conform to some standard pattern. While we may be challenged by today’s realities (step-parents/siblings, birth parents, perhaps even genetic parent!) it is helpful to remember that yesterday’s family configurations were also confusing albeit in a different way (e.g. an “aunt” that was really a half-sister but never acknowledged as such, a child of a slave nanny whose unacknowledged father was the white owner, three generations living together). Use the handout: *What Does It Mean to Be a Family Member?* to help the youth define what constitutes a family and to talk about what being a family means.

Give each person a sheet of newsprint and ask them to create a family tree using the pictures they brought (or names if they have no picture). Be sensitive to the fact that some young people may not feel particularly good about their family tree. Be supportive and affirming – remind people that being family is about more than just sharing genes. This is especially true in an age when one’s genetic material may be donated by one or two anonymous persons to a surrogate mother who gave the child to the parents who actually raised him/her!

Closing

Ask the young people to hold out their hands, together and cupped, as though to receive a gift. Explain to them that in their hands they hold not only their children, but also their ancestors. They hold the future and the past. Explain to them what a precious gift this is that they own.

Close with the following prayer:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who sets the solitary in families: We commend to your continual care the homes in which your people dwell. Put far from them, we entreat you, every root of bitterness, the desire of self-importance, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, and godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy matrimony, have been made one flesh. Turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents; and so inspire wholehearted compassion among us all, that we may evermore be loving one to another; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* *Prayer for Families (adapted)*

Book of Common Prayer, page 828

Handout: What Does it Mean to Be a Family Member?

Below is a list of ways people live and work together. Check those things that you usually do as a member of your family.

- Do the dishes
- Clean my room
- Vacuum/sweep the floors
- Dust
- Visit relatives or family friends with the family
- Listen to others in the family
- Put together a party for a family member
- Babysit for siblings
- Do something special for others in the family
- Play games/sports together
- Watch TV together
- Teach others how to use computer/program
- Go to church together
- Help another family member with chores
- Work at a family business
- Laugh at each other's jokes
- Program the VCR or clocks
- Clean the garage/basement
- Take out the garbage
- Wash the house windows
- Create/update the family web page
- Make my bed
- Water the plants
- Clean the bathrooms
- Cook/bake/microwave
- Iron clothes for self/others
- Fetch the pizza/take-out meal
- Fend off telephone solicitors
- Do the laundry for self/others
- Wash the car/vehicles
- Set/clear the table
- Mow/rake/clean yard
- Put away my/others' clothes
- Contribute earnings to the family budget
- Take care of the family pet(s)
- Do the family income taxes
- Help care for an elderly relative/family friend
- Drive family members where they need to go
- Send the family Christmas cards
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

I Am Made in God's Image: A Living Sacrifice

Goal

This lesson is meant to be a wrap-up for all the lessons we've studied about being made in God's image. We will examine what it means to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice

Area Covered

Self, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Romans, chapter 12

Materials Needed

- A copy of the Romans letter for each person
- Bibles – you may want to have several different versions on hand – the NRSV, as well as some modern versions such as The Message, NIV, The Living Bible, etc.

Background

During this class, we will be reading and reflecting on the twelfth chapter of Romans. This may be the first time that many of the young people in the group have been challenged to work with an entire chapter, but this is a great way to start. Our goal here is to open up the Bible and try to make sense out of a single chapter, to ask ourselves what this means to us personally. What would it feel like if this were written to me?

It may take a little time to prepare for this lesson, but the preparation will be worth it.

Using the wonders of computer technology and the template found at the end of this lesson, generate individual and personalized letters to each member of your group. Date and sign each one and put them in sealed envelopes. Mark each envelope as PRIORITY MAIL.

Hand deliver them to each young person as you see them arrive at church. For some, this may mean giving them their letter in advance of the worship service. For others, it may mean delivering them as they arrive at the classroom.

Activity One

When the class all gathers together, have everyone read the letters aloud together.

Open the discussion by asking:

- What did you think when I handed you this letter?
- Who would send you a letter like this?
- Who do you know who might want you to hear these things? And why?
- What words or phrases stood out to you?
- What piece of advice from this letter do you think is most useful?

Explain that this letter is actually a paraphrase of part of a letter written a long, long time ago. A letter that is now recorded in our Bibles as the book of Romans. Encourage the group to talk through the discussion questions, using their typed, personalized letters and then after our discussion, we will compare it with the words we find in scripture.

Allow the discussion to move through the letter...ask all the questions you can think of!

- What does it mean to live your life as an offering or tribute to God?
- What kinds of messages do we hear from our culture?
- What kinds of messages do we hear from God's words?
- Which messages are easier to hear – the culture's message or God's message?
- What does it mean to be the Body of Christ?
- In what ways is the church successful at acting like the Body of Christ? In what ways do we fail?
- What do you think it means to "love from the center of who you are"?
- How do we associate with poor people and needy people?
- How could we as a group practice radical hospitality?
- What could you do that could "bless your enemies"?
- What does it mean to live in harmony as the Body of Christ?
- What would the whole world look like if we lived into this one chapter of the Bible?

Brainstorm as many ways as you can think of to live into the high calling of God to us. Remind the young people that sometimes it is harder to *think about* living a faithful life, than actually to just do it. God wants us to love one another, live in harmony with one another. The Bible is a guidebook (not a textbook) in that it offers us suggestions for how we might live into the desires God has for each of us.

At the end of the session, pass out different Bible versions and help the young people find Romans 12, so they can see where in the Bible their letter comes from. Remind them that in our lectionary readings we rarely hear more than a snippet from the Bible. The whole book is a rich gift given to us by God, through his faithful people. We are blessed to have it as a resource. God has spoken to us through it, across time and space. Thanks be to God.

- What does it mean to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (NRSV) or to "let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind" (TEV)?
- How are we being transformed as a group?
- How are we being transformed as individuals?
- How might our church be transformed?
- If we all began to live according to these words from Romans, how might the world be transformed?

Closing

Stand in a circle. Hold hands. Use the following modified version of the prayer for candidates in Holy Baptism found on the next page:

This lesson plan was developed by Amanda Millay Hughes,
used with permission.; added 11/97

Handout: A Prayer for Offering Ourselves to God

Deliver us, O Lord, from the way of sin and death.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Open our hearts to your grace and truth.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Fill us with your holy and life-giving Spirit.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Keep us in the faith and communion of your holy Church.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Teach us to love others in the power of the Spirit.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Send us into the world in witness to your love

Lord, hear our prayer.

Bring us to the fullness of your peace and glory.

Lord, hear our prayer.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on the earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Human Family, BCP, p.815

Handout: Letter Template to Personalize

Date

Name

Address

Dear Name,

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Live your life as a tribute to God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God and you'll be changed from the inside out. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

We are all here because of God's pure grace, so be careful not to think more highly of yourself than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking. Remember that we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part contributes to the whole. We are the body of Christ, and we find our meaning and function as a part of his body. So, let's just be what we were made to be, without enviously comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run away from what is evil; hold on tightly to what is good. Be good friends who love deeply. Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. Don't burn out; let your hope keep you joyful. Be patient, cheerfully expecting the best. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Share your belongings with those who are needy and find ways to show radical hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Live in harmony with each other. Make friends with nobodies and don't be stuck-up.

Don't answer aggression with aggression, but try to discover beauty in everyone. If it is possible, so much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Never seek revenge; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; instead, conquer evil by doing good.

Yours in Christ,

R13 Lessons

Society

Eating from the Tree of Life: Rules for Holy Living

Goal

To take another look at the Creation story, looking at the difference between eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and eating from the Tree of Life.

To suggest that the knowledge of good and evil is sometimes a profound burden.

To consider ways in which we might choose Life, rather than trying to figure out what is right or wrong.

Areas Covered

Self, Spirituality, Society

Guiding Scriptures

Genesis 1-3, with particular emphasis on Genesis 2:9b: "*In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*"

Colossians 3:1-15 --- Rules for Holy Living

Background

Read Genesis, chapters 2 and 3 and then discuss the main points in the story, using questions such as

- What trees could Adam and Eve eat from without fear of punishment?
Every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- Did you notice that there are two trees in the center of the Garden? (Gen 2.8-9)
The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In the story, Adam and Eve were told that they could eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We can assume that they could eat from the tree of life. In fact, in the book of Revelation, we read, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7b)

What kinds of images come to mind when you consider these two different trees?

Most of us, most of the time, are interested in being right, in discerning the difference between things which are good and things which are evil. Perhaps another way of thinking about our decision-making rests, however, in our capacity to look for life. Instead of asking *Is this good? Is this bad? Am I right? Are you wrong?* we might ask, *Will this promote real life? Healthy life? The kind of life which Jesus said he came to give to us, abundantly?*

Activity One

Draw two trees on two sheets of newsprint.

Ask the group to brainstorm and come up with ideas for the following questions:

- What grows on a tree of knowledge of good and evil?
- What kinds of things grow on a tree of life?
- How can we determine what things are life-giving?

List all the answers on the newsprint, drawing leaves for each answer.

Examples of possible answers and suggestions for fueling the discussion:

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

Experimentation
Facts
Morality Plays
Personal Power and Authority
Power Struggles
Judgment
"Correctness"
Conformity
Punishment
Justice

Tree of Life

Experience
Truth
Life Stories
Relational Intimacy and Commitments
Cooperation
Reconciliation
Consensus
Accommodation
Compassion
Mercy

Discussion Ideas

One thing that is worth holding out in this discussion is that there is nothing "wrong" with the things that grow on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They just grow there. Punishment, conformity, power struggles – all of those things simply *are*, and we attach some meaning to them, some sense of whether they are, in fact, "good" or "evil." See how insidious the fruit of this tree is? We want to make sure that we have the "right" or "good" stuff on the tree of life and the "bad/evil" stuff on the tree of knowledge. But be careful here, because life is just life....The source for that judgment – of people, events, realities, truth – comes from eating from that other tree.

It is safe to say that God wanted Adam and Eve to simply live. And the burden of trying to discern what things are good, what things are evil, what things will help or hinder – all of those knowledge questions appear to have been the burden of God. It is almost impossible for us to imagine a world in which we did not make these sorts of judgments, but it is an interesting idea to consider that God simply wanted Adam and Eve to live their life; and the temptation of the knowledge was that knowing more would make them like gods. It wouldn't actually make them God, only like gods. God wanted them to be fully human, fully alive, as Meister Eckhart put it, and in being such, they would have given full glory to God.

Look up Colossians 3:1-15 in the Bible. Ask the participants to point out everything which might grow on the tree of knowledge, and those things which grow on the tree of life --- and then add those words or sayings to the trees.

A couple of other things to consider with the young people.

- How did the coming of Jesus change the world we were left with after the Fall?
- How do his death and resurrection change the world?
- What does Jesus set up as the model for relationships?
- How is Jesus like the tree of life?

The bottom line is that Jesus is for us the tree of life. In the coming of Jesus we find the whole of creation redeemed. God is in our midst. God is incarnate. God is present to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our relationships are to be built in mutual accountability and answerability, with means and mechanisms for choice making, and the projection of possible consequences. Perhaps we can take from this story a new question to help us make choices when we ourselves are tempted and unsure of what is right and what is wrong. Perhaps we can get

closer to the truth when we ask, "How does this promote life? If I do this, will it bring life to me and to God's people?"

You might want to look at the Prayer for Young Persons (BCP, p.829), which says that God's ways give more life than the ways of the world. Again, you might want to put up newsprint to list God's ways and the ways of the world. What might you list in each category? How does this list compare with the lists on the trees? But in all of this discussion, remember that Jesus is calling his disciples to himself. Jesus is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life." He does not say that he is the one who knows good and evil. He says he is Life.

Also, remember: Jesus tells his disciples the truth when they ask him questions. He is not all that interested in giving them the "right" answer.

For example, when the disciples ask if they can sit on his right and left hand when they enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus answers them by saying they don't know what they are asking for. Adam and Eve didn't really know what they were asking for when they ate from the tree they were told not to eat from.

Or, for another example, the disciples ask who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answers, the first will be last, and the last first. The greatest will be the servant of all. Adam and Eve may have wanted to be like gods so that they could be the greatest in the garden. They ended up having to work even harder and with greater pain and suffering.

And when you start to think about it, many of the parables are about the ways in which God breaks through what seems "right" to us in order to show himself Holy and Alive. For us, holiness is not the same thing as rightness. Only in the person of Jesus do we find a complete unity between right and holy, between completely human and completely divine. Only in the incarnation of God in Christ do we see the result of living from the fruit of the tree of life. Only in Jesus and in the love and power of God are "mercy and truth met together," and "righteousness and peace have kissed."

Perhaps that is what we mean when we say that we want to get back to the Garden. Perhaps it is more available than we think, when we remember that in Christ Jesus all the promises of God are "yes" and "amen," that in Christ Jesus we can do all things, that in Christ Jesus we see and know the fullness of the godhead. In Christ Jesus we find the garden where relationships are more important than rightness, covenanted love is more important than following rules. In Christ Jesus we are empowered to offer our whole lives, the good and the evil, to the one who loves us, made us, redeems us, and calls us to come home.

Closure

O God, you made us in your image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in the bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for the Human Family (BCP, p.815)

Decisions, Decisions: You Get to Choose

Goal

To remind young people that, even though they are still young, they are able to make many important decisions about who they are and how they will live.

Areas Covered

Self, Society

Guiding Scriptures

Take delight in the Lord and he shall give you your heart's desire. Commit your way to the Lord and put your trust in him, and he will bring it to pass. (Psalm 37:4-5)

Background

For a twelve or thirteen-year-old, it's hard to feel like you have much say over the way you live your life. But, in fact, you do. You are able to make all sorts of decisions along the way that impact all aspects of your life. In this lesson we will identify some of the ways that young teens are able to exercise control over their lives.

Activity One

Hand out the worksheet at the end of this lesson: *Who Gets To Choose?*

Ask the group to spend a few minutes filling in the chart.

After they have filled it in, make a master chart of the items they have listed, using newsprint or a chalkboard.

Ask the members of the group to circle the items that they think are unfair or that they think are choices people should be allowed to make at other times in life.

Examples:

- I am not allowed to decide when I go to bed. My parents decide that for me. I think I'll be able to decide when I get to high school.
- I am not allowed to date. I will be able to go out on dates when I am sixteen.
- Older people aren't always allowed to live on their own anymore. I think that they should always be able to choose where they live.

Ask the group to brainstorm why they are not given the power to choose in those situations. Even if they think that they should be allowed to make that decision, ask them what reasons a parent/guardian/teacher might have for not allowing it (ask what they think they might do if they were a parent with a son or daughter the age they are now). They may also want to brainstorm ways to change the dynamics. What would it take for you to convince your dad that you can choose on this subject? What sorts of skills do you think you would need to have in order to make good choices in this or that situation?

Leaders should listen carefully to the areas where the group members feel that they are being denied the right to choose, and help them to identify where they are on the time line of their lives with regard to those decisions.

The *take-home message* here is that even in those areas where they do not experience a choice, they still have the power to act in accordance with their families' wishes, or to act in some other way. If they are compliant, what happens? If they are rebellious, what happens? Every minute of every day we get to choose how we will respond, how we will interact with others. We get to choose what kinds of people we are going to be. We will wrestle with these questions all of our lives. By looking back at members' early lives, and forward to the future, we can open up a discussion of when, and in what areas of life, are we really able and empowered to exercise choice and control.

For teens, it is important that we hold out the notion that every day, as we act in accordance with our parents/guardians/teachers and even our friends' wishes, we are *choosing* to do so. We are free. And when we decide not to act in accordance to those wishes, we freely choose to accept the likely consequences. It may be that the group will want to talk about Civil Disobedience. This is a powerful concept for adolescent people, as it allows them to consider that when they choose to break certain rules they also choose to bear the consequences of those choices. Thinking about Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and even Jesus as living lives filled with acts of civil disobedience may be useful in helping to raise young people who are willing to go against the grain for the sake of justice and mercy.

It's also important for teens to hear from adults that, while there are many freedoms associated with adulthood, there is also increased responsibility. We are answerable to bosses, checking accounts, family members – and to the church, too. The choices we make in adulthood – day-to-day life choices – are influenced by many of the same constraints that kids feel.

As you move through this discussion, there are three key points to remember:

1. No matter how wonderful or terrible your family may be, you get to decide what kind of person you want to be. We all get to decide – we can all choose to be kind, loving, faithful people.
2. Even Jesus was obedient to his parents for a time in his life: there is the story in the gospel where Jesus gets lost on a trip to Jerusalem, and is found days later in the temple. At the end of the story, he goes home and is obedient to his mother and father. Maybe it is a stretch of imagination to say this, but it seems that Jesus could have chosen to stay in the temple forever. Instead he chose to go home and work out who he was in the context of his family and his home community. We can make that sort of choice, too. We can choose to work on our family relationships. Later in life, Jesus shows us his ability to resist the trends in his culture that were wrong, and to bear the burden of that resistance.
3. Learning to choose wisely takes time, patience, faithful friends, and practice. Little by little over the next years of your life, you will be given greater and greater choice in all that you do. You'll get some choice in what you study at school; and greater choice in what you wear, how you wear your hair, and who your friends will be. One of the ways that the church can help us in these and all aspects of our life is by holding Jesus up as the model of love and compassion. We will all make mistakes and we will all make wrong choices at different times. When we make mistakes, we get to choose again to learn the lessons. When we hurt someone or are hurt by them, we get to choose forgiveness. When we fail, it is our choice to try again.

Closing

Open the *Book of Common Prayer* to A Litany of Thanksgiving, p. 837.

Ask the young people to pray silently for a few moments about their choice-making. Encourage them to ask God's guidance in their lives as they exercise the choice to be the kind of people they dream of becoming. After a few moments of silence, use the Litany to give thanks to God for all that has been given to us, and for all the choices that we face.

Handout: Who Gets to Choose?

Fill in the boxes with what choices a person can make in each stage of life:

- Think about categories such as what you eat, what you wear, how you spend your time
- Ask yourself what sorts of things you wish you could choose for yourself at every stage

AGE	MY CHOICES	OTHER PEOPLE'S CHOICES
INFANCY 0-2		
CHILDHOOD 3-12		
ADOLESCENCE 13-17		
YOUNG ADULTHOOD 18-21		
ADULTHOOD Over 21		
OLD AGE Hard to define exactly when it starts.... 70? 75? 80?		

Decisions, Decisions: Pressure Points & Asking for Help

Goal

To establish the necessity of asking for help

To brainstorm a list of resource people we might turn to when we face difficulties

To consider the ways in which our own congregational community might offer help

Areas Covered

Self, Society

Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 20

Matthew 7:7-8

Background

Everyone faces times of crisis in their lifetime. The Bible teaches us that there is safety in the multitude of counselors. But who are our counselors? As the children of God, as members of the Body of Christ, we need to look to one another for counsel and help.

In this lesson we will identify people we might turn to for advice, and suggest to young people that the Church, with her diversity of members, can offer enormous comfort, and good counsel, in times of decision making. We want to invite young people to brainstorm crisis situations and then resource people they might turn to.

Initially, the list may be more related to peers than to adult resources. Leaders are encouraged to think ahead, consult with the primary clergyperson of your congregation, and prepare yourself with the information specific to your community and congregation that you will need for this lesson. Find out about crisis intervention hotlines in your area as well as who might be on the prayer chain. Practical and spiritual advice are both of great importance to young people.

Remember in the Book of James we read,

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes or daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15-16)

For young people, often the smallest tangible acts of kindness can be very important in their growing understanding of a faithful life and a loving God. When we say to a young person, “I’ll pray for you,” it may be a good beginning (and certainly will help, because God mercifully hears and answers our prayers); but we may also need to sit and listen, help clarify the nature and scope of the crisis, offer possible solutions, or point them to the tangible help they need. Every time that we help a young person in crisis, either by our own assistance or by helping them find appropriate resources, we model the truth of the gospel.

Jesus said,

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

Having said that, there is also the problem of different people offering different and often contradictory help. How can we help young people get what they need? In the first activity we will use Psalm 20. We will look to this psalm as a way to establish the discussion in a biblical context. From there we will brainstorm the kinds of difficulties that we all face, and the resources that are available to us in the community of faith. Finally, we will look to Jesus' words in the gospel and remind one another to Ask, Seek, Knock, and Find.

Activity One

Have the young people look up Psalm 20 and Matthew 7:7-8.

Read the psalm out loud. Ask the young people to list all the ways they can imagine being in distress. Ask the young people how God might protect them in those times of distress. Ask what would "help from the holy place" and "support from Zion" look like?

Leaders may need to help young people think of ways that God could answer their needs through God's people. For many of us, asking God for help means that we are asking for some miraculous event. In that asking, we set our mind's eye to watching for lightning bolts and thunder, manna in the wilderness, miraculous interventions in which it does not appear that any other human being had anything to do with receiving God's help. Because we see that as the way, and sometimes the only way, that God might move in our lives, we miss the power of God's action in and through the members of our families, as well as God's action in the Church. What kinds of resources are available in the Church to answer our needs? Prayer; support – financial, spiritual, and emotional; presence; forgiveness are all possible answers.

One of the reasons we celebrate the Eucharist is to remind us of God's most amazing provision. Even in the midst of trouble, death, loss, pain, and sorrow, we come together and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is an important reality. The central miracle for all of us in times of trouble lives in the person of Jesus. While that may be of some theological comfort, it is also the wellspring of actual help and comfort. The community of God's people is rich with skills and abilities that can help us get through hard times.

- Ask the young people to think of ways that the Church has helped them or their families or friends through hard times and with hard choices.
- Ask them to think of ways and ministries which the church offers as tangible demonstrations of God's love.

Three True Examples

Leaders are encouraged to think of examples which are true to their own experience in the church.

1. A woman in our community has been struggling all her life just to get by. She is now in her mid-sixties. She isn't homeless, or destitute, but she has a lot of trouble making ends meet from month to month. She has been alone for many years. Recently, her car died a sudden and unexpected death. She needs her car because she cannot get to work without it and she can't afford to live on her social security income. She called the clergyperson and asked for help. The clergyperson listened to her struggle and after thinking about it, he gave her the \$500 she needed out of his discretionary funds.

Prayer: Oh, God, help me get my car fixed.

Answer: A miracle. There is something miraculous about God's people giving anonymously to the clergy's discretionary fund.

2. A middle-aged woman just lost her mother to cancer. In the weeks just before and after her death, the community of God's people rallied around her family to provide meals and baby-sitting, and even offered to clean her house so that she wouldn't have to worry about it during those difficult weeks. She had wanted to hide away from the people of God, feeling overwhelmed by her sadness. She made the decision to tell people that she was sad and afraid.

Prayer: Oh God, give me grace to get through this time.

Answer: A miracle. The people of God, the Church, came around to support her in tangible ways.

3. A young person in the J2A program had been acting out at school, skipping group sessions, and was threatening to run away. The mother of that young person called the youth leader and asked if they could talk. They got together and talked and cried, and prayed together for the young person.

Prayer: O God, help this child to follow you.

Answer: Friends from the youth group rallied around the young person and offered her all kinds of support. They encouraged her to stay at home, to consider the danger she was facing; and they helped her find a way to talk to her mom and dad. It was a miracle because neither the mom nor the youth leader asked the group to intervene. They had eyes to see what was going on, and, by grace, were brave enough to tell the truth to their friend.

Other possible answers:

The soup kitchen that feeds the homeless

Share your Christmas Ministries

Dinners for people with Aids

Support groups for divorced families

Crisis intervention hotlines for teens, for battered women, etc.

Conclusion:

Read the passage from Matthew 7:7-8. Remind young people to ask for what they need. Leaders may also want to tell the group that the words used in the gospel reading ASK and SEEK are in a kind of super-active, on-going tense in the original language. It is as though Jesus were saying, "Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking." If you can't easily find what you need, if you can't see a path to getting what you need from God and God's people, you should keep asking, keep knocking, keep seeking help. The answers we need to life's many questions may not always be easy to find, but we can find them. One of the great pressure points in times of difficulty is our own reluctance to ask for and seek what we need.

Some people say that we really need to be careful about what we ask for, and make certain all the time that we only ask for what we know is the right thing. That's pretty hard to do because we don't always know what is right. It may be more useful to think in terms of continually asking and seeking and knocking at the door of God's church and at the hearts of God's people. In the very act of asking, of letting ourselves hear what we want out loud as we ask for it, we may be changed – and we may receive strength and grace.

By opening up to one another in the midst of our need, we may be able to see the ways in which we need to be changed. God is always moving in miraculous ways. In times of crisis it is important to find people to talk to, people to whom you can tell the truth and who will tell the

truth back to you. May God's spirit give us eyes to see the people around us who can help us make decisions and help provide what we need.

Closing

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ, and to proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Decisions, Decisions: Who's Got the Power?

Goal

To look at how and where power exists in the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality, Sexuality

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 4:1-11

Background

What do we know about power? In our society, power is important and it is a big part of our everyday life, even when we don't recognize it. When you hear the word "power", what thoughts or images come to mind?

- Authority figures: bosses, police, politicians.
- Nuclear power plants.
- Energy. Powerful motors driving our fast cars. Electricity.
- Strength. The ability to make decisions.

As we form the list in our minds, it may be a long time before we come to the words love, truth, God. And yet, our scriptures teach us that love is the most powerful force in the universe. It is one of the names of God. It is the force which compelled God to send his only-begotten son to live as one of us and to redeem us from the way of sin and death. Truth sets us free. Truth has the capacity to break the bonds of every chain that binds us. This power is alien to the ways in which we think of power in the world because, by defining power in this way, we look to God. This definition of power is radically rooted in the truth of the Gospel, exemplified in the person of Jesus, realized in the actions of the people of God as we learn to trust in it. The power that we know in our hearts is the power of God's spirit. It is the power which transforms lives.

In this lesson plan, we will look at who has the power by examining one of the stories about Jesus' life.

Activity One

Have the young people find Matthew 4:1-11 in their Bibles (make sure they have the same version of the Bible).

Read the story aloud, assigning the reading to three individuals. One will be the narrator, one the devil and one the Lord Jesus.

Encourage the young people to make this a dramatic reading. You may wish to give them a few minutes to practice and get ready.

After the reading, discuss its meaning. What questions of power are raised in this reading? How does Jesus honor the true power of God in each of the temptations? Ask the young people to consider each of the temptations. The following are suggestions for ways which leaders might want to steer the discussion.

1. When the devil tempts Jesus with the idea that he can turn stones into bread if he wants to, what kind of power is he offering to Jesus?

There are many answers to this question, but one option is to consider that the devil is offering Jesus the illusion that he has the power to determine what he needs in order to live, and that he has all the tools in his hands to create everything he needs.

This is a particularly interesting idea for us as modern American Christians. We are convinced that we have the right and the responsibility to care for ourselves. And in some sense we are right. We do need to be faithful stewards of the many gifts we have been given, but the temptation to think that we can do that out of our own strength, out of our own power, denies the power of God. The Gospel story reminds us that there is a power, a life force that we desperately need, which we cannot generate ourselves. No matter how big or small a home we live in, no matter how successful we may be at providing for ourselves: food, clothing, sneakers, cars, music, all of it, there is something more, something that we are powerless to provide. We need the provision of God.

In the most literal sense, we might say, yes, but people live their whole lives without attending to the powerful, living word of God. But one way to think about that might be to consider a light bulb. It survives without electricity. It is still a light bulb, but without the active infusion of that power, it remains dull and unlit. Perhaps the same is true for us. We are like that light bulb, needing the power of God's word to move and flow through us, to excite our hearts as electricity excites the small coil in the light bulb. Without it, no matter how well we live, how well we eat, the Bible reminds us in this story that we will continue to be dull and "light-less." We need, first and foremost, a strong connection with God's word with all of its life-giving power.

2. When the devil tempts Jesus with the notion that he can cast himself off the top of the temple and survive, what power is he tempting Jesus to prove that he has within himself?

One answer may be the power to avoid the consequences of our actions, particularly when we are foolish and tempestuous. For young people, one way that this may apply to their lives is the tremendous sense that they have of being immortal: I can do anything and survive. I can take terrible risks. It will cost me nothing.

On the one hand, that sense of immortality is a necessary part of being young. It is the strength within us that works for change and tries new ideas and changes the world. But when we become confused and think that we are able, because of our own right to exist, to think, to experiment, to do whatever we wish in the ignorant assumption that we will not suffer the consequences, we disregard the ongoing power of God's life-sustaining presence. We make a false assumption that we can manipulate God's loving power in such a way that we will be relieved of the consequences of our actions.

There are forces in the universe which God has set in place. The law of actions and consequences is one of them. If you jump off the top of a building, you will fall. If you do this, then that. This notion of being relieved of consequences as an expression of one's personal power, or as an expression of God's power, is erroneous. Jesus' life is filled with examples of the law of actions and consequences. To try to exercise power to avoid consequences is futile. Perhaps this is why Jesus insists on forgiveness, on compassion, on acts of mercy.

One of the ways to ponder this particular temptation is to ask, in what ways am I tempted to believe that I can get away with anything? Can I get away with cheating? Can I get away with breaking my curfew? Can I get away with stealing? Do we ever find ourselves praying for release from consequences? The very fact that we ask, in prayer, for help, for rescue acknowledges our understanding of God's power, but it is not a good idea to test God in this way. Oh, God, we say, please help me pass this test even though I didn't study. We ask God to demonstrate power in our lives when we have been unwilling to do what we were asked to do. Jesus says that we should not put the Lord God to the test. God's power is absolute, but we always need to remember that God's love compels us first to act with responsibility and integrity.

Leaders may wish to ask the young people, in what ways do you think people test the power of God by wanting out of natural consequences? Do you think you can get away with certain things? What might they be? How would Jesus handle the situation? What would Jesus suggest to you?

3. Finally, the devil takes Jesus up to a high mountain and shows him all the cities and kingdoms of the world. He says, you can have this if you worship me. Jesus answers that he will worship only God. What power is Jesus tempted to exercise here? And what is the truth about the power of God?

What things are spread before you? What do you want? Who do you think you might have to bow down to in order to get them? Why does it matter to us so much that we are strong and powerful?

It's worth considering with young people the ways in which they are offered so many things, but how will they pay for them? What will it cost them?

The temptation is to believe that personal power and prestige are of greater importance than surrender and obedience to God. This is a hard question for adults and young people. In a culture that inundates us with images of abundance and affluence and bigger and better houses and cars and clothes and shoes and more and more, perhaps we are tempted to look and want it all too. But at what price?

Leaders may wish to invite the young people to remember that God is the source and power of all of life. God does not live in the things we have, but in the people we are in relationship with. The power of God does not live in the buildings we build, or the stereos we own, but in the relationships we form. Try to imagine how differently the gospel stories would have been had Jesus decided that being the ruler of kingdoms was more important than being the servant of all.

Closing

Leaders may wish to close this Bible Study with their own reflections on the role of power in their lives. In what ways have you, as a leader, struggled with questions of personal power? How have you struggled to be faithful to the word of God, allowing it to define your life and choices as Jesus allowed the scriptures to inform his decisions in the wilderness temptation?

These are difficult questions, and should be given time and contemplation in preparation for this lesson. (Remember to model appropriate disclosure – personal but nothing that is too personal or reveals personal details of other people's lives.)

The Scriptures teach us that absolute power belongs to God. The powerful people of the world are still only people and they do not possess the true power of life and love. As we make decisions in our lives, as we choose how we will live, we are wise to remember the temptation of Jesus. He allowed the scriptures to inform his decisions. He allowed his life to be a sacrifice to the power and love of God. Even though we struggle and are uncertain much of the time about who has the power, the truth remains that God has it. We are invited to be people of love. We are called to be servants as Jesus was a servant. We are called to be faithful as Jesus was faithful. We are invited to remember that no matter what happens in our lives, no matter what temptations we face, the word of God feeds us, the consequences of our lives are opportunities for learning and growth, not escape, and all the money and kingdoms of the world don't hold a candle to the love and power of God.

Close with the following selection of sentences from the *Book of Common Prayer*. These words come to us from the Bible, through the *Book of Common Prayer*. They are probably familiar to young people, but perhaps their meaning will be enhanced by this group discussion.

Distribute copies of the prayers and proclamations included as a handout in this lesson, inviting the young people to read them aloud as the closing prayer.

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Handout: Prayers & Proclamations of Power

O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power; because you have created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.

Revelation 4:11 Book of Common Prayer, p. 377

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. For everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all.

I Chronicles 29:11 Book of Common Prayer, p. 377

God of all power, Ruler of the Universe, you are worthy of glory and praise.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 370

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 373

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 827

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: Issues I Care About

Goal

To identify social issues that your Rite 13 group really cares about
To help youth identify what issues really matter to them

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Micah 6:8 --- *"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Background

The Rite 13 years represent a key time to sensitize young people to social issues and how we are called upon, as faithful Christians, to respond to the issues of the time. However (social activists please note), these are not the years to promulgate the clarion call: "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (*Deuteronomy 16:20*). The young people simply do not have the maturity to respond at this level; at best all you can get from them is a declaration, "It's just not fair!"

Hunger plays a prominent role in the social issues of Rite 13. There are good reasons for this:

- Hunger can act as a lens through which we can see the web of social injustice that forces many people in the world into abject poverty.
- Food and the sharing of food is central to our religion. There is no book in the Bible that does not have some reference to food and eating and the sharing of it. A cry for food is nestled in the heart of the Lord's Prayer. The central act of Christian worship is the sharing of a simple meal. Food, as theologian Monika Hellwig points out, "side by side with birth and death has always been a central occasion for humans to pray."
- Hunger may be experiential. In fact, the experience of hunger through a structured fast or similar activity is one of the few social injustices *which young people can actually undergo without any lasting suffering for those experiencing it*. (In the J2A years, a role play on Poverty helps young people understand the difficulties poor people face in obtaining basic services—but, it is only a role play, not an actual experience.)

Prioritizing

It is very hard to come up with a hard-and-fast listing of issues that teens and pre-teens might be concerned with, since there are so many. Television, newspapers and news magazines inundate us with information about almost every conceivable issue. Needless to say, however, one can become overwhelmed with the multiplicity of social issues that exist in the community and in the world. Social issues *must* be prioritized.

We are not comfortable with suggesting issues that all teens might be concerned with. What interests youngsters in Boston, Massachusetts might not be the same issues that interest teens either in Charlotte, North Carolina, or in Salem, Oregon, or in Jeffersonville, Indiana. We suggest, therefore, that in prioritizing these you bear two guidelines in mind:

- What social outreach projects is your congregation engaged in?
- What do the young people themselves see as important?

We recommend that you rely on the collective wisdom of the young people in your class – there is abundant wisdom in our young people – and get them to identify those issues that they would like explored.

It may be helpful to use this lesson plan early in the year, as a way to help focus where the energy might be for outreach projects and other events.

Activity One

Review the list of issues provided in the worksheet. You may add to or delete from these as you see fit. Hand out sheets to the young people and proceed as follows:

1. Ask the young people to check off *all* the issues that interest them (you may be surprised)
2. Suggest that they add any issues of interest to them that are not on the list.
3. Ask them to prioritize those of the greatest interest as suggested in the sheets.
4. Collect the forms, collate them and decide on 4 or 5 issues that you think you can discuss.
5. Don't worry if the list of issues seems overwhelming. Perhaps it might be good to have a very long initial list of issues to share with the young people so that when they cry, "There are too many problems; we can't fix them all!" you can say to them gently, "Yes, only God can deal with all of these. But God needs our help, so we work on one or two and do what we can." This is a "teachable moment," and can lead to helpful discussions about diversities of gifts, interrelatedness of social issues, thinking globally/acting locally, and so forth.
6. It is important for the young people (leaders, too) to get a sense that Christian social action is not "us helping them" but everyone working together for the glory of God.
7. Once you have decided on the issues, the next step is to decide how to approach each one. You will, in all probability, not feel you are qualified to make a presentation or develop a lesson plan on all the issues that might interest your students. Fear not. You have a whole congregation with all its accumulated wisdom standing behind you. Assemble a small task force of people with expertise in a given area, and let them develop a one-, two- or three-session study guide. Use experts in your community; your local public library can be a good place to start. You may decide, for example, if AIDS has a high priority, to bring in a speaker on the subject. Alternatively, you might schedule a visit to a pediatric AIDS unit.
8. Having decided on an approach, find out the resource persons in the congregation who can help you. If you need some kind of literature, check the Resource Guide for organizations that can provide help. Also find out through your public library what local organizations exist that can provide information, resource persons, etc.
9. As a final step, you can incorporate some of these issues into your schedule of lesson plans. Be creative. The following table will give you some helpful hints about activities.

A Classification of Social Issues and Activities ---- The ministry areas in the grid follow the six corporal acts of mercy enunciated by our Lord. (*Matthew 25:34-36*)

Ministry Area	Ministries	Suggested Activities and Organizations
<i>"For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat..."</i>	Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in a CROP Walk (<i>see separate lesson plan</i>) • Collecting money for Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief • Participating in an Oxfam-America Fast for a World Harvest or a World Vision Structured Fast • Volunteering in a soup kitchen or food pantry • Volunteer work for Meals-on-Wheels • Participating in a food collection drive
	Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know a homeless family and working with them
<i>"I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink..."</i>	Environmental issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-based environmental projects such as stream clean-up • Planting native trees and shrubs at a local community shelter, soup kitchen or Habitat for Humanity project • Working on trail maintenance and/or construction in a local park • Participating in a community garden project • Volunteering at an animal shelter • Engaging the congregation in an Adopt-a-Highway project • Organizing a congregation-wide recycling program • Planning a creation-oriented worship service • Making a "Web of Creation." • Cooking and eating foods that are lower on the food chain • Planting a vegetable garden at the church • Celebrating Earth Day
	Rural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting with a rural development project and spending time in the summer working on this
	Urban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in a Habitat for Humanity project • Inner-city or community renovations & greening projects
<i>"I was a stranger, and you took me in..."</i>	Refugee sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the congregation in sponsoring a refugee family
	Migrant workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program
	Runaway teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering in a halfway house for teens
<i>"Naked, and you covered me..."</i>	Providing clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering in a church "clothing closet" • Participating in a clothing collection drive
	Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering to work in a homeless shelter • Volunteering to work in a transitional housing program • Participating in a Habitat for Humanity project
<i>"Sick, and you visited me..."</i>	General illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering in a hospital
	AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering on an teen AIDS hotline
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering on a teen VD hotline
	Multiple sclerosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in an MS bike-a-thon
	Drug addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on a drug addiction hotline
<i>"I was in prison, and you came to me..."</i>	Alcoholism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in an Al-a-Teen program
	Prison ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting a juvenile detention facility or halfway house
	Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling kids who are victims of abuse
	Battered women and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering in a battered women's shelter
	Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with programs designed to abolish racism
	Illiteracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring in a literacy program.

This chart was developed by David E. Crean, © 1996; used with permission; added 9/96

Handout: Issues I Care About

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abortion | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adoption | <input type="checkbox"/> Homelessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aging | <input type="checkbox"/> Hunger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AIDS | <input type="checkbox"/> Male-female relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcoholism | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alzheimer's disease | <input type="checkbox"/> MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal rights | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical handicaps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Premarital sex |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Rights issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Racism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crime | <input type="checkbox"/> Recycling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce | <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death and dying | <input type="checkbox"/> Teenage suicide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> Terrorism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economy | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence on television |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> War |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay and Lesbian issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Equity | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Global Warming | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

These are the *three* topics listed above I am most concerned about:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: World Awareness Dinner #1

Goal

To experience and understand some of the dynamics that help to create hunger in the world, through eating and sharing a meal designed to simulate world hunger.

To determine what is a Christian response to world hunger and poverty.

Areas Covered

Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Isaiah 1:11-17

1 John 3:13-18

Mark 8:1-9

Background

This game provides an experiential illustration of some of the inequities of the present world situation where people are hungry in the midst of plenty. Some of the participants will experience feelings of great frustration. Let them. This is all a part of the experience. You will have to spend a great deal of time in the reflection. Ideally, this is a game for 30 players. To get to this number, you might consider doing this in conjunction with the J2A group.

Setup

The participants will be divided in a 1:3:6 ratio, representing the wealthy, industrialized world (First World), the less wealthy but also industrialized world (Second World) and the poor, unindustrialized world (Third World). The participants will be randomly assigned to a group:

1. **The First World** will have a table set up with candlesticks, a linen tablecloth, nice cutlery and good china and crystal. There is one comfortable chair for each person.
2. **The Second World** will have its own table – no candlesticks or tablecloth, paper place mats, plastic cutlery and paper plates and cups. There is one chair per person.
3. **The Third World** has its own table. It is practically bare. There is one plate, one cup and one plastic fork for every four people. There is one chair for every six persons.

Prepare paper “chips” which will be used as currency to buy food. These are allocated per player as follows:

- | | | |
|---|--------------|----------|
| 1 | First World | 38 chips |
| 2 | Second World | 9 chips |
| 3 | Third World | 2 chips |

For food, have the following on hand; you will “sell” this food to the participants for the following prices:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Meat or cheese or pizza | 1 slice | 4 chips |
| 2 | Salad | 1 helping | 6 chips |
| 3 | Rice | 1 portion | 1 chip |
| 4 | Rolls or bread | each | ½ chip |
| 5 | Butter | 1 portion | ½ chip |
| 6 | Pastry (dessert) | 1 portion | 5 chips |
| 7 | Sodas or fruit juice | each | 4 chips |

8	Milk	1 cup	1 chip
9	Water	1 cup	½ chip
10	Raisins	1 small box	½ chip
11	Crackers	1 packet	½ chip

Have extra food on hand to serve out at the end of the game. (We don't want the kids to go home ravenously hungry, do we . . . or do we?)

Briefing

Have one of the leaders assigning the kids to their tables, giving out chips and taking orders for food. Another leader will brief the kids on the rules of the game. You will also need a couple of people to serve the food (maybe parents or volunteers from YAC group).

1. Tell the kids in the **First World** that they may eat all they have. They may also visit the Second and the Third World as tourists.
2. Tell the kids in the **Second World** that they may have enough to eat. They may visit the Third World but visiting the First World will cost them 9 chips.
3. Tell the kids in the **Third World** that they may eat all they can buy with their chips. They may travel to the First or Second World – but it's going to cost them 9 chips.

Activity One

When all the kids have assembled in one room, announce that food is being served in the other room and may be purchased for chips. Bring the kids up to the food room and show them to their tables. Then watch the dynamics unfold. This game should not be allowed to go on for more than 45 minutes. [**Warning:** Stand by and be prepared for revolution; it sometimes happens. *Have a contingency plan to deal with it.*]

Reflection

When the leader decides that the game has gone on long enough, he or she should call a halt.

At this time, produce the food that has been held in reserve and let the kids eat all they need – reflection does not go over too well on an empty stomach. Then pose some of the following questions and get their reactions:

- Which country did you feel you belonged to in your group?
- What was your reaction to the rules of the game? Fair? Unfair?
- What were your feelings about the people in the other groups?
- Did any problems arise within your group? How were these resolved? Do you think the solution was realistic?
- Did your feelings change dramatically during the experience? When and how?
- Has this experience given you some insight into the plight of poor people? What has it made you want to do?
- What is the Christian response to some of these inequities? What does the passage from the First Letter of John tell us? Based on the gospel story, how do you think Jesus would have acted?

Closing

Use one of the following prayers:

Creator God, giver of all good gifts: Teach us and all the people of the world to live wisely and responsibly on this fair earth. Prosper all efforts to restore a healthful environment – to make the air clean, the waters pure, and the soil rich. Let food abound from land and sea, and grant that it may be so distributed that all may have enough, and that hunger and famine may no longer threaten any child of earth; through Jesus Christ, the loving Shepherd of the flock.
Amen.

The Standing Liturgical Commission

God our Father, in the name of him who gave bread to the hungry, we remember all who through our human ignorance, folly, selfishness and sin are condemned to live in want; and we pray that all endeavors for the overcoming of world poverty and hunger may be so prospered that there may be food sufficient for all. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Kenneth L. Genge

“Together in Christ” (Anglican Church of Canada)

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow human beings throughout the world who live and die in poverty or hunger. Give them, through our hands, this day their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give peace and joy. *Amen.*

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Acknowledgment

This exercise is based on a similar one in Patricia Sprinkle, Hunger: Understanding the Crisis through Games, Dramas and Songs (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980). Copyright © John Knox Press, 1980.

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: World Awareness Dinner #2

Goal

To experience and understand some of the dynamics that help to create hunger in the world, through eating and sharing a meal designed to simulate world hunger.

To determine what is a Christian response to world hunger and poverty.

Areas Covered

Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Isaiah 1:11-17

1 John 3:13-18

Mark 8:1-9

Background

This lesson provides another option to the World Awareness Dinner #1. You may choose to use one lesson one year and the other lesson in the next year. Also, some teens were so moved by their experience of one dinner, that they wanted to host a second dinner for their families – or even for the whole parish. Great way to kick off an outreach fundraising or stewardship campaign.

As in the World Awareness Dinner #1, the participants are divided into First, Second and Third Worlds as before. The only difference is in the Action. Make sure, however, that you have enough food on hand to feed everyone.

Activity One

Assign participants to one of the three groups, as before.

The tables are also set up as before.

1. **The First World** will have a table set up with candlesticks, a linen tablecloth, nice cutlery and good china and crystal. There is one comfortable chair for each person.
2. **The Second World** will have its own table – no candlesticks or tablecloth, paper place mats, plastic cutlery and paper plates and cups. There is one chair per person.
3. **The Third World** has its own table. It is practically bare. There is one plate, one cup and one plastic fork for every four people. There is one chair for every six persons.

The participants receive food as follows (consider having the Second and Third World people go through a food line; the First World people are seated and are waited on):

First World	Second World	Third World
Meat Rice A vegetable Salad Rolls and butter Dessert Soft drink	Rice A vegetable Salad Milk or water	A small portion of rice Water

When the participants have been eating for about five minutes, stop the game for an announcement:

"May I have your attention please? First Worlders, we just want to tell you that there's a lot of food in the kitchen, *and you are entitled to all you want*. Please go back for as much as you will. That's all. Thank you."

Note: Be sure to use the phrase, "You are entitled to all you want," because the catch here is that the First Worlders can get anything they want, not only for themselves *but for anyone else*. But, don't say that to them . . . see if they can figure it out for themselves.

Once again, be prepared for revolution. If the Second or Third Worlders try to get more food, stop them. See whether the First Worlders share their abundant food *but do not intervene to persuade them to do so*. Remember, you are merely an observer.

When the meal is over, call the group together for reflection. Share all the food that is left with everyone. Move to a different place (it helps get participants "out of role"). Ask them what happened? How did you feel? What did you think of the others in the room? Etc. If no one mentions it, ask if it occurred to anyone that the First-Worlders could have all they wanted – and could have taken it and given it to the rest of the group members.

When they have reflected on their experience, ask them to apply it to life. How do you think what you experienced today applies to others in the world? How might those in other countries feel about us? How might others in our community see us? Does this change your understanding of or feelings about those who are poor and if so, how?

Closing

Use this prayer or one of the other prayers from the first dinner:

Creator God, giver of all good gifts: Teach us and all the people of the world to live wisely and responsibly on this fair earth. Prosper all efforts to restore a healthful environment – to make the air clean, the waters pure, and the soil rich. Let food abound from land and sea, and grant that it may be so distributed that all may have enough, and that hunger and famine may no longer threaten any child of earth; through Jesus Christ, the loving Shepherd of the flock.

Amen.

The Standing Liturgical Commission

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: I Need, I Want, I Have

Goal

To help participants clarify their values about material goods as they affect their relationship to God.

To have the students examine their attitude toward material possessions

To allow them to reflect on how these possessions affect their relationship to God

To help them see how rampant consumerism can have a profound, if indirect, effect on the lives of poor people

To introduce a nonbiblical writer and thinker --- medieval English mystic, Julian of Norwich

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 6:24-30

Mark 10:17-22

Luke 12:15-28

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 14:33

Background

Personal Inventory

Give the participants three sheets which form the Personal Inventory. They can spend time filling this in. Go through the exercise with them as they fill it in. Explain that if one has a thing, one might not need it; that wanting a thing is also not necessarily needing it; and that one may need something but not to be able to afford to have it.

When they have completed this, have them think, on their own or with a partner, why they responded the way they did. Alternatively, you could have an open discussion. Let them then fill in the summary table and talk about which of the items listed are material possessions and which are spiritual or emotional values.

Study and Reflection

Give the participants the Julian passage to read. Introduce it by telling them a bit about Julian [Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) is the best resource and ought to be in your church library]. Some questions that you should be prepared to deal with include:

- What is a mystic? (pronounced "MISS tic")
- What is an anchoress?

Have one member of the group read the passage. Ask the participants to react to the piece; it may take some getting used to because of the rather archaic phraseology, but this translation (from *Revelations of Divine Love* edited by Brother John-Julian, S.S.J.N.) comes closest to Julian's original text.

Looking into the Story

When you have gone through the passage and had some discussion, hand out the reflection questions. Ask the participants to fill these out and discuss their answers.

Jesus had a lot of things to say about material possessions – most of what he said we'd find threatening. Read the following Gospel passages to the young people or have volunteers read the scripture to the group:

Matthew 6:24-30

Mark 10:17-22

Luke 12:15-28

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 14:33

There are all sorts of ways the discussion can go. For example:

- What does Jesus mean by "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"?
- Why did Jesus love the rich young ruler?
- What was the rich young ruler's problem?
- Why is the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus thrown into hell? (Point out that this is the only story in the Bible in which we actually see someone in hell.)
- Do you really believe that "if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!"?
- Why are material possessions such a barrier to having a good relationship with God?
- Does one really have to give up all one's possessions in order to follow Jesus?

When you have covered all these, introduce the short piece by Meister Eckhart (pronounced "MYster Ekh-heart"). Explain that Eckhart, like Julian, was a mystic. This piece introduces the concept of interdependence.

At this point there are all sorts of ways that you can have a fruitful discussion or engage in meaningful activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Have the students bring in advertisements that they have clipped from magazines or videotaped. Ask them whether each item is a "Need" or "Want" piece (if they have some of these, the same thing applies).
- Using a resource like Ruth Leger Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures* (currently available from World Priorities, Inc., Box 25140, Washington, DC 20007; see the Resource Guide for other groups), have the participants research and report back on such topics as:
 - how many people in the world are illiterate,
 - how many people do not have enough to eat,
 - how many people do not have access to clean, drinkable water,
 - how many people do not have access to adequate medical care.

You might consider assigning groups of participants specific countries in Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe, and North America (include the USA, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom and other Western European nations in this tally).

You may also wish to show a movie. Check out the website for Church World Service (<http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/>) or call them at 1-800-297-1516. They offer a free

9-minute video entitled "Heart to Heart" as well as many printed educational materials, also available at no cost.

You can also search video sites such as You Tube to view "Chicken a la King" – a 6-minute film directed by Ferdinand Dimadura. It won top honors at the 2006 Berlin International Film Festival, where filmmakers were challenged to create a film based on hunger & food.

There is also a short cartoon film "More" available – it's funny and is great for generating discussion.

Consider engaging in some outreach activity. Here are some suggestions:

- a CROP walk,
- a structured fast,
- serving in a local soup kitchen,
- spending some time in a homeless shelter,
- delivering food through Meals on Wheels.

The possibilities, as you can see, are endless.

Re-Evaluation

After you have been through this, consider having the participants do the Personal Inventory again. Ask them to discuss any difference in their forms they might have now.

Acknowledgment: This exercise has been adapted from a similar piece by Patricia Sprinkle in *Hunger: Understanding the Crisis through Games, Dramas and Songs* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980). Used by permission.

Handout: I Need, I Want, I Have Inventory

Personal Inventory

In the table below, check which of the following you (or, in some instances, your family) needs, wants or already possesses. If you don't need, want or have any of the items, leave that space blank.

Item	I Need	I Want	I Have
More than three shirts or blouses			
More than two sweaters			
More than three skirts or pairs of trousers			
More than three dresses or jackets			
More than three pairs of jeans			
More than three pairs of shoes			
Clean socks every day			
Clean underwear every day			
Make-up			
Regular haircuts			
Electric hair dryer			
Automobile			
Books			
A Bible			
A bedside radio and alarm clock			
CDs			
A CD player			
i-Pod or other mp3 player			
Television			
A flat-screen television			
A DVD player			
A video camera			
A digital camera			
A telephone in my house			
A telephone in my room			
Cell phone in the family			
Personal cell phone			
A computer that works			
A computer that I can use for school work			
A computer with lots of games			
My own computer			
Internet Access in my town			
Internet Access in my home			
A computer with lots of games			
A tennis racket			
A basketball hoop			
A skateboard			
Roller blades			
Skis or a snow board			

Water skis			
A sail- or motorboat			
A canoe			
A ten-speed bicycle or a trail bike			
An off-road, four-wheel-drive recreation vehicle			
A swimming pool			
Three meals a day			
Meat at every meal			
My own room			
Air-conditioning			
Indoor plumbing			
Electricity			
Running hot and cold water			
My own bathroom			
A volunteer job after school			
A regular job			
Time to relax			
Fulfillment in my work			
Acceptance by others			
Friends I can talk to			
A close friend			
Friends I can talk to			
A family that supports me			
Parents or other adults I can talk to			
The capacity to receive love			
The capacity to love others			
A realization of God's love			
Praise from my friends			
A chance to cry in private			
The ability to read			
A college degree			
The chance to go to church every Sunday			

Add up all the items you have checked and write totals below. Then go back to the table and decide which represent **material** possessions (M) and which represent **spiritual** or **emotional** values (S).

Category	Need	Want	Have
Total			
Material possessions			
Spiritual <i>or</i> emotional values			

3. What do you think this tells you about yourself? About your relationship to God?

Handout: Meet a Mystic

Study and Reflection

Julian of Norwich was born in England in 1342 and lived until sometime in 1423. We do not know her real name. She was an anchoress, a religious recluse, who lived in a cell attached to the church of St. Julian in the City of Norwich in England and took the name of that church.

On May 8, 1373 (at the age of thirty and one-half years, as she tells us), while she was desperately ill and close to death, she had a series of sixteen revelations of God's love. She recovered to write of these in a book which she called **Showings**. It was at this time that she became an anchoress so as to spend the rest of her life meditating on these mystical visions and writing further about them.

She was a contemporary of the English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer (who wrote **The Canterbury Tales**), and was the first woman to write in the English language. From her cell, she gave spiritual advice to all who sought it, from the humblest peasant to nobles such as John of Gaunt, uncle to King Richard the Second.

One of Julian's most famous insights is: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." The following passage, also a famous one with its image of the hazelnut, is taken from her fifth vision:

"I saw that our courteous Lord is to us everything that is good and comfortable for us. He is our clothing which for love enwraps us, holds us, and all encloses us because of His tender love, so that He may never leave us. And so in this showing I saw that He is to us everything that is good, as I understood it.

Also in this revelation He showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut in the palm of my hand and it was round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: "What can this be?" And it was generally answered thus: "It is all that is made."

I marveled how it could continue, because it seemed to me it could suddenly have sunk into nothingness because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: "It continueth and always shall because God loveth it; and in this way *everything* hath its being by the love of God."

In this little thing I saw three characteristics: the first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third, that God keeps it. But what did I observe in that? Truly the Maker, the Lover, and the Keeper for, until I am in essence one-ed to Him, I can never have full rest nor true joy (that is to say, until I am made so fast to Him that there is absolutely nothing that is created separating my God and myself).

It is necessary to have awareness of the littleness of created things and to set at naught everything that is created in order to love and have God who is uncreated."

Looking into the Story

What does this passage from Julian tell you about created (material) things?

- God created them and maintains them.
- The devil created them and maintains them to tempt us.
- We created them and it is our responsibility to maintain them.
- In the grand scheme of things, they are really rather insignificant.
- Other _____.

What does this passage tell you about what God feels about material things?

- God loves them.
- God does not like them.
- God does not care one way or the other about them.
- They are very important to God.
- They are very unimportant to God.
- Other _____.

What does this passage tell you about how we should feel about material things?

- We are to love them because God loves them.
- We are to hate them because God does not like them.
- We should not care one way or the other about them.
- They should be very important to us.
- They should be very unimportant to us.
- They should not come between us and God.
- Other _____.

Now read Matthew 6:19-21 (also verses 24 & 33) --- Does this affect what you wrote above?

God wills all persons to be saved. Pray for the whole world; bid this very earth to become a heaven. Pray especially to be freed from the sin of greediness. Pray to recognize others who are in need – for there is no such thing as “my” bread. All bread is *ours* and is given to me, to others through me and to me through others. For not only bread but all things necessary for sustenance in this life are given on loan to us with others, and because of others, and for others, and to others

Re-Evaluation: *Having read and reflected on the above passages, go back to the list you made out earlier (I Need, I Want, I Have). Make it out again...are there any differences?*

Category	Need	Want	Have
Total			
Material possessions			
Spiritual <i>or</i> emotional values			

Compare and contrast the two lists. Are there any other changes you might like to make?

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: Crop Walk

Goal

To have the participants reach out to help hungry people by participating in 10-kilometer Church World Service/CROP Community Walk against hunger

To have the participants learn something about hunger at the local, national and world levels

To have the participants solicit sponsorships from the church members

To have the participants experience some of what poor and hungry people must do daily

Areas Covered

Society

Guiding Scriptures

The Scripture lessons are those approved by the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church for services on world hunger:

Isaiah 58:6-11

Psalm 146:4-9 (Lauda, anima mea)

James 2:14-17

Matthew 25:31-36

Background

Church World Service, the relief and development arm of the National Council of Churches has sponsored CROP (Community Rural Overseas Program) walks since its founding in 1938. These walks help raise money for CWS's relief and development work, both in this country and overseas. Community walks are held each year and give opportunity for church groups to come together in a common cause. CWS publishes a list of dates for CROP walks in your area – call 1-888-297-2767 or go online to <http://www.churchworldservice.org>.

Walking 10 miles or 10 kilometers (about 6.2 miles) not only provides good exercise but is also experiential. This is the distance many women in Third World countries have to walk every day simply to get water.

Activity One

A CROP walk needs careful preparation. It is well to start at least a month ahead of the scheduled walk. Generally, a community has a walk coordinator. This person will contact each of the area churches and get a contact person in each of those. It is the job of that contact person to recruit the walkers from the congregation. *Find out who is the contact person for your congregation; if there isn't one, volunteer yourself.*

Week One Hand out sponsor sheets to the group. Explain what the walk involves and get all members to agree to participate. If necessary, show a film about a CROP walk (see Church World Service in the Resource Guide for details). Have the clergy make announcements about the project at all services from now until the walk. Get some facts about hunger – world and local – in the service leaflet on this and on succeeding Sundays. Get information about the walk into the congregation's newsletter. Using Church World Service literature, have the participants develop a fact sheet about world hunger and ways in which the Christian community can respond.

- Week Two** Set up a table after the service in a prominent place (the coffee hour is a good time). Have posters and publicity. Assign group members to staff the table and get sponsors. You might make this into a contest with prizes for the largest number of sponsors, the largest sponsorship in dollar terms, etc. (It is interesting to see how kids are short-changed by adults in this area. Speaking from personal experience, I was always able to get \$1 a mile; my twin daughters could never get more than 25 cents! This, too, is a teachable moment.) If possible, have a speaker address the Adult Forum and have the kids in attendance.
- Week Three** Continue to get sponsors. Explain to the congregation that up to 25% of the money raised will be returned to the community to fund local anti-hunger activities.
- Week Four** The Walk. Have the kids at the assembly area in plenty of time. Help them turn in their sponsorship forms. Have fun on the walk. Plan some very light activity afterward with a *brief* reflection (What did it feel like? Was it tiring? fun? boring? How would you feel if you had to do this every day?).
- Week Five** Announce the total of dollars sponsored to the congregation. Have the walkers recognized publicly. Have the kids staff the table and collect the money sponsored.

Closing

Use the following Collect for World Hunger at the end of each group session; try to have it included in the liturgy on the Sunday of the Walk:

Loving God, whose hand is open to meet the needs of every living creature: Break down the barriers of ignorance, indifference, and greed, we pray, that the multitudes that hunger may share your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

****Additional Liturgical Resource**

Ask the primary clergy person for permission to use the litany on the next page as the Prayers of the People at Sunday services on the morning of the Walk.

If possible, have the young people lead the Prayers of the People on that day.

A Form of Commitment to Combating World Hunger

(A litany written by the Rev. Lloyd Casson, then Canon at the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul, Washington, DC)

Celebrant

My sisters and brothers, the apostle Paul in his letters reminds us that we are all one body, and that, if any part of the body suffers, we all suffer. Throughout the world today many parts of the body are suffering from lack of food and from improper nutrition. Let us reflect on the plight of the hungry throughout the world and our own place in God's creation. I pray that each of us will come to more fully understand how we are related one to another and how, in reaching out to feed the hungry, we are truly feeding our Lord. I call you now to join with me in offering ourselves to this work.

O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth,

Have mercy upon us.

O God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

Have mercy upon us.

O God the Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the faithful,

Have mercy upon us.

O Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity, one God,

Have mercy upon us.

By the mystery of your Incarnation; by your humble Birth; and by your Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation,

Good Lord, deliver us.

By your preaching to the poor, and your giving sight to the blind; by your feeding of the hungry, and your healing of the sick; by your liberating of the captives; and by your bread of eternal life,

Good Lord, deliver us.

By your hard Life; by your Trial and Agony, and by your bitter Death; by your glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the Coming of the Holy Spirit,

Good Lord, deliver us.

In peace we pray to you, Lord God, for the Church; for all your people, especially for the hungry and the destitute; and for your whole creation,

Hear us, good Lord.

For the Holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth and love and found without fault at the day of your coming,

Hear us, good Lord.

For the leaders in our communities, that they may strive to eliminate poverty and injustice and to serve the common good,

Hear us, good Lord.

For the victims of hunger and deprivation, and for all whose condition robs them of the fullness of life, that they may be succored and strengthened,

Hear us, good Lord.

For starving children whose suffering hides from them your love and beauty, that they may be fed and sustained,

Hear us, good Lord.

For the homeless, the neglected, and the destitute; for prisoners and captives; for the aged, the sick, and all who have none to care for them, that they may be relieved and comforted,

Hear us, good Lord.

For those who know injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions, that they may be delivered,

Hear us, good Lord.

For those who give themselves in service among the poor and the oppressed, that they may be encouraged and supported,

Hear us, good Lord.

For a blessing upon human labor, for the right use of creation, for seasonable weather, and for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, that the world may be freed from famine and disaster,

Hear us, good Lord.

For the forgiveness of our sins and amendment of our lives, that we may be delivered from hardness of heart, and from deafness to your voice in the cries of the poor,

Hear us, good Lord.

For our families, friends, and neighbors, that, being freed from anxiety, they may live in joy, peace, and health,

Hear us, good Lord.

For all who have died in the communion of the Church, and those whose faith is known to you alone, that with all the saints, they may have rest in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal,

Hear us, good Lord.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, and one another, and all our life to Christ our God,

To you, O Lord our God.

Son of God, we beseech you to hear us.

Son of God, we beseech you to hear us.

O Christ, hear us.

O Christ, hear us.

Celebrant

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to yourself, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Compassion & Mercy: Our Duty to God & People

Goal

To use the Ten Commandments as a way to study the relationship between faith and works
To deepen our understanding that social action is at the heart of the Gospel

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 25:34-36

James 1:22

James 2:14-18

Resources Needed:

- Bibles
- Book of Common Prayer
- Ten Commandment Handouts: Selection from the Catechism & cut-out pages

Background

What good is it if we use all the right words, say all the right things, pray all the right prayers, but we seldom DO THE RIGHT THING? Not much good at all.

Sometimes we get confused and think that it only matters what we say and not what we do, but the Bible is pretty clear about the importance of Acts of Mercy. The goal of this lesson plan is to listen carefully to the words of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew and to look to the wisdom of James.

In all the readings, we are reminded that faith in God should compel us to Acts of Mercy. If it does not, then we are encouraged by our Scriptures to examine our lives, trust God, and amend our ways. As James says, we need to be “doers of the Word, and not just hearers”.

In part one of this lesson, we will look at scripture passages which speak to the need of Christian people to answer the needs of others. In part two, we will turn to the Ten Commandments for help in understanding what is our duty to God and to one another, and how we ought to respond to our fellow human beings.

Depending on the size and enthusiasm of your group, as well as depending on the time you have available, this lesson can be broken into two parts. Week One would focus on the readings, and Week Two would focus on the Ten Commandments.

Activity One

Break into small groups. Give each group a sheet of newsprint with the following questions, the list of Bible passages and enough Bibles for each participant. Ask the groups to discuss the reading, in light of the questions below. Leaders are encouraged to sit in with the small groups, join in the discussion, and help keep the group focused on the passages.

Discussion Questions for small groups:

- What is this passage about?

- What does it say about the connection between faith & works?
- When have we seen someone hungry and refused to give food? Naked, and refused to give clothes? Thirsty, and refused to offer a drink?
- Are these the only things that people need? Food, water, shelter, clothing? What about medicine? Safety? Time? Affirmation? Companionship?
- What is the difference between a hearer and a do-er?
- Where in your church do you see people doing things?

Gather after about ten minutes. Ask each group to share what they discovered in the readings.

Record their insights on newsprint! Remember, every time we record on paper, we help to demonstrate to the young people that we are carefully listening to what they are saying. Every effort should be made to record as accurately as possible – using the exact phrasing of the speaker, as much as possible – even if leaders or other group members might disagree with what is said. It's okay to have conflicting opinions listed up for the group to ponder.

This is a process of discovery! It's more important that we listen to one another and affirm the effort, than that we focus on "right" and "wrong" answers. The goal is to journey together as a group, as part of the Body of Christ, until together we come to the truth.

Helpful Hint: Some Thoughts on Hypocrisy

Although there are a million ways that this discussion might go, don't be too surprised if the discussion includes some themes around hypocrisy. In fact, if it doesn't go there, ask about it!

Young people at this age are developing a very powerful code of honor. They can see and recognize what they deem to be hypocrisy at every turn and they may need some guidance to see the church as more than just "a bunch of hypocrites." Yes, it is true, that we often see examples of self-proclaimed Christians acting in decidedly un-Christ-like ways... but remember this is a journey we are all still on, and we serve a God of Forgiveness, Second Chances and Reconciliation.

The following issues are worth considering in any discussion with young people on the subject of hypocrisy.

1. They may be absolutely right! The prophetic voices in the church today who speak to us about social justice challenge us to use some powerful measuring tools to determine our commitment to social justice. For example, look at your checkbook. The voices remind us, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" and teenagers understand that in our society, we often show what we value by how we spend or allocate our money. So take an honest look at it... How much money do you give to the poor? To caring for needy friends and family members? The same kind of analysis can be applied to church budgets. What programs do we fund? Who is served? It might be worth examining the budget and the narrative budget for your congregation. Invite a member of the congregation's governing board or the primary clergy person to come to this group, or a follow-up session, to go over the budget and to show what our offerings are used for.
2. Blaming other people/systems/organizations for their failure to act with mercy is not the same thing as acting with mercy. And if we're not careful, this blaming becomes

a kind of hypocrisy, too. "If 'So and So' would just do more..." can easily become a kind of avoidance mechanism. It is easier to complain about what's not being done than it is to actually do something about it ourselves. Commercials on television say JUST DO IT...and as often as not, the best course of action is one that begins with ME. As much as I am able, I can give my time, talent, and resources to those who need them. It is my job to fulfill the Gospel, not to worry about how someone else is or isn't fulfilling it in their life.

3. At the beginning of the year, when you created a community covenant, you probably had some discussion about Compassion, Willingness, and Presence? These attributes can function as powerful guidelines for examining all aspects of life and ministry. In the Gospel readings it doesn't seem to matter to Jesus *why* people are hungry, thirsty, naked, or in jail. It only matters that we give them food, water, clothes, and comfort... because in doing so, we seek and serve the Christ in others.
4. Finally, remember that God calls his people individually as well as collectively to meet the needs of the world. We are all called to Acts of Mercy, but each of us will have to keep our eyes open to see when, where, how. It may be as simple as sharing a lunch with someone at school. Not everyone can go to the prisons to visit prisoners. Not everyone can feed the hungry. But, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, everyone ought to be willing to stop and offer God's grace and provision to the needy we see along our path. Most acts of mercy happen without anyone noticing – being noticed is not the point. A lot of ministry goes on behind the scenes. The question always returns to us. What do I see? How will I respond?

Activity Two

Using the cut-out pages that follow, make enough copies for everyone in the group. Cut apart along the cut-out lines. Put all the pieces into a small envelope.

Hand out the envelopes and ask the group to find the two commandments that say the same thing. They will find one in all capital letters and one in upper and lower case letters. One is from the Ten Commandments, the other is from the Catechism in the back of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

After they have found the matches, ask them to put them in order, as they appear in the Bible (Exodus 20:2-17 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21) or *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP, p. 847-848)

Using the question-and-answer section regarding the Ten Commandments, we can find help in understanding our duty as Christians. The sections are attached to the end of this lesson plan as a handout.

Some discussion of these points may be possible; but even if you run out of time, hand out the Catechism and ask the young people to take it home and read it over. Our Catechism is a rich resource as we struggle to answer God's call in our life.

Discussion questions may include:

- What is a Catechism? Have you ever seen these pages before?
- What is the difference between the Ten Commandments in the Decalogue (p. 350 BCP) and the list in the Catechism (p. 847-848 BCP)?
- Does reading both versions give you more of an understanding than just reading one

version? Which version do you find easiest to understand?

- Why are there more things included in the list from the Catechism?

One reason may be the incorporation of the teachings of Jesus, added to the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). For example, in the eighth commandment, we read, "You Shall Not Steal." The catechism expands the phrase to include the acts of mercy we have been talking about because Jesus makes it clear that it is not enough not to steal – we are called to give.

The Ten Commandments are an essential part of the history of our faith, and a very important tool for structuring our lives in obedience to God's Word. Of course, Jesus said that the whole of the law could be summed up in two parts: to Love God and to love one another. Sometimes it is hard for us to discern what it means to love God, and, even more, how we ought to love one another. The Ten Commandments, especially the "expanded" version in the Catechism, can offer us help in finding the specific ways we are called to act.

Closing

Learning that it is our duty as Christians to follow God's call to obedience can be very frightening. In an age of moral relativism – if it feels good, do it – it can be difficult to sort out what is the necessary, the good, course of action. Sometimes nothing feels good, but we are still called to action. By looking to the Scriptures, we can find help in this process of living faithfully.

Leaders are encouraged to summarize the discussion, speaking gently back to the group the insights and concerns expressed.

Gather in a circle and close with the following prayer:

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every heart, and especially the hearts of the people in this room, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
Prayer for Social Justice, BCP, p.823

This lesson plan was developed by Amanda Millay Hughes and added 11/97

Handout: Ten Commandments (selection from the Catechism)

Q. What are the Ten Commandments?

A. The Ten Commandments are the laws given to Moses and the people of Israel.

Q. What do we learn from these commandments?

A. We learn two things: our duty to God, and our duty to our neighbors.

Q. What is our duty to God?

A. Our duty is to believe and trust in God;

- I. To love and obey God and to bring others to know him;
- II. To put nothing in the place of God;
- III. To show God respect in thought, word, and deed;
- IV. And to set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways.

Q. What is our duty to our neighbors?

A. Our duty to our neighbors is to love them as ourselves, and to do to other people as we wish them to do to us;

- V. To love, honor, and help our parents and family; to honor their authority, and to meet their just demands;
- VI. To show respect for the life God has given us; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures of God;
- VII. To use all our bodily desires as God intended;
- VIII. To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as people who answer to God;
- IX. To speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence.
- X. To resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him.

Q. What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

A. The Ten Commandments were given to define our relationship with God and our neighbors.

Q. Since we do not fully obey them, are they useful at all?

A. Since we do not fully obey them, we see more clearly our sin and our need for redemption.

Book of Common Prayer, pp. 847-848

Handout: Ten Commandments (cut-out pages)

Make enough copies for all members. Cut along the dotted lines.

Place each set of cut-outs in an envelope marked: OUR DUTY TO GOD AND PEOPLE.

I I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF BONDAGE. YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

Love and obey God and bring others to know him.

II YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF ANY IDOL.

Put nothing in the place of God.

III YOU SHALL NOT INVOKE WITH MALICE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD.

Show God respect in thought, word, and deed.

IV REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY AND KEEP IT HOLY.

**Set aside regular times for worship, prayer,
and the study of God's word.**

V HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.

**Love, honor, and help our parents and family; honor their
authority, and meet their just demands.**

VI YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER.

Show respect for the life God has given us; work and pray for peace; bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and be kind to all the creatures of God.

VII YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

Use all our bodily desires as God intended.

VIII YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

Be honest and fair in our dealings; seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and use our talents and possessions as people who answer to God.

IX YOU SHALL NOT BE A FALSE WITNESS.

**We are to speak the truth,
and not mislead others by our silence.**

X YOU SHALL NOT COVET ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him.

Choosing to be a Servant: Choosing to Share

Goal

Another look at the distribution of wealth/food/property.

(note: this lesson is designed to follow the World Awareness Dinners and I Need, I Want, I Have)

Areas Covered

Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

John 6:1-15

Background

In the Scripture passages used for the World Awareness Dinners, we focused on the feeding of the four thousand as it appears in Mark's Gospel. In John's Gospel there is another story, in which Jesus feeds five thousand people. It is the same kind of story of provision, but there are some changes which will add another dimension to this ongoing discussion of faith and social justice issues.

Activity One

Look up the reading from John's Gospel – John 6:1-15. Open the discussion by asking, how does this gospel story differ from the story in Mark? Use the following ideas as focus points for your discussion.

Jesus actually talks to his disciples about where they might BUY the food. Is money the answer to everything? The story tells us that Jesus was "testing his disciples." What's the test? Where do you put your confidence when faced with a big problem? In God? In Jesus? In money? In other people?

Philip says, "We don't have enough money." How can we look for and find solutions when we don't have enough money? Can we look to what we have? Are there hidden resources in our lives?

They get the loaves and fishes from a boy, and they almost dismiss what the boy has to offer because they think it won't be enough. How often do we say, "I can't...I don't have enough." What do you have to offer?

Jesus gave the crowd as much as they wanted. Would they have had more than enough if they took only what they needed? Sometimes Jesus is just downright generous! It is somehow in the nature of God to give us as much as we want...sometimes! The lesson comes through to us after we are fed and warmed and clothed. When did you have as much as you wanted? What do you want?

Jesus tells them not to waste any of the leftovers. Don't waste grace! When God provides for us – and we do experience God's provision all the time – we need to be very careful about how we manage what looks to us like leftovers. How can we be responsible with our leftovers? Hodge-Podge Nights: where we improvise whole dinners from what we have left over in the refrigerator. Recycling. Composting: returning the extra to the earth. A Clothes Closet for the poor. What does our church do with leftovers? Does the church recycle? If not, why not?

Jesus recognizes that he is getting in trouble with the expectations of the people. Can you think of times when people who provide for the needs and concerns of others end up getting in trouble? Martin Luther King? Gandhi? Have you ever done something for someone even though you knew you might get yourself in trouble afterward?

Activity 2

After the Bible Study, ask the young people to role-play the hidden story. What happened to the boy when he got home and all he had was a basket of scraps of fish and bits of bread? How would he tell his mother and father that he met Jesus and they had fed five thousand people? How might you explain to your parents that they still have more than enough, they just have to manage it differently?

Closing

Use one or both of the following prayers:

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, p. 827)

Almighty God, whose loving hand has given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor you with our substance, and remembering the account which we must one day give, may we be faithful stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, p. 827)

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Compassion & Acts of Mercy: Understanding the MDGs

Goal

To about the MDGs – Millennium Development Goals – and discover how we can be involved

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 25:34-46 Seeking & Serving Christ in others – caring for the ‘least of these’

Galatians 6:10 “Whenever we have the opportunity, let us work for the good of all...”

Proverbs 22:9 “Those who are generous are blessed, for they share bread with the poor...”

Materials Needed:

- Poster board, flipchart, or blackboard with magic marker or chalk
- Envelopes filled with monopoly money or copies of actual bills, enough for everyone
- Copies of the MDG handouts

Background

More than one billion people live on less than \$1.00 a day. Every day 30,000 children die from preventable consequences of extreme poverty. Every year 500,000 women die from complications of pregnancy – most of them exacerbated by poverty.

In the year 2000, at the dawning of a new millennium, leaders from 189 nations – including the United States – agreed to work together to cut extreme global poverty in half by 2015. These world leaders unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration, which led to eight specific **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, to be achieved by 2015. If the world meets these goals, more than 500 million people would be lifted out of extreme poverty.

Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation has a great website (www.e4gr.org) with lots of info, statistics and activities. Check out the links below for more ideas:

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

1. **[Feed the Hungry – Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger](#)**
Cut in half the proportion of people (starting at the 1990 proportion) whose income amounts to less than a dollar a day and who suffer from hunger.
2. **[Educate all Children – Achieve universal primary education](#)**
Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
3. **[Empower Women – Promote gender equality](#)**
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
4. **[Save Children’s Lives – Reduce child mortality](#)**

Between 1990 and 2015, reduce by two thirds the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

5. **Keep motherhood safe – Improve maternal health**
Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate. Ensure that pregnant women have access to a midwife, nurse or doctor, as well as any necessary medicine
6. **Heal the Sick – Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
Using education, medicines and mosquito nets, halt by 2015 and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7. **Care for the earth – Ensure environmental sustainability**
Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs to reverse loss of resources. Reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.
8. **Work together to Heal the World – Develop a Global Partnership for Development**
Identify actions that donor countries must take to support developing countries to achieve Goals 1-7. Rich governments help poor governments and people help people in other countries by paying them fair prices for food and other goods.

Many churches of many different denominations have gotten involved with the Millennium Development Goals (see online resource section for weblinks) so we believe it is important to include some discussion of the MDGs in the *Journey to Adulthood* program.

Activity One

Begin by asking your group what they know or have heard about the Millennium Development Goals. If they aren't familiar with them, just give them a brief overview and ask what they know about poverty in other countries.

Pass out copies of the Millennium Development Goals. Read through each goal and talk about what it means. (You may want to add some statistics to your explanations – see websites below for further information.)

Ask each person in your group to take a few minutes to think about each goal individually and things they might do to help. Hand out pens or pencils and let them jot down notes under each picture on the handout. Gather back together and share your responses.

Activity Two

There are many creative ideas out there for helping congregations and other groups learn about the MDGs – not just learning the informational facts, but also understanding the concept of how the MDGs relate to our responsibilities as Christians.

This project stems from MDG #4 Reducing Child Mortality: Ask your group, “Did you know that around the world, a child dies every three seconds of preventable, treatable causes?” Ask them to join you in a brief meditation. Have the group to count to three with you and then snap. Do this 15-20 times in a soft, prayerful manner... asking the group to remember the children who are dying right now, even as we meet.

If you want to make an even more vivid impression, bring in 1200 popsicle sticks and while you talk, have the teens lay down sticks to form a multi-layered cross. If your group meets for 60 minutes, then approximately 1200 children will die during that hour. Seeing that many sticks will help teens conceptualize that number.

For an even bigger project you could involve your whole congregation in, check out the info at http://e4gr.e4gr.org/digital_faith/dfcfiles/89 which describes (and shows pictures) of a popsicle stick cross using 10,200 popsicle sticks. This number represents the number of children who died each day that General Convention met and people from all over helped put together these amazing crosses.

That link will also give you creative ideas to talk about each of the 8 goals.

Online Resources for Activities and More Info

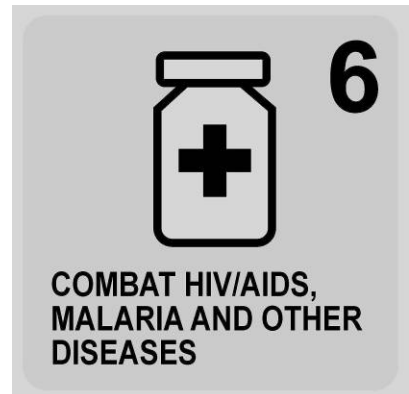
Free downloadable youth resources: <http://www.e4gr.org/c-y-ya/resources4youth.html>
Episcopal ONE Campaign: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3654_75425_ENG_HTM.htm
Lutheran Church: <http://www.elca.org/hunger/resources>
UNICEF: <http://www.unicefusa.org/site/c.duLR1800H/b.25933/k.CA88/Home.htm>
Hunger No More: http://www.hungernomore.org/web_resources.html
Church World Services: <http://www.churchworldservice.org>
Presbyterian Church: <http://www.pcusa.org/hunger/resources.htm>
Bread for the World: <http://www.bread.org/get-involved/one-campaign>

Closing

End your time together by standing in a circle. Have teens put their MDG sheets on the floor in front of them and use the MDGs as a prayer, praying "God help us eradicate extreme poverty and hunger... God help us achieve universal primary education..." etc.

Lesson plan added August 2009 © Tracey E. Herzer. Used with permission.

Handout: The Millennium Development Goals



R13 Lessons

Sexuality

Communicating with Others & Being Real

Goal

To learn what it means to be “real” – with each other and with God

Areas Covered

Self, Society, Spirituality, Sexuality

Guiding Scriptures

I Samuel 16:7 Human beings look at the outside, but God looks at the heart

Romans 12:9 Let love be genuine

Materials Needed

- Poster board, flipchart, or blackboard with magic marker or chalk
- Envelopes filled with monopoly money or copies of actual bills, enough for everyone
- A copy of the book *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams

Background

Gather the group together and briefly check in with everyone, asking them how their week was. Ask each person to share one good thing and one bad thing that happened to them that week. (I had one youth group that did this exercise each week and they called it “Pows and Wows.”) Give each member about one minute to share.

After you have heard everyone’s “pows and wows,” tell the group this story:

This week something really surprising happened to me and I want to share it with you. I received an unexpected gift this week. One day I went to my mailbox and there was an envelope just crammed full with paper bills I couldn’t believe it. At first, my mind raced with all the things I wish I could buy for myself and my family... a new car, some great vacations, new clothes, etc. But after living with it for a couple of days, I decided that was kind of a selfish approach. After all, I am a Christian and part of this Christian community... so after much prayer and deliberation, I have decided to share what I have with you.

Then bring out a stack of envelopes filled with either Xerox copies of bills or monopoly money. Have everyone open their envelopes at the same time. (At this point, we suggest having chocolate, popcorn, or other treats to bribe the rowdy and disappointed crowd!) ☺

Ask some questions, such as:

- In my story, I never actually said the word “money” but I wanted you to think it. How did you feel when you thought I was giving you money?
- How did you feel when you found out it wasn’t real money?
- Have you ever heard of a situation where someone pretended to be something – a real friend, a “tough guy”, someone who is romantically interested in someone else, a super-religious person – but then something happened and you found out that wasn’t who they really were?
- Have there ever been times when you didn’t want to show the real you?
- What do you need to have in order to be the real you? (Someone who you trust to like you no matter what? Time to get to know someone? A relaxed atmosphere?)

On a flipchart or board, make two columns: one labeled “real” and the other labeled “not real” (try to stay away from using the word “fake” because for the purpose of this lesson, even when we aren’t living into our most authentic selves or behaving in the most authentically Christian way, it doesn’t mean that we are a total “fake”).

Ask the group to think about words that describe characteristics of “real” and “not real” and see what you can come up with. If they get stuck, give concrete examples such as:

- A gimmicky sales person who calls you “buddy”
- A true friend
- Someone who pretends to be smart
- Someone who hides how smart they actually are because they’re afraid of reactions
- A faith healer on TV who says God will heal you if you send money
- Someone who acts like they like you so they can copy your homework
- Someone who acts like they are romantically interested in you to make someone else jealous
- An athlete with real talent and skill

After your discussion, ask the students to close their eyes and listen to a story. If your space (and their clothing) allow it, tell teens they can lie on the floor and close their eyes to listen – it will help them relax and concentrate. Ask them to listen carefully for words or phrases they hear in the story that relate to our discussion of authenticity.

Read *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams.

After the story, ask them to share the words or phrases they liked. Write them up on the board and see how the book phrases can be linked back to the earlier conversation.

Talk about how the best relationships – family, friends, romance – are all based on honesty... where you can be your real self and still be loved and accepted. It can be scary to allow yourself to be that vulnerable with someone else, but in the end, it’s worth it to be truly known.

Closure

As you close, ask each person to silently think of the people in their life with whom they can be the most “real” – the people who love you in spite of your “shabby coat” or your faults.

Remind the class that God knows the real me – the me I want to be, the me I am when I’m at my best and the me I am when I’m at my worst, the me I hope to someday become – and loves us with a singular, astonishing passion.

Close by reading Philippians 2:13 – “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.”

Remind them that being “real” is not something you either are or are not... it is a process, something we work on over the course of our entire life.

I Am Made in God's Image: God Said it was Very Good

Areas covered

Sexuality, Spirituality

Goal

To remember and deepen our understanding of the creation story in Genesis

Objectives

To have participants do their best to remember all the details of the creation of Adam and Eve, the garden of Eden, and the first sin.

To begin to examine how men and women relate to one another, and how the consequences of that first sin have distorted our relationships.

Overview

A lot of people don't know that there are really two accounts of creation in the Bible. The first is known as the P (from Priestly) account and the second as the J (from the German Jahvist for Yahwist) account. Look at the language: in the first account God is referred to simply as "God" (Hebrew: 'elohim), in the second as "Lord God" (Hebrew: Yahweh 'elohim). While this is incidental to the main object of this lesson, it is worth knowing.

*For more information on the creation stories and how they reflect differing understandings of God and God's creation, look to the **Doubleday Pocket Bible Guide** by Linda L. Grenz (out of print but it may be available online). In the chapter on the Hebrew Scriptures, she offers a brief explanation of the many different sources, perspectives, and storytellers whose works and influences comprise the Old Testament.*

This is a helpful step for leaders, especially in this lesson, because we are going to begin by asking the young people to tell the creation story from memory. Don't be too surprised if many of the details are lost, and if parts of the story are misrepresented altogether. It may be that young people in your group have never actually read the story, and, in fact, have never even heard the whole thing. But they will probably be at least a little familiar with it, and you should be prepared to fill in details as need be. Don't worry, we're not suggesting that you memorize the whole creation story—although that wouldn't be a bad idea—but rather that you familiarize yourself with it and pay attention to what happens to Adam and Eve.

There are a few things you might want to remember and consider as you prepare:

Many young people reject this story of creation as merely a myth, not literally true or happening in seven 24-hour days. Many people think that the word "myth" can be taken to mean that the story is not to be believed: "It's a myth, after all, like the Greek myths, or the Roman myths." But *believing* a myth is the whole point. Hidden in stories we call mythology are many of the basic truths of living: People can be cruel, Life is hard, Evil plays a part in our human experience, but so does the Divine.

When Christians talk about myths, particularly with regard to the Scriptural stories of our heritage and tradition, we do so with the understanding that God has acted in the past in ways which are evident, though not always easy to understand. The stories of the Old and New

Testaments were divinely inspired by God's Spirit in order that we might have a framework for understanding how life got to be the way that it is.

For many of us, calling the Bible a collection of "myths" makes us uncomfortable. We fear that by doing so, we put these stories in the same category with the myths of Zeus, or the myth of Sisyphus. In fact, when we say that the stories told in the Bible may be "mythical" in structure, rather than simply factual accountings of actual events, all we are saying is that the history of God's action is so important to us that God inspired writers to tell these essential stories.

There's no way to know if every single detail is factually accurate (we weren't there at the creation of the world, so we can't know if a "day" is the same way we understand a 24-hour day today) but nevertheless we understand that these stories hold out principles which undergird our whole way of being in the world. For example, the creation story may be factually accurate – many faith-filled people believe that it is – but it may also be a myth. In either case, it recounts the miraculous creation of the world and all its people, plants, and systems. We see in the first chapters of Genesis a marvelous creator God, working out a plan for all of creation. Whatever we believe about the details of how things happened, what is most important is that we understand the story of God as a loving Creator who longs to be in relationship with His beloved creations.

Bible Study

Have the young people look up these passages in their Bibles: Genesis 1:26-31a; Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25; and Genesis 3:1-21.

Read each section aloud. Ask the young people to consider some of the following questions. The focus of the discussion is to consider how this story might help us to understand some of the struggles between men and women in our modern world.

- What things happen in this story which might be explanations for the ways that men and women understand one another?
- How has this story influenced our understanding of male/female relationships?
- Go through each of the questions in the handout and ask for discussion on each one.

Newsprint and markers might be very useful here.

- **In the first creation story, it says: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." What does this mean to you? Do you think this means that men and women are equal in God's eyes?**

To know that we are made in the image of God does not necessarily mean that we "look" like God, but rather that we have qualities of character and personhood which are representations of the character of God. For example: God's nature is defined throughout the scriptures as loving, compassionate, just, powerful. Because we have been made in the image of that character, we have the capacity to love, show compassion, act justly, affect change in the world. Another consideration might be that God is Triune – Three in One. That says something about our need to be in relationship with one another, honoring the dependency and interdependency of human beings. It is important to mention that the very fact that the Bible announces that "male and female, he created them..." is a powerful reminder of the basic equality of men and women,

even if history has distorted that equality. Human beings also have a tremendous capacity to be wrong (we are human after all, NOT gods) and the distortions of our understanding are evidence of our frailty.

- **In the first creation story, it says: "God blessed them." What does this mean?**
*The blessing of God is another important factor. This verse reminds us that just by our being – before we do anything – we are in a blessing relationship with God. Just being alive and human is enough for God to grant an original blessing, as Matthew Fox describes in his book, **Original Blessing**. What happens next cannot negate the original moment of exchange with God. The rest of the experiences in the Garden and after, throughout history, may alter the experiences we have of that blessing, but the blessing is there.*
- **In the first creation story, it says: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." What does this mean? What does it say to us about the equality of men and women?**
Pay close attention to the words "everything" and "very good." In the garden there does not appear to be a hierarchy of good, better, best. Only very good. Men and women are both, always, very good.
- **In the second creation story, it says: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' " What was God's next step? Why was this not satisfactory?**
God made animals! All sorts of animals. But eventually God made Eve. She was like Adam, the same species. She was what he needed. This tells us something really important about human life. We need the company of others who are like us, in order to be fully human. The capacity human beings have to share stories, memories, reflections, and experiences is central to the nature of being human. We are more than instinct. We have a capacity to ponder together, to exchange insights and feelings. Relationships between individuals allow us to become more human.
- **God made the rib taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. What was the man's reaction? Does this affect your views about the equality of men and women?**
*It appears from the scripture that that moment of recognition – "this is part of me" – is deeply human. Adam was feeling that same thing that we feel in modern times when we meet someone who seems to complete us. They offer to us something which we know we had in us all the time; but now we can see it, touch it, be in relationship with that feeling and quality through the presence of the other. Perhaps this is why, even in our modern culture, we find ourselves saying things like, "It's as if I've known him all my life," or "When I am with her, I feel more like myself."
Adam's delight in Eve, and her delight in him, must have been the same sort of feeling. Loving another human being, as we can assume Adam and Eve did, often gives each of us a greater sense of who we are as people.*
- **"And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." What does this tell us about our sexuality?**
Remember, God blessed this relationship. They had nothing to be ashamed of. They were living their life in the Garden, eating from the Tree of Life, in right relationship with God and with each other. Perhaps we can infer from this text that there is a necessity

for right relationship with God if we are ever to be truly seen and known by another person without shame or fear. What happens next in the story reminds us that the first and most important thing any of us need is a right relationship with our Maker. Another human being, no matter how important he or she may be to us, is not enough. WE all need to be in a blessing relationship with God, and, as much as we are able, to be obedient to God's call on our lives, if we are to be in right relationship with one another.

- **In the account of the Fall, it says: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves." What does this tell us about our sexuality?**
Generations of scholars and mystics have struggled with the text we are now looking at, so don't be surprised if these verses stir up a lot of controversy in your classroom. There are likely to be lots of opinions and conflicting ideas. That's OK. The Christian tradition and the Jewish tradition before it have come to many (sometimes contradictory!) interpretations of this story. For our purposes, it may be enough to simply restate the comments from the last question/answer. Without an absolute assurance of our right relationship with God, it is going to be difficult for us to trust one another, to allow one another to be known, to be comfortable with who we are. A relationship with God grants us the greatest security in who we actually are. God has said time and again through history that we are loved, and loved, and loved. But when we decide to do our own thing, break all the rules – decide that being our own god, a god unto ourselves, is more important than living in relationship with the one true God – we are likely to find ourselves ashamed and uncomfortable in all our relationships.
- **What would have happened if Adam and Eve had taken responsibility for their sin? What would have happened if Adam said, "I ate the apple and Eve ate the apple. We were wrong. Forgive us." Would it have made a difference?**
Because this is not the only story in the Bible, we can look to the rest of the book and conclude with great confidence that God would have forgiven them. Every time a person repents – turns around after making a mistake and admits both the error and the responsibility for that error – God is merciful and quick to forgive. You may wish to ask the young people if this is true in their own families. Do your parents react differently when you tell the truth and when you lie about your mistakes? Do your parents appreciate it when you say, "She did it!", instead of saying, "I am responsible"?
- **God punished both Adam and Eve. What do the different punishments say about equality between sexes?**
If nothing else, the punishments remind us that if we are going to blame one another we will be isolated from one another. When Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent, the result is that they are sent off into that isolation. Men will have to work hard away from women – tilling the field. Women will have to work hard away from men – bearing babies with pain. It isn't that they couldn't do this work together, but the blaming puts what the Bible calls an enmity between them. Enmity means bitter feelings between enemies. Blaming makes enemies. Telling the truth reconciles people, both with one another and with God.
- **Would saying "sorry" be enough?**
One of the difficult truths that we face as adults is that even though we can recognize and admit, even confess as sin, the mistakes we have made, the long-term consequences remain. Even if Adam and Eve had said that they were sorry, that they

were responsible for their sins, they would still have eaten from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they would have had to live with the consequences forever.

- **What's the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?**

This is one of the central issues for all of us. Being forgiven is the first step. Even if Adam and Eve had admitted their sins, they would still have had work to do with each other. They would still have had to find paths for reconciling their relationship with God and their relationship with each other. No matter how sorry we may be about our mistakes, we have trouble forgetting them! The same is true for all the things we know as sins. We may be forgiven, but we can't seem to forget. This is where it gets interesting for us today. All that blaming, all the sin, all the perils of being human have been forgiven in the love and death of Jesus Christ. But we are still in the business of reconciliation with one another and with God.

Lead the discussion to connect the Adam and Eve story to the young people's personal lives:

- When have you done something that you were really sorry for but couldn't change the consequences of?
- Why is it so difficult to imagine the consequences of our actions in advance?
- What might have happened if Adam and Eve had waited to talk to God about eating the fruit?
- How can we find wise counsel when we face temptations? Whom do you talk to when you are in a quandary? It is noteworthy that Adam and Eve did talk to one another... maybe they should have talked to God. Maybe they should have waited for a day before they did something that God expressly told them not to do.
- How can we help one another to not make the same mistakes over and over again?

Other ideas might spring up! For example:

- Some people think that we are supposed to try to get back to the Garden of Eden.
- Leaders may remember that chorus by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young: *"We are stardust, we are golden. And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."*
- What was in the Garden that we might want to get back to?
- Relationships: Before the Fall, there is a clear message in the scriptures that Adam and Eve were in right relationship with each other and with God. Using the story, what kinds of things might we be expected to do in our own lives to restore the relationships we experience?

The main themes to be drawn out are:

- The goodness of creation
- The equality of men and women in the eyes of God
- The blessedness of this relationship
- The position of the woman in the second creation story as a companion to the man (in this respect, you may want to refer to Meister Eckhart's perceptive comment: *"When God created woman, he did not take her from man's head that she might be his superior nor from his feet that she might be his inferior, but from his side that she might be his equal"*).
- What sin did to distort this relationship

The Story of Adam and Eve and My Story

Now that we have looked at the Bible stories, let's consider how this plays out in our relationships, particularly in relationships between boys and girls, men and women.

At this stage of the proceedings, you might want to distribute paper or white 3x5 cards for the participants to list their responses to the questions (or use the handout):

- Do you feel superior to boys/girls in any way? Why?
- Do you feel inferior to boys/girls in any way? Why?
- Is there any way you feel that boys/girls are your equal?
- Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?
- Do you have a boy/girl as a friend? Did you ever? What did people say about the two of you?
- What do you think the love and forgiveness of God might offer to us in our friendships with people of the opposite sex?
- What do men and women need to do in order to be reconciled to one another?
- *Answers you are looking for include: to stop blaming, to take responsibility for our actions, to honor one another.*

Distribute colored 3x5 cards for the participants to list their responses to the questions:

- Boys: list three things about girls that you *really like* and three things that you *really dislike*.
- Girls: list three things about boys that you *really like* and three things that you *really dislike*.

These responses can be shared.

Another way of going about this is to have an open discussion, recording the answers on newsprint (having them put the likes/dislikes onto 3x5 cards later). You will probably get some spirited responses – just try to avoid civil war! Insist rigidly on the group norms, especially the one relating to listening to the other person and respecting his or her views. With the final question, you may wish to adopt a completely different approach:

- List three things about boys/girls that you *really like* and three that you *really dislike*.

Get *all* the responses on newsprint and try to get *plenty* of discussion.

When you have completed the newsprint-guided discussion, ask the participants to list their responses again on 3x5 cards with different colors for “really like” and “really dislike.” When everyone has finished, put the cards face down on the table in separate piles for girls and boys, like and dislike (you will have four piles). Shuffle each pile.

For the “really dislike” piles, distribute (or deal as if it were a card game) the girls’ choices to the boys and the boys’ responses to the girls. Form a prayer circle and offer these up aloud in prayer as part of a confession of sin.

Note: The point here is to get the young people to understand that what is sinful about things one might dislike about another person is that the dislike can create a barrier to true relationship. For example, if a girl thinks boys are too noisy, and she then begins to reject all boys because of this, or to judge all boys as being too noisy, she is putting up barriers to relationship, barriers to mutual concern and support. Dislike can lead to judgment and rejection, putting others down, etc., and this is the direction that leads to sin. Someone can dislike something about another person without judging them for it or rejecting them; they simply accept that the person has faults like everyone else does, and continue to build a relationship with them. They don’t blame the person for things they dislike about him or her, but continue to honor one another as children of God. Sin is not about personal faults,

it's about actions that lead to broken relationships. Sin is breaking our relationship with God, with others, with God's creation, or with ourselves. Before leading the group into the prayer circle, get them involved in a discussion about this concept of sin.

Then have each girl draw three cards from the girls' "really like" pile and similarly for the boys (or, as before, distribute these cards to each group so each participant in his or her group has the same number). Form the prayer circle again and offer up the "likes" aloud in prayer as thanksgivings. Be creative. Perhaps the participants can design their own liturgy. The conclusion of this activity constitutes the **Closure** section of this lesson plan.

Closing Thoughts

Two themes are crucial to this lesson: God's blessing and our need. We have a deep and abiding need to be in a blessing relationship with God. When we as individual people work on and learn how to love God and live in relationship with God, we are blessed. That blessing extends into our relationships. It makes us able to trust deeply, live more fully. But when we make mistakes, when we overtly sin, we need to admit it and begin the work of reconciliation. This is going to be true in every relationship we have for all of our lives. We need God and we need each other – and there isn't any way out of it. The only path that makes sense for us as people of faith is a path which leads us to tell the truth, to admit our weakness and ask God for mercy. Then, and perhaps only then, are we in a position to stop the blaming, to restore our relationships with others, and to live as God intended us to – eating freely from the tree of life.

Handout: And God Said it was Very Good! Creation

Read the following passages from the book of Genesis:

Genesis 1:26-31a

Genesis 2:4b-9,15-25

Genesis 3:1-21

Looking into the Stories

In the first creation story, it says: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." What does this mean to you? Do you think this means that men and women are equal in God's eyes?

In the first creation story, it says: "God blessed them." What does this mean?

In the first creation story, it says: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." What does this mean? What does it say to us about the equality of men and women?

In the second creation story, it says: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' " What was God's next step? Why was this not satisfactory?

God made the rib taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. What was the man's reaction? Does this affect your views about the equality of men and women?

"And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." What does this tell us about our sexuality?

In the account of the Fall, it says: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves." What does this tell us about our sexuality?

The man's reaction to the God's questioning was to blame the woman: "The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.'" How does this contrast with the man's first reaction to the woman?

God punished the man and the woman. "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'" What does this have to say about equality between the sexes?

What would have happened if Adam and Eve had taken responsibility for their sin? What would have happened if Adam said, "I ate the apple and Eve ate the apple. We were wrong. Forgive us." Would it have made a difference?

Would saying "sorry" be enough? What's the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? One of the difficult truths that we face as adults is that even though we can recognize and admit, even confess as sin, the mistakes we have made, the long-term consequences remain. Even if Adam and Eve had said that they were sorry, that they were responsible for their sins, they would still have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they would have had to live with the consequences forever.

When have you done something that you were really sorry for but couldn't change the consequences of?

Why is it so difficult to imagine the consequences of our actions in advance?

What would have happened if Adam and Eve had waited to talk to God about eating the fruit?

How can we find wise counsel when we face temptations? Whom do you talk to when you are in a quandary?

How can we help one another from making the same mistakes over and over again?

The Story of Adam and Eve and My Story

Now that we have looked at the Bible stories, let's look at our own feelings. Answer (be completely honest, now) the following questions:

For the girls:

Do you feel superior to boys in any way? Why?

Do you feel inferior to boys in any way? Why?

Is there any way you feel that boys are your equal?

Do you have a boyfriend?

Do you have a boy as a friend? Did you ever? What did people say about the two of you?

List three things about boys that you *really like* and three things that you *really dislike*.

I really like:

I really dislike:

What do you think the love and forgiveness of God might offer to us in our friendships with people of the opposite sex?

What do men and women need to do in order to be reconciled to one another?

Decisions, Decisions: Tools for Decision Making

Areas covered

Self, Spirituality, Sexuality

Goal

To look at a few ways to make decisions

Guiding Scripture

Luke 14:25-33 Count the cost!

Overview

There are steps that we can take to help us make good and solid decisions. Sometimes we really are unable to see all the consequences of our choices, but there are a few tools that we can employ in order to aid us in the struggle to be faithful.

Many psychologists say that we make all our decisions based on self-interest. We consider whether this or that decision will make us feel good or bad, provide comfort or chaos, answer our questions or create new questions for us. The premise of this thinking is that we are basically self-interested beings. We can only decide to do what we determine is good for us (even if we are ultimately wrong, or even self-destructive, we decide based on our misunderstanding that this will nevertheless be “good for us.”).

This is a very provocative notion and it raises some interesting questions for young people. How can I determine what is best for me? How can I project my thinking out into the future to see what might happen as a result of my choices? What consequences am I willing to live with and what consequences do I wish to avoid?

But there are other ways to think about our decisions. Some say we make choices based on the benefits to others, to those close to us. Others say that we choose on the basis of our understanding, or our intuition, on knowledge, on a whim. Some say we should always be blindly obedient to the rules, the rules are there to protect us. Others tell us that we are always supposed to consider the situation, and the ethics of the moment. In fact, we probably do a little of all of the above, and we struggle because sometimes we can't figure out what's best for me, for you, for strangers, for friends. How then can we decide? What resources and tools are available to us when we face a dilemma?

This lesson plan seeks to introduce young people to a couple of ways to think things through and some tried and true resources. What we want for our young people is to have tools at their disposal to help them make the best possible decisions as they enter into the tumultuous experience of adolescence.

As they earn more freedom in their social lives and the activities in which they choose to engage, and also as they begin to deal with their changing bodies and hormones and new relationships, the importance of making good decisions becomes not just important – but can literally be a matter of life and death.

We will look examine thought patterns that influence decision making and how thoughts of “doing what I want to do when I want to do it” – the pattern of “if-it-feels-good-do-it” thinking. We will also look at how we might consider consequences, both seen and unseen. We will also introduce the notion of civil disobedience. Jesus is such a fine example of this in that he was willing to break the law, but he understood the consequences he would likely suffer if he did so. Helping young people see possible consequences of a certain decision is an essential skill in this journey to adulthood. In addition, we will look at the wisdom of asking for advice, and the resource of the scriptures as an aid in our decision making.

Activity

Ask the young people to consider how they make choices. Leaders may wish to offer a couple of scenarios which will open the discussion. For example:

A man’s wife is a diabetic and she desperately needs insulin. He is unemployed, they have no health insurance. Standing in the pharmacy, he sees a package of insulin, exactly the dosage his wife needs, sitting on the counter. The store is suddenly empty. He knows he can steal the insulin and not get caught. Should he take it?

You and your friends go to a party where there are a lot of kids you don’t know. There is alcohol at the party, but no one in your immediate group has had anything to drink yet, but a couple of them are talking about it. What do you do?

A homeless person approaches you as you enter the church. The person is poorly dressed and barefoot. Suddenly you have an idea that you should give him the shoes you are wearing. You look at his feet and your feet and you are sure your shoes will fit. How will you decide if you should give him your shoes?

At a school dance, you are approached by someone you like. You aren’t sure if they know how you feel about them, but you’ve wanted the opportunity to tell them. After a dance and/or some lighthearted flirting and conversation, they ask you to come outside with them or to an empty classroom. What do you do?

A young woman comes to your door. She says that she lives three blocks away and has just had her power turned off. She needs \$45.00. You have never seen her before, don’t know if she is telling the truth, but you have the money because your grandmother sent you a check for your birthday. What should you do?

Allow the group to discuss all the possible options in each of the stories. Help them think through possible consequences of each decision. Talk about how sometimes the hard part about decision-making is that although you know yourself and your thoughts and intentions, you can’t always predict what someone else will do. In each of the above scenarios (and in much of life) there are ways we can imagine things unfolding in completely safe and benign ways... and there are ways we can imagine something darker. It’s important to help young people look at both sides – not consistently dwelling on only the negative, but also not being overly naïve or unprepared.

As the discussion continues, leaders may watch for moments when the following strategies are introduced by the group. Leaders should note these strategies, and if they don’t come up, introduce them into the discussion.

- Decide selfishly, giving no thought to consequences which extend beyond yourself.
- Consider the consequences and determine whether you can live with what might happen as an outcome.
- Consider “The One and The Many.” If I do this, it seems like it would be OK. What would happen if everyone did it? Are there special rules that apply only to me? What happens if those same rules are applied to everyone?
- Take time to consider the problem.
- Ask for help. Seek out advice of friends and family.
- Identify how the Church or the Scriptures have addressed this or similar issues.
- Try to remember what the gospel shows as a way to answer these dilemmas. Then ask yourself if you are willing and able to do what you believe the gospel suggests. Ask yourself, how will this choice extend the good news of God to the world?

These strategies are just a few of the many ways that we make decisions. But the point of the discussion is to try to find pathways that allow us to be responsible decision makers. Sometimes it is fun and even important to do things on a whim, or just because we feel like it, but life is full of choices and decisions, and we are wise to stop and consider before we act.

After the first discussion, invite young people to read the gospel story. Ask them to reflect on the meaning of the reading.

- How can our decisions be like the cross? How did Jesus decide to pick up the cross for us? What motivated him to do it?
- Thinking about different areas in your life, what things are like the tower in the reading? What are you trying to build and how have you considered what it will cost you as you make decisions about different aspects?
 - The tower of your Self – your identity, your personality, your reputation?
 - The tower of your place in Society – your friendships and other relationships? Your role in helping others?
 - The tower of your Sexuality – your body, the intimacy of knowing another person’s heart, your choices
 - The tower of your Spirituality – your relationship with God, your relationship with other Christians, your place in the community of faith
- What battles are you fighting in your life, and who could you go to for advice? Are there any people in your life who might be ambassadors for you when you go into hard situations?
- Do you think the Gospel teaches us to think about others more highly than we think of ourselves? What consequences might there be for us if we were all alone in that kind of thinking? What would happen if everyone thought that way?

Closure

Bring closure to this discussion by reminding your young people that in every decision we make there are consequences which we can see, and those which we cannot. One way that we can structure our lives as faithful people is to remember to offer all our dilemmas to God in prayer.

We may still have to struggle for a solution and for the right choice, but we believe that God wants to be involved in our decisions. And we believe that God will provide clarity as we seek God throughout our lives. Clarity comes through the people in our lives, through our experiences, through the Scriptures. Our challenge is to open up our hearts and minds to one another and to God so that together we can make choices which help to extend the good news of God into every situation, every heart, every moment.

Closing prayer:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

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Sexual Stereotyping: Prejudice

Areas Covered

Sexuality, Self, Society

Goal

To establish male-female friendships as positive values

Objectives

To examine the role that prejudice plays in forming stereotypes

To examine how stereotyping affects our relationships with members of the other gender

To understand that gender identity is a gift of God and need not be proven

To learn how proving gender identity functions to manipulate people and to develop strategies for resisting that manipulation

Guiding Scripture

Mark 7:24-31 The Syrophenician (Gentile) woman who approached Jesus

Matthew 5:21-24 Reconciliation before worship

Activity

Have the group look up and read the passage in Mark and then have them respond to the following questions:

- What was Jesus' image of this woman?
- How did this affect how he related to her?
- Would he have related to her any differently if she had been a Jew?
- How did the woman respond?
- Did any change come about in Jesus as a result of the woman's response? How did he relate to her after this? How quickly did this change take place?
- Is there any model for us here?

Prejudice Inventory (How prejudiced can you get?)

Have the group participants write down one good and one bad thing about each of the following people who are of _____ ancestry or extraction:

American Indian
Black
Chinese
Dutch
English
Filipino
French
German
Irish
Italian
Japanese

Jewish
Korean
Mexican
Northern
Polish
Puerto Rican
Scottish
Southern
Swedish
White

When they have finished, get the reactions on newsprint. Then have them do the same thing for:

- Men or boys
- Women or girls

Again, collect the remarks on newsprint.

Reflection

Ask the group to respond to the following questions:

- Was it easier to think of your own positive and negative statements, or did you “hear” the voices of things other people may have said around you over the years?
- Did you think it was easier write down good or bad things about the different nationalities or the genders? Why?
- Was it easier for boys to write down good or bad things about girls or women? Why?
- Was it easier for girls to write down good or bad things about boys or men? Why?
- Does Jesus have anything to teach us about this?

Have the group look up and read the following piece of Scripture: Matthew 5:21-24.

- Did you find it easy to jump to conclusions or make rapid judgments about others?
- Do you think people ever make snap judgments about you?
- Can the group modify their answers in accordance with the above? How and why? Get some open discussion going.
- Can Christians have stereotypes, especially when they are negative?
- Which stereotypes do you think most get in the way of people getting along?
- Which stereotypes generated the most conversation (or anger?) in your group?

NOTE:

It is extremely difficult for us to admit to racism so you may well find that the youth claim that they aren't racist and list friends they have of other races. It is important that the leaders not reinforce this illusion. One good way to address this is to challenge the group to go to a website and play a game that allows them to test themselves. You may or may not want to discuss their experience later – if you do, make sure you don't do so until everyone (including the leaders) have done the “test.” This is a demonstration site of a project at Harvard University.

Go to <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.html> and select the **Gender IAT** or the **Race IAT** button and then follow the directions. You might also suggest they try the **Skin-tone IAT** one (especially if you have a predominantly group of black teenagers) or one of the other buttons. If you have internet access at the church it would be best to demonstrate this to the group and give them written instructions before sending them off to do it on their own! And in any case, the leaders should try out these before giving them to the young people.

Sexual Stereotyping: Stereotypes of Men & Women

Areas Covered

Sexuality, Self, Society

Goal

To establish male-female friendships as positive values

Objectives

To examine the role that prejudice plays in forming stereotypes

To examine how stereotyping affects our relationships with members of the other gender

To understand that gender identity is a gift of God and need not be proven

To learn how proving gender identity functions to manipulate people and to develop strategies for resisting that manipulation

Guiding Scripture

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Activity

Read the passage from 1 Corinthians 11:1-16.

- What stereotypes of women does Paul conjure up in this passage?
- Do you agree or disagree with what he says? With what specifically do you agree/disagree?
- How has this passage colored our images of women?
- How does the passage above agree with Galatians 3:27-28?

Stereotype Inventory

Hand out the following list, or write the list out on newsprint for all to look at. Add to or subtract from the list as you see fit. Have the group members indicate whether they feel that the following are jobs or positions that are or could or should be done by men only, by women only or could be done by either or both:

Army general	Father
Artist	Fighter pilot
Assistant clergy in a congregation	Housewife
Bank president	Lawyer
Bishop	Mother
Cab driver	Nuclear physicist
CEO of a major corporation	Nurse
Cheerleader	Photographer
Chef	Playwright
Civil engineer	Priest
Clergyperson	Professional athlete
Comedian	Reporter
Cook	Secretary
Doctor	TV Newscaster
Entertainer	Wage earner

Have the group list three things in each category below as follows:

Girls do _____ Girls don't _____
Boys do _____ Boys don't _____

Have the group complete the following sentences:

I can be a man and still _____.
I can be a woman and still _____.

Reflection

Gender is used as one of the basic mechanisms by which larger social goals are translated into individual ones (e.g., macro-goals of capitalism), so that those are formulated more personally – a good **man** supports his family, and a good **woman** becomes a full-time consumer. Presented this way, both positive and negative goals are hard to resist.

Have the participants defend their conclusions. Girls will probably challenge the boys and *vice versa*. Guide the discussion as best as you can . . . and try to avoid civil war.

NOTE:

The demonstration site of a project at Harvard University noted above also has a test that measures how you associate certain words with men or women.

Go to <http://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/takeatest.html> and click on the proceed to select the button labeled **Gender-Career** at the bottom or **Gender-Science** closer to the top. Again, if you have internet access at the church it would be best to demonstrate this to the group and give them written instructions before sending them off to do it on their own! And in any case, the leaders should try out these before giving them to the young people.

Sexual Stereotyping: Male-Female Relationships

Areas Covered

Sexuality, Self, Society

Goal

To establish male-female friendships as positive values

Objectives

To examine the role that prejudice plays in forming stereotypes

To examine how stereotyping affects our relationships with members of the other gender

To understand that gender identity is a gift of God and need not be proven

To learn how proving gender identity functions to manipulate people and to develop strategies for resisting that manipulation

Guiding Scripture

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 10:38-42

Activity

Have volunteers look up and read aloud the scripture passages above. What do the two scripture passages say about Jesus' relationship with women?

The problem with male-female friendships is that these tend to be skewed by the sexual overtones. Ask the group if any of them have seen the old movie *When Harry Met Sally?* In that movie, there is a quote where Billy Crystal says, "Men and women can never be just friends... the sex stuff always gets in the way."

Ask your group what they think of that theory?

Then brainstorm other movies, TV shows, songs, etc. that allude to this same myth that men and women can never be just friends. (ie - Think about the show *Friends* and how many romances, and even a marriage, cropped up between the friends at different times.)

- What does our culture tell us about male-female friendships?
- Several years ago, Hollywood and TV producers figured out a way for a man and woman to be "just friends" without the "sex stuff" getting in the way... what was it? (Hint: Think about the *Will & Grace* TV show)
- What does it infer about our society if we believe the only way a man and woman can be "just friends" with no sexual undercurrent is if one of them is gay, and therefore not likely to be attracted to the other person in the first place?!?

Even in the students' daily lives at school or in social settings, they have probably heard people being teased, "Susie has a boyfriend" or "Jimmy has a girlfriend" when all that the person was doing was TALKING to someone! How many times have these situations occurred with or been witnessed by the participants?

Going back to the scripture passages –

Jesus welcomed the prostitute in the first passage. Is there any sexual overtone in this passage?

Jesus demonstrated his friendship with Martha and Mary in the second passage. Is there any sexual overtone in this passage?

What would it be like for a boy to have a girl as a friend and not as a girlfriend?

What would it be like for a girl to have a boy as a friend and not as a boyfriend?

Does this require a certain form of bravery? A willingness to step outside of others' expectations?

Jesus constantly upset others' expectations, as well as the conventions of the times. For example, he healed a woman who had a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34).

This was scandalous to the Jews. Have the participants look at Leviticus 15:19-28.

- What does this passage mean?
- What light does this shed on Jesus' healing of the woman with the hemorrhage?
- Can Christians be bound by social mores governing the relations of men with women?

Looking to the Book of Common Prayer

The *Book of Common Prayer* says this about marriage:

"The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity. . ."

Book of Common Prayer, page 423

"Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. Amen.

Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. Amen."

Book of Common Prayer, page 429

- What relationship is here between friendship and sexuality?
- How could these words apply to other relationships – such as the relationship of this group?
- What are some of the qualities of the best marriages you know?
- Do some of those qualities also apply to friendship?

And also consider these passages from our Baptismal Covenant, calling us to:

"Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself...

Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being..."

Book of Common Prayer, page 305

- How do these words speak to our relations with people of the other gender?
- If our gender is a gift from God, how can we celebrate each others' gifts?

Closure

Use the following adaptation of the prayers said at a marriage:

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor on the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially on these young men and women. *Amen.*

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common lives, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. *Amen.*

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their life. *Amen.*

Make their lives together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. *Amen.*

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, page 429

R13 Lessons

Spirituality

Images of God: An Introduction

Overview

This section includes lesson plans focusing on the images we have of God. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God is seen by many people in different times in myriad ways. How the people of the Old and New Testaments saw God and how we see God affects the ways in which we interact with and understand God. Perhaps the best place to begin is to remember that God is not “like” anything in creation. There is nothing we can compare to God. Human language and human understanding are limited, and so we must always acknowledge that any image we have of God is merely that, an image. God is more, bigger, brighter, fuller, transcendent, all in all, always MORE.

As we image God, it may be helpful to remind ourselves that God is *transcendent*: God is, we believe, omnipotent, ultimate, and wholly other. But God is also *immanent*: fully self-giving, with a generosity of spirit that moves toward us, God’s creation, in ways that we can comprehend. There is a tension between the image of God as the Supreme Being of the Universe – the ultimate source of all things – and the image of God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. There is a further tension in the image of God as Jesus Christ, who was also a human being. Perhaps that is why the Creed moves us from the omnipotent image of God the Father Almighty to the particular image of God the Son – Jesus Christ, born, crucified, and risen – with remarkable particularity.

But that is still an inadequate expression of the true nature of God that we believe as Christians. Were we only to believe in the Almighty God, the supreme maker of all things, and in the particular Son of God, Jesus, we would miss the opportunity to experience and know the movement of God in our time, the power of God’s presence in our day-to-day lives. The Holy Spirit is that Person of the Godhead who moves, actively and dynamically, through our lives and “will not leave us comfortless.” It is the presence of the Three in One that allows us to know and experience God both historically and personally.

So what do we imagine when we imagine God?

One of the Greek phrases used to describe the Trinity can best be translated as “The Dancing Three.” There is a quality of involvement between the three Persons of the Godhead. They are moving together, taking a step, giving way to the step of another, dancing all the while. Perhaps as we begin to look at the images of God in our own hearts and minds, we might watch for the motion of dancing. We might want to celebrate and embrace a diversity of images – no one image will suffice – and in the dance, come to better understand and appreciate the God who is All in All, the Alpha and the Omega, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all life.

Images of God: Images We Carry

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Sexuality

Goal

To gain a clearer understanding of how we see God, so that we can more easily recognize him in our day-to-day lives.

Objectives

To become aware of the numerous ways in which images affect us.

To see ourselves reflected in images of God.

Guiding Scripture:

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...."

Background

In this first session on the Images of God, we will look at our own images and the images which have filled the arts for centuries. For the most part, we probably take our images of God for granted. We say the word "God" with relative ease, not even bothering to look closely at the feelings, insights, and images that appear in our hearts and in our mind's eye at the mention of that name.

There are many references in Scripture to the ways in which God has appeared to men and women throughout the ages. There are also many references in the writings of historical and contemporary Christian mystics. It is difficult to know where to begin. Many images of God are elemental: fire, flame, water, light. And then, of course, there are the royal images: king, warrior, judge of all things living and dead. Beyond that, we find images of God as Father, the progenitor of all life, as well as feminine images: Jesus said that he wanted to gather his people as a mother hen gathers her chicks.

So what are we to do?

The more stories we know about God and God's action in history, the easier it will be for us to recognize God's work in our own lives. In fact, that's the main reason we're working on our images of God – so that we can recognize God in our midst. As we struggle to connect to God, we do so in the company of generations of human beings who have sought to see and appreciate God. One place to begin is to look to Jesus. The New Testament has a lot to say about the person of Jesus. To begin with, we believe that all the fullness of the Godhead lived in the person of Christ Jesus. We also believe that Jesus is our access point to the fullness of God. He is the gate, the vine, the source; the way, the truth, and the life. One of the best ways to see God is to see Jesus. But how do we do that?

First, we do it by knowing the stories that are written down in the Gospels. We see Jesus as an infant. We see him as a twelve-year-old boy. We see him as the teacher in the Sermon on the Mount. We see him as friend in the stories of his conversations with disciples, with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and with sinners and tax collectors. We see Jesus as healer when he takes

the dust of the ground, spits on it, makes a paste, and gives the blind man sight. The more we're able to imagine this loving, human, divine Son of God, the more fully we can access the fundamental grace and giving nature of God. We can use the work of artists in combination with the Gospel stories to begin to experience Jesus in ways we can understand.

We can also see God and God's true nature in one another. The Bible teaches us that we are made in the image of God. There is something about the nature of being human that points to the nature of God. Granted, we are always only the created; we are not little gods. Yet we are able to see something of who God is by being in relationship with others, by really *seeing* one another.

Before we expand our images of God to include things which might seem unfamiliar to some, let's begin with the person of Jesus.

Preparation

Find an illustrated children's Bible, pictures of the Sistine Chapel, and if you can, some pictures of the Trinity from ancient texts, and a few modern depictions of God. Ask your local librarian for help. One good resource is *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. There are several good representations of images of God in this book. It is also a wonderful resource for information about how different images have been understood and how different misunderstandings (what theologians call heresies) have been represented in images.

Find as many images of God as you can. In this case, more is definitely better. Identify several images likely to be familiar to the young people. Then identify unfamiliar ones. Begin with the extremes, most familiar and least familiar.

Because our focus is on entrusting the faith which we have been given to these young people, we recommend looking exclusively at images that have informed and continue to inform our culture and our faith. You can expand horizons by including unfamiliar pictures that are not the traditional "Jesus with blond hair standing at the door" or "God as an old man with a long, white beard." But we encourage you to refrain from including pictures from Greek mythology, other religions, etc. Non-Christian images are likely to confuse young people. Our goal is to experience through images the one true God whom we know in and through Christ – the one who loves us and cares about us and continually calls us into relationship with each other and with God in Christ.

Activity

Have the young people find several different images of Jesus from the publications you have researched. If your church has stained glass windows that represent Jesus at different times in his life, you may also want to use these images. As you look through the images, ask the young people what they can tell about Jesus from this or that image. Try to find six or seven different images. If possible, make a color copy of the images you choose so that at the end of the exercise you can hang them on the walls of your classroom.

When you have made your selection, divide the young people into small groups. Give each group one of the images of Jesus to discuss.

It will be useful to point out to your young people that stained glass windows, icons, sculptures, and paintings in museums and churches throughout the world were intended to give people a better understanding of God. Explain that these images sometimes reflect the image-maker. For

example, human representations of God and pictures of Jesus usually look like the artist. Point out any obvious examples of this that you may have found in your collection of pictures – e.g., Jesus as a white man with blond hair and blue eyes or as an Asian man with oriental features or as a black man. Ask the young people to think about what Jesus probably really looked like. Encourage them to think about pictures of Middle Eastern Jewish men. Why do you think people tend to portray Jesus, who must have looked like a Middle Eastern Jewish man, in ways so different from that?

We are made in God's image and we tend to make God in our image – i.e., we see God as "like us."

Explain that the pictures people created, especially in earlier times, were designed to be a kind of nonverbal study guide. Many of the great works of art in the world were not created for the super-educated members of the community of faith, but rather for the illiterate, those who lacked education and in-depth instruction. If people could not read about God, they could learn about God by looking at the pictures, stained glass windows, and sculptures. So these images of God needed to be more than just physical representations – they needed to tell a story about who God is.

Ask the young people to imagine that if they knew very little about stories from the Bible, and if they couldn't read them for themselves, what would they learn from images in churches, pictures and sculptures? For example:

- What does Jesus as a shepherd represent to us?
- Or Jesus walking on the water?
- Or Jesus on the cross?

Give the youth a few minutes to study the image and prepare to tell the story it represents and what this image of God has to teach us.

Leaders may need to help young people with the story depicted in the image. You might bring along a concordance to this lesson, and ask them to figure out the key word (e.g., shepherd, manger, or cross). It will take them some time to find the appropriate story, but that's okay.

After a few minutes, gather back together and share the stories. Hang the images on the wall of the classroom as reminders of the stories we know, the images we carry of God in the world.

Alternate Activity: Jesus as the Image of God

We can imagine what Jesus looked like. Jesus was, after all, a human being much like us, but he was also the Son of God. Several images come to mind easily:

- The baby in the manger
- The figure on the cross
- The teacher walking by the side of the lake
- A man walking on the water
- A man reaching out his hand to heal someone

Ask the young people to close their eyes and imagine the person of Jesus, based on the pictures they've been studying. Tell them to take as long as they need to get a clear picture of who Jesus is. Assure them that we will all wait for one another, and that you'll know that they're done when they open their eyes.

When they have opened their eyes, ask them: How did you see Jesus? Remind them that they cannot get this wrong. This is just the image that they have and are familiar with. Ask: "Did anyone see Jesus as a teenager?"

Look up Luke 2:41-52 and read it aloud. Discuss the passage with these questions and others that come up as you go through the exercise:

- Does this story ring true?
- What in your experience is like this story? Have you ever been both lost and found at the same time?
- Have you ever wandered away from your parents to do something that you really wanted to do and got caught up in some activity?
- How did your parents react?
- Has your mother ever reacted the way Mary did? What was your response? Was it anything like Jesus' response?
- How does thinking about Jesus as a teenager make you feel about yourself?
-

To finish this exercise, go back to the closing activity above. Ask the young people to list the qualities they see in Jesus from the story of the Finding in the Temple and insert them into the closing prayer.

Note

It may be useful to remind teens not to "waste their grace." In other words, while the story of the Finding in the Temple is often true for teenagers, we need to be honest about the moments in our lives when we have truly been engaged with activities in which we found God in new ways, versus times when we just forgot to call home. If we are really having a "time in the temple" like Jesus, we ought to tell our parents what is going on. It will help build a new relationship! We might still be punished, but we will have shared our grace with one another in the process. On the other hand, if all we were doing was running late, or pushing the curfew, we are wise (and skillful) to admit that we made a mistake!

Closure

Ask the young people to name the qualities of God that they have heard about and discovered in these stories. List these on newsprint. Some examples might be: bravery, patience, kindness, power. God in Jesus represents to us all the different qualities of humanity brought into obedience and service of God.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, so live and move in us that we might be [fill in with the words from your list above] in your image. Make us people who show forth your true nature in all that we do. Strengthen each of us to be a faithful witness and true representative of your action in the world. Amen.

Images of God: Imagine That!

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Sexuality

Goal

To learn to connect to God through words as well as pictures.

Objective

To discover new ways of seeing God.

To transform words into images.

Guiding Scriptures

Genesis 3:8	The Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day
Isaiah 6:1-5	I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty...
Exodus 3:1	The Lord appeared in a flame of fire
Revelation 1:10-18	I saw one like the Son of Man clothed in a long robe
Matthew 3:16	A dove coming down from heaven
Acts 2:3	Tongues of fire
Revelation 20:11	A king sitting on a great white throne
1:13	A man dressed in a long robe with a golden sash
1:14	A man with hair like white wool and with blazing eyes
1:16	A man with a two-edged sword coming out his mouth

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Prayer Books
- Markers, crayons, and large sheets of paper
- Copies of handouts

Background

“Can we really imagine God?”

Well, yes and no. As we said in the Introduction to this section, it is very difficult for us to get an accurate image of God. Our best bet is to begin with the Gospel stories of Jesus, because he was human *and* God. His life, language, relationships, and sacrifice are all tangible evidence of the true nature of God. Having that as a beginning point, we can begin to look at images of God which come from the Old Testament, the book of Revelation, and the insights of the mystics and teachers throughout the history of our faith.

Almost all of us have some kind of image of God... some way of thinking about God that feels comfortable and familiar. Sometimes we get attached to certain images with so much passion that we are uncomfortable with having those images expanded. This lesson is designed to open up a host of new ways of seeing God. For many, some of the suggested images will be hard to imagine, but the point of this entire unit is to remember that God is so much more than any one flimsy image.

If you have already done the lesson plan from the Self section entitled, "Images of God: Opening the Heart", you may want to revisit that memory with your class. Remember how we made images of ourselves – paper representations of the real us. When we shared them with others, we held up the image and said, "This is an image of me." But then we dropped the paper and said, "This is the real me." We are going to try to do the same thing here... use images of God as a way to help us understand characteristics of the real, living God.

Activity One

Make copies of the IMAGES OF GOD checklist. Distribute them and ask the young people to mark off every image of God that is familiar to them. Talk about where they got those images. If you did not talk about the tendency of humans to think of God as being "like us" in the previous session, this is a good time to initiate that discussion. Ask why people think of God as an old man with a long, white beard.

Ask if they've ever seen pictures of God depicted as someone of a different ethnicity. Ask how they imagine someone in another part of the world might think of God. Encourage them to think about why our images of God change depending on who we are, where we live, and what we see.... Why do we want to see God as being "like us"?

Activity Two

Make copies of the quotations handout sheet. Cut into small pieces with one quotation per piece of paper. Fold and place in a basket.

Pass the basket filled with quotations. Ask each young person to take a piece of paper. When all have drawn from the basket, have the youth read them aloud, one by one.

Using poster board or large sheets of paper, working individually or in teams, ask the young people to make visual representations of the sayings. We're trying to create visual images for the word images we heard.

It is important to tell the young people that we remember in pictures, not in words. We associate words with images. For example, if you say the word "Mom" to the group, they will imagine a picture of Mom. The goal here is to create images to associate with the words.

Allow about fifteen minutes for the drawing. At the end of the time, ask each team or individual to explain their drawing to the group. Ask them to clarify what the group is seeing. Hang the images on the walls of the classroom.

Alternate Activity

You may wish to use an excerpt from *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. On pages 176-179, the characters Celie and Shug talk about the Bible and God and what God looks like. Read it aloud and discuss its implications. This is a remarkable passage, and will open up lots of discussion, but the key issue is the graciousness of God. God really does come to each of us in ways we can understand.

Closure

Ask the young people to stand in a circle, facing out, so that they are looking at the images hanging all around the room. Make sure everyone is looking directly at an image. Remind the

group that we do not have to close our eyes to pray. Sometimes it is easier to keep our eyes open, to focus on the beauty and mystery around us as we look for God.

Closing Prayer:

This is an adaptation of the *Benedictus es, Domine* (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 90). Tell the young people what their sentence is and ask them to repeat it before you begin the prayer. It may also help to tell them that you will pause briefly before it is time for them to join you in the last line.

Leader: Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers and mothers,
 you are worthy of praise; glory to you.

All: Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name;
 we will praise you and highly exalt you forever.

 Glory to you in the splendor of your temple;
 on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.
 Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim;
 we will praise you and highly exalt you forever.

 Glory to you, beholding the depths;
 in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.
 Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
 we will praise you and highly exalt you forever.

Handout: Checklist of God Images

When you think about God, what image or what images come to your mind?
(check all that apply)

- A tiny baby in a manger
- An old man with white hair and a long, flowing beard
- A young, vigorous man
- An angry old man who punishes sin
- Someone who is always looking to see how we behave and punishing us if we are bad
- A motherly woman
- A young woman
- An old woman
- A great light that is not blinding
- An underground river
- A burning bush
- A dove coming down from heaven
- Tongues of fire
- A bolt of lightning
- A king sitting on a great, white throne
- A queen sitting on a great, white throne
- A man dressed in a long robe with a golden sash across his chest
- A man with hair like white wool and with blazing eyes
- A man with a two-edged sword coming out of his mouth
- A comforting presence or feeling
- An uncomfortable presence or feeling
- Other:
- Other:
- Other:

Handout: Images of God – Quotations

We all have our own images, and they nourish us, but ultimately the Lord to whom we pray is beyond all images, all imaginings.

Madeleine L'Engle (contemporary)

We can say nothing of God because nothing is like him.

Meister Eckhart (1260-1329)

“God is love, and where true love is, God himself is there.”

Hymnal 1982 (ancient hymn)

Feminine Images of God

As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother.

Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1423)

God is not only fatherly. God is also mother who lifts her loved child from the ground to her knee. The Trinity is like a mother's cloak wherein the child finds a home and lays its head on the maternal breast.

Mechtild of Magdeburg (1210-1280)

From all eternity, God lies on a maternity bed giving birth. The essence of God is birthing.

Meister Eckhart

God rejoices that he is our Father, and God rejoices that he is our Mother, and God rejoices that he is our true spouse, and that our soul is his beloved wife. And Christ rejoices that he is our brother, and Jesus rejoices that he is our savior. These are five great joys, as I understand, in which he wants us to rejoice, praising him, thanking him, loving him, endlessly blessing him, all who would be saved.

Julian of Norwich

Nature Images of God

God says: I am the supreme fire; not deadly, but rather enkindling every spark of life.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

One day I saw, with the eyes of my eternity, in bliss and without effort, a stone. This stone was like a great mountain, and was of assorted colors. It tasted sweet, like heavenly herbs. I asked the sweet stone: Who are you? It replied: I am Jesus.

Mechtild of Magdeburg

God is a great underground river that no one can dam up and no one can stop.

Meister Eckhart

The seed of God is in us. Now, the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree; and a hazel seed grows into a hazel tree. A seed of God grows into God.

Meister Eckhart

Social Images of God

I am endeavoring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone.

Mahatma Gandhi (died 1948)

How am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter.

Mahatma Gandhi

In God, action and being are one.

Meister Eckhart

Theological Images of God

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness.

Meister Eckhart

God is a being beyond being and a nothingness beyond being.

Meister Eckhart

God is everything which is good, and the goodness which everything has is God.

Julian of Norwich

Images of God: Finding Images of God in the World

Areas Covered

Spirituality

Goal

To expand our image of what and who God is.

To find pictures to capture some of the vastness of God

Guiding Scriptures:

Genesis 3:8	The Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day
Isaiah 6:1-5	I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty...
Exodus 3:1	The Lord appeared in a flame of fire
Revelation 1:10-18	I saw one like the Son of Man clothed in a long robe
Matthew 3:16	A dove coming down from heaven
Acts 2:3	Tongues of fire
Revelation 20:11	A king sitting on a great white throne
1:13	A man dressed in a long robe with a golden sash
1:14	A man with hair like white wool and with blazing eyes
1:16	A man with a two-edged sword coming out his mouth

Background

Use the previous three lessons on "Images of God" as the background reading for this lesson. After the young people have examined (and hopefully expanded) their ideas about images of God, this fun lesson plan will help them create a picture collage of aspects of God.

Materials Needed

- Digital cameras or Polaroid cameras
- Instant picture printers or color printers (if using digital cameras)
- Posterboard
- Glue sticks
- Markers
- *Alternate – if using digital pictures, you can have the groups create a PowerPoint slideshow of their pictures instead of a paper collage of printed pictures.
- The book *God's Photo Album* by Shelly Mecum is a great resource of ideas, but is not necessary. You may want to check out the website www.godsphotoalbum.com to read about the project that inspired this lesson plan.

Optional Gathering Activity

As the young people are arriving and getting settled, play some music that will help them start thinking about images of God. One suggestion is to use the soundtrack recording from the movie *Bruce Almighty*, which includes two great songs: *What if God Was One of Us* by Joan Osborne and *God-shaped Hole* by Plumb.

You could also play a short clip from the movie *Bruce Almighty* starring Jim Carrey and Jennifer Anniston.

Activity

Open your discussion by asking “What is God like?” You may want to record all answers given – if you have a flipchart or board nearby. Then ask, “Where do you see God?” and again record the answers

Review previous discussions about images of God and see how many images they recall. Ask questions, such as:

- What images of God resonate most with you? What images of God surprise you?
- What images of God make you uncomfortable?
- Where do we see traditional images of God such as the cross, symbols for Trinity, pictures of Jesus, etc?
- Where have you seen modern images of God?
- Where in your everyday life do you find images of God?
- What images of God can you find by looking at your friends or in the mirror?

After you have had some discussion about images of God and done some brainstorming about where we might see God’s image in our everyday life, introduce the activity by showing the class the book *God’s Photo Album*.

If you don’t have the book, just explain the basic concept: A group of young people was given the assignment to “find God.” They were sent out with cameras and notebooks and they came back with stories and lots and lots of pictures. Some kids saw God in nature – at the seashore, in the intricacies of a flower, in the beauty of clouds and a clear blue sky. Some kids saw God in other people – in people they loved, in the faces and actions of strangers, in each other.

Depending on how many digital or Polaroid cameras you have, divide the teens into groups. Set a time limit and have the groups wander the church building and grounds to take pictures of where they find God. Here are some images our group came up with:

- A clear shape of a cross – in the inside of a flower
- Our silver communion chalice
- A baby’s hand
- A father holding his sleeping child
- A tiny, sprouting bud
- A close up of the flame of a candle
- An old leather Bible, obviously well loved and well used
- People holding hands
- A children’s Sunday School class, praying with their heads bowed
- Our church altar
- A woman laughing with her eyes shut and head tipped back
- Two children hugging
- A peace sign (close shot of a bumper sticker in the parking lot)

It was really fun to see what we could come up with. The list above is just a small sampling of some images that worked for our group... encourage your group to “think outside the box” and look for God in unconventional, as well as traditional ways.

At the appointed time, gather the group back together and share what each group found. If you have time, print out the pictures and create a collage with them.

If you are working in a digital format, see if someone would volunteer to put the pictures together in a slide show and maybe even choose some music to play during the slides. If possible, look for an opportunity to present this slide show to the rest of your congregation.

Closing Prayer

O God, who shows up in our lives in many surprising ways, help us be more constantly aware of your presence in our world and in our lives. Remind us also that we are instruments of your presence – we are your hands, your feet, your voice, your smile. Give us grace to recognize your presence and give us the wisdom to live as your people. All this we ask in the name of the one who first taught us to look for you in human form.
Amen.

Lesson plan added July 2006
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Help, I made a mistake! Understanding Reconciliation

Areas covered

Self, Spirituality

Goal

To introduce the ideas behind the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Overview

When was the last time you repented?

Probably more recently than you think.

Repentance means, quite literally, to turn around. A useful image may be of driving into a strange city. You are trying to find your way but you don't know where you are. After several false turns and false starts, it is sometimes best to simply stop, turn around and try again.

That's the process of repentance. We do our best, most of us, most of the time; but we still need to remember that mistakes and errors are part of the journey we are on, and we have the choice to stop and change direction.

In the course of any relationship, mistakes will be made. And this holds true inside the community of faith as well.

The *Book of Common Prayer* offers us a liturgy and a sacrament for changing our minds in the community of faith. It is a sacrament which allows us to admit that we have made mistakes and to consider how we might amend our lives.

Activity

For this lesson, leaders are encouraged to invite a member of the clergy to come and discuss the ways that the Sacrament of Reconciliation might be included in a young person's experience of life and faith.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not intended to be used only by what we might think of as "notorious sinners," the really bad people of the world, but by all of us as we struggle to be faithful. Many of us may have images of shame-filled confessions of horrible deeds, or worse, shame-filled confessions of minuscule deeds, mistakes blown out of proportion by guilt and fear, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The sacrament of reconciliation is available to us as a life giving, love-affirming mechanism of grace. You can find this sacrament in the Book of Common Prayer, pages 447-452.

In asking the clergy to prepare for this meeting, make the following suggestions:

- What is the history of this sacrament?
- How often do people in our congregation take advantage of it?
- How often do you, as clergy, go to someone for this sacrament?
- Do you think this sacrament would be helpful for young people? Why?
- What does God offer to us in this sacrament?
- How does it differ from the general confession in the Liturgy of the Word?

For many young people this will be their first Introduction to this liturgy. They may have many preconceived notions about its nature and import. Much of what they know about it probably has its roots in the media's portrayal of the Roman Church's confessional. Explain that we don't have confessional booths and this sacrament can easily take place while sitting in a priest's office.

Go slowly here, and speak gently.

This is a rich liturgical form and one which may be used to provide great strength and encouragement to young people if handled properly.

For many clergy, this may be the first time they have ever discussed this with teens. Leaders are encouraged to remind the clergy of the needs and concerns of this group, and to let clergy know how this lesson fits into the whole section on decision making.

Request that the clergy try to answer questions the young people may come up with. Ask the clergy to help young people understand how this sacrament might be of help to a teenager who realizes that as hard as they have tried to be faithful and to make good choices, they have made mistakes and want to change their lives.

Closure

Request that the clergy offer a closing prayer for the lesson.

I Am Made In God's Image: The Healing of Jairus' Daughter

Areas covered

Self, Spirituality, Society

Goal

To remind young people that sometimes we need to be healed and in a community of faith, that we can trust our parents and our elders to seek out the help we need.

Objectives

To look at the healing of Jairus' daughter in Mark's Gospel

To reflect on the care of the community of faith in our struggle to be whole and healed

Overview

Everybody needs some kind of healing. No one is exempt from woundedness, illnesses, struggles and sorrows. To think that we are somehow going to be able to live our lives without ever feeling the pains of being human is to deny the reality in which we live and to reject the healing touch of God.

This can be a particularly troubling concept for teens, and equally troubling to their parents. Sometimes young people are not able to speak up for themselves. Sometimes they will have to rely on the faithfulness of parents, caretakers, teachers, and youth leaders – in fact, on the whole community of faith – to speak up when they are in distress.

Because we live in a culture that wants to deny suffering and illness – and indeed, if possible, to deny death – a lot of what happens in our lives gets ignored. Kids become bulimic, or anorexic, or suicidal, and no one seems to notice.

The gospel story is a call to honesty. It is a reminder that we must ask for, seek, and find what we need. And when we cannot do that for ourselves, then we need others to do it for us.

Most of the gospel accounts of healing take place because someone who is sick actively seeks out healing. In this story, the parents and servants of the girl seek it out for her. In fact, in this story Jesus receives the call to go to the home of this young person, only to be interrupted by a woman with a hemorrhage. (That interrupting story is a powerful one as well: Jesus was willing to be touched by the woman. Her faith in Jesus healed her. And it is a story of some significance to feminists and women in the church because Jesus was not made "unclean" as custom would have expected by the touch of this bleeding woman; rather he simply acknowledged her faith and went on his way to heal the child.)

Jesus goes to the house of Jairus and his daughter, taking with him only Peter, James, and John. At the house, he finds the mourners, weeping and wailing. They believe that the girl is dead, and the situation is a lost cause.

But Jesus tells them they are wrong. They laugh at him, as though he were naive. Dead is dead, after all. But Jesus takes the father and mother into the girl's room, along with his companions, and he heals her. The very last thing he does in this story is to tell the people who love this girl to feed her.

Bible Study: Mark 5:21-43

Ask the group to read Mark's Gospel story aloud. This may be a good story to read in a Round Robin, with each young person reading a verse at a time. (It's a good thing to get the Gospel spoken by our youth. There is power in simply saying it aloud.) After the reading, ask the young people to consider the following questions:

What kinds of illnesses seem to strike young people today?

Depression, addictions, bulimia, anorexia, obesity, childhood leukemia, HIV/AIDS, etc.

Would you know if you or someone else had one of those illnesses? How? What are the symptoms?

Some of the responses you might get include [NOTE: see end of this lesson plan for help on how to respond] :

- **Drug addiction:** mood swings, behavior changes, bloodshot eyes, sniffles, needle marks, "borrowing" money that's never paid back, hanging out with known "druggies."
- **Alcoholism:** mood swings, behavior changes, bloodshot eyes, "borrowing" money that's never paid back, drinking alone, binge drinking (e.g. 5 drinks in an evening – remind the young people that 1 beer=1 wine=1 shot as each contains the same amount of alcohol), several drinks a week (most young people think of "falling down drunk bums" as alcoholics – remind them that most alcoholics are not as outrageous in real life as they might be depicted on TV. The test is: does alcohol change your behavior (e.g. you get into fights) or your relationships (e.g. your friends don't like being around you when you drink) or you need to drink (e.g. to have fun at a party).
- **Eating disorders** – anorexia (don't eat) or bulimia (binge eating, then throwing it up): low self esteem, overly thin, constantly dieting even when thin, someone who eats a lot but is still very thin, especially if they disappear to the bathroom directly after eating. If you can see someone's ribs, wrist/arm bones, etc. there may be a problem. Many teens, especially girls, don't know what their proper weight should be – bring a chart. Talk about models and the unreal images they create.
- **Leukemia:** pale, tired, bruises easily.
- **HIV/AIDS:** pale, low energy, bruises, sores.
- **Abuse** (physical, emotional or sexual) or self-abuse (e.g. cutting self): depression, low self-esteem, bruises, sexually repressed or overly active.
- **Asthma:** wheezing, difficulty breathing.
- **Suicide:** depression, withdrawal or even suddenly happy, persistent talk about killing self or the topic of suicide.
- **Learning disorders:** being very "clumsy," difficulty reading, reversing numbers and letters, difficulty concentrating (although that might just be hormones!).

Is it possible that you would have to rely on your parents or other adults to diagnose your need for help?

Anorexia is a good example because one of the symptoms of anorexia is a distorted image of one's self. It takes a "reality check" with another person to break through the illusion that the illness creates in the mind of the victim.

If you or one of your friends were really sick, who would notice? Who would they call on for help?

Friends, doctors or therapists, parents, and leaders in the church such as priests or youth leaders are the most common answers.

Sometimes people declare young people as “lost causes.” How does this story remind adults to keep on believing in God’s love and care for young people?

Remember, when Jesus arrives at Jairus’ house, everyone laughs at him when he announces that she isn’t dead, she isn’t a lost cause. Sometimes only people of faith have eyes to see the hope of the gospel. Sometimes we really need one another to see that things are not all lost, and that God can help even the most lost cause we know.

When you are ill, or someone you know is ill, do you pray for help?

This story does a good job of reminding us that we don’t always have the strength to pray for ourselves. We can’t always reach out. We will have to let others do it for us.

In what situations might a parent be smart to call for help even if the person resists?

When a someone clearly is doing harm to him/herself or others. When physical or emotional health is impaired. When primary relationships are damaged or broken.

When might school officials, youth leaders, clergy or other professional intervene even when a young person resists?

Similar to the answers above. Adults have a responsibility (and in some cases a legal obligation) to intervene when they see or even suspect abuse or serious harm to self or others. What if you were an adult, you suspected a problem, did not intervene and a young person injured or killed him/herself? How would you feel? What would you expect of yourself?

Who in our faith community might be like James and Peter and John in the story?

Who stands in and keeps believing in us when the whole rest of the world seems to be laughing or crying over our situation?

Deacons, priests, and youth leaders may be the most obvious answer to us! But to young people those folks are often invisible in a crisis. Sometimes they are really not there, but other times they are right there, believing, praying, offering support – but we can’t see it because we are inside the crisis. Remember, Jairus’ daughter had her eyes closed. She was thought to be dead – unaware of her surroundings!

Young people are most likely to talk about family members or different friendships they have experienced. You may wish to bring up this quote: “True friends are people who know your song by heart, and even if you can no longer sing it or you forget the words for a while, they’ll still keep singing it until you can sing again.”

Have you or any of your friends ever been unaware of what was happening all around them?

Could it be that God might call you to be like Jesus, or James, Peter, and John in the story? Could it be you who answers someone else’s request to help out a friend?

Why would Jesus remind the household to feed this young person?

If for no other reason than to remind them that this one is really alive and still growing. God is interested in all aspects of our life, even our need to eat!

Allow the discussion to move, wander, even be interrupted in the same way that the story of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage interrupts this story. You never know when healing might occur.

But remember, also: the point of this lesson is twofold:

1. To remind young people that others may sometimes need to reach out on our behalf, and that God hears those requests for healing as surely as He hears direct requests.
2. To encourage young people to care for one another as the father and the servant care for the daughter. Ask for help for your friends. Pray for each other. Recognize what's going on and in faith call on God's mercy.

Closure

Read responsively by whole verse (leaders and young people)

Psalm 3 (BCP p 587)

¹O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me;

²many are saying to me, "There is no help for you in God." Selah

³But you, O LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.

⁴I cry aloud to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah

⁵I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the LORD sustains me.

⁶I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

⁷Rise up, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸Deliverance belongs to the LORD; may your blessing be on your people! Selah

This lesson plan was developed by Amanda Millay Hughes,
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Note to Youth Leaders

The list of illnesses and their symptoms is not intended to be a diagnostic tool, but is there to give you a sense of some of the responses you can expect. What the young people actually say will depend on their experiences and knowledge. Draw them out a bit to see what they actually know. Prepare yourself so you can hear them without flinching (e.g. when Joey says, "My buddy cuts himself all the time") or panicking (e.g. when Mary says, "I think about suicide a lot").

Listen carefully. If you recognize a problem, or if a young person self-discloses a problem, be prepared to act. If you think a child is going to say more than he or she might later be comfortable with, you can gently interrupt and say something like, "It sounds like you have some concern about x subject. Could you and I talk about that later?" If a young person blurts out something serious (e.g. about abuse or suicide or serious illness) ask how you can help. If intervention seems needed, confer with your priest or youth coordinator immediately. Decide if you will speak to the young person and/or his or her parents (depending on the problem). Before this session, make sure you have reviewed your state's law regarding the reporting of abuse – in some states you will be required to report to the police or state authorities any abuse a young person may tell you about.

This may raise a question about the confidentiality norm. You may need to clarify that confidentiality means not talking about personal things that may be funny, embarrassing, sad, etc. It does not mean keeping secrets about serious issues like physical or sexual abuse, suicide threats or serious self-destructive behaviors. We all have a responsibility (if not legal obligation) to respond to these issues even if it means telling parents or authorities. It is usually best to tell the young person you will be doing so and tell them why you will do so. Invite them to go with you or ask if they want to meet with a professional, priest, etc. after you have told them.

This is not the time to make this a major focal point. You just want to introduce the concept that there are many difficulties that young people face – physical, emotional, and spiritual illnesses – and that they often will need the help of their parents, friends, and other adults. This note is just to remind you that you need to be prepared to have things emerge that may require your attention or intervention. This is true every time you meet with young people. Any discussion can lead to your discovering that one of the young people is ill or suicidal, is being abused or is abusing him/herself through drugs, eating disorders, etc. This lesson plan makes it obvious – being well prepared for it will enable you to respond appropriately when it comes up later.

Oh, and by the way: if you convey the sense that these problems are real and that you stand ready to help anyone with them (rather than conveying a sense of anxiety or disapproval), it is likely that young people will come to you – but it is also likely that it will take several weeks or months before that happens. Often young people will use a discussion such as this one to "test" you to see how you will respond. They may even tell you about a fictional or greatly elaborated story about a "friend" of theirs just to see what you do. So think about how you will handle this lesson. You may even want to role play some of the conversations with other leaders beforehand. If you have professionals who work with these issues in the congregation or community, the youth leaders may want to discuss this lesson with them beforehand.

I Am Made in God's Image: Icons and Angels

Areas covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To explore ways images can open us to prayer and connect us to God

Objective

To prayerfully create at least one angel icon for each participant and/or for someone else

Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 91:11—Angels to guard you.

Luke 2:14—"Glory to God in the highest."

Mark 16:5—As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe...

Materials Needed

- Angel Cards (print on card stock using the J2A Angel) mandala (search for some online) or other pattern-like image that can be colored
- Markers or colored pencils
- One or more icon books (e.g. *Icon Painting*, by John Taylor)
- Several contemporary icon images – a set of 12 multicultural 3½ x 5 cards is available from Bridge Building Images (www.bridgebuilding.com)

Background

The word "icon" means picture, image, or likeness. It generally refers to a specific type of image – a religious picture painted on a wooden panel, done in a mosaic (small ceramic pieces or stones arranged to create the image), or enameled on metal. While they have become increasingly popular today, icons originally were developed as an art form in Constantinople and are associated with the Greek Orthodox Church. Most early icons were made by monks. They served several purposes. They were, of course, an artistic expression for artists who wished to dedicate their gifts to the church. In an age when hardly anyone could read, they also were a primary way of conveying the biblical story to worshipers. And they were a form of prayer for their creators. Icon makers tend to speak of "writing" their icons – rather than "painting" or "assembling" them – as if they were writing a prayer (which is exactly what they are doing). Classical iconography has a very structured way of writing the icon. The precise arrangement of the arms and legs, what the individuals depicted carry or are surrounded by and how the face and especially the eyes are painted, the way and order the strokes are applied, etc. are all established by tradition and faithfully learned by new icon artists. It takes years to learn this skill.

There have always been people who oppose the use of icons within the church. Some people see them as "idols" and fear that people will worship the image instead of God. Others object to the type of representation created by the artists. However, many other Christians throughout the centuries have been drawn to icons. For them, the icons capture and project the spirit of their reverent creation. Many people find these images draw them into a prayerful space. Images of the saints – monks, mystics, prophets, martyrs, teachers, and preachers – continue to inspire us, and strengthen our determination – "God helping, to be one too!"

Today, many people have revived the concept of creating images that tell a story and draw people into prayer. New images are being created in new ways. For example, there is a contemporary set of icons mounted on boards (and also available printed on cards) that is distributed through Bridge Building Images. In addition to the traditional saints, they have a series of contemporary spiritual leaders (e.g. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mother Teresa) and ethnic-specific images (e.g. Mexican Christ, Navaho Madonna).

Angels

Angels are traditionally seen as messengers from God. They can be non-human celestial beings, or appear in a human form (cf. Genesis 18). Some people believe they are simply projections of our hopes and desires. Others see them and experience them as real entities – e.g., a being that physically stopped them from stepping off the curb into the path of a passing car. For these people, angels are truly sent by God to protect them – hence the term guardian angel. While we can't be certain what angels really are, it may be useful for those of us living in a highly scientific era to develop a sense of the holy walking in our midst and to listen for God's word sent to us by messengers – human, angelic, or just the still, small voice of God in the wind.

The Bible cites various instances in which messages from God are delivered by angels (or humans identified as angels). The most commonly known instances are probably the angels who sing the heavenly chorus at Christ's birth and the angels (or young men) at Christ's tomb.

Leaders should note that much of the secular interest in angels does not come from Christian faith and does not lead toward Christ. While you do not need to discuss the following, it is provided to alert you to some of the ideas young people may have heard and may raise in this or other discussions in the program. The galaxy of beliefs commonly called "New Age" has taken the concept of angels and applied it to a complex alternative theory of the composition and relationship of the spiritual and material worlds. In this non-Christian view, there is a relatively small number (some hundreds of thousands) of immortal souls, spirit beings, who go through multiple births and rebirths in the history of this world as they move toward their more evolved states (the movie **Defending Your Life** took a light-hearted look at this concept). According to this theory, some of these immortal souls are currently alive (One might be you! One might be me!); others communicate with the living by "channeling" advice and observations through "mediums"; still others manifest themselves as "the angel of understanding" or "the angel of courage."

Within this belief system there is no place or need for repentance, redemption, or Christ, since the immortal souls progress by their own efforts and experience toward perfection (in classical theology, this is known as Pelagianism, after Pelagius, a monk and philosopher of the fifth century). There is also a strong flavor of Gnosticism (from *gnosis*, the Greek word for "knowledge": the teaching that there is one set of truths for everyday people, and another set for you and me, the "insiders" or "enlightened ones" who are the only ones who will be "saved"). At a less exalted level, this sort of system plays to people's arrogance, interest in magic and secrets, and yearning for a shortcut to goodness and power.

Both Christians and non-Christians have a fondness for speculating about angels – wondering how many can dance on the head of a pin, speculating about what their names might be, and trying to get the attention of the best, the strongest, or the brightest. Leaders should have a sense of what the Bible says – and does not say – about angels, to encourage useful attention

and interest without straying into excess. Two books which might be useful are **Angels Unawares**, Megan McKenna, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995; and **Angels and Demons: What do we really know about them?**, Peter J. Kreeft, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995.

Activity One

Spread out an assortment of traditional and contemporary icon images on the table. Engage the young people in conversation about the nature of icons. Explore what understanding they have; share what information you know. Read together any descriptions you have of how icons are made. Draw on your prior work together on prayer and images of God to encourage them to think about why people create icons and how icons can be used.

Engage the young people in a conversation about angels. Identify any angels among the traditional and contemporary icons you found. Talk about the current popularity of angels, inviting them to identify where they see them in today's culture, what they think angels are, why they are popular, and what it means to be an angel.

Activity Two

Distribute materials to enable each participant to create at least one icon. You may want to have several options available (cards, pictures, blank paper to create your own, etc.). Make sure you have enough colored pencils (for cards) and felt-tip pens (for mounted artwork) available in a wide range of colors. It is also helpful to have a few boards and some decoupage materials available to attach the finished picture to the board (consult a craft store or craft artist for advice).

The Angel or other images you find can be colored and used as greeting cards, mounted on boards and decoupage as icons, or framed as artwork. The Angel might be used as a way to thank congregation "angels" who pledge funds to support the program (à la St. Timothy's, Creve Coeur, MO, whose youth group thought of the neat fund-raising idea of calling their supporters angels). Or group members could send cards to someone who is ill or homebound. They might want to keep their Angel or personally- created icon as framed artwork for their room, or they could give it as a gift.

While the group is working on their images, engage them in conversation about how one prays while working. If they are making the image for themselves, ask what message they feel the angel is bringing them, or what message do they hope the angel will convey to others. If it is a gift for a specific person, what might they pray about as they work? You might want to play quiet music during the last ten minutes of the session to encourage prayerful reflection. You may want to do this work in short periods over several meetings, especially if you are making several items to be sold as a fund-raiser or as gifts.

Closure

When the items are completed, lay them out in a circular pattern on the floor and gather the group around them. The items should fill in the circle and face outward so you can see them. Turn off all the lights in the room except one or two that focus on the images. You might want to do this in your church sanctuary with the items lying in a circle over, on, and around the altar and only one or two spotlights in the sanctuary lit.

Invite the group to "bless" the images, reminding them that when we bless something we are both inviting and announcing God's blessing – God's grace and goodwill. People also "bless"

God by praising and thanking God. Invite the group to walk slowly around their images and "bless God" – give thanks to God for what they created, for their artistic gifts, for those who will receive them, etc. Begin this having one leader announce: "Let us bless the Lord!" – begin walking and start randomly naming things you want to thank God for. Keep the walk going around slowly in silence for some time after the last person has spoken. Then stop.

Invite the group to bless the images that they may become messengers of God to those who wear them or receive them. Invite the group to hold their hands over their creations and bless their works. The leaders model this by saying, for example, "Lord, bless the card I created for Jon and bless him as he receives it." Or, "Lord bless the icon I created and bless all who see it."

When all have finished, end by saying, "Let us bless the Lord," to which the response is, "Thanks be to God." Repeat it three times, saying the phrases louder and more enthusiastically each time.

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Compassion and Acts of Mercy: Where True Charity is Found

Areas covered

Society and Spirituality

Goal

To prepare for an act of compassion and mercy

To learn the difference between charity as a “handout” vs. true charity

Background

Many Christian people participate in “outreach ministries” in which they build homes, serve meals, volunteer at a homeless shelter or gather food (or funds) for the poor. Often this is done without much, if any, thought or preparation. The result is that many well-meaning people unintentionally add to the pain and burden of those whom they seek to serve. They do this because of their attitude or the way they choose to serve.

When we seek to serve others, it is important to begin by looking at ourselves. Why are we doing this? What benefit do we derive from it? What does it really cost us? What is our true motivation?

Unfortunately, the initial human response to another person’s misfortune is often pity, perhaps mixed with a bit of relief that it is “them” and not me experiencing the misfortune. The motivation to help is often driven by a combination of guilt (“I have so much, they have so little”) and a sense of well-being, even superiority (“Thank goodness I’m not like that, don’t have to live like that.”) The act of compassion then becomes essentially an act of making ourselves feel better about ourselves.

In addition, the distance between ourselves and “them” is so great (at least in our minds) that we unconsciously convey our pity for them in ways that make those whom we serve feel even more powerless. This is the opposite of what we at least say we want to happen. But our actions, taken without preparation or reflection, often unintentionally convey the message that those whom we serve are powerless, are at fault for their misfortune and are incapable of doing anything about their situation.

(For more discussion of this topic, see the “For Further Reflection” material in the J2A lesson plan entitled *Volunteer! Work in a Service Organization*)

The focus of these sessions is to help young people move from seeing those who are homeless, poor, elderly or disabled as “them” – as people who are other than and less than we are. That attitude leads to charity as a “handout” – a giving to another from my abundance. Rather the goal is to lead young people to recognizing that anyone, including themselves, could be in the same situation and that our response must be a true charity that is the love we give to our own brothers and sisters.

Learning to “love one another as Christ loved us” is much, much more difficult than just giving some “poor soul” a couple of hours of our time or a couple of dollars. Loving someone requires having a relationship with them that is more than just a one-time event in a one-up, one-down way of relating.

Activity One

Read the first two chapters of the book of Ruth. Don't worry, it's not that long! Suggest that the young people take turns reading a paragraph each. Invite the group to talk about Ruth and Naomi's life circumstances and how Boaz responded to them. Use the following ideas as focus points for your discussion.

How did Ruth and Naomi come to be homeless? What was their contribution to their situation – in other words, what did they do to cause their misfortune? Or what did they do to help it? What else might they have done? Why do you think they did or did not take various courses of action? How does this compare to homeless people today?

How does Boaz respond to Ruth's situation? [He goes beyond the normal gleaning privileges granted to the poor (see Lev 19:9; 23:22; Deut 24:19) but in either case Ruth is treated with respect and empowered to obtain the food she needs.]

How does Boaz's response remind you of or differ from how we respond to the hungry? What happens when he discovers that she is a relative? What would happen to those serving the poor if they discovered that a relative was among that day's guests? What does it mean to respond to the poor as if they were our brother or sister? How might our behavior differ?

Read Genesis 18:1-8. Ask the group:

What does Abraham do for his unexpected guests? [Sets forth a lavish feast while downplaying it by calling for a "little water" and a "little flour." He also washes their feet – a sign of hospitality – and stands while they eat – a sign of respect.]

Who are Abraham's guests? [They are the Lord or the angels of the Lord – Abraham entertains God and his angels without knowing it at the time. So, too, those whom we serve can be, and are, the Christ in our midst. This is captured in the ancient phrase often found in hymnody – *Ubi misericordia et caritas, ibi Deus est* or "Where there is mercy and love, God is always present" (Or see Taize setting of *Ubi Caritas* in the Closure section below)

Activity Two

After the Bible Study, ask the young people to role-play the situation they will be entering (see the handouts at the end of this lesson). We will use, as an example, going to serve a meal at a soup kitchen. However, you can adapt this lesson plan to fit other outreach situations. In that case, you will need to adapt the role cards at the end of this session.

Give "church people" role cards to the youth leaders and a couple of the youth. You need at least 4 servers but want to have most of the youth role playing guests at the soup kitchen. [You might even want to recruit some other adults to come in for this session and role play "church people" and thus allow all of the youth to be "guests." This would be a good time to include adults who might be organizers of outreach projects in the church or have an interest in working with the youth but can't participate regularly.]

Give the "guest" cards to the rest of the youth. Invite the guests to go outside of the room (preferably outside of the building) and line up to wait until the meal is ready to be served. The "church people" need to quickly set up tables with chairs for the guests and a serving station. While you are preparing, get into your roles, talking about what you are doing, about the guests, etc. When you are ready, let the guests into the room and serve the meal. When you

are finished, nudge the remaining guests into leaving so you can clean up. Close the door and start to rearrange the furniture. Meanwhile, one youth leader will need to go out to round up the rest of the youth and bring them back into the room to debrief. If you like, you can do the feeding in one place (your fellowship hall – preset for this if you have lots of youth) and do the debriefing conversation in your regular meeting room.

Questions to ask and points to make include:

- OK, now that we are back to being ourselves again, tell me, what feelings did you have during this role play? What happened to you and how did you feel about that?
- What, specifically, did someone do that contributed to that feeling?
- What could have they done that would have made you feel empowered or loved?
- What are some of the things you have seen others do in other situations that probably contribute to people feeling put down or pitied or disempowered?
- Why do you think we do those things? What can we do differently?
- The Golden Rule says for us to do unto others as we want them to do to us. What would you want to have happen to you if, or when, you are hungry, poor or homeless?

Tell them about the arrangements to serve a meal in the soup kitchen next week. Make sure you talk about how they will apply what they learned from this experience to their serving in the soup kitchen.

Closure

Learn the Taize chant *Ubi Caritas* – it is very simple and very short – 9 words.

The words are *Ubi caritas et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est* which roughly translates as “Where Charity and Love are, God is there.”

Phonetically pronounced:

OOO-bee CARE-eh-toss ehtt ahh-more
OOO-bee CARE-eh-toss day-us eee-bee ehst

If you aren't familiar with this simple, sweet tune, you can do a quick Internet search for “Taize Ubi Caritas” and find recordings. Or better yet, visit the official Taize site, where you can see the printed music and hear midi files of the tune:

http://www.taize.fr/en_article503.html

You can also order the music for *Ubi Caritas* from GIA Publications, 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638, phone 800-442-1358, fax 708-496-3828, email: custserv@giamusic.com. The catalog # is 2586.)

Begin by just having the group hum the melody several times through. Then have a leader sing through the whole phrase.

After you have practiced it a couple of times, explain the translation and ask some questions such as:

- How we can apply these words to the other things we have talked about in class today?
- How do we provide an atmosphere of true charity and love?
- By doing that, how can we invite (and embody!) the presence of God in the world?
- The words to *Ubi Caritas* aren't familiar to us... in what ways do you find that difficult and in what ways can you see it as a gift?

Then invite the group to stand in a circle, holding hands. Quietly sing the song over and over as a response to one-sentence petitions. Give a couple of examples:

- 1 *Ubi Caritas* song, – pause.
- 2 “I ask your prayers for all those who have left their homelands and traveled to live in foreign lands.”
- 3 *Ubi Caritas* song, – pause.
- 4 “I ask your prayers for the hungry.”
- 5 *Ubi Caritas* song, – pause.
- 6 Etc.

Suggest that you go around the circle once but that anyone can “pass” by gently squeezing the hand of the next person. After everyone has a turn, those who wish can just jump in with additional petitions.

When there are no more petitions, finish up with a couple rounds of the *Ubi Caritas* song, – you stop the action by having one of the leaders sing louder and slowing down the last three words, holding the last one. That’s a little trick that signals a group that it is now time to stop.

Remember to leave a moment of silence before saying a dismissal: “Let us go home, carrying this song and our prayers in our hearts and minds during this next week.”

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Handout: Soup Kitchen Role-Play

CHURCH PEOPLE CARDS:

Cut out and distribute the following to those who will be role-playing the "church people" serving at the soup kitchen. Multiple people can have the same role description as they will interpret the role differently.

You are a faithful member of your congregation who has helped with a number of other outreach projects. Usually these have been gathering food for the poor or organizing a fund raiser. But this time you decided to help out at the soup kitchen. You have seen the homeless on the street but have never spoken to them and have never been to the soup kitchen before. You believe that most of the people there are a sorry lot in life – probably got themselves into this mess by becoming an alcoholic or being a drug user. You feel sorry for them but don't think they have much potential anyway. So what else can a good Christian do but at least help them out. You are recently retired so you have some time to give and think it would be a good thing for you to do.

You are an outreach ministry champion. You are actively involved in every outreach ministry in your congregation. You love helping others. You rush to assist an elderly person who looks like he or she might need your assistance. You are quick to see how much people are in pain and are ready to help them talk about it. You are very solicitous, very caring, very loving to everyone who you know will be blessed by your ministry. You leave church feeling very good about how much you were able to do for these poor folks.

You came because your spouse asked you to. You are not sure the church should be doing this because these people really ought to get a job and earn their own keep. Serving them food like this just keeps them around and gives them permission to live off others. You regard your fellow servers as a bunch of "do-gooders" who are naive about the people you serve and just don't realize that they are being taken advantage of. You do think calling these people "guests" is ridiculous – they are a bunch of losers here for a handout and ought to be treated as such. Then maybe they'd get off their butts and get a job.

You are young, naive and a wide-eyed enthusiast. You adore children and older people and you feel terrible when you see how bad some of them look. You try to cheer them up. You try to help them see that life isn't so bad – if they just trust God, all will be well. You are very optimistic, cheerful and friendly.

GUEST CARDS:

Give the one of following to each young person. If necessary, give the same one to more than one young person.

You are seventeen and have a 9-month-old baby girl with you. You live with your mom, but she is on drugs a lot and right now she is sitting in the local jail. Since you had the baby, she's had four boyfriends living with you. Your boyfriend, however, split right after he found out you were pregnant – said he didn't like fat girls. It is near the end of the month and there is absolutely no food or money in the house. You are very worried about your baby and you need to get enough food to feed her over the weekend when this soup kitchen is not open.

You are a Vietnam War vet with a severe case of post-traumatic shock syndrome. Ever since you came back from the war you just can't hold it together. You keep having flashbacks. You keep seeing people dying. You live in constant fear of dying yourself. Often you escape by drinking or doing drugs. Sometimes it's better and you get settled into a job for a few weeks – until the nightmares start all over again. It's cold outside, and you are ill-clothed and have nothing. You're not sure where you'll sleep tonight.

You are a family man here with your wife and two children. You have a job but it pays so little that there is just not enough to go around. In the last couple of days before your paycheck comes your family finds there just isn't any money. So, here you are. You are ashamed that you can't provide for your family. You are embarrassed to be here with lots of crazies, druggies and winos. You are worried about your children and how they will be impacted by this environment. You are angry at yourself for not being able to earn more.

You are a fourteen-year-old and have come with your eight-year-old sibling. The two of you came because neither your mom nor your grandmother were at home and there was no food in the house. You were hungry and had come here with your mom before so you took it upon yourself to get food for the two of you. But you're afraid you might be seen by some of the kids at school who already make fun of you. You are especially anxious when you see kids are serving today. What if some of them know you? If it was just yourself, you'd split, but you are concerned about your sibling who you don't like to see going hungry. So, here you are.

You are a schizophrenic. Some days or hours you are fine. Sometimes you don't know who you are or where you are. You've been in and out of hospitals and hate all of them. You've been on medications, but don't like what they do to you. And you keep hoping and believing that you'll be better. So, you eventually quit taking the medicine, and then you start having episodes where you say strange things, talk to imaginary people or objects, etc. You come here because you can count on a good meal and the people usually don't hassle you about going into a hospital for treatment.

You are a grandmother who has worked hard all of her life and who is still working. About a year ago, you ended up with custody of your daughter's four children. For awhile you held it all together – doing your job and getting the children off to school. But then the summer arrived and you discovered you had to quit your job in order to care for them or they'd end up on the streets. You started work again this fall, but the summer drained what little savings you had and your new job doesn't pay well. You've brought the children here because it is one way you can stretch your dollars. You're beginning to feel desperate. You love these kids and want to do right by them, but how are you ever to pay for the costs of raising four children – and especially at your age. You hate having to accept help for others because you've always been the one to help.

You are an older person, widowed about four years ago. Gradually you've used up the savings you and your spouse had accumulated. You're here because you're trying to make your Social Security check last through the month. You found this church just three doors down from your apartment serving this meal and really appreciate the extra help. You once went to church many years ago, but don't feel like you fit in anymore. You miss your spouse and the independence you used to have.

You grew up in a middle income home, went to college and had a good job. Then you were in a terrible accident and lost the use of your legs. For awhile the medical and unemployment insurance covered your expenses. But then, to your shock, you discovered that before you qualified for additional assistance you really needed to be "down and out." Gradually you used up your assets. Your job disappeared and you found yourself in a situation you never dreamed you be in. You're just barely hanging onto your apartment and getting yourself to rehab. You've finally resorted to coming to this soup kitchen because it is one place where you don't have to fill out forms or wait forever. This is humiliating for someone who used to be just a "normal person."

Compassion & Acts of Mercy: Modeling True Charity

Areas covered

Society and Spirituality

Goal

To participate in an act of compassion and mercy and reflect on it

Background

This is obviously a continuation of the lesson "Where True Charity is Found" and should not be done without that preparation.

It is also extremely important that you schedule reflection time after the service time so the young people can learn from this experience. You might, in fact, decide to serve several meals or do several different acts of compassion and mercy.

In that case, you would need to spend some time preparing beforehand, talking about what the young people learned from the last experience and what they want to do differently or want to repeat the next time. And you need to schedule a reflection time after each experience.

Activity One

Meet as a group ahead of time, especially if this is the first time you are doing this activity. Answer any questions the youth might have. Remind them of what you discussed in the preparation time and ask if there is anything they have thought of or learned since then that they would like to share before you go to the soup kitchen. Remember to review any behavioral norms that may apply.

Before you begin your work, take time to pray. Invite the young people to offer short prayers. Make sure that the youth leaders offer petitions that ask God to give you humility and love for each other and for the guest you are to serve (unless one of the youth offers those prayers). Then begin serving. Youth leaders obviously should participate while keeping an eye on the youth to make sure nothing goes off track.

Activity Two

After the time of service, gather for a time of reflection. It is best if you can do this either in the group's regular meeting room or in the sanctuary. And, it is best if the youth sit on the floor (at least for the closing activity although it is better if they can be there the whole time). Talk about what they experienced.

- What was this experience like for you? What were you thinking and feeling? What did you like most/least? What was comfortable/uncomfortable? Why?
- What did you learn about our guests?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about God/Christ?
- Do you think we were loving, showed true charity? Why or why not?
- What might we do differently next time? What might we repeat?
- *Where there is mercy and love, God is always present.* Did you experience God's presence? How? Did you see Christ in each other (meaning both the youth group

and the guests)? How?

- What does it mean to serve in Christ's name? How is that different from just being a "do-gooder"? Or, another way to ask the question: how is Christian service different from service by a non-believer? [Hint: "The mission of the Church is to restore people to unity with God and each other *in Christ*" p. 855 BCP.]
- How can we be Christ-bearers in our service? How can we do that in our daily lives?
- Would you like to serve in the soup kitchen again? Or is there another act of compassion and mercy that you would like to do? [Gather ideas and suggest that the group discuss them at their next meeting. That will give you time to check out the ideas to make sure they are doable so the group can plan accordingly.]

Closure

Invite the group, adults included, to sit cross-legged on the floor and light a candle in the center of the circle (turn off the lights). Invite them to place their hands held in their lap as if they were holding a bowl of water. Ask them to recall someone they served today and to imagine that they are holding that person in their hands and offering them to God while they prayerfully sing *Ubi Caritas*.

Invite them to offer prayers between each rendition of the song, as you did in the last session. Or, you can sing the song once and then hum it while people offer prayers for the person they are remembering, then sing the song again followed by humming it while prayers are offered, etc. The leaders need to be prepared to explain what will happen and to model it so the youth know what is expected. Also, tell them that you will keep the song going for a long time to enable them to move into a prayer space in which they can imagine God receiving their person and them being in a relationship with God and that person. Explain that the goal is not to sing enthusiastically as much as it is to provide a gentle environment in which we can pray. Again, close the time by singing louder and slower when you feel the group is ready to end.

Then dismiss them: "Go in peace and the God of peace go with you."

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Faith and Trust: A Changing Definition of Faith

Areas covered

Self and Spirituality

Goal

To establish a working definition of faith, and to write a statement of faith to carry with us

Guiding Scriptures

Romans 10:17

Matthew 17:20, 21:22

Galatians 2:20

Overview

There are many sayings about faith: "Have faith." "Keep the faith." What does that mean? Faith in what? Faith in whom?

Sometimes the very words we use to talk about our religious beliefs and convictions are words we aren't really sure of. We use them easily, lightly, in an off-hand way, when in fact, they define the very core of who we are, so we should use these words carefully, reverently. This lesson plan is meant to help young people begin to wrestle with the ideas that are central to a life of faith. What does it mean to be faith-filled people?

According to a Bible dictionary, "Faith is in general the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true. Its primary idea is trust. A thing is true, and therefore worthy of trust."

But how do we come to know what things are true? One way that we learn the truth is through story. We listen to the stories of the people we trust and care for, and little by little we learn what people and things and facts are worthy of our trust. This is how we learn to look both ways at the street corner, not to run with scissors, and when and how to pray. We learn faith by hearing the stories of people of faith. The writer of the book of Romans says that "faith comes by hearing" (Romans 10:17), faith comes from listening to stories of God's actions both in history and in the day-to-day lives of God's people. That's why we listen to the reading of the scriptures week after week as part of the worship services in our church. We listen and we hear the stories, and our faith increases.

As we experience growth and connection in the Rite 13 program, it is important to focus again on the ways in which God has acted in history, and acts now – even how God acts through us. Leaders are encouraged to offer stories of their own faith in this lesson, stories from their lives and the lives of their families that will reinforce the loving presence of God in all our lives.

Activity

Ask the question: What is faith?

Allow young people to brainstorm definitions for the word. List all the answers on a board or sheet of newsprint in your classroom. After you have exhausted the expected answers, ask

them to think deeply about what these words mean: Faith, Believing, Trusting. You may wish to use a dictionary or a Bible Dictionary to help with definitions.

Go around the circle of young people, and ask them to tell a story or give an example of a way in which they have experienced or heard about God acting faithfully. Leaders might wish to go first, telling a story from the Bible in their own words, or a personal story about a time when God acted faithfully. Leaders are reminded to use simple examples in order to set the tone for the young people. In preparation, leaders are encouraged to reflect on their own lives and to pull from the richness of their own experience a story that is true for them.

As each young person tells the story, the leaders should record the key ideas of the story on newsprint. Be careful to record their words as precisely as possible. When in doubt, ask, "Are these words I've written an accurate reflection of what you said?"

Sometimes there will be young people who cannot think of a time when they had faith. In that case, ask them to consider a time when they wished they could have believed in something, could have believed in God.

After each young person has shared their story, leaders are encouraged to think of one or two words which describe the faithfulness of God in their story. Going around the circle, reminding everyone of each story told, leaders make statements of faith for the young people.

For example, if a young person says that their grandmother died of cancer, but at the very end she said she could see the angels coming, leaders might say, "Because of Anna's story, we have faith in a God who comes to us with angels as we face death."

Or in a situation where a young person describes the miraculous recovery of a beloved pet, leaders might say, "We have faith in a God who cares for every living thing."

Leaders will also want to speak to those situations where faith is so difficult to have and find, and remind young people that sometimes we can rely on other people's faith in hard times.

When we cannot see the working of God in our own lives, we look to the stories of God in history and God in our parents' and friends' lives as a way to reinforce our own believing. As Christians, we do believe in individual faith, but we also believe in the faith of the whole church, of the Whole Body of Christ. That's one of the reasons why we recite the creed together saying, "**WE** believe. . ." Faith is a community matter as well as an individual one.

For additional ideas on talking with teens about faith, see the J2A Lesson "Feeling the Faith".

Closing

Hand out 3x5 cards. Ask the young people to write a statement of faith on the card that they can tuck in their pocket and carry with them.

Leaders may wish to give the group a few suggestions from statements of faith in the Bible.

Matthew 9:22

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

Matthew 17:20

"If I have faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for me."

Matthew 21:22

"Jesus said, Whatever I ask for in prayer with faith, I will receive."

Galatians 2:20

The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Hebrews 11:1

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

1 Corinthians 2:5

"... so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God."

Romans 10:17

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God

Closing Prayer

Ask the young people to hold up their cards, lifting them to God for a blessing. Pray the following prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 235

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Faith and Trust: Let Your Doubt Sprout!

Area covered

Spirituality

Goal

To understand that having doubts is one of the ways that faith begins to grow

Guiding Scripture

Mark 9:24

Mark 9:14-29

Overview

Sometimes the only way we can begin to believe is by asking God to help us believe. That means we will have to be honest about our own lack of faith and trust. It can be difficult for young people to admit that they don't believe, in the face of a whole community of faithful people. But the truth is that all of us struggle with our beliefs. The story in the Gospel of Mark reminds us that Jesus only needs a tiny bit of faith and a whole lot of honesty from us in order to make miracles happen in the face of difficult times and situations. Sometimes, even those people whom we look to and trust to have more faith than we do cannot seem to "fix things." But this story reminds us that doubt is a part of our faith journey, and prayer is a way to build our faith.

Look up the reading in the Bible (Mark 9:14-29).

Read the passage aloud.

Ask the young people to respond to some of the following questions:

- What do you think the father was feeling about his boy?
- Can you imagine what the disciples must have thought when Jesus was able to do something that they couldn't do?
- Why did Jesus say that these things take lots of prayer?
- What could prayer do for us when we have doubts?
- Do you ever think you can hide your doubts from God?
- Why not tell God the truth, as the father in the story tells the truth?

Don't be surprised if the discussion turns to focus on demons and casting out spirits, and whether the group believes in that. The stories in the gospels are supposed to be provocative. Remind them of the times in which Jesus lived: there were limitations in medicine and psychiatric care. Allow them to wonder if there are demons in our day; and if so, does God want to set people free of them as he did in this story?

Sometimes we are afraid to open this sort of discussion because we think that we need to have the right answer, and we ourselves don't know whether we believe in demons and possessions and evil in the world. But this is just another example of letting our doubt sprout, so that God can move in our hearts to remind us that He loves us and is actively willing to care for us, to heal us, to release us from all the things that torment us as we become willing to believe, as we allow God to give us the faith and trust we need.

Young people need a radical faith. Young people need assurance that even when they lack faith, God will meet them in their doubt and do amazing and wonderful things. It may be that none of us ever sees a demon cast out of a person, it may be that we don't even believe this story is literally true, but rather that it's a metaphor for God's desire to free us in general. Either way, this is a story which will certainly open up a healthy, perhaps heated, discussion of God's power to save us, even when we need help believing it is true.

Closing

Ask the young people to think about all the things in the world that they think God should cast out, as Jesus cast out the demon.

What evils can they see in the world?

What darkness in the world around them needs the light of Christ?

The answers may include: poverty, war, AIDS, diseases, hunger, homelessness, violence in their schools and neighborhoods.

Remind the young people that these are the things we should pray for: that God will put an end to all the evils around us; and that God will heal each and every person in the world. When we pray in this way, asking that God help us with our unbelief, we open up our hearts to the love of the gospel – a love that changes the world.

Closing Prayer

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, Prayer for the Oppressed, p. 826

Faith and Trust: Embracing the Creed

Area Covered

Spirituality

Guiding Passage: The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Activity

As young people prepare for the end of Rite 13 and the beginning of the J2A years, it is a good time to invite the clergy of your congregation to come for a visit. In this lesson plan, we encourage you to invite the clergy to come into the classroom and lead a lesson on the Nicene and/or Apostolic Creeds. Begin by contacting the primary clergyperson well in advance, and ask that he/she prepare a lesson on the history and the importance of the creed. Ask that they

prepare to answer all the kinds of questions that they can imagine the young people will ask. This is a great opportunity for the clergy to use all the things they learned in seminary! However, particular focus should be placed on the meaning of the creed, why we recite it, how it affects our lives, how it stands as one of the centerpieces of our common life.

The word *creed* has its root word in the Latin word for heart. These are the words of our heart, the heartbeat of our faith. They deserve our attention.

Notes:

It might be fun to ask the young people if they can recite either the Nicene or Apostolic Creed from memory. Chances are they can! Get them started, help them along. These words are the foundation of our faith and our faith tradition. This is the time to ask questions, to celebrate what we believe, and to talk about the things in the creed that trouble us, or confuse us. In a real sense, this is the first lesson in preparation for Confirmation at the end of the J2A years.

Leaders may wish to meet with clergy ahead of this lesson to talk about the kinds of lessons you have been teaching and to give the clergy insight into the young people in your care.

Encourage them to explain the little things, too. For example, why do some people bow at the mention of Jesus coming down from heaven? Why do some people make the sign of the cross at the last lines of the creed? Encourage the young people to ask those kinds of questions as well.

Also, following this lesson is a copy of the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed, which you can reproduce as a handout.

Closing Prayer

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, p. 230

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Handout: The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Handout: The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,
the Father the Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son,
our Lord.

He was conceived
by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate;
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

What I know, What I Don't Know and What I Believe

Areas Covered

Self, Spirituality, Society

Objective

To establish a way of living out our faith in times of crisis

Guiding Scriptures

The Lord's Prayer

Heb 11:1 Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen. (NRSV)

Background

This is one of those important lesson plans to have as a resource. Whenever tragedy strikes – as in September 11, 2001 or Hurricane Katrina or even a local tragedy such as a teenager being killed in a car accident – there are always caring adults who WANT to help, but sometimes they don't know how.

This lesson will help give you some ideas about how to respond.

For background material, please read "A Personal Reflection on Crisis" by Amanda Millay Hughes and the packet of suggestions from Tracey Herzer – both articles are reprinted at the end of this lesson.

Explain to the group that this is the gift of corporate worship – of being part of a group, and not just having to rely on yourself alone. There are times when each of us may lose our faith, and find it hard to continue to believe in God. When this happens, we rely on our community of faith to hold us in *their* faith until our crisis is past. There will also be times that others in our community lose faith, and then it is our turn to hold *them* in our faith until their crisis is past.

Activity

Have the young people look at the handout "What Do I Believe? What Should I Do?", and to fill out the questionnaire on the second page. When they've completed it, gather them together for a discussion of the feelings these questions brought up.

Closing Prayer

Our loving Father, we know, even in times of peace and comfort, that there will be times in our lives when crisis overwhelms us and we find it hard to have faith. Help us to trust in your strength, that we will be able to cope when we are overwhelmed, and have faith in your love, that we are cared for no matter what happens. *Amen.*

Handout: What Do I Believe? What Should I Do?

Who can you trust to tell the truth? Doesn't everyone say whatever serves them best?

This kid comes to my school hungry every day. She's not my friend, but we all know she's doesn't get enough to eat. What does my faith tell me to do?

My favorite teacher was fired because the school objected to her lifestyle, not her teaching skills. They said the way she lives is sinful. How do I figure out what is sinful and what is faithful?

Do I have to call God "father"? If God is like *my* father, I wouldn't want to pray to him. If I call God something else, will God still listen?

If God is so real and trustworthy, how come so many terrible things happen in the world?

I pray and pray and nothing ever happens. How can I trust there is a God that hears me or cares about me?

What would I do if someone got hurt at school, or if violence occurred? Could I stay safe, and help anyone who needed it at the same time?

Read the following statements and circle the response that best fits you. This is NOT a test! This is so you can think about what you really do believe. Do not put your name on this paper before you give it to your leaders (unless you want to have it back after the session).

Jesus Christ is the only way to God.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
God created the whole universe.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
Jesus died for our sake.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
Jesus died on the cross	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
Jesus rose from the dead.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
God answers my prayers.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
God loves me just the way I am.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure
God cares what I do with my life.	I believe	I do not believe	I'm not sure

A Personal Reflection on Crisis – by Amanda Millay Hughes

Note: This reflection is particularly pertinent for the Faith and Trust lessons in Rite-13.

Over the course of the months and years that I have traveled to speak to groups about the *Journey to Adulthood* program, I have listened to and in some small way shared the sorrow of a great many parents who have suffered the loss of a child, or of youth leaders who are struggling to care for youth who have lost someone close to them through divorce or death. It has been my privilege and my sorrow to sit in meetings with grieving congregations. The pain is enormous and the help is slim. Loss, when it comes to us, is one of the many reminders of our own human frailty. No matter how well we eat, or live, or work, sorrow and death will come to all of us sooner or later.

Life has a way of dealing us difficulty, and it is a sad truth that tragedy comes to many of us while we are young. It is unfair, and it is painful. As youth leaders, one of the things that we can offer to the young people in our care is our perspective. We have had our own sorrows and tragedies and we have survived them. In some way, our sorrows and our losses define us. But we are more than our sorrows. We are individuals filled with the Holy Spirit of God. As adults, we may be scarred and wounded; but, nevertheless, in faith, we do the best we can to live our lives in the light of the gospel. Faith sustains us: faith in our God and God's desire to provide for us. Week after week, we say the Lord's prayer—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is what we pray. This is what we desire: that the will of God be realized in our day. Often, a problem arises for us when we face grave difficulty because we haven't really taken the time to reflect on what it means to pray in this way.

In dealing with the losses that many young people face, it has proved useful to give them a way of thinking about the balance between knowledge, ignorance, and faith: what we know, what we don't know, and what we believe. We are asked, as faithful children of God, to hold these three in a vibrant, living tension in our day-to-day lives. The things we know serve to orient us to the reality of the human condition; the things we don't know remind us of our need to ask, to listen, to learn; and the things we believe give us the strength to continue on the pilgrim journey to which we are all called. Faith is what keeps us going when everything we know and everything we don't know fails us. Faith wells up in the heart and mind; and, as children of our loving God, we hold up what we believe as the most important piece of our day-to-day experience.

Times of crisis can be exceedingly difficult for young people, particularly with regard to the loving nature of God. How can God allow this suffering? Why did God let our friend die? Where is God when we need Him? These are legitimate questions. And, as often as not, the honest answer is, I don't know. But that is not the end of the discussion. There is the question we must answer as Christian people: What do we believe about God? Where can we put our trust and our faith?

In times of crisis, it may prove useful to offer young people the following tool:

What I Know

First, **Gather the information.** Do everything in your power to assemble the facts of exactly what has happened.

Often, well-meaning parents and friends will try to shelter adolescents from the details. In an automobile accident, a well-meaning parent may say, "She died instantly without suffering." That is a piece of what happened, but young people are unlikely to be satisfied with the answer. The facts are

what they need. Exactly what happened, where, what time, who was driving. There's no need to go into overly gruesome details, but as many facts as are known should be given to the young people.

In another example, when a person dies, young people will benefit from being told exactly why they died and what treatments were attempted, when and how. The notion that many people tried to save a life is a great comfort to young people, and keeping the details from them denies the empowerment of knowing what can be known.

What I Don't Know

Second, **Acknowledge the limits of knowledge.** Admit the things we do not know.

There is no shame in admitting ignorance. One of the hardest questions an adult can face is Why? Especially when the true answer is, "I don't know."

It is helpful for leaders to remember that telling the truth means saying we don't know, at least once in a while. When a young person experiences the death of a loved one, or experiences a loss through divorce, separation, or illness, or any of a multitude of possible sorrows, the questions, Why? and even, Why me? often surface. To answer that this loss is the will of God may be more damaging than comforting. The very fact that we pray every week for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven reminds us that things on the earth are not in full accord with the mind and will of God. It is important that we admit our ignorance. We are unsure. We don't know the answer to why there is suffering in the world.

Some people maintain that suffering is a curse from God for our sins, or at least the effect of human sin. This is a difficult concept for young people who may just be developing a moral code, a deep understanding of actions and consequences, and are beginning to develop their own individual and personal relationship with God in Christ. The notion that we are being punished for our sins by the death of a loved one, or that if we had just been good enough our parents would not have divorced, is hollow comfort to a teenager in the face of a crisis. In addition, it overemphasizes the impact of our actions. Despite all our best efforts, we will continue to fall short of God's call to us. God will still be God, no matter how good we are or how good we become.

Perhaps the best tack we can take with teenagers in crisis is to tell them that we do not know why. We don't have an answer as to why suffering has come to them, or to us. We know the facts, but if there is a reason behind the events, as often as not, we don't know what it is.

What I Believe

Third, **Remember together and remind one another of what we believe.**

In the face of the facts and the ignorance we find in our experience, it is important that we remember to hold up what we believe. At the center of our faith are the creeds, the statements of faith we make in the middle of our Liturgies of Worship. The creeds can function as a sort of pacemaker for our hearts as we recite them. We believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth...we believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body. These statements remind us that in the face of all that we know and all that we don't know, we believe in God. We believe God's love for us is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. We believe that there is more to this life than we can see with our eyes, hear with our ears, understand with our intellect. There is the life of the Spirit: invisible, holy, mysterious.

In working through crisis points with teens, it may be useful to use this breakdown to help with the discussion and the management of pain. There may be no answer for suffering and no way to get around it. We must simply go through it. If we try to avoid the sorrows of our lives, the sorrows will emerge later to remind us again of our losses.

In the event of a tragedy or period of extreme difficulty, youth leaders should be prepared to help adolescents face the situation. Listing the things we know, the things we don't know and the things we believe is a small way to be supportive with kids in crisis. The psalms remind us that the Lord enlarges our hearts in times of distress. In sharing sorrow with one another, in facing the distress of our losses and pains, we are enlarged, becoming more and more like Jesus in his compassion.

In my own experience of working with teens in crisis, and with youth leaders working with teens in crisis, it has been helpful for me to be able to say: I know this hurts so very much. I don't know why we have to suffer. I believe that God will somehow redeem even this, and I believe absolutely that God is love.

As a point of closure, offering the history of faith in a moment of crisis may not be the best tactic. A willingness to stand with someone in crisis, to merely be present and silent, is a gift. But it is important to note that the Scriptures are filled with suffering and sorrow and the great men and women of faith who, while not spared from that suffering, stand as examples of ways to experience the suffering of life and remain faithful. Paul was imprisoned. Hagar and Ishmael were exiled. The Hebrew people wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Ruth and Naomi stood together in the loss of their loved ones. Each and every one continued to call out to God. Each and every one suffered and lost and continued to believe. This is our model. The Scriptures remind us that life is very, very hard; but that God is love, and is able and willing to redeem even the most horrible experiences by the power of that love. Holding out the love of God to God's children enables us all to feel what we feel, to live with the tension of ambiguity, and to remain faith-filled witnesses to a world so in need of redemption.

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Talking with Teens About Tragedy – by Tracey Herzer

A letter from April 17, 2007 – introducing a packet of resources for parents & teachers

Dear Friends –

The tragedy on the campus of VA Tech has shocked and saddened people from all over the country. We are reminded of other tragedies we have witnessed as we again encounter the feelings of pain and brokenness. In the face of such violence, it is easy to feel helpless and unsure about what to say. Many leaders have contacted us, asking for resources for discussing this event with their youth groups or Sunday School classes and what follows is a collection of suggestions and resources that we hope will help.

We ask your prayers for the many members of the VA Tech community and the surrounding area of Blacksburg, VA, as well as all the people who are tied to that community through friends and family. Please take time to remember all the parents, students, professors, employees, neighbors, and citizens who are grieving.

We encourage you to distribute this resource to all parents, youth leaders, Sunday School teachers or anyone else that may benefit from it. You also have permission to post a link to this document on any church-related website and you can use this address: http://www.leaderresources.org/downloads/free_downloads/talking_to_kids_and_teens_about_violence.pdf

As we walk through these difficult days, may we find glimpses of the Easter season we are also called to remember.

God's peace to us all,



Tracey E. Herzer
Executive Director

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Young Persons, BCP p. 829

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT TRAGEDY

Images from the shootings at VA Tech this week saturate our televisions, radios and conversations, calling to mind other dark days. When this kind of violence happens, it is important to talk with our children, but it is often difficult to know what to say. Here are some suggestions that may help...

- ✘ **First and foremost, children need to be reassured that they are safe.** Children often experience anxiety, fear and a personal sense of risk. Limit television viewing for younger children, especially preschool age. It is very difficult for young children to process images and messages in news reports. Let children know that tragic events are not our everyday experience and that the adults who love them will always try to take care of them. (ie – “I know you are scared. I am too. It’s a scary thing that happened, but I love you and I will always do my very best to make sure that you are safe.”)

- ✘ **Just like adults, children will have varied reactions.** They may ask lots of questions, cling to parents or exhibit behavior of younger children, have stomachaches or headaches, or may have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Older children and adolescents may make inappropriate jokes or glib comments or direct their anger and frustration at other seemingly unconnected situations. All of these are various ways of dealing with tragedy. Expect and give permission for a wide range of reactions. It is important to validate your child’s feelings and not try to explain to them why they should feel another way. Many children will need more physical affection and one-on-one time with parents.

- ✘ **The best plan for discussion is to talk honestly, but without a lot of graphic detail.** Be gently concrete and truthful when answering questions. Be careful of using euphemisms for death such as the people “passed” or “went to sleep” or “went away”. These may send scary messages to younger children who wonder if they might go to sleep and not wake up or if their parents will go away forever.

- ✘ **Be aware of where your child is developmentally.** Preschool children may see death as reversible, temporary or impersonal. Children between ages 5-9 are beginning to realize that death is permanent but may still think they could escape through their own ingenuity or efforts. From age 9 or 10 through adolescence, children begin comprehending fully that death is irreversible, that all living things die, and that they too will die someday.

- ✘ **Reinforce your family’s values.** This is a good time to talk about your family beliefs regarding the sanctity of life or helping others. Reiterate your position as a person of faith and don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know why this happened” or “I just don’t know how to answer that.” Also be aware that some religious explanations that may comfort adults may unsettle a child. For example, saying “It must have been God’s will” or “Those people are with God now” might be frightening to a child who may worry that God could decide to come get them. Assure them that God loves us and is present as we struggle to understand.

- ✘ **If they don't want to talk, give them other options.** If your child doesn't want to talk much about the incidents and you suspect they may be worrying about things they can't articulate, you might ask them to draw pictures or talk about what feelings they think *other* people might be having. This gives the child an opportunity to gain some distance to what they themselves are feeling. If your child doesn't want to talk about the events at all, they may not need to talk and you might just take a walk with them or read them a book or give them a hug to let them know you care about how they feel.
- ✘ **Remind children of safety procedures.** Talk about measures that are already in place, such as police, fireman, authorities and policies at school for dealing with danger, etc. Talk with them about safety plans that might make them feel more comfortable. Keep talking with them even after the media coverage subsides.
- ✘ **Keep your schedule normal.** As much as possible, try to continue with family routines such as dinnertime or bedtime rituals. Children (and adults) can often find some comfort by connecting with some sense of normalcy, even in the midst of chaos and fear.
- ✘ **Find a way to participate in rebuilding or reconciliation.** Times of tragedy bring out both the best and the worst in people. Help your children by making a conscious choice to take part in caring for others and helping where you can. Get involved in a neighborhood watch or a community campaign. Doing something concrete helps us feel like we are part of the solution and it a definitive statement of hope and rebirth.

When we respond to tragedy, our feelings may be intense and varied. Give your children and yourself some time to adjust. There are no magic words, no "right answer" – just be with your children and talk with them. Remember there are people available to help you – your school counselors, as well as community agencies and professional counselors who are specially trained to deal with situations like this; and there are many resource people in the church who can be of tremendous help and comfort in a time of tragedy.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- ✘ Consider spending some family time praying for the people who have been hurt or have died. Talk to God about not understanding why this happened. Pray for the students, teachers, and employees at the school, as well as the people who live in the area and people everywhere who lost someone they loved.
- ✘ Read prayers together from the Book of Common Prayer or other books. One suggestion is to look through the services for burial, pages 462-507 or read collects like For Social Justice on p. 260 or the Prayer attributed to St. Francis on p. 833 or the Prayer for the Human Family or the Prayer for Peace on p. 815 or For Schools and Colleges on p. 824.)
- ✘ Read scripture together (Especially appropriate are Psalm 23, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 46:1, Psalm 121, John 14:27, Romans 8:34-35, 37-39, 2 Timothy 1:7, Revelation 21:2-7)
- ✘ Don't hesitate to contact members of the clergy or educational staff at your church if you want further suggestions or just want to talk.

TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT TRAGEDY

Much of what has been written about talking with children can pertain to talking with teenagers as well, but some additional suggestions follow:

- ✘ **Teen reactions may be intense.** Teenagers already live with emotional ups-and-downs and a tragic event may exacerbate the situation. Watch for displaced anger/aggression and be aware that routine disagreements may escalate quickly while teens are processing feelings. Try to be gentle with your teen. Give them space and consider letting some non-essentials slide for a few days. Tell them you love them – even if you aren't sure they want to hear it.
- ✘ **Reassure your teens that the world is not total chaos.** Many teens will have increased anger and cynicism about people in general, especially when they hear stories of cruelty and brutality. Pointing out all the ways people have honored the victims and tried to help their families may help balance out some of the anger teens feel about the world in general.
- ✘ **Teens may be fascinated with graphic details.** Teens inundated with media images may be mesmerized by gory news reports, etc. This is one way of dealing with their feelings. They may be overly interested in body counts, stories of how and where people died, etc.
- ✘ **Teens are in a different developmental stage.** Teenagers understand death is inevitable, universal and irreversible, but may still feel as if “this could never happen to me”. Teens are more likely to ask big questions about the way life works or the nature of God's character. They may need adult guidance for processing grief or developing appropriate coping skills, but don't be surprised if they first turn to their friends. Teens are not sure how to handle emotions, either public or private, and may process things as they talk with trusted friends.
- ✘ **Talk about how we treat others.** It is important to discuss the complex social forces that can sometimes lead to violence. Talk honestly about social pressures in teens' lives... about what it feels like to be left out or ostracized; about how we deal with alienation and how we manage our anger. While most situations won't lead to this kind of violence, it is important to acknowledge the frustration and pain that teenagers feel when they don't fit in.

Additional Suggestions

- ✘ Brainstorm ways to help. Finding concrete tasks may help your teenager regain their sense of personal power and security. Writing consolation cards, working to make schools and communities safer, advocating for gun control, or just vowing not to contribute to violence in any way – all these may help your teen regain equilibrium. Check out the National Crime Prevention Council for great teen programs: www.ncpc.org/programs/tcc/
- ✘ Besides reading the scriptures or prayers listed above, the Journey to Adulthood Curriculum offers a wonderful lesson plan called “*What I know, what I don't know, and what I believe.*” This is a great way to process what has happened, to give voice to all that we don't understand or control and to reaffirm our basic beliefs.
- ✘ Another good option for teens is to read through The Great Litany (p. 148 BCP). Many congregations use this litany in Lent, but the words offer some haunting and comforting words that may help to express some of our feelings about recent events... VERY powerful!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

<http://www.ctdiocese.org/resources/ResourcesFollowingTragicEvents.pdf>

The Diocese of Connecticut has put together a wonderful list of books and websites full of valuable tips and information about violence and news headlines.

<http://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/Main/Mourning.asp>

An ecumenical website offering several session guidelines and lesson plans for talking about the events of this week, the issues of gun control and where to find God during disastrous events

<http://www.pcusa.org/youthministry/>

Specialized youth lesson plans and online devotions for teenagers and youth leaders – from the national Presbyterian Church offices

http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.2676463/k.5ADF/Tragedy_at_Virginia_Tech.htm

Stories, prayers, reflections and resources from the national Methodist Church Offices

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm>

From the National Institute of Mental Health – a wealth of resources about dealing with violence and trauma, plus a downloadable booklet of information about how to talk to children & teens

<http://www.myfaithmylife.org/prayer.html>

Great website especially designed for Episcopal teenagers that includes some wonderful ideas for exploring different prayer methods – especially helpful when we don't have adequate words for all that is in our hearts

<http://www.hr.vt.edu/supportresources/>

VA Tech's webpage for coping with grief and loss

<http://rosa.hosting.vt.edu/index.php/memorial/>

VA Tech's official website for expressing condolences, prayers, etc. (Note: Due to incredibly high volume, this website may be extremely slow... please be patient)

<http://www.gcu.edu/vtech/>

This amazing photo montage created by a student at Grand Canyon University as a tribute to VA Tech students is set to the Christian song "I Can Only Imagine" by MercyMe

R13 Lessons

Prayer

Talking to God – Listening to God: An Introduction

Purpose

We all pray at some time or another. These next eleven sessions on prayer introduce young people to ways in which they can enhance their own spirituality. We cannot emphasize strongly enough the role that prayer plays in a young person's – or anyone's – life. We therefore strongly encourage Rite 13 leaders to begin these lesson plans quite early on in the first year, when the community has been formed and the young people have begun to feel comfortable with themselves and with each other. Prayer should form a regular part of the Rite 13 group experience.

This section includes eleven lesson plans focusing on the nature of prayer and its necessity for faith development. The eleven lessons are:

1. **WHAT IS PRAYER?**
2. **WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT PRAYER?**
3. **TYPES OF PRAYER: Supplication**
4. **TYPES OF PRAYER: Thanksgiving**
5. **TYPES OF PRAYER: Confession**
6. **TYPES OF PRAYER: Adoration**
7. **THE LORD'S PRAYER**
8. **COLLECTIVE PRAYER**
9. **LISTENING AND SILENCE**
10. **LIVES DEDICATED TO PRAYER: Religious Orders**
11. **PRAY WITHOUT CEASING**

These lessons will enable you to examine the ways in which we pray and inventory the things we pray for; look at some of the teachings about prayer that Jesus used; examine some of the different *ways* and *methods* by which we pray and find them in the *Book of Common Prayer*; and explore how some people in the Bible, and elsewhere, have prayed. The young people will also write their own prayers and share these with the group or in a wider worship setting and have ample opportunity to experience various ways of praying.

The purpose of these sessions is to give our young people a solid grounding in prayer and to introduce them to the myriad ways of praying that are part of the Christian heritage. Many young people are attracted by the meditative prayer forms in new age spiritualism or Eastern religions. It is important that we help them learn about and experience the Christian tradition of meditation, contemplation, mysticism, etc. Some of the forms introduced here may not be familiar to you, and you may want to draw on the experiences of others in your congregation or community.

Overview

Prayer is a special word for the interaction of our hearts with the heart of God. For most of us, we consider prayer to be a kind of talking, quietly, humbly, with our heads bowed down, our eyes closed, our bodies very still. But for the sake of this section of the curriculum, we want to consider a broader definition of prayer.

Prayer can be spoken or silent, whispered or shouted.
Prayer can be active or contemplative.
Prayer can be still and motionless, or action-packed.
Prayer can be joy-filled or sorrowful, triumphant or angry.
Prayer can be passive or insistent.
Prayer can be individual or collective.
Prayer can be public or private.
Prayer is at the very center of the life of the Church.

The brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist have defined prayer this way in their Rule of Life:

Prayer is responding to God in thought, word and deed, with or without words, through Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not all will use the time of personal prayer in the same way, but whether in meditation based on Scripture or in the lifting of the heart in contemplation, we are united to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This union with Christ will find expression in the offering of adoration, thanksgiving, penitence and prayer for our needs and those of the whole world. It is the source of the hope and love we bring to our personal relationships and the wellspring of commitment to work for social justice.

For us, as youth leaders working with young people in the Rite 13 program, we want to begin with the notion of establishing that unity with God, in Christ Jesus. Leading young people into their own life with God is our primary task. This means that we will honor their own understanding of who God is, while helping them find new and useful ways to deepen and enrich their relationship with God. We will incorporate the teachings of Jesus, our Savior, the lessons from the Bible, and the rich heritage in the *Book of Common Prayer*, as these are reliable sources for direction in establishing a life hallmarked by prayer. We will also reach into the heritage of saints and mystics who have gone before us, as well as to the wealth of spiritual writings available to God's Church. But most important of all, we will pray, and by our prayers open up the most important relationship we have: our relationship with God.

It is not possible to have a true relationship with a stranger. In many ways, God is a stranger to us; and in fact, we are strangers to ourselves. Prayer is one way we can be known by and know the One who loves us, calls us into new life, and asks us for obedience. Every aspect of our life, every thought, longing, need, plan, and celebration can be wrapped in our prayers. As we pray, we get to know God. As we pray, we get to know ourselves and each other. As we pray, we light the path and take steady steps on the journey of faith.

These lesson plans are designed to be a kind of road map. Our goal is to pray, and then to pray again. All the information and intellectual insight available to us concerning prayer is still not prayer itself. Prayer is a wondrous dialogue between the heart of God and the hearts of God's people. Thinking about prayer, talking about prayer, worrying about prayer can never replace the action of prayer itself. Prayer is a process, not a concept. We learn and understand it only by doing it.

As we begin these eleven weeks on prayer, leaders are encouraged to look closely at their own prayer disciplines. It will be useful to ask, How do I pray? What do I believe about the nature of God's call on my life? How do my prayers sustain me and make me strong for this work? It is also a good time to begin to pray for the young people in our care, and our ministry to them.

No matter how well we work this program, no matter how wise we may be in responding to the needs of adolescents, our God – the one true God of all living things, young and old, rich and poor, wise and foolish – will have to meet us in this effort. God will answer our prayers. It will be God who calls these young people to himself. It will be God who shows himself true and faithful to them. It will be God who invites them into a deeper and deeper relationship with Love. Our task is not to “get out of God’s way” but rather to get in there and model for our youth the nature of a life of prayer. Our task is to show by word and deed the power and presence available to us through prayer.

So, how shall we begin? We will begin where we will end – in prayer.

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying, “Lord have mercy.”

An Anthology of Selected Prayers

These prayers are intended to be used with or by the young people. In using them, it is important that we let teens know something of where they come from; many of these prayers are ancient. The leaders, therefore, should share something of the history. The young people should know that, whenever we pray, we do not pray alone. We join our voices with the "multitude without number" who have preceded us in this world and who wrestled with much the same faith issues as we do.

Prayers of Adoration

Yes, Lord, you are the God of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the King of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Almighty.
Yes, Lord, you are the Governor of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Savior of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Judge of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Life-giver of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Keeper of all.
Yes, Lord, you are the Nourisher of all.

Patriarch of Antioch, 5th Century

You take the pen,
 and the lines dance.
You take the flute,
 and the notes shimmer.
You take the brush,
 and the colors sing.
So all things have meaning and beauty
 in that space beyond time where you are.
How, then, can I hold back anything from you?

Dag Hammarskjöld, 20th century

<i>Celebrant</i>	Blessed be God, who gave us breath and life.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be God, who loves us always.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Blessed be God, who makes us a holy people.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be God, now and always. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

The prayers by Vienna Cobb Anderson (above & below) are from *Prayers of Our Hearts: In Words and Action* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). © 1991 by Vienna Cobb Anderson.

Mother of the world,
to you we sing
praise and adoration
for life's abundance

and grace.
You provide for our needs
with the bounty of your womb.
You bless us with the touch
of your breath upon our souls.
You caress us with your love
in our hearts.
Praise and thanksgiving
to you we raise,
with joyful hearts
and grateful praise. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

Receive the prayers of our hearts,
O God of love.
Let your Spirit
give voice to what we cannot say.
Grant that through these prayers
our hearts and minds may be transformed
to do your will;
in the name of Jesus Christ,
who taught us to pray. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

Celebrant The blessing of God whose love embraces all be with you this day and forever.
People Thanks be to God.
Celebrant The blessing of God whose grace forgives our sin be with you this day and forever.
People Thanks be to God. So be it.
Celebrant The blessing of God whose Spirit inspires our living be with you this day and forever.
People Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

Celebrant Blessed are you, Mother of all life.
People Blessed be your name forever and ever.
Celebrant Blessed are you, Father and Creator.
People Blessed be your name forever and ever.
Celebrant Blessed are you, Redeemer of the world.
People Blessed be your name forever and ever.
Celebrant Blessed are you, Sanctifier of life.
People Blessed be your name forever and ever.
Celebrant The blessing of God, Source of our salvation, be with you always.
People Blessed be God's holy name, forever and ever.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

Meditative Prayers

Lead me from death to Life, from falsehood to Truth;
Lead me from despair to Hope, from fear to Trust;
Lead me from hate to Love, from war to Peace;
Let Peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta
World Peace Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is discord, union;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, Grant that we may not so much seek
 to be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Saint Francis of Assisi

Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in your presence. So may my every word and action have a moral content.

Susanna Wesley (17th-18th century)

God, of your goodness give me yourself for you are sufficient for me. I cannot properly ask anything less, to be worthy of you. If I were to ask less, I should always be in want. In you alone do I have all.

Julian of Norwich

Lord, may I ever speak
 as though it were the last word
 that I can speak.
May I ever act
 as though it were the last action
 that I can perform.
May I ever suffer
 as though it were the last pain
 that I can offer.
May I ever pray
 as though it were for me on earth
 the last chance
 to speak to you.

Chaira Lubich

O Lord God, in whose presence we have knelt this day, so change our lives that people may know that we have been with Jesus. Grant that we, who have worshiped you here this day, may at last see you face to face where you live and reign for ever. Amen.

Church of the Province of Southern Africa

O Lord my God, thank you
 for bringing this day to a close;
Thank you for giving me rest
 in body and soul.

Your hand has been over me
and has guarded and preserved me.
Forgive my lack of faith
and any wrong that I have done today,
and help me to forgive all who have wronged me.
Let me sleep in peace under your protection,
and keep me from all the temptations of darkness.
Into your hands I commend my loved ones
and all who dwell in this house;
I commend to you my body and soul.
O God, your holy name be praised. Amen.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Letters and Papers from Prison*

O Lord, do not let us turn into “broken cisterns” that can hold no water. Do not let us be so blinded by the enjoyment of the good things of the earth that our hearts become insensible to the cries of the poor, of the sick, of orphaned children, and of those innumerable brothers of ours who lack the necessary minimum to eat, to clothe their nakedness, and to gather their family together under one roof.

*Pope John XXIII
Journal of a Soul*

For Parents

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families: We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vainglory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh. Turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we may evermore be kindly affectioned one to another; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, page 828

Almighty God, giver of life and love, bless *N.* and *N.* Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. And so knit their wills together in your will and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may live together in love and peace all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, page 444

O Mother and Father of creation,
we give thanks to you for our fathers.
We thank you, and them,
for the nurture, love, and providence
that they have bestowed upon us.
Bless them in their work,
bless them in their leisure,
bless them in the depths of their hearts.
Fill their days with wonder,
their nights with peaceful rest,
and their lives with the presence
of your eternal love;

in Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

O Mother and Father of creation,
we give thanks to you for our mothers.

We thank you, and them,
for the nurture, love, and providence
that they have bestowed upon us.

Bless them in their work,
bless them in their leisure,
bless them in the depths of their hearts.

Fill their days with wonder,
their nights with peaceful rest,
and their lives with the presence
of your eternal love;
in Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

For Children and Young People

Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, page 829

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world; Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, page 829

Blessed God, you have created life to begin with childhood, a time of innocence, laughter, and exploration. Bless, we beseech you, the children of this world. Grant unto them the nurture they need for strong physical growth, keen minds, balanced emotions, and a holy spiritual life. Send unto them teachers to inspire an inquiring and discerning heart, to enable curiosity toward their surroundings, and a knowledge of this global village. Bless them with love, hope, and vision, and keep them ever in your unfailing compassion and protection; for the sake of the one who loved children, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

O God of the children of Somalia, Sarajevo, South Africa, and South Carolina,
Of Albania and Alabama, Bosnia and Boston,
Of Cracow and Cairo, Chicago and Croatia,

Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

O God of black and brown and white and albino children and all those mixed together,
Of children who are rich and poor and in-between,
Of children who speak English and Spanish and Russian and Hmong and languages our ears
cannot discern,

Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

O God of the child prodigy and the child prostitute,
Of the child of rapture and the child of rape,
Of runaway or thrown-away children who struggle every day
without parent or friend or place or future,
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

O God of children who can walk and talk and hear and
see and sing and dance and jump and play,
And of children who wish they could but can't,
Of children who are loved and unloved, wanted and unwanted,
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

O God of beggar, beaten, abused, neglected and AIDS- and drug- and hunger-ravaged children,
Of children who are emotionally and physically and mentally fragile,
Of children who rebel and ridicule, torment and taunt,
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

O God of children of destiny and despair, of war and peace,
Of disfigured, diseased and dying children,
Of children without hope, and of children with hope to spare and to share,
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Celebrant

Commit us in all our different roles to seeing that no child in our wealthy nation, and no child in our world, whose fate we have a chance to affect, will be left behind because of what we fail to do. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Marian Wright Edelman
The Children's Defense Fund*

A Prayer for Friends

You have blessed us, O God,
with the gift of friendship,
the bonding of persons
in a circle of love.
We thank you for such a blessing:
for friends who love us,
who share our sorrows,
who laugh with us in celebration,
who bear our pain,
who need us as we need them,
who weep as we weep,
who hold us when words fail,
and who give us the freedom
to be ourselves.
Bless our friends with health,
wholeness, life, and love;
in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord,
Give bread to those who have hunger,
And to those who have bread,
Give a hunger for justice.

Theodore Hesburgh

Lord, when did we see you?
I was hungry and starving
 and you were obese;
Thirsty
 and you were watering your garden;
With no road to follow, and no hope
 and you called the police and were happy that they took me prisoner;
Barefoot and with ragged clothing
 and you were saying, "I have nothing to wear; tomorrow I will buy something new;"
Sick
 and you asked, "Is it infectious?"
Lord, have mercy.

*Anonymous
Anglican Cycle of Prayer, 1990*

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow human beings throughout the world who live and die in poverty or hunger. Give them, through our hands, this day their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

O God of all youth, we pray to you:
We are young people, and we want to celebrate life!
We cry out against all that kills life,
 hunger, poverty, unemployment, sickness,
 repression, individualism, injustice.
We want to announce the fullness of life:
 work, education, health, housing,
 bread for all.
We want communion, a world renewed.
We hope against hope.
With the Lord of history we want to make all things new.

*Prayer of Brazilian young people
The Anglican Cycle of Prayer*

Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ. Rest your weary ones. Bless your dying ones. Soothe your suffering ones. Pity your afflicted ones. Shield your joyous ones. And all, for your love's sake. Amen.

*St. Augustine
Compare the Book of Common Prayer, page 134*

Help us, O Lord, always to wait for you, to wish for you, and to watch for you, that at your coming again you may find us ready; for your sake we ask it.

Prayerbook, 5th Century

O heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life we may never forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your sight; for your own name's sake.

Prayerbook, 5th Century

Compare the Collect for Guidance in the service of Morning Prayer, *Book of Common Prayer*, page 100

Jesus, our Master, do meet us while we walk in the way, and long to reach the Country; so that, following your light, we may keep the way of righteousness, and never wander away into the darkness of this world's night, while you, who are the way, the truth, and the life, are shining within us; for your own Name's sake.

Mozarabic liturgy, 6th-8th centuries

O God, who in your loving-kindness does both begin and finish all good things; grant that as we glory in the beginnings of your grace, so we may rejoice in its completion; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Leonine Sacramentary, 7th century

O my God, by whose loving providence, sorrows, difficulties, trials, dangers, become means of grace, lessons of patience, channels of hope; grant us good will to use and not abuse those our privileges.

Christina Rosetti, 19th century

Short Prayers

Grant, O Lord, that, with your love, I may be big enough to reach the world; and small enough to be one with you.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

O Lord, let me rest the ladder of gratitude against thy cross and, mounting, kiss thy feet.

Prayer from India

The things, Good Lord, that we pray for, give us the grace to labor for.

Thomas More

I find thee throned in my heart, my Lord Jesus. It is enough. I know that thou art throned in heaven. My heart and heaven are one.

Gaelic Prayer

Ever-Present God, allow me to forgive myself for not being you.

William J. O'Malley

The prayers by William J. O'Malley (above and below) are all taken from *Daily Prayers for Busy People* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1990).

God of mercy and justice,
let me know that in your transforming hands, no gift of mine is small.

William J. O'Malley

God of surprises, when I am content, disrupt me.

William J. O'Malley

God, let me use my days, not the other way around.

William J. O'Malley

God, let me understand you, not as a noun, but as a verb.

William J. O'Malley

God, it is so difficult not to be in control; purge me of the craving.

William J. O'Malley

Talking to God — Listening to God: What is Prayer?

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To give young people an opportunity to pray together and reflect on the nature and purpose of prayer.

Objectives

To establish the Rite 13 classroom as “holy ground.”

To look at the ways in which we currently understand prayer.

To spend time in prayer.

Guiding Scriptures

Exodus 3:1-7 Moses takes off his shoes at the burning bush.

Joshua 5:13-15 Joshua takes off his shoes when the Lord tells him.

John 13:2b-20 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.

Background

Sometimes we need a reminder of who God really is. We forget, in the midst of our busy lives, that God is holy, powerful, omnipotent, wise, and in the person of Jesus Christ, a servant and savior. In this lesson, we hope to surprise young people into considering the presence of God in their classroom. We want to make a prayer space – and like Moses, Joshua, and the disciples, we are going to take off our shoes as a reminder of the power and holiness of God.

Being barefoot in this modern culture is a sign of poverty and weakness. It was the same in the Bible. The men and women needed their shoes to protect them from the heat and stones and dust. We need our shoes to protect us from concrete and glass shards, from hot asphalt and cold marble. And we use shoes as status symbols. The television and print media seem convinced that we will be better athletes, better people if we wear hundred-dollar sneakers or all-leather Doc Martin boots. It is a great equalizer to remove our shoes and sit barefoot with one another. It’s a little thing, but its significance is reinforced throughout Scripture. God wants us to stand on holy ground, and to feel it through our feet.

This may seem a bit risky to leaders and young people. Suddenly we all find ourselves self-conscious – what if my feet smell? What if I am wearing hose or tights? What if I have ugly feet? What if I have toenail polish with chips and scratches? What if I need a pedicure, badly? All of these concerns are just tiny reminders of how difficult it is for all of us to be vulnerable to one another and to God. If we cannot even show one another our feet, how will we welcome one another into our day-to-day lives? If we think everything depends on whether we have clean toes, how will we set out to do God’s work in the world?

For the most part, we want to do good, to work for social justice, for peace and equality, but only if we can maintain our position as “right,” “good,” “clean,” superior.” Taking off our shoes to talk about prayer is one way to touch our inadequacy and our fears. And in a funny sort of way, taking off our shoes in front of each other will remind us, if we have hearts and eyes and

ears ready to learn, that God already knows everything about us – even the shape of our tiny feet.

The second thing we will focus on is the nature of prayer. What are we trying to accomplish? Why do we do it at all? Over the next few weeks, we will look at lots of ways to pray and ways to think about prayer. But for today, the focus is on getting to know who God is, and who we are. Prayer is one access point. In addition, we want to remind young people that getting to know God requires that we try to respond to God's action, God's attendance in our lives. God is already here, waiting for us to turn and look and see how good and loving and faithful and present he is.

Preparation

Make a sign for the classroom door which reads:

**REMOVE YOUR SHOES AND
LINE THEM UP NEATLY BY THE DOOR.
THIS IS HOLY GROUND.**

Bring flowers, candles, a scarf or piece of linen cloth, a loaf of bread, a glass of wine, a branch or a vine. Icons or other images of Jesus and God might be a welcome addition as well.

Activity One

As the young people arrive, explain to them that today we are going to make our classroom into a prayer closet. Do not let anyone in who is wearing shoes. One leader may need to stand outside the door to help facilitate the removal of shoes.

Rearrange the furniture, and set up a space for prayer.

This could take on many different forms. Perhaps your group would want to set up individual corners for prayer. In this case, you might want to have enough flowers and candles to go around. (Leaders get to keep the matches, of course, and will have to explain that they are going to function as the acolytes this morning!) Or perhaps the group will want to make a central focal point. Choose a spot on the floor in the middle of the room or create an altar-like arrangement at one end. Ask the young people what configuration they would like to try.

Work quickly. Involve everyone.

Once the space is prepared, light the candles and turn out the lights. Ask the young people to sit silently for three minutes.

At the end of the three minutes, a leader asks:

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

WHAT IS PRAYER AFTER ALL?

Turn on the lights and record answers on newsprint.

The answer we are looking for is: We're talking to God. But the question remains: *Why?* And why did we take our shoes off?

Leaders may want to take a few minutes to explain that prayer is a word for the special way God and God's people talk to one another. Prayer is the means to building a relationship. We took our shoes off to remind us that we all need God, and God is not interested in our looking cool or smelling good or being well-dressed. God is more interested in our coming into relationship than impressing one another. God wants us to be who we are.

Leaders may want to make note of the stories in the Old and New Testaments where God asked people to take off their shoes – with Moses at the burning bush, with Joshua at the walls of Jericho, and with Jesus at the foot-washing. If the young people are unfamiliar with these stories, have them look them up in the Bible and read them aloud. Talk about what happened to these people and why they took off their shoes. In all three examples, holiness and vulnerability were the issues. We cannot do the work of God in the world – we can hardly pray at all, if we come with all sorts of protection. Taking off our shoes reminds us that we are dealing with God. We take off our shoes as a small reminder of our need to be humble before God.

Activity Two

Try this as a demonstration of the problems of getting to know someone! Ask one young person to stand in the middle of the room. Ask all the others to sit in a circle around the central figure, facing away from her. Recording responses on the newsprint, ask the young people to describe the central figure. What is her name, her parents' names; what color are her eyes? How long is her hair? Is she smiling? Frowning? Laughing? Crying? Ask as many questions as you can think of, and be sure to ask specific questions, ones that will make the group realize that they will have trouble answering the questions without looking at the one in the middle. What is she wearing? What color is her shirt? Are her toenails painted? What size shoe does she wear?

After the group has listed as many things as they can, have them turn around and face the one in the middle. Ask a new round of questions, or ask again the questions that were difficult or impossible to answer without looking.

Until the young people acknowledge that they need to ask that central figure, need to talk to her and with her, their experience and understanding of this individual will be limited. It's hard to answer a question like, "What did she have for breakfast?" without asking her, "What did you have for breakfast?"

Prayer is like that.

A lot of what we say in prayer is really looking away from God and thinking things over. We look at our past experience, our memories, our knowledge, but we avoid looking at God. Perhaps we are even afraid that if we look, we won't be able to see God. But God has promised that as we look at Jesus, in the Bible and in each other, we will begin to see and know God's face. When we look to see God, we join with Moses and Joshua and David and Mary and Martha and Paul and all the men and women throughout history and in our present day who have looked and have seen the one true God.

Ask the young people to list ways that they might get to know God.

Possible answers might include:

Prayer

Leaders might ask: Do you all pray? What kinds of things do you pray for?

Reading the Bible

Leaders might ask: Yeah, but do you ever read the Bible? Why? Why not?

Talking to people who know God

Leaders might ask: When was the last time you asked someone to tell you about God? Or, when was the last time you told someone else about God?

What about feeding the poor?

Clothing the homeless?

Can you really see Jesus in your schoolteachers? In other kids at the mall? In your moms and dads?

Leaders might suggest that this week we all try to see God in everyone. After all, we are all made in God's image. There must be some sparkle of God in everybody and everything. Remember the psalmist says that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth shows forth his handiwork" (*Psalms 19:1*). We can get to know God by opening our eyes to see the people and the world around us. We can even ask God to open our eyes to see all the ways that we turn away from looking, turn away from seeing God in our day-to-day lives.

Closure

Ask young people to choose one of the objects leaders brought to the classroom this morning. Ask them to hold it in their hands and look closely at it. Assure them that each of these objects is a symbol designed to remind us to look at God. Each object is there to bring us closer to the one who made us. Explain that you are going to read the following verses from the Bible to welcome God to come to us, and be known to us in prayer. Holding the objects, stand in a circle with arms linked. Leaders will read the following:

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."

Jesus said, "I am the vine."

Our God is a consuming fire, a burning bush. God whispers in our hearts. Our God cares about every single thing we do, think, remember, and want. But most of all, our God wants to be in relationship with each of us, individually and collectively, as living members of the Body of Christ, standing barefoot on holy ground.

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the power of your spirit, lift us up to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God. Give us ears and eyes and hearts to see you and your hand in everyone, everything, all the time, because we want to know you, and we want you to know us. We ask all this and so much more through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

— adapted from BCP, p. 832, The Prayer for Quiet Confidence

What did Jesus Say About Prayer?

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To gain a deeper understanding of the personal nature of prayer.

Objectives

To look at the ways we currently pray: What do we pray for? When and where?

To look at what Jesus says about prayer.

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 6:5-15 The Lord's Prayer.

Matthew 7:7-11 "Your Father in heaven [will] give good things to those who ask."

Background

Last week we focused on understanding prayer as relationship building. While we only hinted at these things, in fact, we opened up three distinct areas that are worth bearing in mind as we proceed into this lesson.

First, by taking off our shoes, we established our own weakness and humility. It is a small thing, but if we are going to be in relationship with God, one of the first things we need to recognize is who we are. We are God's beloved creation, and we are very small. By taking off our shoes, we reminded ourselves and one another, if only just a little, that we are vulnerable and human. No amount of covering, no fancy footwear, can hide what is true. We are human, and we are children in God's eyes. God wants to be, and is, the satisfaction for our needs.

Second, we focused our attention on who God is, and where we might see him in his creations. At the end, we talked briefly about seeing God in one another, in parents, friends, even enemies. We remembered together that God can be seen in the heavens, in the earth, in all people, and in all things. This is important because, unlike us, small and barefoot, God is everywhere, large, powerful, and present.

The third thing we focused on was building a relationship between ourselves and God. God has already moved toward us in the person of his son Jesus, and continues to move toward us all the time. We are the ones with our backs turned away. Any action, any prayer, any motion we make toward God is always in response to his first move toward us.

This week, we will look at the kinds of things we currently pray for, and then examine two passages in Matthew where Jesus sets a standard – and it is a harsh one – for our prayers. Jesus is challenging us to remember who God is and who we are throughout the Sermon on the Mount. In the passages selected for this session, Jesus reminds us to "get real" with God and to "get real" with ourselves. Prayer is not a time for putting on a good show. Prayer is our chance to tell the truth to God and to listen again to God's call to us. Prayer is the time to ask, knock, seek – and God will answer, open, and be wonderfully found.

Preparation

- Make certain your classroom has Bibles and copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*, or your own prayer books, enough to go around.
- Make copies of the *Handout: Personal Prayer Inventory*.

Activity One

Hand out copies of the Personal Prayer Inventory. Ask the participants to take a few minutes to fill in their sheets. Remind them that this is just an inventory, not a test. There aren't any right or wrong answers. Leaders should fill out the inventory, too, and share from their own experiences in prayer. After they have finished filling in the sheets, ask them to look again and circle the items on the inventory that left them feeling a little weird or uncomfortable. For example, perhaps they can't thank God for giving them "a loving family" because they don't experience their family as loving. Or, perhaps they wondered why they felt sorry and said so to God when they "told the truth in order to get someone in trouble." Certainly that point in the inventory raises all kinds of questions about truth-telling and morality. Ask them to share which questions were the hardest to answer. List those on newsprint. As they list their concerns, remind them that God knows what is in our hearts better than we do. Sometimes we pray for or refuse to pray for things because we aren't really sure what to do or what to think about something that has happened to us.

But remember, prayer is a language, a special language for God. When we pray, it isn't necessary for us to always understand intellectually everything we want or need or hope for. What matters is that we lift those concerns to God's care. Remember in the opening of the Eucharistic Prayer, what do we say? (Ask them to find this in the *Book of Common Prayer* – e.g., p. 361.)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give [God] thanks and praise.

One of the reasons we say those words, week after week, is to acknowledge what is at the very center of our experience of life, even when we are not aware of it: God is with us. We can trust God with all the things we worry about. When we see God at the center of all that we do, it becomes easier to give thanks.

Every single item on the inventory is worthy of prayer – every concern we have. The real question is not so much the particular concerns of the prayers we make, but the posture of our hearts. Remember – barefoot and humble. God can take all the concerns we have, all of our sorrow, all of our joy, all of our confusion, all of our worry. But God is not interested in our fancy words or fancy clothes. God is interested in what is going on in our hearts.

Activity Two

Ask the young people to look up Matthew 6:5-16. Read it aloud.

Ask the participants to find a place in this passage where Jesus says "If you pray..." Of course, they won't be able to find it, and that's the point. Jesus is working from the assumption that everyone prays! The words he uses are, "When you pray" and "Whenever you pray."

On newsprint, write in big letters:

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT PRAYER!

List the answers they provide using the following for ideas if you need to prompt them or want some idea of responses you could offer.

1. When, Not If!

Jesus was so certain that people need and want to talk to God that he was confident everyone would do it sooner or later.

2. Don't be like hypocrites.

Leaders may want to make certain that everyone understands what a hypocrite is: someone who says one thing and does another.

3. Don't get your reward by looking all pious and proper.

Remind the group that there is a place for praying together; Jesus did it all the time with his disciples. The point is that Jesus wasn't doing it to impress his followers; he was doing it because he had such a strong, living relationship with God that prayer was as natural a way of being for him as breathing or sleeping or walking. When prayer becomes a part of our way of life, it gets easier to do it in front of people without worrying about what others are thinking. We can practice looking at and to God for grace and strength even in front of other people. But if we pray because we want people to think we are holy and good and righteous and not because we want to talk things over with our God, Jesus is warning us to watch out!

4. Pray all alone in your room. Pray in secret.

There is something really important about having some sort of private prayer time. It's kind of like time you spend all alone with your best friend. Those are the times when our deep relationships grow. It's the secrets we share with one another, the trust we build in quiet times spent alone with a friend, it's even the silliness of that time that makes us true friends. It may not be impossible, but it certainly is difficult to have a best friend if we never spend any time alone together. This is what Jesus is focusing on here. God wants to be close to us, share our secrets and answer our concerns because he loves us.

5. Don't use a lot of empty phrases. God hears us even when our prayers are simple.

The German mystic, Meister Eckhart (1260-1329), said, "If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank you,' that would suffice." And sometimes all we need to say is HELP! God knows what we need. Prayer is as much about listening to God, in stillness and silence as it is about talking and asking questions. Sometimes we use a lot of words to try to cover up what we really need. Prayer is not a good time to fake anything. Prayer is the safest time in our lives to be real with God. Another thing to consider is how silly heaped-up, fancy and empty phrases would sound to anybody's best friend. How silly it would be when your friend asks you, "How are you?" to answer, "Why, I am terribly well, thank you, and you?" We don't always need to be formal with God. God is not impressed by fine and fancy prayers. When God asks us how we are doing in prayer, the best answer is the honest one, without all the silly words that we think protect us or make

us better than we are.

6. Jesus said we should pray the Lord's Prayer.

That's right. The Lord's Prayer is a really good model for all of our prayers because it holds up all the concerns that we face in our lives and wraps them with simple and straightforward language. But that is not the only prayer Jesus made in his life, and it shouldn't be our only one, either. Jesus prayed for his disciples. Jesus prayed with the sick. Jesus gave thanks for the bread and wine at the Last Supper. There are lots of ways to pray. And over the next few sessions, we will look at many of them.

The discussion may take many loops and turns, but it always returns to what Jesus is saying in the passage from Matthew. He is teaching his followers how to pray. The italicized sections above are suggestions for ways of talking about the things Jesus says in this gospel passage.

Other questions that might foster discussion:

- Where did Jesus tell his disciples they should pray?
- Where do you pray?
- Why do you think that Jesus instructed his followers to pray in private and told them that they should not stand up and make a show of their prayers? What does this have to say about praying in public (e.g., in church or in a large assembly)?
- What do you think Jesus meant by "empty phrases"?
- What is fasting? What is the relationship between fasting and prayer?

Ask the participants to turn to Matthew 7:6–11. Read it aloud.

In this passage, Jesus reminds his followers of God's desire to answer our prayers and reinforces the notion that we must ask. Sometimes it is frightening to both young people and adults to take this passage seriously. We think, well, what if I ask for the wrong thing? What if I ask, but God doesn't give me what I want? This is a good chance to lead into the next sessions (3-6) in which we will be looking at several different ways to ask, seek, and knock. But for now, ask the group to list all the good things they can think of that we know God wants to give to people. Record the answers on newsprint.

Some possible answers indicated in the reading itself are:

Food **Shelter** **Clothing**

And then there is the long list of other concerns:

Health **Dignity**
Safety **Humor**

Sometimes we need God to change our understanding of what each of these words means. For example:

Food

We certainly need enough food, but we don't all need filet mignon!

Clothing

We all need to shield and shelter our bodies from the elements, and we need to be modest, but we don't need designer shoes or jeans.

Shelter

We all need a place to sleep and rest and be warm, but do we need mansions?

Health

Sometimes we forget that death is a healing. Sometimes we resist the notion that wholeness is more important than "getting better." It seems we can only learn some lessons through illness. It may not be fair, but it certainly is true.

Summary

The teachings of Jesus are clear on the necessity of prayer. He says *when*, not *if* you pray. He says we should ask for what we need. God is a good father and wants to provide for us. But Jesus also warns us not think too highly of ourselves when it comes to prayer. Just because you pray all the time, with lots of fancy words, doesn't mean you are building a true relationship with God. And just because you pray the Lord's Prayer every day or every week, doesn't mean you are realizing all the possibilities for prayer. Again, prayer is a process. It is in prayer that our hearts are changed and our understanding broadened. Look to God, through Jesus, and build that relationship.

Closure

Place all the prayer inventory sheets on the floor in the center of the room.

Stand in a circle.

Have one young person read Matthew 7:7-11 aloud.

Invite the group to pray the Lord's Prayer; encourage them to remember all the concerns on their prayer inventory sheets.

Leaders may want to practice one of the ancient disciplines of the Church: repetition. Remind the young people that we are not saying this prayer over and over because God doesn't hear us the first time, but because we don't really listen to the words. For example, explain to the group that we are going to say the Lord's Prayer seven times. This is the kind of prayer that ancient pilgrims and monks and nuns might have used. Rosaries and prayer beads and knots have been part of the Christian tradition for a long time, and are used in repetitive prayers. The group might say it together in unison seven times, walking in a circle around the inventory sheets, or the group could stand in a circle around the inventory sheets with each person repeating the prayer aloud while others pray silently. Leaders should decide in advance which technique they are going to use. By using a repetitive prayer technique, we are inviting the young people to reinvest meaning into this prayer that they have been saying all of their lives.

Handout—Personal Prayer Inventory

Note: In responding to this Prayer Inventory, please try to be perfectly honest. While your leaders will ask you to share your responses with the group, *you don't have to if you don't want to.*

1. Have you ever prayed that God would:

Heal a friend or family member who was ill	Yes	No
Help you get through a test at school when you haven't studied	Yes	No
Help you become popular	Yes	No
Get you a particular gift for Christmas or a birthday	Yes	No
Stop your parents, or a friend's parents, from getting a divorce	Yes	No
Make it snow so that you wouldn't have to go to school the next day	Yes	No
Make it snow so that you wouldn't have to go to church on Sunday	Yes	No
Have someone on a journey arrive safely	Yes	No
Solve the problems in countries like Iraq, Afganistan or North Korea	Yes	No
Stop hunger in the world and in this country	Yes	No
Help your school team win in a sport	Yes	No
Forgive you for having hurt someone	Yes	No
Punish someone for having hurt you	Yes	No
Bring a relative who has died back to life	Yes	No
Stop your brother or sister from bugging you	Yes	No
Clean up the environment	Yes	No
Bring about peace in the world	Yes	No
Help you break a bad habit	Yes	No
Help you get out of a difficult, embarrassing or dangerous situation	Yes	No
Put food on the table	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

2. Have you ever thanked God when:

A friend or family member recovered from an illness	Yes	No
You got through a test at school when you hadn't really studied	Yes	No
You got a gift that you really wanted for Christmas or a birthday	Yes	No
It snowed/rained so hard that you didn't have to go to school	Yes	No
It snowed/rained so hard that you didn't have to go to church	Yes	No
Someone on a journey arrived safely	Yes	No
Your school team won in a sport	Yes	No
You scored a goal or a touchdown or beat your opponent in a sport	Yes	No
Someone you hurt or upset forgave you	Yes	No
Someone who hurt or upset you was punished	Yes	No
You got away with telling a lie	Yes	No
You did a good job of work at school or at home	Yes	No
Your brother or sister stopped bugging you	Yes	No
You got out of a dangerous, difficult or embarrassing situation	Yes	No
Food appeared on the table	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

3. Have you ever thanked God for:

Creating the universe	Yes	No
Creating you	Yes	No
Giving you a loving family	Yes	No
Giving you food, warmth, and a roof over your head	Yes	No
The gift of Jesus Christ	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

4. Have you ever said "I'm sorry" to God when you have:

Hurt or upset someone	Yes	No
Been rude to your parents	Yes	No
Been rude to your brother or sister when they bugged you	Yes	No
Told a lie (and been found out)	Yes	No
Told a lie (and <i>not</i> been found out)	Yes	No
Told the truth in order to get someone in trouble	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

5. Have you ever said "I'm sorry" to God when you have *not*:

Done your homework (and flunked a test as a result)	Yes	No
Told the whole truth	Yes	No
Helped someone who asked for your help	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

6. Have you ever been angry with God when:

Someone you had been praying for died	Yes	No
Someone you cared for (grandparent, aunt, uncle) became very ill	Yes	No
A close friend moved away from town	Yes	No
A friend's parents got divorced	Yes	No
Your parents got divorced	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No
Other _____	Yes	No

7. Have you ever praised God for just being God?

Yes No

Types of Prayer: ACTS – A is for Adoration

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self.

Goal

To remember to praise God.

Objectives

To look at how we use our time.

To find ways to stop and give God praise.

Making a “Cross of Christ bag” to carry with us at all times.

Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 150 Praise the Lord!

Luke 10: 38-42 Mary and Martha.

Background

There is so much to do. That’s true for all of us, young people and adults. Our days are filled with so many demands, and even when all the demands are satisfied, we are often just plain tired. There’s little or no time left to stop and simply acknowledge the goodness, majesty, love, and kindness of God.

We all spend time on so many things! Schoolwork, chores, jobs. For teenagers the demands are equally great. There’s school, of course. Then sports, drama, lessons, and practice time. There’s the telephone, and time with family and friends. Who has time for anything more?

We all suffer with the growing sense that there isn’t enough time in our lives for all that we already face, let alone adding something more, something else to what we are expected to do! But Scripture remind us that we ought to, are invited to, must praise God.

For most of us, as people of faith, we can easily give intellectual assent to the notion that God is worthy of our praise, but it is much more difficult to set aside time from our busy schedules to actually offer our praise and adoration to God. Sometimes we think, Well, everything I do is in praise of God. But there is something more, something which the story of Mary and Martha encourages us to consider. When do we stop, sit, be still, and look and listen to the One who made us, the One who loves us? How often do we find ourselves too busy for God? Of course, God cares about all the things we care about, but God – our Father, Mother, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer – wants us simply to spend time in God’s presence.

We will begin this week with an exercise designed to help us discover how we use our time. We will continue by examining how we might spend a few minutes every day focusing on the loving and gracious God of the universe. The lesson is not designed to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed about the way we currently spend our time, but rather as a chance to explore our day-to-day lives and God’s call to us to come and sit at his feet, as Mary sat at the feet of Jesus.

In the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus comes to visit his friends. Martha is glad to receive him into her house. When Mary greets Jesus, immediately she sits down with him, setting aside all the other concerns of her life. While Martha continues to work, perhaps to make a meal ready for their guest, setting the table, finishing paying the bills, all the things that she must do, Mary sits at the feet of the Savior. It is, perhaps, true Sabbath time for Mary. She has ceased her work, and sits with the Savior just for the pleasure of his company.

The Scriptures don't tell us much about Mary and Martha's lives when Jesus is not a visitor in their home. We only know what happened on this one day. Perhaps we might imagine that Mary is always lazy. Perhaps Martha does all the work every day. We don't know. What we do know is that Mary and Martha had a relationship with Jesus which allowed for honesty. Martha comes to her friend Jesus and asks him to tell her sister to get up and come help her. She even asks Jesus if he cares that she is working so hard while her sister rests. It is safe to read into this story that Mary and Martha and Jesus knew one another well. Mary felt safe enough to sit at his feet, and Martha felt safe enough to object.

In the Gospel story, we know that Jesus tells Martha that he understands how hard she works and how much she worries, but Mary has chosen a different set of priorities, and no matter how much we may not like the answer Jesus gives to Martha's complaint, he nevertheless reminds her that Mary has chosen the "one needful thing." Mary has chosen "the good part." Mary has chosen to take time out of the business of the day to sit with Jesus.

Psalm 150 reminds us of the importance of our praises. God is so worthy, so magnificent, so lovely and loving, that everything that has breath must give praise. Sometimes it is difficult for us to let all the concerns fall away so that we might simply give out praises to God. There is so much to worry about, so much to do, and in the midst of it all, we simply forget to say, Praise God. We forget to be silent in the presence – the omnipresence – of the Maker.

The second exercise is an ancient Celtic practice called the "Cross of Christ bag." A tiny linen bag is made and sewn into the garment of the individual, under the left arm, close to the heart, as a reminder of the presence of God. The bag was traditionally made of linen because the shroud which wrapped the body of Jesus after the crucifixion was linen. Each individual put a small piece of paper in bag. Some of the bags held sayings from the saints, some held prayers, and some Bible verses. These pieces of paper were often illuminated with small drawings and patterns. Although some preparation is required for this exercise, it is well worth it. The young people will take their bag, a verse, a prayer, a statement of praise, color it, decorate it, and then put it in the bag and pin it under their left arm. (The Celtic saints sewed them into their clothes because they didn't change clothes, or even wash them nearly as often as we do! A safety pin is good enough.)

Throughout the activities, leaders are encouraged to talk with young people about their own experiences in praising God. Looking at the Mary and Martha story, leaders might share with the young people whom they relate to: Mary or Martha? What kinds of things do we praise God for? What are the qualities of God that we might use as exclamations of praise?

Remember, we praise God every week at the Eucharist when we sing the *Sanctus* (from the Latin word meaning "Holy"):

*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

And for many of us, our earliest memories of the Church are wrapped in the simply melody:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise God, all creatures here below.

Praise God above the heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Now that that melody is refreshed in your memory, we will use it at the very end of this session.

Preparation

Cross of Christ bags:

- 1 Linen: enough to make a small bag, approximately 3 x 3 for each participant
- 2 Safety pins
- 3 Paper: plain paper for making the inserts and/or photocopied copies of the *Sanctus*, the Doxology, or other verses from Scripture or the *Book of Common Prayer* which give praise to God
- 4 Markers, colored pencils, crayons
- 5 Handout: My Busy Life
- 6 Bibles
- 7 Book of Common Prayer

Activity One

Using *Handout: My Busy Life*, ask the young people to fill in a week's schedule. Tell them to include everything from sleep to meals, to car pools, soccer, school, all of it.

Activity Two

Open the Bibles to the passage in Luke and read the Mary and Martha story aloud (Luke 10:38-42). Ask, who are you in this story? How might we choose the better part? The one needful thing?

One way to think about making room for sitting at the feet of Jesus is simply to find a way to remind ourselves of his presence in our lives, and every time we remember to just stop and whisper, "Yes, Praise the Lord." Remember, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Leaders might want to remind young people that sometimes it is hard to give thanks in difficult circumstances. It is hard to remember that God is good and holy when there is so much suffering in the world. But our hope is in Christ Jesus. Remember in the baptismal liturgy we say

There is one Body and one Spirit;

There is one hope in God's call to us;

One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;

One God and Father of all.

Sometimes, in difficulty, it is helpful just to remember the simple words we say in our services. These words remind us of what is true, even when we cannot see it or feel it. It is good news that we have one true and living God. For many, remembering that God is good and present is a pathway to giving thanks. Even when we can't see anything worth saying thank you for, specifically, we can praise God for just being God.

Leaders are encouraged to think of all the things we say to praise God in our weekly Eucharist:

Blessed be God...and blessed be his kingdom

Glory to God in the highest....

We praise you, we bless you, we give thanks to you....

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might....

Activity Three

Hand out the Cross of Christ bags and papers. Ask the participants to write on the paper a few words of praise, or use the printed papers. Color them! Decorate them! Make them look like they belong to you!

Explain the history of the Cross of Christ bags. Explain that these bags have been used to remind people of what is true and good about God and God's people. We will use these bags to remind us, maybe at each change in activity on our Busy Life sheets (after school and before homework; after dinner and before TV; after soccer and before chores [yuck!]) that there is so much about God we want to remember.

After they have decorated their papers, placed them in the bags, ask them to help each other (being sensitive to use only appropriate touch) to pin the bag inside their clothes. They do not need to tell anyone about their bag. It is just a private reminder.

Closure

Gather in a circle. Place all the MY BUSY LIFE sheets on the floor in the center. Pray together, asking a young person to use the following prayer, or one of your own choosing. Finish with the singing of the Doxology.

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

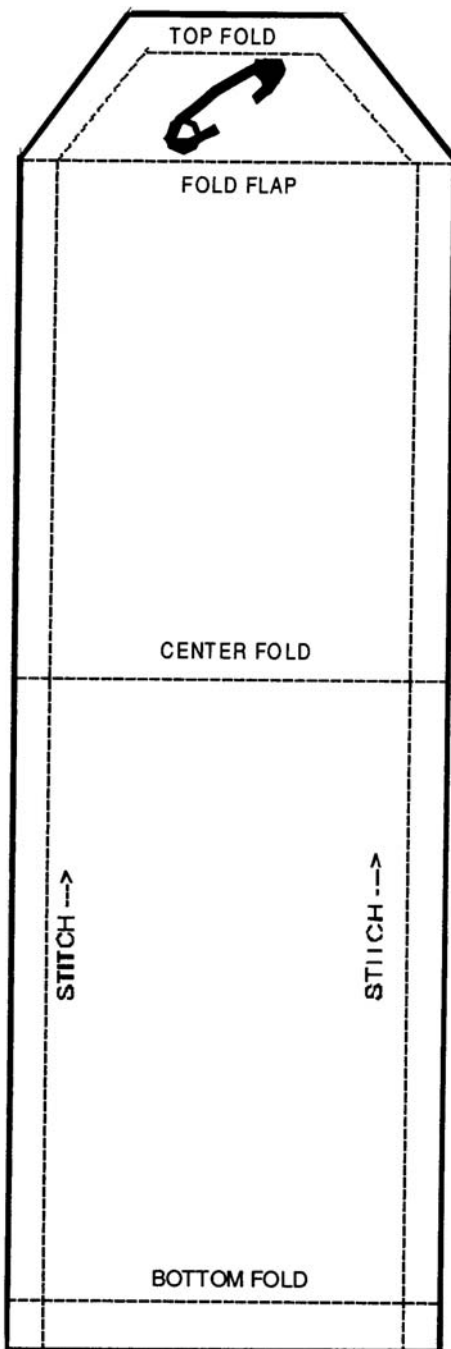
Prayer for the Good Use of Leisure, Book of Common Prayer, p. 825.

Prayer 6 — Adoration: My Busy Life

Handout—My Busy Life

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
MORNING 6 AM- NOON							
AFTERNOON NOON- 6 PM							
EVENING 6 PM- MIDNIGHT							
NIGHT MIDNIGHT- 6 AM							

Prayer 6 — Adoration: Pattern for the Cross of Christ Bag



DIRECTIONS:

Step One:

Cut one piece of fabric for each bag, using the solid line as the cutting guide.

Step Two:

Fold fabric down along top three fold lines. Press, and stitch in place to finish edges.

Step Three:

Fold up the fabric along the bottom fold line. Press and stitch in place to finish the edge.

Step Four:

Along the center fold line, fold fabric with right sides together and stitch along the edges, leaving the top open.

Step Five:

Turn the bag right-side out, and fold down the flap and press down.

Step Six:

Secure the flap to the bag with a safety pin

Types of Prayer: ACTS – C is for Confession

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To explore why, how, when, and where we need to make our confessions

Objectives

To look at the Scripture passages that remind us to tell the truth.

To find a way to remind ourselves of our need for God's mercy

To pray for the forgiveness of our sins

Guiding Scriptures

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, [God] will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Background

As Christians, we live with a terrible and wonderful tension. On the one hand, we recognize that we are called, loved, redeemed, sanctified; in fact, made in the image of the one, true, and holy God. All through these sessions on prayer, we have focused our attention on the building of our relationship with God. We have talked about our need to get to know God, to ask for our heart's desires, and to rejoice and give thanks for all the good things God has given to us. As we open our hearts and get to know God, we find that God is loving, always. We announce and pronounce in our prayers: *Holy and gracious Father, in your infinite love you made us for yourself.* The writers of the *Book of Common Prayer* were careful in their selection of the words "infinite love." The use of those words reminds us that we can count on God to always and forever love us.

Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:28).

These are powerful words. In every way, every day, God is maintaining his relationship with us, through the love of his son Jesus.

But we have also seen that, as we get to know God, we will also get to know ourselves. The truth about God is Love, but we are not always loving. We are not always merciful, kind, fair, just, good. The Bible tells us that God never forgets about us, but we forget about God. We do it all the time.

If we are going to build that living relationship with God through prayer, then one of our prayers will have to be an acknowledgment of our mistakes, our weaknesses, our sins. Anything else would be another mistake, another weakness, another sin.

In order for us to make that sort of confession, we will have to know a few things, and we will have to let those things define our interaction with God. First, God is love and mercy. If it

weren't for God's love for us, we wouldn't be able to bear to come before him with the pain of our own mistakes. We can come and make confession because we know something about the nature of God. Our prayers begin, "Most merciful God," "Gracious God," "All-loving God." Even when we are admitting our worst failures, we do so in light of God's love.

Throughout history, men and women have been saying very simple prayers, as well as more complex forms of confession. This week, in this session, we will look at one of those simple prayer forms and make a tangible reminder of it to carry with us. We will also look at the parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee for the wisdom it offers on what God wants from each of us. Finally, we will use the Penitential Order found in the *Book of Common Prayer* to make our own prayer of confession.

Briefly, it is worth noting that confession is not only used as a statement of sin, but also as a statement of faith. We confess what we believe in the creeds. We confess our belief in God and the work of our Lord Jesus in Baptism and Confirmation. We make many confessions along the way. And they matter.

Something important happens inside of us when we finally make confession. We are changed by the acknowledgment of what is true. It is absolutely true that we are all sinners. It is absolutely true that God is love. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul reminds us, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Romans 10:9-10).

In 1 John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, [God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Leaders might want to show the group that a lot of what is in the *Book of Common Prayer* comes directly from the Bible. This is an easy example! Have one member of the group look up p. 352 in the BCP and 1 John 1:8-9 in the Bible. This is a good reminder that we are a Church which has its foundations in Scripture as well as the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Preparation

- Bibles and copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*.
- Newsprint and markers for recording comments.
- Pieces of soft twine or other washable rope. Make one for each young person and leader, approximately eighteen inches long.
- Scissors.

Activity One

Ask the group to open their Prayer Books to the Decalogue on page 350. Ask them to think about what we see in our world that corresponds with this list of commandments. On newsprint, list each commandment and examples of the ways we break it in our world.

You shall have no other gods but me.

Leaders ask, What gods do we worship in our culture? Possible answers might be money, personal power, prestige.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

Leaders ask, What idols do we have in this culture? What is an idol? An idol is something which we worship and say has power to change our lives, make us better people. So a possible answer might again be wealth, a new car, a better house, a safer neighborhood. We use these things to protect ourselves, and we mistakenly think they will give us what we need. It's almost like we want a car so that the car will make us free and independent. The car has no power, really. It is just the power we give to it. That's one of the big distinctions between an idol and God. Unlike a car, God really does have the power. We don't give God power. We merely acknowledge what is true.

You shall not invoke with malice the name of the Lord your God.

A good example of this in our country is the ease with which we say and hear "God dammit." We say it as though God's name were not a part of what we are saying. But in fact, that is exactly the sort of thing that this commandment is talking about. It's a bad idea, a sin, to invoke God's name (even in something as seemingly innocuous as an off-hand "God dammit"). [Leaders might want to refer to "Ten Teachable Moments" for more guidance on the use of bad language! Chances are this one reference to swearing might open up a whole discussion of why we call bad language "bad."]

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

Leaders might ask, Why do we need a Sabbath day? Again, this opens up a whole world of theology, but for now, it is enough to remind young people that God asked his people for one day a week, one day to stop all the business in our lives and remember all that God has done for us, all the things to be grateful for. We break this commandment in our culture not so much by racing around on Sundays, but by maintaining in our hearts that we are so strong and successful and even cool, we can do whatever we want, we don't have to stop to acknowledge God.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not commit murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness.

Leaders might ask, What does that mean? It means lying. Every time we lie, we break a commandment. St. Augustine of Hippo said, "God has no need of our lies."

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Leaders might ask, What does it mean to covet? How does jealousy play into coveting something?

For each Commandment, try to get the group to think of examples in the world at large as well as in their own experience. We may want to refer back to the many things we prayed for in our session on Intercession and Petition. How much of what we currently need from God relates to our mistakes and sins?

Activity Two

Hand out pieces of twine. Explain to the young people that as we continue talking about sin, we will be tying knots in our twine. Each young person should tie ten small knots into their piece of twine.

Activity Three

Open the Bible to the parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee – Luke 18:9-14. Read it aloud, or have two young people act it out. Use the following discussion questions:

What's going on here?

Two individuals are praying.

What's the difference between them?

One is humble and one is proud. One is concerned with getting into a real relationship with God, and the other is concerned about not being like that miserable wretch over there! One has his attention turned to God, and the other has placed his attention on his own position.

Yeah, but the Pharisee is at least thanking God. What's wrong with that?

The Pharisee is thanking God for something that is not part of God's true intention for the world. The Pharisee believes that he is in some better position with God just because he is a Pharisee and rich and powerful.

What else does the Pharisee think makes him better?

He prays and fasts. Remind the group what Jesus said about praying with fancy words and empty phrases.

What does the Tax Collector pray?

He prays for mercy, and humbles himself.

What does Jesus say about these two types of prayer? Which one makes more sense to God? Why?

Leaders may suggest to the group that God is not interested in our political positions, our power, our prestige. God is not all that interested in games where we compare ourselves to other people. A modern equivalent to this might be, O, God, thank you that I am not like that homeless person or that alcoholic or that adulterer.

In today's culture, who might we tell this story about? Who would be the tax collector? Who are our Pharisees? Who are we in the story?

The truth is we are both people at different times. Sometimes we feel proud of ourselves and we are glad we aren't like those people. Other times, we finally get the truth – we need to be forgiven. The Tax Collector recognizes that what he really needs is God's mercy. And he isn't afraid to ask for it.

Check and see how the knot-tying is going along. Has everyone got one with ten knots? After they are all tied, explain that we are going to use the little ropes like prayer beads, like an Orthodox prayer rope. If one of the leaders has a working knowledge of rosaries and prayer beads, or a personal rosary or prayer rope to show the group, this would be a good time to do so. What we want to focus on is that prayer beads and rosaries, like our prayer bracelets, are

simply reminders of times and ways to pray. We are going to say the Decalogue, and holding our prayer beads, count off along the knots every time we say, "Amen, Lord have mercy."

If you still have candles or other prayer items in your classroom from the first session, now would be a good time to reassemble them.

Recite the Decalogue on page 350 of the *Book of Common Prayer*, saying the response, and counting along the knots. Continue with the Penitential Order on the next page. (If your congregation is not Episcopalian, you may choose to use a penitential order from your own book of worship, create one (perhaps with your clergyperson) or use the above prayers, which are included as handouts for this lesson plan.)

Remember, we do not need a priest for this liturgy. The only change we make as lay persons is at the absolution, when instead of saying, "Almighty God have mercy on you," we substitute "us" for "you" and "our" for "your."

After reading aloud the sentence of Jesus, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel..." explain to the group that they are to tie another knot in their twine. One for the first and great commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Encourage them to make it a bigger knot! Then working together, have them tie the bracelets around the left wrist as a reminder to love their neighbor as themselves. This should be done silently.

Continue with the confession of sin and the statement of our forgiveness.

Closure

After the liturgy, remind the young people that they do not have to tell anyone why they are wearing this bracelet. It is a part of their private prayer life. Every time they see it or touch it, they might remember to say, "Lord, have mercy on me." The Orthodox Church calls this prayer "The Jesus Prayer." As a part of their religious tradition, they say it many, many times a day as a reminder of God's love for them. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God," they pray, and we pray with them, "Have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen."

Finally, leaders may remind the group that confession of sin, like the confession of faith, is both personal and public. There are things that we confess all together and things that we confess alone; but no matter when or where or how we make that confession, we do it knowing that God loves us, and is calling us into a relationship with him. Confession is just one part of our prayer lives. It is a necessary part of our life of faith. By making these prayer bracelets together, and tying them around each other's wrists, we are reminded that even when we pray and confess our sins all alone, we are members of the family of God. When we say, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," faithful people all over the world, all through history, and even here in our own church are praying with us.

Handout—Decalogue from the *Book of Common Prayer*

The Decalogue: Contemporary

Hear the commandments of God to his people:
I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.
You shall have no other gods but me.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Honor your father and your mother.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit murder.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit adultery.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not steal.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not be a false witness.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.
Amen. Lord have mercy.

Handout—Penitential Order from the *Book of Common Prayer*

A Penitential Order: Rite Two

For use at the beginning of the Liturgy, or as a separate service.

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

The people standing, the Celebrant says,
Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.
Amen.

In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost:

Celebrant Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In Lent and on other penitential occasions:

Celebrant Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins.
People His mercy endures for ever.

When used as a separate service, the Exhortation, page 316, may be read, or a homily preached.

The Decalogue may be said, the people kneeling.

The Celebrant may read one of the following sentences:

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." *Mark 12:29-31*

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *1 John 1:8,9*

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. *Hebrews 4:14, 16*
The Deacon or Celebrant then says,

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence may be kept.

Clergy and People

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

*The Bishop when present, or the Priest, stands and says,
Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins
through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all
goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you
in eternal life. Amen.*

*A deacon or lay person using the preceding form substitutes "us" for
"you" and "our" for "your."*

*When this Order is used at the beginning of the Liturgy, the service
continues with the Gloria in excelsis, the Kyrie eleison, or the Trisagion.*

*When used separately, it concludes with suitable prayers, and the Grace
or a blessing.*

Types of Prayer: ACTS – T is for Thanksgiving

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To celebrate every good gift from God

Objectives

To look at the scriptural mandate to give thanks in everything

To make a list of all the good things that fill our lives

To spend time in prayer, just saying thank-you

Guiding Scriptures

1 Thessalonians 5:18 In everything give thanks.

Philippians 4:8 Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely...think on these.

Book of Common Prayer

A General Thanksgiving p. 836

Background

On a pilgrimage to Ireland, in the summer of 1996, the pilgrims met with one of the Brigidine Sisters, an order within the Anglican Church in Ireland, resident in Kildare. After a time singing and praying and lighting candles, as well as typical Irish hospitality – tea and cookies – Sister Mary closed the session with a very simple and very powerful prayer. She said:

For all that has gone before, we say, Thanks.

For all that is yet to come, we say, Yes.

This prayer is attributed to Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961), a Swedish statesman who served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations (1953-1961).

It was a particularly moving prayer for the pilgrims, as Sister Mary had spent some time sharing her concerns for the world and for Ireland, for the people of faith, and for her own mother who was very ill at the time. The litany of concerns and sorrows which she shared might have seemed overwhelming if Sister Mary had not remembered and practiced one of the central teachings of the Church on prayer: Give thanks. Always give thanks. Give thanks even when you don't understand. Give thanks even when there does not appear to be much to be thankful for. Sister Mary affirmed the love and presence of God in her life and in the life of the Church and world by saying thank you for all that had gone before and yes to all that would come.

Last week we focused on the needs of the members of our group, our church, our community, nation, and world. This week we turn to God only to say thank you. We want to change our focus from what we perceive ourselves to need and want to what the Bible, *Book of Common Prayer*, and our own experience teach us about God's wonderful provision for all of us.

We will begin by looking at A General Thanksgiving. From there we will move to our specific thank-yous.

For many, this is a challenging exercise in faith. We are so easily consumed and distracted by the troubles and strains of our lives. To stop and ponder God's goodness to us can be a richly diverse and healing experience. Two Scripture passages will aid us in this effort to focus on God's provision and to wrap words around our gratitude. The verse in 1 Thessalonians reminds us to give thanks in everything. The verse in Philippians reminds us to look at all the good, to use our minds to focus on the many blessings that God has already given to us.

Finally, we will thank one another for the many ways we each bring the joy of the gospel to one another.

Preparation

Again, make sure you have copies of the *Book of Common Prayer* and Bibles in your classroom. Make copies of the following, one for each young person and leader:

**For all that has gone before, we say, Thanks.
For all that is yet to come, we say, Yes.**

The copies can be small, photocopied or handwritten. You will need multicolored, self-stick notes and markers. Designate a space on the wall in your classroom, in the shape of a cross, where you will hang all the notes.

Activity One

Stand in a circle. Assign the two Scripture verses to members of the group (1 Thessalonians 5:18 and Philippians 4.8) and ask them to look the verses up and read them aloud at the end of the prayer, after the Amen.

*Don't be surprised if your group hasn't any idea where to find those books in the Bible. Tell them they're in the second half, past the Gospels, and they'll get there eventually. **By having the young people use the Bible to find the verses, we are teaching them how to use the Scriptures, or at least how to find their way around in them.** If you provide a copy or copies of the fascinating Access Bible (published by Oxford Press) for them to look at, they may even get interested enough in the Bible to do some looking on their own.*

Pray the prayer for A General Thanksgiving from the BCP, page 836 (below), followed by the Scripture readings.

A General Thanksgiving

Accept, O lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us.

We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying through which he overcame death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. *Amen.*

Activity Two

Ask the members of the group to be seated. Hand out 3 by 5 index cards, or colored self-stick notes and black markers. Ask the young people to name every single thing they can think of to say thank you for and write each thing on an individual card.

Leaders can make suggestions and encourage a wide range of possibilities:

Health, food and, shelter are certain to come up again, but think in specifics as well. My mom, my dad, my best friend. Breakfast. Bagels and cream cheese. Laughter. Funny jokes. (We might even get them to tell us a few – or tell them a funny joke!) Soccer. Tennis. Games. Work we like. Reading. Great books. Telephones. Electricity. The list should be long. Keep them going for as long as you can. Leaders will remind them that these are the things Jesus said he came to give us – good gifts. Remember, Jesus said he came to give us abundant life. And, in the Epistle of James, we read, “Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from the Father.” Every single good thing in our lives comes from God.

For some of us, it is hard to just give thanks because we are so aware of the many pains and sorrows, all the ways in which we are privileged at someone else’s expense. This lesson is not the best time to address that concern. The program affords other times to look at the distribution of wealth, racism, and other social ills. For now, we just want to give thanks!

After they have made their many cards or sticky notes, assemble and arrange them on the wall of your classroom in the shape of a cross.

Leaders may wish to remind the group that everything good in our lives comes directly from the hand of God, and is made available to us because of the work of God in Christ Jesus. The cross is our access point to all the good things God has for us.

Activity Three

But what about the hard things! Ask young people to list on cards the very hardest things they face in their lives. Assure them that these things will also be put up on the cross, but that we will turn them over, face down, so that they can remain private. The group can even fold them shut if they want to so that they are really private.

Leaders may wish to tell the young people the truth: It is hard to give thanks for difficulty, but we are called to do it. A General Thanksgiving that we read at the beginning of the group time says, “We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.”

It would be easy to give thanks if everything about our lives was good. But that is a lie. Even in the United States, where we are wealthy as a nation and have so many opportunities, we still face so many sorrows and struggles. Even if we try our very best to do everything right, according to God's plan, we will still make mistakes, hurt one another, and face disappointment. Some of that will be the focus of next week's session, when we turn our attention to our confession of sin and need. For now, remind the young people that the challenge is to give thanks for it all.

After they have made their notes and posted them again on the wall in the shape of the cross, ask the young people to stand. Turning again to the *Book of Common Prayer*, and to the Litany of Thanksgiving found on page 836, ask the young people to enthusiastically give thanks for it all.

Encourage them to cheer, to exult, to raise their voices. It may be appropriate to say, "YEAH, God!" just like we would at a sporting event. The Bible is full of references to God's army. Maybe we can extend the metaphor and think about being on God's team! "Yeah, God!"

Remember, we are working to model lots of different ways to pray. We want to touch our joy, our enthusiasm, our childlike faith in the goodness of God. Sometimes we need to literally "make a joyful noise!" before we can feel joyful. Clap. Shout. Laugh. Rejoice. There is so much to be grateful for.

Activity Four

Working quickly (we will be almost out of time), ask the young people to go around the room and say thank you to one another. Just say thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for being part of this group. Thank you for bringing Jesus into my life. Thank you for sharing. Thank you for coming this morning. Encourage them to continue to say thank you until they have thanked every one in the room. Leaders will probably have to model this for the group by walking around and joyfully shaking each young person's hand and saying something like, "Thank you so much for coming this morning, Anne" or, "Thank you for being here, Chuck." As the leaders are saying thank you, they will also hand out the tiny slips of paper with Sister Mary's prayer, giving one to each member of the group.

Closure

Ask the kids to fold Sister Mary's prayer and put it in their shoes, as though it were a secret treasure. Ask them to carry it there, in their shoes, near their bare feet, for the whole week, reminding them that God is good, wishes them only blessings, and is worthy of all our praise and thanks.

Holding hands, say together:

**For all that has gone before, we say, Thanks!
For all that is yet to come, we say, Yes!**

Types of Prayer: ACTS – S is for Supplication

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self.

Goal

To remind young people that God cares about all their needs and the needs of the whole world.

Objectives

To look at the two types of supplication: petition and intercession.

To find ways to ask for what we need and what others need.

To reflect on the notion of asking only “in accordance with God’s will.”

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given to you. . .

1 Timothy 2:1-3 First of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks [should] be made for all men...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 Paul remembers the Church in Thessalonika in his prayers.

Luke 18:1-8a The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Book of Common Prayer

The Prayers of the People, pp. 383-395.

Background

It’s not always easy to know what to ask for. Sometimes we find ourselves confused about all the different things we think we need and want. For many people, this confusion is reason enough not to ask for anything at all. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but all through the Bible the message seems to be: ask and ask again, keep on asking. God wants to hear from you.

Last time we talked about prayer, we mentioned that there are some things that we can be relatively certain God wants for all his children: health, food, shelter, safety. When we ask for those things, with open hearts, we are assured that God wants to give them to us; although sometimes the way we receive God’s provision may surprise us. We think we know what we need, and we often think we know the best way for us to get it. But God knows better than we know. And God is always working to bring us into that awareness. This is one of the many paradoxes of faith. We are supposed to ask; we are reminded to ask again and again throughout Scripture and throughout the *Book of Common Prayer*, but at the same time, we are often ignorant and stubborn. We don’t really know, yet we are certain that we do. It is a troubling question, but one for which both Scripture and the *Book of Common Prayer* offer significant help.

Jesus said we should ask, seek, knock, and persist in our prayers. He tells the Parable of the Persistent Widow to remind us that we must ask and keep on asking. Something happens to us and to God in that asking. What, exactly, is hard to tell. But if we listen to the parable, there can be no mistaking the message that Jesus is giving to his followers: “...Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?” Perhaps the real key to the parable

lies in what the persistent widow is asking for: justice. She is asking that things be made right in the world. She is asking, in her own way, out of her own experience, for a restoration of fairness and justice. This is closely related to Jesus' prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." There is something important for all people in this seeking, earnestly, for the restoration of fairness, equity, justice; in essence, for the establishment of God's order in the world. One way we can check on our own prayers and how well they line up with the heart of God is by asking, "Will what I am asking for promote peace, harmony, justice?" Or, "How will this thing that I am asking God for help to bring all people into relationship with Christ in the Church?"

In the two suggested readings from the Epistles, the Church is reminded to pray for one another, to pray that we might be able to follow God's call, spread the gospel, live our lives according to God's plan. It is not that Paul and his followers are asking God to make it easy for us, only that we could continue in faith, believing in the work of God's love in the world. One of the messages that Paul seems to convey through many of the prayers included in his letters is that we don't lose heart. The writer of the gospel parable says it is a parable about our need to always pray and to not lose heart. Something important happens to us when we lift up our concerns to God; it gets easier to continue on the path of faith.

Living a life of faith is not easy. It is demanding and exacts from us the very best we have to offer. But prayer, and particularly prayers of intercession, are a way for us to share those demands and concerns with God and to welcome God's participation in our struggle. Again, there is a paradox here, for God is already working on our behalf. Perhaps prayers of intercession are more about our getting in line with God's purposes, and letting our hearts be changed by God's passion and compassion, than any particular answer we might want.

In the fourth Collect at the Prayers, BCP p. 394, we pray:

Almighty God, to whom our needs are known before we ask: Help us to ask only what accords with your will; and those good things which we dare not, or in our blindness cannot ask, grant us for the sake of your son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hidden in this collect is the truth of our experience: Even in our best and most well-meaning prayers, we need God to speak and change us. We need to have our hearts and our desires adjusted and changed by the heart and desires of God. There we are, back at the beginning of these sessions on prayer. We need a relationship with God in which we learn who God is. And we must allow ourselves to be changed by the knowledge and experience of God's love.

Preparation

Bring in copies of the Sunday newspaper, the church newsletter, and the Sunday bulletin. Copies of *Time* magazine or *Newsweek* might be helpful, too, as well as a copy of the diocesan newspaper. Other magazines may be useful. Check the church library or ask clergy for help finding publications.

Hang seven sheets of newsprint on the walls of the room.

Label each sheet of newsprint with the following titles:

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, ITS MEMBERS AND MISSION
THE NATION AND ALL IN AUTHORITY
THE WELFARE OF THE WORLD
THE CONCERNS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

THOSE WHO SUFFER AND THOSE IN ANY TROUBLE
THE DEPARTED
OUR OWN NEEDS

Activity One

When we pray, what should we ask for?

Ask the participants to go through the newspapers, bulletins, magazines and church newsletter in search of things we might pray for this morning.

Hand out markers and ask them to record on newsprint anything and everything they can find in these publications that fits into the categories listed on the newsprint pages. Tell them to work hard, to find as many things going on in the world, the nation, and the community that they might think God is interested in. Keep going until every sheet of newsprint has several items listed on it.

After the lists are completed, gather all the newspapers and magazines.

Discussions will probably go on throughout this exercise. Leaders are not expected to be experts in world politics. The goal here is not to have a heated philosophical debate over America's foreign policy or different political perspectives, but rather to find things happening in our world today that we might want to offer prayers for.

Activity Two

Once the lists are completed, turn to the Parable of the Persistent Widow in the Bible (Luke 18:1-8a). Ask one or two young people to read the story out loud. You may even wish to dramatize the story. Have three young people take on the roles of Jesus, the Judge, and the Widow. At the end of the reading, ask the young people the following questions:

How often do you pray?

Leaders might suggest that according to the parable, Jesus is suggesting that his followers pray all the time, "day and night."

How do you think God answers prayers?

Leaders might suggest that God answers every prayer, but not always in ways we can understand or accept. Some people say that there are three possible answers to any prayer: yes, no, and not now. Sometimes there may even be a fourth answer: "You do it, and I will be there with you." When we pray for the hungry and oppressed, often God will call us to work to feed the hungry and free the oppressed. Sometimes the answer to our prayers is God's call to action.

Is this parable saying that if we really bug God, God will give us our heart's desire?

Leaders may want to discuss what is our heart's desire. If we are praying for an A on a test, or a new pair of shoes, there is no question that God cares about every little detail of our lives, and knows them well, but that is not the heart's desire. That is more like a fleeting want. Our heart's desire is to be in right relationship with God and God's people, with the world and with ourselves. If we are praying for that, however that plays itself out in particulars, then, yes, God will give us our heart's desire. And there does seem to be something important about asking and asking again and again.

The words used in the Greek for ask, seek, and knock, are all in a kind of continuing, super-active tense. A better translation might be “ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking.” The implication is that we are continually asking, forever seeking God’s action in our lives. It is not that we are unsatisfied, but rather that we are active in our on-going longing for God and his work in the world.

Closure

Open *Book of Common Prayer* to the Prayers of the People (p. 383).

Show the rubrics of the prayers to the young people. Explain that we will be praying these prayers this morning, and we will use the lists we made on the walls to supplement the prayers.

Turn to Form II (BCP, p. 385).

Again, show the rubrics (the instructions for the prayers) to the young people. Explain that in the silence between each petition, we are going to read off the lists on the walls. We are going to ask God for all these things.

Leaders may want to briefly explain to the group that there are many ways to pray, and we are going to talk about some of them over the next few weeks. Today, however, we are praying prayers of supplication. Prayers of supplication are either for ourselves (petition) or for others (intercession). If there’s time, leaders may want to look at the simple definitions of intercession and petition in the Catechism (BCP, p. 857). Today, we are going to cry out to God, like the persistent widow, for all the needs we have identified this morning.

Leaders should be sure to include a time in which the group may pray for things they couldn’t write on the board and can’t even speak aloud. God cares for all the things in our hearts.

Allow for plenty of silence. Invite the members of the group to read off the lists out loud in between bidding.

Before beginning, walk through the prayer form, establishing with the young people which sentence refers to their lists on the walls. Or leaders may use the modified form of Form II found on the following page:

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Let us pray:

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for our Bishop(s)_____; for this gathering; and for all ministers and people.

Pray for the Church.

This is the bidding in which we remember the first list: the Church and its mission.

I ask your prayers for peace: for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people.

Pray for justice and peace.

This is the bidding in which we remember the nation and all in authority, the welfare of the world, and the local community.

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison.

Pray for those in any need or trouble.

This is the bidding in which we remember those who suffer and those in any trouble.

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him.

Pray that they may find and be found by him.

This is the bidding in which we pray for each other, ourselves, and all the world. This is the prayer of our heart's desire.

I ask your prayers for the departed.

Pray for those who have died.

I ask your prayers for all our concerns, all the things we cannot speak that we offer silently to God.

I ask your thanksgiving for_____.

Leaders should allow time for young people to give particular thanks, and as they are able, leaders should give thanks for the many blessings in their own lives.

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored.

Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

Almighty God, to whom our needs are known before we ask: Help us to ask only what accords with your will, and those good things which we dare not, or in our blindness cannot ask, grant us for the sake of your son Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Prayer: The Lord's Prayer

Goal

To examine the Lord's Prayer with fresh eyes, ears, and hearts.

Objective

To find a deeper meaning behind the familiar words.

Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 5:1-7:29 The Sermon on the Mount.

Background

We say it all the time. But what are we actually praying?

When Jesus gathered his disciples and followers and taught them to pray, he did it in the context of a long time of teaching, beginning with the Beatitudes, a revolutionary set of statements that run counter to most if not all of our preconceived notions of what makes us happy and blessed, and continuing with a long set of instructions about how to live our lives. Jesus reminds us to be "salty people," filled with good works and truth. He reminds us to take the law of Moses seriously, and to remember that what is happening in our hearts is more important than a mere adherence to rules. He challenges us to push beyond the simple life of obedience into a life of devotion. And then – as if it weren't enough to ask us to pray for our enemies, give away our coats and cloaks, never swear by heaven or earth, be the light of the world – he challenged us to make our true faith a matter of the heart. He says we ought not practice our piety for other people to see, but for God alone.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a sermon which lets us walk away smiling, comforted, consoled. It is a challenge to live by a set of standards which only God can make possible in our lives. Remember, in the Baptismal Covenant we promise to do all these things with God's help.

The Lord's Prayer has been handed down to us through generations of faithful people, and sums up all our prayers. In this session we will explore these few words, and try to understand them. Our goal is to take something we have all known for most of our lives and memorized and recited, and reinvest it with our common understanding.

Use your imagination. Ask for grace. Listen to one another. Tell one another the truth as best you can. Together we will be praying this prayer for the whole session.

Preparation

- Make copies of Handout—The Lord's Prayer.

Activity One

Hand out copies of the Lord's Prayer to every participant. Explain that we are going to "annotate" the prayer. We're going to try to expand on, unpack, and explore each line to see if we can get at what this means to us, personally, and why we use this prayer so regularly in our worship.

Beginning with the first line and continuing to the last, ask the following kinds of questions. Encourage them to write on the sheet, and take notes on what the others have said.

- Why did Jesus say, "Our Father," and not just "Father?"
- What does "hallowed" mean?
- How do we forgive one another? What does that tell us about God's forgiveness?
- What is God's will for us? Where can we look to find the answers?
- When Jesus talks about "daily bread," is he talking about food? About love? About all the things we need?

In the contemporary version of this prayer, we say, "Save us from the time of trial," rather than, "Lead us not into temptation." What tries us? What tempts us? How are we "delivered from evil?"

What does "amen" mean, anyway? *"So be it!"*

In advance of the group meeting, leaders should prepare as many questions as they can think of, and take the time to consider their own responses. Remember, we never want to do anything with our youth groups that we are not willing to participate in ourselves.

Another suggestion: Write the Lord's Prayer in giant print on newsprint or a chalkboard or whiteboard in your classroom. Circle the key words and phrases. Write all the comments around the edge of the prayer.

And yet another suggestion: take each phrase in the Lord's prayer and add three or four phrases that expand on it. For example, "Our Father, who are in heaven," might have "who is beyond all imagination," "who is above all and yet within all of us" etc.

Activity Two

Role play or act out the story found in Matthew 6:1-7.

Leaders may choose to act this one out themselves – making it silly, dramatic, and engaging. You will need someone to be Jesus, of course, reading from the Scriptures. Why not have a young person read the passage while the leaders act out the giving of alms in public and in private, prayers spoken in public and in private, prayers filled with many words, and finally the Lord's Prayer? This could be done in advance of the annotation exercise above.

Closure

At the end of the session, join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer together. Tell the group in advance that you want to say this prayer slowly, one line at a time, with a short silence in between each line, to allow them a chance to reflect on what they have discovered in this session.

Handout—The Lord’s Prayer

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN,

HALLOWED BE THY NAME,

THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE,

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER, AND THE GLORY,

FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

The following two passages are the forms of the Lord's Prayer found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Look at them and see how these differ from the traditional form which most of us use in church.

(Matthew 6:9-13)

(Luke 11:2-4)

Finally, we look at the contemporary form of the Lord's Prayer found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and used by many churches:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Reflections:

What are the differences among these versions of the Lord's Prayer?

What are the similarities?

Why do you think there are differences?

Collective Prayer

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self.

Goal

To explore how we pray together.

Objectives

To look at what happens when we pray together

To discover the structure of the Collects in our *Book of Common Prayer*

To write a prayer for the Rite 13 group.

Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 141:2 "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you...."

Background

Now that we have explored many of the ways we pray, it's a good time to try our hand at writing a prayer which follows the basic form of the Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and in the books of worship of many other denominations.

When we gather together for worship and prayer, we agree to ask, listen, seek, praise, confess, *together!* Over the centuries of the Christian faith, prayers have been written which help us, as groups, to focus together on the concerns of our lives and the world at large, and to offer our prayers and praises to God using formal prayers. The Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer* are designed to "collect our thoughts" and offer them to God. As we pray the Collects, we do so with the knowledge that others all over the world are praying with us. There may be a million little and not so little things we would like to ask of God, or acknowledge our gratitude for, but in using the Collects we join together to say a few simple words, to focus our attention on these particular concerns.

Many of the Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer* date back as early as the eighth century – a few are even older. We can pray these prayers with confidence, knowing that we are joining our prayers with the prayers of faithful men and women across time and space and culture.

Today, we are going to write a prayer for the Rite 13 group. Using the structure found in most (not all) of the Collects, we will write the prayer, one line at a time.

The authors have used this exercise many times with groups of all ages. One Rite 13 group, in a silly mood, ended up writing a Collect for the local pro-ball team, while another wrote a prayer expressing their concern over the sinfulness of all our lives, and the hope that parents and leaders would stand by them as they struggle to become faithful Christians. The important work is in the writing of the prayer and the discussion of its component parts. Don't be too surprised if the opening line goes something like, "Yo, Big Guy!"

Sometimes it is really important to remember to talk to God as you would talk to your best friend. Familiar words and idiomatic phrases may seem disrespectful at first, but chances are they are merely the effort of the young to make relevant that which seems

too well connected to "adult speech!" Remind yourselves that God is always more interested in the heart than in the words. We are not looking for puffed-up language here, rather, a simple, honest, collective prayer.

Activity

Using one of the Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 159-210 traditional and pp. 211-261 contemporary, or find them at the end of many lesson plans), ask the group to see if they can discover the following parts of these prayers:

There are five parts to a traditional Collect:

Address

This is the opening salutation to God. It is rather like the opening to a letter... "Dear God." In prayer, we are not talking to the cosmos, or to just anyone, we are talking to the One True God. The address helps us focus our attention.

Ascription

This ascribes to God certain qualities. It is our chance to name God as gracious or powerful or mighty or loving. It can also state certain actions of God in history. The attributes of God give us assurance as we make our requests. Remember, when we talked about the Lord's Prayer, we talked about Our Father. Fatherhood is one of the attributes of God. When we remember that God is a father, we are able to expect certain things from him. Good fathers care for their children. Good fathers love and are present to their children. By using the ascription, we remind ourselves that we can count on God to act in certain ways. By speaking these things to God, we express our understanding of God's character and purpose, however limited and frail that understanding may be.

Request

This is where we make a specific request of God; we ask for something that we would like God to do. Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount that while it is true that God knows what we need before we ask, we should ask! Jesus says it is good for us to ask God for what we need in Matthew 7:7-11.

Consequence

In this line, we state what we expect will be the result of our request. *Please do this, so that...* We can project the result from our knowledge of how God has acted in the past, in the Scriptures, and in our own lives. Often, this section will reflect what we imagine our lives ought to look like in light of all that God has done and will do for us. We can expect certain results when we know the stories of faith. The Gospels are filled with examples of what will happen if we ask God, if we love our neighbors, if we follow Jesus.

Doxology

This is the closing, rather like the way we sign off a letter: "Give our love to your wife and kids" or, "Say hi to grandpa for me." It is the time when we acknowledge that God, to whom we pray, is in relationship in the Trinity. As often as not, this piece of the prayer reminds us that God the Father/Creator lives with Jesus/the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit/Sustainer forever and ever. This is an important piece of the prayer because

it reminds us once again of the true nature of God, who is above all, in all, and through all.

As you discover the parts together, write your own Collect. Post it in your classroom. Use it as a regular part of the time you spend together.

Closure

Write a clean copy of your prayer on newsprint. Stand in a circle and pray it.

Leaders: encourage the young people to live into their prayers. When we pray, not only do we ask God to act in certain ways, but we also set our hearts in a direction. As we pray, by the very act of our prayers, we set our attention on living a life of faithfulness.

Note: From this point onwards, encourage the young people to begin leading the prayers themselves. A closing Collect is often provided, but it is better to use one of the prayer forms in these lesson plans, or to have the youth write their own collects. Develop a closing ritual – e.g., a prayer led by a young person (occasionally, a leader might “take a turn”), then the Lord’s Prayer in unison, holding hands. Closing rituals help the group end and say “goodbye” clearly – a necessary task if the group is to clearly say “hello” again the next time. These rituals help a group bond, and help newcomers enter and feel welcome – they develop a feeling of belonging once they learn how to enter and leave the group.

Handout—Writing Our Own Prayers

The *Book of Common Prayer*, hardly surprisingly, contains a large number of prayers. Some of these prayers are known as Collects. These are found, for the most part, on pages 159-210 (traditional) and 211-261 (contemporary). There is a Collect for each Sunday of the Church year and a number for special occasions, such as Saints' Days, for Peace, and for Education.

Some of the Collects are very old, dating back to the eighth century C.E. and beyond. They have a particular form. This form is as follows:

Address or Salutation – This is the opening salutation to God, rather like the way we begin a letter “Dear ____.”

Ascription – This addresses one or other of the acts or one of the characteristics of God such as God's mercy, God's loving-kindness, etc.

Request – This makes a specific request of God: we ask for something that we would like God to do.

Consequence – This states what we expect as Christians will happen if God grants the request.

Doxology – This is the closing, rather as we close a letter, and is actually a hymn of praise to the Holy Trinity.

Sometimes this standard form varies, and one or another of the pieces is missing; but generally the structure for most of the Collects is the same. For an example of how a Collect is put together, let's look at the structure of the Collect for All Saints' Day (*Book of Common Prayer* [BCP] p. 245):

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

Address Almighty God,

Ascription you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your son Christ our Lord:

Request Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living,

Consequence that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you;

Doxology through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting.

This form is not always followed rigidly. For example, the Collect for the First Sunday in Advent (BCP p. 211) contains the salutation but no ascription, going straight to the request, consequence, and doxology:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

In the Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent (BCP p. 212), the address follows the first request and there is no consequence:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

In the Collect for Proper 17 (BCP p. 233), the address and ascription are combined and there is no consequence following the four requests:

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Look at some of the other Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer* and see which stick to the form given above and which are variants.

Now, given the structure of a Collect, try writing your own, either individually or as a group.

Prayer: Listening and Silence

Areas covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To spend a few minutes in silent prayer

Objective

To create a space in which we can hear the voice of God.

Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God...."

Habakkuk 2:20 "...The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!"

Background

In one of the classics of devotional literature, E. Herman's *Creative Prayer*, an entire chapter is devoted to the ministry of silence. As Herman points out, silence is "an integral part of all true education" and "children, so far from looking upon a demand for silence as an unnatural and intolerable imposition, have an inborn aptitude for quietness."

Herman, E. *Creative Prayer: A Devotional Classic*,
Forward Movement Publications, Cincinnati, OH.

Okay. So we will work from the premise that silence is possible and necessary even for teenagers! This may seem a stretch to some because so much of what we experience with young people is that they are filled to the brim with thoughts, questions, arguments, gossip, songs, and memories – how will they ever be silent?

This lesson plan is only an Introduction to the idea of silence as a kind of prayer. One verse in Psalm 46 comes to mind: *Be still and know that I am God*. Sometimes stillness is the only way we can know that God is God. We have to stop for a few minutes. Silence the voices. Watch the ideas in our minds float past as though we were watching a train ride by – we watch, but we are not attached to the movement of the train.

For many, this may be the most difficult lesson plan on prayer, partly because it offers so little help. Perhaps leaders will want to enlist the help of the clergy or a spiritual director in this lesson. Simply, silence is friendly. We do not need to be afraid of it. Most of us have been socialized to fill up every gap in a conversation. We rush through our liturgies, and when the rubrics tell us a period of silence may follow, the period only lasts long enough for the reader to take a breath before moving on. But silence is friendly. Nothing bad will happen to us if we sit in silence for a few minutes.

Activity One

Have the group break into pairs. Ask them to stare at each other – to play that old game of "Don't Blink." See which team can last the longest. It's okay if this gets silly and then sillier. Silence is friendly and joyful. Give everyone time to try to win and lose.

Activity Two

Play another round of games. This time, try, "Whatever You Do, Don't Laugh!" Staring at one another in silence, see who can last the longest!

Activity Three

Explain to the group that in each of these games they have practiced silence. No words are allowed in trying to make someone blink or in getting them to laugh. We have to communicate something to one another or resist that communication without words.

In this exercise, ask the young people to sit all along the edges of the classroom, either in chairs or up against the wall on the floor. Tell them you are going to read a short passage and then we are going to sit in silence, with our eyes open or closed, for several minutes. Plan on between three and five minutes of silence. Silence is the goal. In the first two games, we were silent in order to play the game. Now we are going to be silent just for the sake of being silent.

After everyone gets comfortable, read the following passage:

When the bishop's ship stopped at a remote island for a day, he determined to use the time as profitably as possible. He strolled along the seashore and came across three fishermen mending their nets. In pidgin English they explained to him that centuries before they had been Christianized by missionaries. "We Christians!" they said, proudly pointing to one another. The bishop was impressed. Did they know the Lord's Prayer? They had never heard of it. The bishop was shocked.

"What do you say, then, when you pray?"

"We lift eyes to heaven. We pray, 'We are three, you are three, have mercy on us.' "
The bishop was appalled at the primitive, the downright heretical, nature of their prayer. So he spent the whole day teaching them the Lord's Prayer. The fishermen were poor learners, but they gave it all they had, and before the bishop sailed away, he had the satisfaction of hearing them get through the whole formula without a fault.

Months later, the bishop's ship happened to pass by those islands again, and the bishop, as he paced the deck saying his evening prayers, recalled with pleasure the three men on that distant island who were now able to pray, thanks to his patient efforts. While he was lost in thought, he happened to look up and notice a spot of light in the east. The light kept approaching the ship, and as the bishop gazed in wonder, he saw three figures walking on the water. The captain stopped the ship, and everyone leaned over the rails to see this sight.

When they were within speaking distance, the bishop recognized his three friends, the fishermen. "Bishop," they exclaimed. "We hear your boat go past island and come hurry, hurry to meet you."

"What is it you want?" asked the awe-stricken bishop.

"Bishop," they said, "we so, so sorry. We forget lovely prayer. We say, 'Our Father in heaven, holy be your name, your kingdom come...' and then we forget. Please tell us prayer again."

The bishop felt humbled. "Go back to your homes, my friends," he said, "and each time you pray say, 'We are three, you are three, have mercy on us!'"

Leaders conclude by saying, in their own words, *"We have little or nothing to teach you about prayer. Silence and God's true spirit will have to meet you in the journey you are on. Gracious God, have mercy on us all."*

Allow for five minutes of silence.

At the end of that time, ask the young people if they want to share any thoughts about the story and their own silence. Be patient. Wait. Remind them that silence is not the enemy.

Closure

After a time of sharing or another few minutes of silence, bring out food: donuts, bagels, juice, or some appropriate snack food. Spend the rest of your time just being together, talking or not talking. Enjoy one another.

Note: Many youth crave silence in a world where they are constantly bombarded with noise. Create opportunities for silence. For instance, once a month you might end an evening session by going into the sanctuary, lighting several candles, turning off the overhead lights, and sitting in silence. Then gradually, as each person is ready, gather around or near the altar for a brief closing service or just to stand in a circle, holding hands and slowly saying the Lord's Prayer.

Lives Dedicated to Prayer: Religious Orders

Goal

To develop an understanding of and appreciation for those in religious orders who dedicate their lives to prayer.

Objectives

To identify religious orders in the Episcopal Church
To write a personal Rule of Life

Note: Other denominations using this program may want to substitute their own orders (for example, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, etc.). Or just generally cover the concept of the religious life. Still others appropriately may chose to omit this lesson.

Guiding Scriptures

Luke 14:26 "Whoever comes to me...."

Mark 13:35-36 "...You do not know when the master of the house will come...."

Psalm 119:164 "Seven times a day do I praise you...."

Book of Common Prayer

Prayer for Monastic Orders and Vocations, page 819

Background

Men and women who live in religious orders dedicate their lives to prayer. Most religious orders structure their daily schedules around several times of prayer. Because the early Christian Church was largely comprised of Jews, the basis of these monastic prayer times was in the Jewish faith. In New Testament times, devout Jews met morning and evening to read and pray the Scripture. In addition, the third hour (about 9:00 am), the sixth hour (noon), and the ninth hour (about 3:00 PM) were times when Jews prayed privately, wherever they happened to be at those hours.

In the early Church, many Christians observed these five traditional Jewish times of prayer and two nighttime hours: midnight and cockcrow (about 3:00 am.), which were the vigil times when the Christian community watched and waited for the coming of Christ. "Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly." (Mark 13:35–36). This schedule of prayer – five times during the day and twice at night – was further developed and regularized by the monastic communities which sprang up as an alternative way for early Christians to totally dedicate themselves to God, rather than becoming martyrs. St. Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century developed the monastic rule that is probably most familiar in the church. He set the number of daytime hours to seven ("Seven times a day do I praise you...." Psalm 119:164) and instituted a single, longer nighttime office with readings from Scripture, and from the lives of the saints and martyrs. The nighttime service (or office) was called *Matins*. The daytime offices were called *Lauds*, at daybreak; *Prime* at the first hour after sunrise; *Terce*, at the third hour; *Sext* at the sixth hour (usually noon); *None*, at the ninth; *Vespers*, at sunset; and *Compline*, at bedtime.

While the men and women in religious orders continued to do this round of readings and prayers, the rest of the Church was not able to sustain such extensive readings or the number of services. The readings began to be shortened, and the average Christian did not observe all of the times of prayer. When Thomas Cranmer wrote the first English-language Prayer Books in 1549 and 1552, he simplified these eight offices into two – originally called Matins and Evensong, now known as Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Morning Prayer uses parts of Matins, Lauds, and Prime while Evening Prayer is largely based on Vespers (and Compline which was restored to the Prayer Book in 1979). The *Daily Devotions for Individuals and Family* in the *Book of Common Prayer* (pages 136–140) are vaguely based on the minor offices (Lauds, Prime, etc.).

Many adults in the Episcopal Church are surprised to discover that we have religious orders. So you should not be surprised if young people know little about our orders. Much of what they know will probably be strongly influenced by what they have heard or experienced about Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. This lesson will provide an opportunity for them to identify what they have experienced or what they surmise life would be like in a religious order. It will also be a time to work on a Rule of Life – a commitment anyone can make to do those things that help us grow spiritually.

If you are fortunate enough to be near a monastery or convent, you may want to invite some of the sisters or brothers to be part of the team for a weekend retreat, or to join you for this session or for all of the sessions on prayer. If no Episcopal order is nearby, check into the possibility of Roman Catholic brothers or sisters. In either case, make sure you meet with the person(s) well beforehand and talk about what will happen and what role they will have. Some brothers and sisters are excellent with young people; others have little experience with young people and may not be helpful. Have an initial meeting with them to talk about the program, and make sure you feel comfortable with them before you decide how you will involve them.

A list of the religious orders and religious communities is provided. You may want to reproduce the list just to show the young people the number and types of orders we have. It will also be useful in identifying orders in your area. You may also wish to consider visiting an order or planning your pilgrimage to include time at an order house, should they have appropriate facilities.

Activity One

Write the words “monk” and “nun” on a sheet of newsprint. Ask the young people to say whatever comes to their mind when they hear these words. Quickly record their responses while they call them out.

You will probably get a picture of someone who is really, really religious – actually a bit over-religious! Someone who wears funny clothes, prays a lot, may be real holy or rather strict and maybe even mean (especially if anyone has seen movies about Sister in Catholic schools – they tend to portray them as strict guardians of behavior, ever-ready to apply a ruler firmly to one’s hand or bottom). In short, they are likely to see monks and nuns as very different from themselves.

An alternative activity is to invite them to write a one- or two-sentence description of a monk or nun – a brother or sister. What are they? What makes them different from other people? Encourage them to read their descriptions aloud and discuss their impressions.

Ask, What are traditional vows people in religious orders take?

Poverty, chastity, and obedience. What does each of those vows mean? *Poverty usually means owning property in common versus private possessions, living simply, being good stewards by not consuming more than is needed. Chastity traditionally means being celibate – which is an emphasis on being in primary relationship with God rather than a spouse and/or children. The focus on abstinence from sex is secondary in orders! Traditionally, obedience is a commitment to follow God's leading through the direction of the community in which one lives.* What is the primary work of a person living in a religious order? *Prayer is the primary work of the brothers and sisters. Most of them work, either within the community (cooking, raising food, cleaning, staffing a bookstore, creating and selling a product, doing retreats, preaching, etc.), or they may work at church or secular jobs to earn money to support the community. But whatever they do, it is done to support a life of prayer and ministry.*

Look at the description of what constitutes a religious order in the Episcopal Church's Constitution and Canons:

A Religious Order of this Church is a society of Christians (in communion with the See of Canterbury) who voluntarily commit themselves for life, or a term of years: to holding their possessions in common or in trust; to a celibate life in community; and obedience to their Rule and Constitution.

Discuss how this is the same as or differs from their understanding of what constitutes a religious order. Explain that there also are groups called "Christian communities" that are recognized by our church. The Canons give this description:

A Christian Community of this Church under this Canon is a society of Christians (in communion with the See of Canterbury) who voluntarily commit themselves for life, or a term of years, in obedience to their Rule and Constitution.

Ask, How is this the same as or different from a religious order?

Both of these descriptions talk about a "Rule." What is a "Rule" or a "Rule of Life?"

A rule of life is the commitment we make to a conscious practice of nourishing our relationship with God and others. Prayer is a vital part of that. People who live in religious orders and those of us who live in families, other communities, or by ourselves can benefit from having a rule of life.

Margaret Guenther's latest book, *Toward Holy Ground*, defines a rule of life as "stewardship of time and energy." She says further, "While most people go through life without thinking of it, we all have a rule of life, a pattern for our days reflecting our deepest beliefs." However, for many of us a rule of life is something that is essentially undisciplined, something not intentionally undertaken. She says, "It is not enough to live by an unconscious rule. For Christians, there are predictable components related to prayer and worship. A typical 'bare bones' rule of life would include such questions as, how and when do I pray? What are my rhythms of corporate and solitary prayer? What is the place of the sacraments in my life? How often do I join in the celebration of the Eucharist? If it is part of my tradition, how often do I avail myself of the sacrament of reconciliation?"

She suggests that rule of life be structured to a fourfold pattern:

1. our relationship to God
2. our relationship to others

3. our relationship to the whole of creation
4. our relationship to our own deepest selves

The things she identifies further as making up a rule of life include:

- a commitment to the guidance and companionship of spiritual direction or spiritual friendship (*spiritual directors are clergy and laity trained to help others grow in their life of prayer*)
- the cultivation of simplicity
- a commitment to generosity going beyond gifts of money to include gifts of self and service
- some provision for self-care – study, music, solitude, manual labor, fasting (especially fasting from the media)

An important part of a rule of life includes setting aside time for play. Our need for true play, she believes, is often neglected in a rule of life. “Play exists for its own sake. When we play we also celebrate holy uselessness. Play – holy play – is what keeps us humble and keeps us human. Without it, we tend to become ponderous, convinced that God can’t run the operation unless we are there to cover for him.” She notes further that only one letter separates “praying” from “playing.”

Activity Two

Invite the young people to develop a simple rule of life for themselves. Write Margaret Guenther’s four aspects on newsprint, and encourage them to name one or at the most two things they *already* do or would like to commit to doing. Urge them to be realistic. What are they, or what would they like to do each day that would help their relationship with God? For one person it might be something as simple as giving thanks to God each morning before getting out of bed. For another it might be attending a daily worship service. One person might commit to calling the parent he or she does not live with to talk about their day. Another might work on their relationship with a friend. Remind them that every person is different and that each may want or need a different rule of life.

Religious communities are made up of people who have decided to adopt the same rule of life because it meets their needs, and because experience has taught that certain ways of living are more effective in fostering spiritual growth than others. You might want to talk about the hours of prayer used in religious orders (see the background material for this session) and ask what pattern of prayer would fit them. Ask them what actions would strengthen loving relationships with other people. Ask them what actions would help connect them with God’s creation. And ask them what they could do each day that would affirm themselves.

Write an individual “Rule of Life.” Alternatively or in addition, you could write a group “Rule of Life” for your time together. If you can find parchment paper or something that will make an attractive presentation, use it. You can also purchase or make frames so they can hang their Rule in their bedroom. Or they can make it into a booklet. Have supplies on hand that will allow flexible formats.

Closure

Gather in a circle and ask each young person to read their Rule of Life. After each reading, have the group recite the following (print on newsprint beforehand):

*May the Lord who has given you the will to choose these things
give you the grace and power to do them.*

Closing Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the good of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

— adapted from The Book of Common Prayer, page 832

Religious Orders
Recognized by the Episcopal Church's
House of Bishops Committee on the Religious Life

FOR MEN

Congregation of Companions of the Holy Saviour

Celibate priests, deacons, and candidates for Holy Orders. Common Rule, but not in community. Rule for lay and clerical association.

- Congregation of the Companions of the Holy Saviour, Box 637, Hayward, WI 54843

Order of the Holy Cross

A Benedictine monastic community for clergy and laymen.

- Order of Holy Cross, Office of the Superior, Box 1296, Santa Barbara, CA 93102 (805) 963-8175, Fax (805) 963-8175
- Holy Cross Monastery, Box 99, West Park, NY 12493 (914) 384-6660, Fax (914) 384-6031
- Mt. Calvary Retreat House, Box 1296, Santa Barbara, CA 93102 (805) 962-9855
- Holy Cross Priory, 204 High Park Avenue, Toronto, ON M6P 2S6 Canada (416) 767-9081
- Incarnation Priory, 1601 Oxford, Berkeley, CA 94709, (415) 548-3406

Order of St. Benedict

Community of monks in the Episcopal Church living the Benedictine rule.

- St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

Society of St. Francis

Community of priests and laymen dedicated to prayer, study, and Franciscan works of mercy. Retreats, parochial supply, and mission work.

- Society of St. Francis, Provincial Headquarters, Box 389, Mt. Sinai, NY 11766 (516) 473-9434
- Little Portion Friary, Box 399, Mt. Sinai, NY 11766 (516) 473-0553
- Saint Elizabeth Friary, 1474 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11207, (718) 455-5963
- Saint Damiano Friary, 573 Dolores, San Francisco, CA 94110, (415) 861-1372

Brotherhood of St. Gregory

Open to all Anglican men, clergy and lay, single or married, living under a common rule and serving the Church on parochial, diocesan, and national levels. The brothers live individually, in small groups, or with their families and support the Community's activities from their secular or church-related employment.

- Brotherhood of St. Gregory, c/o St. Bartholomew, 82 Prospect, White Plains, NY 10606-3499

Society of St. John the Evangelist

A community of ordained and lay brothers who take life vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. First Anglican religious order for men. Known as the Cowley Brothers.

- Monastery of St. Mary and St. John and the Guesthouse, 980 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, MA 02138 (617) 876-3037
- Emery House, Emery Lane, West Newbury, MA 01985 (617) 462-7940
- Camp St. Augustine, Foxboro, MA

Society of St. Paul

Celebrating a life of prayer, personal growth, and service to others. Counseling and work with persons suffering from addictions. Fellowship includes a "Rule of Life" for Associates and Companions.

- The Society of St. Paul, Box 14350, Palm Desert, CA 92255-4350 (619) 568-2200

Servants of Christ Priory, OSB

A religious order of clergy and laymen living in community under the Rule of St. Benedict dedicated to prayer, study, and works of mercy.

- Servants of Christ Priory, 28 West Pasadena, Phoenix, AZ 85013 (602) 248-9321

The Worker Brothers of the Holy Spirit

International Covenant Community for Lay Brothers, Lay Workers, and Clergy regardless of marital status. Life Commitment to common Rule, Benedictine in orientation but not lived in community. For contacts, see Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, below.

FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Order of Christ Centered Ministries

Quasi-contemplative religious order for clergy and laypersons, married or celibate, seeking to live the Baptismal Covenant in the Benedictine tradition. Members are from Anglican, Roman Catholic, and alternative communions and practice a Life of Prayer, Study, Eucharistic Celebration, and ecumenical outreach. Spoon Retreats, Quiet Days, Contemplative Outreach Groups courses on Centering Prayer, and Contemplative Living.

- Order of Christ Centered Ministries, 740 Clarkson, Denver, CO 80218, (303) 832-7309

The Hie Hill Community

A non-residential community of men and women, lay and ordained, who seek to live out their Baptismal Covenant in light of Benedictine Tradition. Focus on conservation, worship, and study. Rule includes the Daily Office, Eucharist, study, and attendance at community gatherings.

- The Hie Hill Center, 26 Chittenden Hill Road, Westbrook, CT 06498

Life in the Lamb Community

Members live under a simple rule of life and make promises of commitment to God, the Church, and the Community. Conducts retreats, quiet days, and seminars on the spiritual life, Lenten and Advent series.

- Mavis E. Petersen, Box 3113, Tustin, CA 92681 (714) 960-5477

Community of the Paraclete

The Brothers and Sisters are single or married, leading a life of prayer and ministry, under a Rule and Vows. Work is to bring healing and wholeness to those who are broken in spirit, mind, and body, through the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

- St. Stephen's Priory, Box 61399, Seattle, WA 98121

Society of St. Francis

Third Order, American Province

Clergy and lay persons, married or single, called to follow the Gospel way of St. Francis within the secular world. Rules of life are individually approved, but all must address matters such as

simplicity, corporate and private prayer, spiritual direction, study, and work for God's Kingdom. Local fellowship groups and area convocations promote community where diversity is respected and the Christ life is nurtured.

- The Third Order c/o Box 399, Mt. Sinai, NY 11766

FOR WOMEN

All Saints Sisters of the Poor

Life of liturgical prayer. Guests, Retreats, Scriptorium. St. Anna's Residence, 2016 Race, Philadelphia, PA 19103, provides hospitality for families of hospital patients. Joseph Richey House, 828 N. Eutaw, Baltimore, MD 21201—hospice for patients with cancer or AIDS.

- All Saints Convent, Box 3217, Catonsville, MD 32338-0127

Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity

Special dedication to the Incarnation. Religious Order with strong emphasis on life of prayer in community. External ministries are evangelistic in nature and take a variety of forms.

- *Mother Superior*, 101 E. Division, Fond du Lac, WI 54935
- St. Mary's Retreat House, 505 E. Los Livos, Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Community of the Holy Spirit

Augustinian Rule, liturgical prayer, Christian education, church-related institutions, chaplaincy, and spiritual direction.

- St. Hilda's House, 621 W. 113; St. Hilda's and St. Hugh's School, 619 E. 114, New York, NY 10025
- Melrose School, St. Cuthbert's Retreat and Conference Center, RD2, Federal Hill Road, Brewster, NY 10509

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Order of St. Anne

Ministry to God's people through hospitality and community service.

- Convent of St. Anne, 14 Claremont Avenue, Arlington, MA 02174-5812
- Bethany Convent, 25 Hillside Avenue, Arlington, MA 02174
- St. Anne House, 15 Craigie, Cambridge, MA 02138
- Convent of St. Anne, 1125 N. LaSalle, Chicago, IL 60610
- St. Anne Convent, 2701 S. York, Denver, CO 80210

Community of St. Francis

Franciscan Sisters living a life of prayer study and work with special concern for poor and deprived.

- St. Francis House, 3743 Army, San Francisco, CA 94110

Order of St. Helena

A religious community for women. Sisters work in the convent and community. Retreats, spiritual direction, congregational ministry.

- Convent of St. Helena, Box 426, Vails Gate, NY 12584
- Convent of St. Helena, Box 5645, Augusta, GA 30916
- Convent of St. Helena, 134 E 28th, New York, NY 10016

Community of St. John the Baptist

Retreat House; congregational work. Conduct retreats, workshops, Christian Education, spiritual direction.

- Convent St. John the Baptist, Box 240, Mendham, NJ 07945

Society of St. Margaret

Episcopal religious community of women seeking to find Jesus present in worship, common life, and ministry which concentrates on responding to needs of the time. Corporate liturgy of daily Eucharist and 4-fold Office from BCP. Retreats, education, pastoral care of elderly and youth, congregational work, urban ministry, summer camp, hospitality.

- St. Margaret's Convent, 17 Highland Park, Boston, MA 02119
- St. Margaret's House, 5419 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144
- St. Margaret's House, Jordan Road, New Hartford, NY 13413
- St. Margaret's Convent, Port-au-Prince, Haiti (c/o Agape Flights, 1779 15E, Sarasota, FL 34243)
- Sisters of St. Margaret, 50 Fulton, New York, NY 10038
- St. Margaret's Convent, 71 Washington, Box C, Duxbury, MA 02331 (summer)

Community of St. Mary

Retreats, conferences, guests; altar bread; children's hospital.

- St. Mary's Convent, St. Benedict's Retreat House, and St. Gabriel's House, Peekskill, NY 10566
- St. Mary's Hospital for Children, 29-01 216th, Bayside, NY 11360
- Community of St. Mary's, 1840 N. Prospect Avenue #1014, Milwaukee, WI 53202
- St. Mary's Convent, 1100 St. Mary's Lane, Sewanee, TN 37375
- St. Mary's Convent, 5608 Monte Vista, Los Angeles, CA 90042
- St. Mary's Convent, 2619 Sagada, Mountain Province Philippines

Teachers of the Children of God

Prayer Life; Day Schools N-8.

- Tuller School at Maycroft, Sag Harbor, NY 11963
- Tuller School, 5870 E. 14th, Tucson, AZ 85711
- Tuller School, Tuller Road, Fairfield, CT 06430

Community of the Transfiguration

Ministry with children and aged, retreats, educational, and recreational work.

- Convent of the Transfiguration, 495 Albion Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45246
- Bethany School, St. Mary's Home, St. Monica's Rec Center, 495 Albion Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45246
- Transfiguration House, San Pedro de Marcoris, Dominican Republic; Retreat Work, Transfiguration House, Box 116, Ferndale, CA 95536

The Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit

International covenant community for lay sisters, lay workers, and clergy, regardless of marital status. Life commitment to common Rule; Benedictine in orientation but not lived in community. From a contemplative model of prayer, meditation, worship, the Eucharist, and ministry in the local congregation, the church, and the world.

- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, Box 611047, Port Huron, MI 48061
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 509 Hargis Lane, Belton, MO 64012
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 8585 W. 109, Overland Park, KS 66210
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 151 Pleasant, Plainfield, MA 01070
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 1513 Briarcrest, Grapevine, TX 76051
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, Box 103 Dwight Lake of Bays, ON POA 1H0 Canada.
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 3874 Olivia Place, Victoria, BC V8P 4T2 Canada
- Worker Sisters of the Holy Spirit, 68 Bruce, Thornbury ON N0H 2P0 Canada.

- **Religious Orders Identified with the Episcopal Church but Not Recognized by the House of Bishops Committee on the Religious Life**

The Society of the Holy Cross

Better known by its Latin Initials, SSC. Oldest Catholic Society in the Anglican Communion. Secular institute open to priests and bishops to sanctify the priestly life by rule, unite members in special bond of charity, faith, and discipline, extend Catholic principles, and strive for corporate reunion with Rome. *By invitation only.*

- Deputy Master, 1605 NE Madison Avenue, Peoria, IL 61603
- Atlantic *Provincial Vicar*, 440 Beatty Avenue, Verdun, QC Canada
- Gulf Provincial Vicar, 1325 Cardinal Lane, Lantana, FL 33462-4205
- Central Provincial Vicar, 308 N. Vermillion, Danville, IL 61832
- Pacific Provincial Vicar, 1314 N. Angelina Drive, Placentia, CA 92670-3492

Order of Agape and Reconciliation

Contemplative semi-monastic religious order, for clergy and laypersons, married or celibate. Anglican sponsored but ecumenical in outreach, including Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic members. It seeks a modern adaptation of the eremitical ideal and the cultivation of higher consciousness.

- *Inquiries*, The Prince of Peace Priory, Box 960, Chemainus, BC V0R 1H0 Canada, (604) 246-9578
- In Costa Rica, Prior to de San Miguel Ado, 114 Caseate 4400 CR
- The Prince of Peace Priory, Box 844, St. Joseph, MN 56374 (612) 363-4796

Order of Julian of Norwich

Mixed, traditionally monastic, semi-enclosed, contemplative community, following the spirituality of Dame Julian. Associate and Oblate affiliations for laity and clergy.

- Order of Julian of Norwich, S10 W26392 Summit Avenue, Waukesha, WI 53188 (414) 549-0452, Fax (414) 549-0670

Community of Celebration

Christian community of men, women, children, lay/clergy, married/single, shares common life undergirded by daily Morning and Evening Prayer. Ministry to live baptismal vows among poor and oppressed, pray and work for renewal and reconciliation in church and world, offer hospitality, retreats, and conferences (home or away) on worship leadership, Christian education, liturgical renewal, prayer.

- Community of Celebration, Box 309, Aliquippa, PA 15001

Community of Christian Family Ministry

Combines traditional and innovative approaches to Religious Life. Lay/clergy, men/women, single/married. Catholic, charismatic, and evangelistic. Ministry includes hospital visits, preaching, retreats, counseling, drama, and music. Bilingual (English/Spanish); has a multifaceted work relationship with Hispanics. Associates follow rule of life as it applies to their household. Oblates and Companions.

- *Coordinators*, Community of Christian Family Ministry, 801 Valley Crest Drive, Vista, CA 92084 (619) 727-1848

Order of the Holy Family

Rule inspired by Celtic tradition and includes adoration of God, reverence for creation, hospitality, and creative work. Order includes oblates and associates.

- Order of the Holy Family, 485 Main, Lumberton, NJ 08048 (609) 265-8951

The Order of the Servants of Christ the King

Different modalities of life-style under comprehensive rule. Mission is to live and work among, with, and for spiritually and/or materially poor. Admission without regard to race, sex, marital or clergy/lay status. Admission of handicapped dependent upon each person's ability to live the rule and perform mission of order.

- Order of the Servants of Christ the King, 2262 Village Court, Brandon, FL 33511

Companion Sisterhood of St. Gregory

A Christian Community-in-formation, under the sponsorship of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory. Open to Anglican women, clergy and lay, single or married, living under a common rule and serving the Church on parochial, diocesan, and national levels. The sisters live individually, in small groups, or with their families and support the community's activities from their secular or church-related employment.

- *Inquiries: Director of Vocations*, 6537 N. Newgard, 2nd Floor, Chicago, IL 60626

Sisters of Charity

Operates Wellspring Retreat and Conference Center. Following the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, engage in ministry to the sick and elderly in their homes and by visiting nursing homes, jails, and prisons. Quiet days, retreats, and counseling.

- Sisters of Charity, 701 Park Place, Box 60818, Boulder City, NV 89006, (702) 293-4988

Anamchara Fellowship

Founded in the tradition of the Episcopal Church but is ecumenical with a Celtic spirit. Men and women, clergy and lay, married, single, or partners in a committed relationship live in their own homes and are self supporting, being bound to each other by common ideals and commitment to prayer and service.

- Anamchara Fellowship, 4142 Ogletown-Stanton Rd. #141, Newark, DE 19713, 302-420-5059 or 302-420-7117; email: SisterBJ@anamcharafellowship.org or SisterJulian@anamcharafellowship.org,

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Pray Without Ceasing

Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

Goal

To bring closure to this section on prayer

Objectives

Examine three other models for thinking about prayer.

To revisit and review.

To create a "Prayer Box"

To get ready for the next unit: Images of God.

Guiding Scriptures

1 Thessalonians 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."

Background

We have been exploring the different types of prayer, how to build a relationship with God, how to ask for forgiveness, how to be silent, how to write our own prayers, and how to understand the prayers we have been saying all our lives. The problem with any lesson plans on a subject such as prayer can be summed up by saying, It is only the beginning. We are not able to say enough, do enough, teach enough, or learn enough on the subject to feel that what we have done is satisfactory. It is best to think that we have only begun.

The whole of the *Journey to Adulthood* program hinges on our understanding of process. The journey is a process. A little here and a little there. An insight, a frustration, a grace, a prayer. It is all only a small piece of the whole of God's action in our lives.

In returning to the Introduction to these lesson plans, we read that the Cowley Fathers define prayer as "the source of hope and love we bring to our personal relationships and the wellspring of commitment to work for social justice." In the months ahead, we will look more closely at our personal relationships and social justice concerns, as well as a host of other subjects, but always we do so with our hearts in prayer.

Prayer is a process, not a concept. We will learn and understand it by doing it.

In this session, introduce a few last ideas about prayer. Each section that follows is a suggestion. You may wish to ask the young people to tell you what they have learned. You may wish to do a review of all the ideas that have surfaced along the way. One of the reasons we suggest using newsprint to record ideas and insights is that it allows us to look back at what we've learned and to break through our tendency to remember only what we want to remember.

Leaders can help build up the community of these young people by acknowledging specific insights: *Sara, I liked it when you said...when we talked about the prayers of the people.* Or *John, I thought it was a great insight into the Gospel when you said...I've thought a lot about that.*

Finally, we will make a Prayer Box to keep in the room for the next two years. Encourage young people to add prayer concerns regularly. The box will remain in the room and be tied up with a ribbon at the end of each meeting. As a part of your ongoing prayer times, leaders may wish to remember all the concerns in the box as part of the opening or closing prayers of the group.

Preparation

- Make copies of Handout: Ways to Remember How to Pray.
- Purchase or build a small box (a 3 x 5 card file box will do).
- Ribbon large enough to wrap around the box and be tied in a bow.
- 3 x 5 cards.
- Dividers for the Prayer Box, labeled with each person's name.
- Bibles, of course. You never know when you'll need one!
- Prayer Books.

Activity One

Spend a few minutes asking the young people to review all that we've covered so far. Work through the topics: What is prayer? What did Jesus say about prayer? Four types of prayer: Supplication, Thanksgiving, Confession, Adoration; The Lord's Prayer; The Collective Prayers; Listening; and Silence.

Activity Two

Hand out copies of WAYS TO REMEMBER HOW TO PRAY. Walk through the materials with the young people.

There are two models for remembering prayer types which may be helpful. The first is to use the acronym ACTS.

A is for **Adoration**: praise and general worship of God. We put this first because it is the most important part of our prayer life.

C is for **Confession**: we must always remember in prayer who God is and who we are. The terrible tension between God's love and our weakness is addressed by our telling the truth as much as we can, and especially to God. We have no need to lie to God about who we are. Remember, too, while we have talked about confession mostly in terms of confession of sin, we can also think of confession as simply stating what is most true about our lives. Confessions of faith are as important as confessions of sin.

T is for **Thanksgiving**: we have so very much to be thankful for, even when we face hardship and difficulty. Remember, the Psalmist says, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord and to sing praises unto his name, to show forth his loving-kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness by night."

S is for **Supplication**: this is the time when we ask for what we need. Go ahead: ask. God loves us and wants to give us the desires of our hearts.

The second model for remembering is using the hand. Ask the young people to trace their hand on the back of the handout. On each finger, write one of the following types of prayer:

The thumb represents the **Prayer of Adoration**, where we praise God just for being God.

The index finger represents the **Prayer of Confession**, where we tell God how sorry we are for the things we have either done (sins of commission) or not done (sins of omission).

The middle finger is the longest and stands for the **Prayer of Thanksgiving**, where we thank God for all that God has done for us and which therefore ought to be the longest prayer. (The German theologian, Meister Eckhart [1260-1329] once said: "If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank you,' that would suffice." You might talk a bit about this.)

The third finger, the ring finger, represents the **Prayer of Intercession**, where we pray for the needs of others.

The little finger represents the **Prayer of Petition**, where we pray for ourselves and our own needs. In the grand scheme of things, our needs are pretty small!

The Benedictine monastic community uses yet another way to talk about different prayer types:

Lectio (reading) You can pray when you're reading; in fact, one of the best ways to read the Bible is prayerfully.

Oratio (praying aloud or silently in words) You can speak to God, which is our conventional idea of prayer. Explain that sometimes prayer is *listening* to God. An Englishwoman named Pamela Grey once wrote: "For one soul that exclaims, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearth,' there are ten that say, 'Hear, Lord! for thy servant speak to,' and there is no rest for these." Ask how many of them think that just being quiet in the presence of God is a form of prayer.

Meditatio (thinking on the Word) Sometimes you read a meaningful passage in a book and you just have to think about what you've read, silently and prayerfully. This is called Meditation. You might try leading the group on a guided meditation. Tilde Edwards' book, *Living in the Presence* (see Resource Guide), is very helpful here. If you don't have experience with guided meditation, it would be best to find someone who is experienced and ask them to lead the meditation.

Contemplatio (contemplation) This is a difficult concept to explain to young people. Contemplation is a form of prayer where no words are necessary. You can be on a beach or mountain, watching a sunset, in a green field, or even in your room and be suddenly conscious of the presence of God. Contemplation is regarded by some as the highest form of prayer. It is just being in the presence of God. . . being "at one" with God.

None of these ways of categorizing prayer types is sacrosanct and each has its value. You may also want to use *Handout—Types of Prayer* as background information or to supplement your work. This is especially true if there is a desire to expand this topic beyond the eleven sessions or if you plan to do some or all of these sessions within the context of a weekend retreat.

Activity Three

The *Book of Common Prayer* offers another way to remember how to pray. Since few of us live in monastic orders, the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families found on pages 136 - 140 let us pattern our daily lives with prayer times. Prayers are offered in the morning, at noon, in

the early evening, and at the close of the day. Ask the young people to find the parts of prayer we have spent time looking at in these prayer forms. Where is the silence? Where is the confession? Where is adoration, supplication, petition, thanksgiving? Over the course of the day, these four prayer forms offer all the kinds of prayer available to us.

Activity Four

Hand out 3 x 5 cards. Ask each young person to write a concern or a thanksgiving, or both, on the cards. Place them in the Prayer Box.

Explain to the group that this will be our Prayer Box. Show them that they will have their own section in the box where they can add prayers or remove answered prayers at any meeting. Encourage them to spend a few minutes in silence considering what concerns they would like the whole group to remember in the prayers. After enough time for everyone to make one or several cards, pass the box around, so that each can put their cards behind their name. Ask someone in the group to tie the ribbon around the box.

Closing Prayer

Holding the box, and passing it from person to person, in silence, lift these concerns to God. When the box has come full circle, pray in unison the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

Almighty God, who hast promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in thy Son's Name: We beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ear to us who have now made our prayers and supplications unto thee; and grant that those things which we have faithfully asked according to thy will, may effectually be obtained, to the relief of our necessity, and the setting forth of thy glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Answering of Prayer, BCP p. 834

NOTE: The authors have left the prayer as found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. It might be worthwhile to spend a few minutes showing the young people where this prayer is in the Prayer Book and explaining that when we pray it, we join with Episcopalians/Anglicans all over the world who lift their concerns to God. It might also be worth asking if everyone understands the prayer we are about to say. If not, spend time making sure we all know what we are saying. Always remember, time is not the enemy in youth work: take as much time as you need. Parents will understand if, when they ask, "Why were you late?" and kids respond with, "We were praying!"

Handout—Types Of Prayer

There are various ways to categorize **types** of prayer. Here is one: hold out your left hand with the palm facing you.

The **thumb** represents the **Prayer of Adoration**, where we praise God just for being God.

The **index finger** represents the **Prayer of Confession**, where we tell God how sorry we are for the things we have either done (sins of commission) or not done (sins of omission). It is also the time we acknowledge where our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, or with creation has been broken, seeking God's healing and wholeness.

The **middle finger** is the longest and stands for the **Prayer of Thanksgiving**, where we thank God for all that God has done for us. As it is the longest finger, it reminds us to make this our longest prayer. (The German theologian, Meister Eckhart, who lived from 1260 to around 1329, once said: "If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank you,' that would suffice.")

The **third finger**, the ring finger, represents the **Prayer of Intercession**, where we pray for others.

The **little finger** represents the **Prayer of Petition**, where we pray for ourselves. As it is the shortest finger, so it ought to also be the shortest prayer! However, in real life this often turns out to be the longest prayer. And since God loves us so much, all of our prayers of petition will be heard, even if the list is long.

Another way you can remember these prayers is to lump Intercession and Petition together to get Supplication, and then you get the acronym **ACTS**:

Adoration
Confession
Thanksgiving
Supplication.

Handout—Ways to Remember How to Pray

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Examples of Each Type of Prayer

Prayers of Adoration

The obvious prayer here is the Sanctus (from the Latin meaning 'holy') which we say every Sunday at the Eucharist

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

There are others in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Many of the Psalms are prayers of adoration or contain prayers of adoration. For example:

- The Great Thanksgiving at Holy Communion, Eucharistic Prayer D (Book of Common Prayer [BCP] p. 373)
- A Song of Creation, Benedicite, omnia opera Domini (BCP pp. 47-49)
- Psalm 150 (BCP pp. 807-808)
- Gracious Light, Phos Hilaron (BCP p. 118)
- Psalm 95 and Psalm 100 (BCP p. 724 and p. 729)

One prayer that is not in the *Book of Common Prayer* is the Canticle of the Sun, written by St. Francis of Assisi. An adaptation of this prayer is also found in *The Hymnal 1982*, #406.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no one is worthy to mention your name.
Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom you give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High One.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through which you give sustenance to your creatures.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living being can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give God thanks
and serve God with great humility

Prayers of Confession

There are many prayers of confession in the Book of Common Prayer. For example:

- The General Confession (p. 79)
- "The Reconciliation of a Penitent" (p. 447) is designed to be used by someone who wishes to make a private confession. The prayers of confession in this service can also be used privately or in worship
- The Penitential Order (p. 351), which many churches use at the beginning of the Eucharist during Lent, includes a communal confession
- The Ash Wednesday Liturgy (p. 264) also includes a confession and the sign of receiving ashes on your forehead as a sign of penitence.

One very brief prayer of confession, found in the Bible, is the prayer of the tax collector:
God, be merciful to me, a sinner. (Luke 18:13b)

This gave rise to another prayer which is used a great deal in Orthodox Christianity and is called the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen."

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Many of these are found in the Book of Common Prayer. One of the best of them is the General Thanksgiving (p. 101):

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to your service,
and by walking before you
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

- The prayer at the Blessing of the Marriage (p. 430)
- A General Thanksgiving (p. 836)
- For the Beauty of the Earth (p. 840)
- Psalm 95 and Psalm 100 (BCP, p. 724 and p. 729)

Prayers of Intercession

Most of the Prayers of the People which we use at the Eucharist are prayers of intercession. They have a definite structure to them which you will find if you look at page 383 in the Book of Common Prayer. It says there that prayer is offered with intercession for:

- The Universal Church, its members, and its mission
- The Nation and all in authority
- The welfare of the world
- The concerns of the local community
- Those who suffer and those in any trouble
- The departed (with commemoration of a saint when appropriate)

Other Prayers of Intercession in the Book of Common Prayer:

- Prayers for the Candidates in Holy Baptism (p. 305)
- The Litany at the Burial of the Dead (p. 497)
- The Great Litany (p. 148)

One of the most extraordinary prayers of intercession that we have found is the following. It was written by an unknown prisoner in Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany during World War II and left by the body of a dead child. Ravensbrück was the concentration camp set up by the Nazis specifically for women and children. These were mainly Jewish but included others, as well. The inmates died very often of malnutrition and disease. With that as background, read this prayer and imagine the great spirituality that it must have come out of:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this – and when they come to judgment, let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness.

Prayers of Petition

Prayers of petition in the Book of Common Prayer:

- The Collect for the Early Evening in Daily Devotions (p. 139)
- Prayer before receiving Communion (p. 834)

And one you won't find in the Book of Common Prayer: written by an English general, Sir Jacob Astley (1579-1652), before the battle of Newbury in the English Civil War. It's a great one to memorize and perhaps use before a big exam, important game, or some other event:

O Lord, thou knowest how very busy I must be this day;
if I forget thee, do not thou forget me: for Christ's sake. Amen.

One of the more powerful prayers of petition in the Bible is Jesus's Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane before his Passion (Luke 22:42)