

# J2A

## ***Part II of The Journey to Adulthood program***



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Durham, NC

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**J2A Lessons**

**Self**

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# What Role Do I Play?

## Goal

For each member of the group to experience and determine how he or she functions in a group while doing a task – in this case, cooking and serving a simple meal.

This is a great lesson plan to do as your very first J2A activity – it helps illustrate the difference between Rite 13 (where the adults were primarily responsible for the class) and J2A (where the students are called on to participate more and take on more responsibility).

## Area covered

Self, Society

## Objectives

To explore the ways individual members function naturally

To examine the different roles that people adopt in a group

To discuss the differences between how we see ourselves and how others see us

## Time Allotted

Cooking:	45 minutes to 1 hour
Eating together and cleaning up:	45 minutes to 1 hour
Discussion:	30 minutes
Scripture reading, prayer and songs:	20 minutes
Total time for this exercise:	2-3 hours

## Equipment Required

Food for preparing the meal (see following pages)

Recipes – the ones we give here should provide enough food for 10-15 people

Newsprint and markers

Bibles

A kitchen – if the church does not have a kitchen, then find a willing family. A home is as good a place as any for this evening's work!

## Before the Meeting Time

1. Assemble all items needed for the dinner and leave in the kitchen for the group
2. Make a copy of the instruction sheets and leave in a prominent place in the kitchen
3. Put up signs at the doors to direct young people to the kitchen
4. Make copies of the sheet that summarizes the role titles and styles

## Action

At the appointed meeting time, teenagers will arrive and, *without any contact with the group leaders*, follow signs that direct them to the kitchen. In the kitchen they will find all the ingredients and instructions for preparing a spaghetti dinner. They are to follow the instructions as exactly as possible.

When the dinner is ready, the young people will come get the leaders for dinner. After everyone enjoys the meal, the group will need to clean up the kitchen – again, without the help of the adult group leaders.

While the cleaning up is happening, the adult leaders can set up the space for reflection.

- Using the sheet provided, write up each role title on a piece of newsprint, along with the statement that characterizes that role style. Put the sheets where everyone will be able to see them.
- Gather Bibles for the group to use.

## Reflection

When the kitchen has been restored to its original state, gather the group together to discuss the evening. Ask each participant to evaluate how he or she functioned in their task. The group then evaluates whether they see that as a correct assessment and provides gentle feedback to each individual. Here are some questions that might help:

- Using the styles on the newsprint, what role do you think you played tonight?
- Can you give an example of something you did tonight to support that choice?
- Did you find yourself drifting between roles or did you stay in the same role?
- Do you think this is the same role you play in your family? Or a different one?

**Note:** Some young people may have difficulty identifying or admitting to their “style.” Be patient. If they are still unable, even after the other members of the group have taken their turn, ask the group to help choose. Remember too, that roles change over time and in particular situations.

Some other questions that might help your discussion:

- Are there other roles that are missing from our sheets?
- How did the group, as a whole, function to complete their task?
- How would it have been different at home or with other friends?
- How did others see you tonight? Did they agree or disagree with the role you thought you were playing? (**Note:** Don’t be surprised if one teen thought he was facilitating and everyone else thought he was being entertaining!)
- Are you able to defend your position in the face of the group’s critique?
- What role would you have liked to play tonight?
- What role do you like to play at home or with your friends?

## Closure

Pass out the “Different Styles to Consider” sheet. Let each person read the scripture that was included for their personality type. Remind the group that they are all valid styles and that we often play more than one role and just because we play one role in a certain situation, doesn’t mean we will always play that same role in every other situation.

Have the participants look up and read each of the following passages of scripture:

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-30a
- Luke 9:18-20
- John 6:32-35

## Closing Prayer

Gracious God, help us to see our strengths and our weaknesses as honestly as possible. Help us to use our talents, to trust our friends, to try new things and to grow in your grace. We give you thanks that, in all things, your dear Son Jesus is the head, the author of our faith and the one who gives us the grace to grow, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*



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## Handout: What Role Do I Play? Styles to Consider

**Teacher: "Let me show you how to do this . . ."**

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (*Matthew 7:28-29*)

**Facilitator: "OK. You make the salad. You cut the onions. I'll find the knife. . . ."**

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. (*Luke 10:1*)

**Caregiver: "Are you all right?"**

Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (*Matthew 23:37*)

**Preacher: "Let me say just this one thing before we begin!"**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew 5:1-3*)

**Gatekeeper: "I know who's in, who's out, what's up, what's down."**

Jesus said to the disciples, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." (*John 10:7-9*)

**Servant: "What needs to be done? OK, I'll do that!"**

After Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (*John 13:12-15*)

**Entertainer: "You may not think I do very much, but I keep everyone smiling!"**

As Jesus sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (*Matthew 9:10-11*)

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## Handout: What Role Do I Play – Instructions

*Dear J2A Group:*

*Welcome! It's your night to cook!*

*All the ingredients you will need to make a great spaghetti dinner are spread out before you. All you have to do is follow the directions.*

*Plan to serve the dinner at 5:00. The table should be set with napkins, silverware, dishes and glasses. (Remember to set two extra places for us – we're hungry too!)*

*Keep in mind as you fix the meal that whatsoever you shall mess up, that also shall you clean up!*

*In the event of an absolute emergency (e.g., burning down the kitchen, cutting yourself with a sharp knife) you can find us in the library, relaxing but ready to help. Otherwise, just please come tell us when dinner is ready.*

*Do your best to have everything ready on time.*

*You may set up to serve buffet style, but remember that we will want to give thanks before we serve.*

*After the meal (and after you have cleaned up) we will assemble to reflect on the experience.*

*Now, wash your hands and have fun. We know you'll do a great job!*

*Your leaders*

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## MENU

### Spaghetti and Meatballs Tossed Salad and Garlic Bread

#### Meatballs

3 pounds ground chuck  
½ cup dry flavored bread crumbs  
3 cloves of garlic, minced  
3 teaspoons salt  
½ teaspoon pepper  
3 eggs, lightly beaten  
¾ cup of milk  
1 teaspoon basil  
½ cup chopped parsley  
½ cup olive or salad oil

In a large bowl, combine all the ingredients except the oil.

Mix well with your hands (*make sure your hands are CLEAN*) to combine.

With moistened hands, shape the mixture into balls 1½ inches in diameter.

Put the oil in a skillet and heat. Add the meatballs (*put in just enough meatballs to cover the bottom in one layer*), and cook until they are browned all over. Remove the meatballs from the skillet as they brown, and place them on a paper towel.

When they have all been browned, add them to the spaghetti sauce. Simmer them in the sauce, covered, for 30 minutes.

Transfer to one or two serving dishes.

#### Spaghetti sauce

Pour 3 large-size jars of prepared spaghetti sauce into a VERY large pot – one that has a lid and will be big enough to hold all the sauce, plus all the meatballs.

Bring to a near boil, then lower the heat and allow the sauce to simmer.

#### Spaghetti

Cook the spaghetti in a large saucepan of water, following the directions on the package.

Drain and transfer to one or two serving dishes.

#### Tossed Green Salad

Remove the leaves from the heads of lettuce provided.

Wash the leaves and drain them.

Shred them by hand into a large salad bowl.

Immediately before serving, add the salad dressing and toss the salad with the salad servers until the dressing is evenly distributed.

#### Garlic Bread

Melt one stick of butter in a small saucepan.

Peel and mince one clove of garlic; add to the butter. Keep warm but *do not allow to froth*.

Slice the bread (not all the way through).

Spread the garlic butter on the bread.

Wrap the bread in aluminum foil and heat in a 300°-oven for 20 minutes.

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# Listening Skills Are A Great Place to Begin

## Goal

To explore our capacity to listen carefully to the self and to others

## Area Covered

Self

## Objectives

To practice listening and following directions

To communicate and assess our ability to give and receive precise information

## Equipment Required

Newsprint or blank paper

Markers or pens/pencils

It's helpful if you have books or clipboards or something the drawer can bear down on

Copies of the drawings (on following pages) – one page for each pair

Timer or watch

Bibles

## Before the Meeting Time

1. Assemble all items needed
2. Make a copy sheet of drawings – if possible, cut sheets in half vertically so all "A" drawings are together and all "B" drawings are together

## Action

Have the group divide itself into pairs. If there is an odd number of participants, one of the leaders should join a team. Each team receives a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. The teams should spread out so that each has a semi-quiet area in which to work. The exercises are timed. The teams have only *three* minutes to complete each exercise.

Exercise #1A: Team members stand back to back. One person is designated as the Describer, the other the Artist. The Describer is given drawing #1A. The Describer then tries to give verbal instructions to the Artist so that the Artist can recreate the drawing. *The Describer can NOT look at the Artist's effort and the Artist must remain silent throughout the process.*

Exercise #1B: After all the teams have accomplished this task (or the allotted time has run out), the team members reverse roles and try the task again with a different drawing. Drawing #1B is given to the new Describer.

Exercise #2A: The basic rules remain the same. However, this time the drawing (#2A) is somewhat more complex, so the teammates stand side by side and the Describer may watch the Artist's effort (although not show them the original drawing). *The Artist may not ask questions and must still remain silent.* The Describer may not say "Stop" or "No, that's wrong," but must do his or her best to communicate in light of what he or she sees.

Exercise #2B: At the end of this task, the teams again reverse roles and repeat the exercise using drawing #2B.

Exercise #3A: In this level, there is full and complete communication. The pair stands side by side. The Descriptor may see the work of the Artist and the Artist may ask any questions for feedback or guidance. Use drawing #3A.

Exercise #3B: Reverse the roles again and repeat using drawing #3B.

## Reflection

How well do we listen? It is not enough to know something; we must be able to articulate what we know, and we must be able to combine our pre-existing understanding with new, additional information. These exercises provide a framework for experiencing our strengths and weaknesses in communicating.

After all the drawings have been completed, ask each team to assess themselves and talk about which drawing turned out to be most accurate and why.

Gather the whole group back together and talk through some of these questions:

- What made this task difficult?
- What qualities made for the best artist?
- What qualities made for the best describer?
- Did the accuracy of the drawing have anything to do with drawing ability?
- Which of the three ways of doing this exercise was the easiest for you? Why?
- How do you think these three ways illustrate different kinds of communication?
- How important is feedback in communication?
- Which of the three ways of doing this exercise was the hardest?
- Could we have done this with a blind person? A deaf person?
- In what ways did you establish a relationship with your partner? Did that help?

If time permits, have the group examine some of these additional questions:

- In what ways do we communicate with our eyes (winks, smiles, tears)?
- What about body language?
- Can you really tell something about a person by the way they sit or stand? Can you demonstrate? Show me, without words or touching, that you like the person next to you. Show me you dislike them. Show me you are bored. Show me you are impatient.
- Can language be a hindrance to communication? How? (**Examples:** If your partner says "Draw an isosceles triangle" and you don't know what that is, that doesn't help you. When I say, "I love you" to my Mom, it means something completely different than when I say it to my boyfriend or girlfriend.)

Sometimes we think we understand exactly what is being asked of us or what we are being told to do. But we must always be careful to listen closely and to ask the right questions. Remember when Jesus tells the disciples that, on the last day, we will be judged for the times we have fed him, clothed him, given him a sip of water.

It is the wise student that asks, "When did we see *you*?" The wise question opens the door to the truth. In this case, Jesus reminds them, ". . . Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (*Matthew 25:40*)

We need to be willing to ask. When we don't understand, we must say so. That is the quickest avenue to grace.

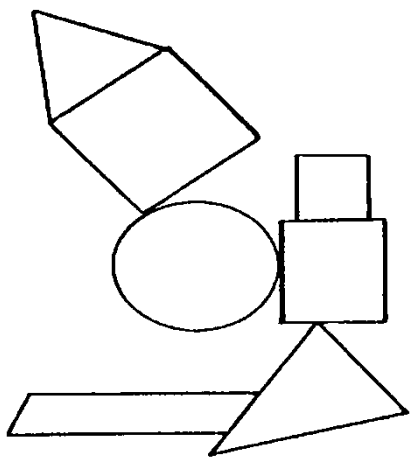
### **Closure**

Read Psalm 119:105-112 together as a group. Have the participants look it up in either the Bible or in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

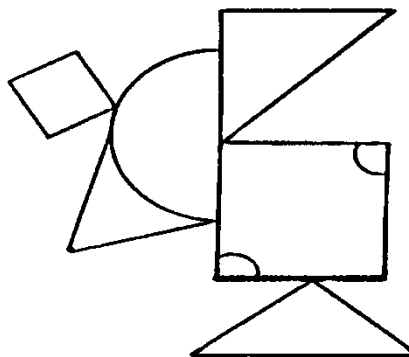
### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, make us clear – clear thinkers, careful listeners, clear communicators. We offer to you all the things we know and all the things we don't know. Help us to be faithful to the gifts you give us; and in the name of your dear Son, Jesus Christ, we will give you thanks for the lessons that we learn. *Amen*.

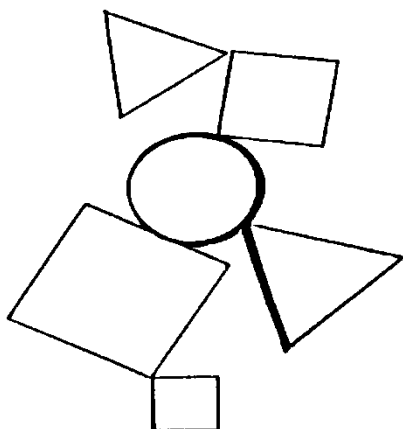
Lesson Plan update August 2004 by Tracey Herzer



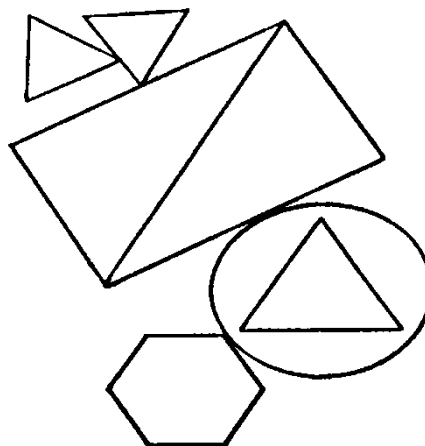
1A



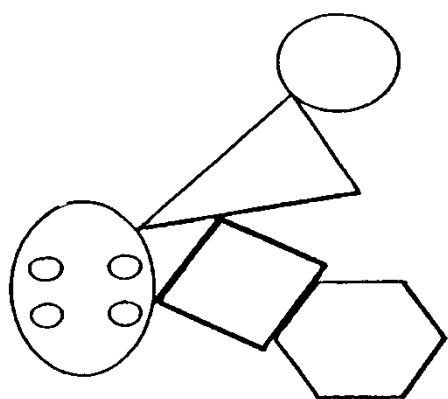
1B



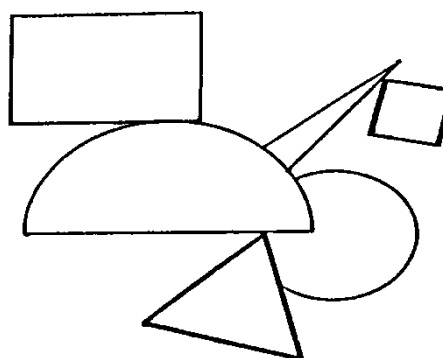
2A



2B



3A



3B

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# Who I Am vs. Who I Would Like To Be

## Goal

To talk about the differences between who we are and who we might like to become and to realize that we are all “works in progress”, loved by God

## Areas Covered

Self, Spirituality

## Objectives

To play together

To broaden our understanding of human nature and of God’s nature

To learn to be gentle with ourselves

## Equipment Required

Clue cards from a game or ones you have created yourself – see “Before the Meeting Time”

Soft clay or Play-Doh (one or two cans, depending on the size of your group)

Wax paper

Handi-wipes to clean hands (or access to a nearby sink!)

Newsprint and markers

Bibles

## Guiding Scriptures

Philippians 2:12-13

Romans 7:14-17; 8:1-2

## Background

For centuries, theologians have discussed and debated the qualities of human nature and the qualities of God’s nature. Thomas Aquinas, famous philosopher and Christian scholar from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, argued that there is a fundamental relationship in creation between essence and existence, potential and actual. Let’s explore some of these relationships.

## Before the Meeting Time

1. Assemble all items needed
2. You can use clues from a game like Pictionary or Clay to Win, but if you don’t have a game, just make up your own. You will need at least 10-15 words to describe objects, phrases, or activities. Clues can be challenging, but need to be possible! (Ex: mailman, skipping rope, The Leaning Tower of Pisa, “raining cats and dogs”, railroad tracks, etc.)

## Action

Open the session time with a brief prayer and then introduce the following game:

Divide the group into two teams and have them sit across from each other, preferably at a table. Each person receives a piece of wax paper and a lump of clay approximately the size of tennis ball. Clay amounts need to be as equal as possible.

Someone on Team A chooses a clue and shows it to everyone else on Team A. Then Team A must communicate their clue to the member of Team B sitting directly across from them. The



members of Team A may not speak. They must make a clay model of the words on the card and manipulate the clay to show the words. All actions must be shown through the clay.

If Team B guesses correctly within the allotted time – usually 2 minutes – each member of Team B takes a small amount of clay from the member of Team A sitting across from them. (The amount of clay depends on how long you want to play – usually no more than the size of a golf ball)

If Team B cannot guess correctly in the allotted time, the members of Team A take the clay from the other team. Play continues until all the clay is held by one team.

After you have played several rounds, gather the group together and talk about the game. Ask them questions like:

- How hard (or easy) was this to do?
- Did you find it difficult to make the picture in your mind with the clay?
- How well did the other team do at guessing what you were trying to make?
- Did the reality of what you made with the clay match the image in your mind?
- Can you think of other things that are crystal clear in your mind, but then the reality doesn't match at all?

List the following pairs on newsprint and post them around the room:

To be vs. Being

Potential vs. Actual

Essence vs. Existence

Substance vs. Form

Mind vs. Body

IQ vs. Achievement

The Problem of Sin vs. The Miracle of Grace

Have the young people gather and look at the newsprint you've posted. At first, they may have no idea what you are trying to get them to see, but explain that we are going to look at who we are and who we are becoming.

Give a couple of the examples below to get them started and then give each person a marker and have them jot down a short phrase on each piece of newsprint – whatever their first reaction is to the pair of words, or an example that illustrates the tension between that pair, if they can think of one.

### **Substance vs. Form**

Trying to make a drawing of another person. In your mind's eye, you can imagine exactly what the person looks like (substance) but it is impossible, or virtually so, to give that substance form on paper.

### **Mind vs. Body**

Why are we so often shocked by how we look in photographs? How does our mind's image affect how we feel about ourselves? What is the reality?

### **Potential vs. Actual**

How many times have you heard your parents or other adults say, "But she had so much potential!" or "You're so smart, honey, why are you failing geometry?"

After everyone has had a chance to walk around a bit and contribute, gather the group back together and look at the ways in which we sometimes experience a “divided self.” Ask the group to read some of the things they have included on the newsprint.

Pass out Bibles and have students find Romans 7:14-25. Read the passage aloud.

**(Note:** *This passage reads a little bit like a tongue-twister (“Now if I do what I do now want, it is no longer I that do it”), so don’t be surprised if students end up in giggles or completely baffled. The only time I have ever heard this passage make ANY sense when read aloud is when the reader read with kind of a “Yiddish” accent and all of the sudden, I realized that maybe the author was just trying to make a point by restating the same basic principle in several different emphatic ways!)* ☺

This passage of scripture talks about how we often want to do one thing, but end up doing something else. Ask your group some of the following questions:

- Does this passage make sense to you?
- Does the concept of wanting to do one thing, but doing another make sense to you?
- What are some ways in which we want to do the right thing, but fail? (New Year’s resolutions or the last week before exams? Why do we make these “I will do better” promises to ourselves and each other? What keeps us from achieving our goals?)
- What do you think the author of this passage would say to us if we asked him about self-discipline and laziness? Do you think he would say that laziness is a sin?
- Is this problem equally distributed among all people? Why do some people seem to achieve so much more of what they dream?

## Reflection

Aquinas believed that our fallen nature keeps us from realizing our full potential, but that God is perfect and complete. Only by a right relationship with God, through the indwelling Spirit, can our lives be truly transformed.

If we read a bit further in Romans, we see the author of Romans comes to a similar conclusion:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)*

This material may seem a bit lofty – but it’s good to stretch our minds with new ideas. It is important for young people to be reminded that our modern understanding of human nature and selfhood reaches back to the writers of the Scriptures, the Desert Fathers, the great thinkers of our Western Heritage. Certainly Aquinas is one such thinker. His arguments are lucid and profound, but not necessarily easy to understand.

A good resource book for leaders on the thoughts of Aquinas is Brian Davies, *The Thoughts of Thomas Aquinas*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993. Remember as you go through this lesson, that although many young people (or adults!) may have trouble following the writings of Aquinas, most of us can grasp the basic concept and relate to the idea of a divided self.

## Closure

It may be difficult to bring real closure to this discussion. Chances are it will roll into a talk on trying hard and what it means to live a “good” life. One way to bring the session to a close is to ask a question like: “Who can summarize what we’ve talked about today?”

[**Note:** We affectionately call this the “Reader’s Digest Version” and have found this to be a significantly successful tool to use to see how the young people are responding. Ask them to re-tell you the entire lesson – in a condensed way – and see how they do.]

## Closing Prayer

Use either or both of the following prayers:

O God, give us hearts that follow your love. Grant us mercy as we struggle to live according to that love. In everything, in every way, we need your gracious spirit. Thank you for giving it to us so fully and freely. Gracious God, we give thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*

Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give me an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give me an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. *Amen.*

*Prayer by St. Thomas Aquinas*

Lesson Plan update August 2004 by Tracey Herzer

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## Contingency: We Are All Connected

### Goal

To grapple with the nature of existence by touching on St. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of Contingency – that is, that we are all dependent on each other and on God.

### Areas Covered

Self, Spirituality

### Objectives

To remind ourselves that we are all connected

To broaden our understanding of the definitions of community

### Equipment Required

Poster board or stiff cardboard – each person will need a square approximately 12x12"

Staplers (preferably more than one!)

Yarn or string – perhaps several different colors

Pencils or Markers

The Way of the Wolf by Martin Bell (story: *What the Wind Said to Thajir*) – This story is also available on CD, read by the author, as part of the collection of all The Way of the Wolf stories. A great addition to any youth library! Visit [www.barringtonbunny.com](http://www.barringtonbunny.com) for info.

### Guiding Scriptures

Luke 10:29-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan ("Who is my Neighbor?")

### Background

In the J2A lesson *Who I am vs. Who I Would Like to Be* we talked some about Thomas Aquinas, famous philosopher and scholar from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, who said there was a fundamental relationship between potential and actual. In this lesson, we are going to examine another of his theories – the Theory of Contingency. Although this can be a deep theological issue, the basics of this theory is that all of creation is contingent – that is, interdependent – upon each other and more importantly, we are all dependent on God.

### Action

As students arrive, each person should get a piece of poster board and a pencil. Give them the following instructions:

- In the middle of the paper, draw a small stick figure. This will be you.
- Think about all the different groups or people whose lives intersect with yours and begin to draw dots around your figure that you can label – such as family, church, school, choir, neighborhood, soccer team, etc.
- Pull off a section of string 3-4 feet long.
- Staple one end of this string to the middle of the paper, on top of the stick figure.
- Then begin to connect all the dots in ways that show relationships, using the string and stapler. For example, start by stapling the string in the middle of the stick figure. Then stretch the string to the dot for School, stapling it in place there. If you know people from school who also go to your church, connect the newly-stapled string from the School dot to the Church dot. The idea is to create a web of connections and relationships. Use different string or different colors if you need more.

After everyone has worked on their projects for a while, gather the group together and ask people who are comfortable doing so to share their “Web of Life” with the group. Even if someone doesn’t want to explain, they might still be willing to show their web. Note how intricate some of the webs may be and encourage students to think about how many lives their life touches.

Spend a few moments looking at how your group is similar and how it is different. Have everyone start by standing in one group, since presumably they all go to the same church. Then have everyone split into different groups to represent the different schools they go to. Then have a volunteer call out an activity such as “playing soccer”. Anyone who doesn’t play soccer, sits down. Anyone who does play soccer groups according to teams. Then someone calls out another activity. Your class may find out some things about each other they didn’t know previously – like someone who plays the same sport at another school.

After you have played with your web of connections, invite students to lie down and close their eyes or just relax comfortably for a few minutes. Tell them you are going to read them a short story about how our lives are connected and then there can be some discussion.

If you were able to find a copy of “The Way of the Wolf” by Martin Bell, begin this session by reading the short story, *What the Wind said to Thajir* – or by playing the recording of Martin Bell reading the story if you have the CD.

If you were not able to find the story, you can read this passage from the story:

*"You are everyone who ever was and everyone who will ever be. You are the whole of creation – past, present and future. Decisions that you make today, in what we call this present – this here and now – will validate or invalidate everything that has gone before, and make possible or impossible all that is yet to come. Anything that hurts anyone, hurts you. Anything that helps anyone, helps you. It is not possible to gain from another's loss or to lose from another's gain. Your life is immensely important. Everything depends on you."*  
(Used with permission from Martin Bell- August 2004)

After the story, invite teens to sit up and discuss some of the following questions:

- What did you think of this story?
- What were the three great secrets the wind shared with Thajir?
- In what ways does Thajir learn that life is connected?
- At the end of the story, why is Thajir’s mother afraid for him?
- What might happen if we lived our lives aware of how connected we are?
- What do you think of the phrase “Anything that hurts anyone, hurts you. Anything that helps anyone, helps you.” Do you agree or disagree?
- How does this philosophy relate to bigger world issues such as war or famine or oppression?
- How does this philosophy relate to small world issues such as having a new kid at school or how you react to someone who is very unpopular?
- What does it mean “Everything depends on you.” Do you agree or disagree?

## Closure

After you have had a chance to discuss what it means to be connected – invite your group to stand together in a circle, holding hands. Remind them that church is a place where we all belong. When you walk in the doors here, you don’t have to be cool enough, rich enough,

smart enough, ANYTHING enough to belong here. We are the body of Christ – God’s presence in the world. Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing.

### **Closing Prayer**

O God, your unfailing providence sustains the world we live in and the life we live: watch over those, both night and day, who work while others sleep, and grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other’s toil; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Prayer from the service of Compline, BCP p. 134*

New Lesson plan added August 2004 by Tracey Herzer

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# The Johari Window: One Way of Thinking about Ourselves

## Goal

To examine how well we are known and how we present ourselves to the world around us by using a tool called The Johari Window

## Area Covered

Self

## Objectives

To look at the way personality is disclosed

To assess how well we know ourselves and how well others know us

To look at what motivates us to share ourselves with others

## Equipment Required

Newsprint

Markers

Paper

Bibles

## Guiding Scripture

1 Corinthians 13:11-12

## Background

In this lesson, we are going to examine how we perceive ourselves vs. how we are perceived by others and discuss the ways in which we can choose to be known by others.

The basics of the Johari Window theory are included below. They can be a little bit confusing, but we have tried to offer some clear explanations to make things easier. Read over the following material a couple of times and if you still have trouble understanding it, ask someone in your church or community who is a therapist or counselor to help you with it or do some further research online. Try to have a fairly good grasp of the concept so that you can present it clearly to your class. If you would like to – make a copy of the following page to hand out to the teenagers AFTER you have made your initial presentation.

The Johari ("Joe-Harry") Window was invented by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingraham who, as you can see, created the name from their first names. They used this model to look at four areas of personal awareness. The model is divided into four quadrants:

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known to Others	<b>I: Open</b> Things that both you and others know about yourself	<b>II: Blind</b> Things that others know about you but you don't know
Unknown to Others	<b>III: Hidden</b> Things that only you and no others know about yourself	<b>IV: Unknown</b> Things that neither you nor anyone else knows about yourself

Here is a brief explanation of the four quadrants:

**I: Open (Known to Self, Known to Others)** – The Open quadrant are things that are readily apparent - things that you know about yourself and others know about you also. They can be physical attributes such as “I have blonde hair” or interests you have such as “I play basketball” When you first meet someone, the size of this quadrant is very small because they don’t know much about you.

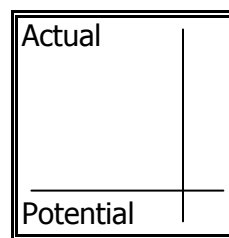
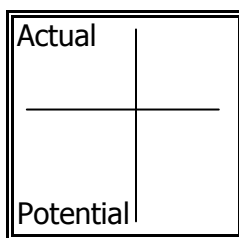
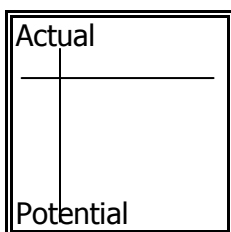
**II: Blind (Unknown to Self, Known to Others)** – The Blind quadrant are things that others know about you, but that you are unaware of. These can be things such as the fact that you have a piece of spinach caught in your teeth, but can also be things like you think that you come across as smart and helpful, but others perceive it as cocky or annoying. It can also be something positive such as other people notice how calm you are under pressure, but you don’t think of yourself that way.

**III: Hidden (Known to Self, Unknown to Others)** – The Hidden quadrant are things that you know about yourself, but others don’t know. For example, everyone may not know what your favorite kind of pizza is. However, if you tell them, this makes your Hidden quadrant shrink a little and your Open quadrant grow a little. The same may be true about the fact that you are sensitive about having red hair. Your sensitivity is hidden until you choose to reveal it. As you get to know and trust someone, you disclose more of your hidden quadrant to them.

**IV: Unknown (Unknown to Self, Unknown to Others)** – there are things that are unknown by everyone – either because they are unknowable or because they have not been discovered yet. For example, talking about being made in God’s image may create new awareness in you, so that even though previously you may have defined yourself as being insecure and others may have described you the same way – now that you see yourself as a beloved creation of God with gifts and abilities, you discover a new confidence you hadn’t known before. A new situation can move information from the Unknown quadrant into another quadrant because it brings out a new side of you.

### Self-Disclosure: Learning to Trust

Over the course of our lives, the goal is to get your “window frame” to progress from a small “actual” window and a large “potential” (babies know very little about themselves, nor do others know much about them) to a larger “actual” window and a smaller “potential” window. How large the actual window gets depends on how much we know and reveal information about ourselves and how open we are to learning about ourselves from others. (See illustration) Have someone in the group read I Corinthians 13:11-12. (“When I was a child, I spoke as a



child...”) Talk about what it



means to grow up and ask about some of the childish things that we have put away. Remind the group that even though we now “see in a mirror, darkly” someday we will know and be known by the One who made us and loves us.

### Action

Describe the Johari Window and how it works (or is meant to work) to the class. Draw the Johari Window on newsprint and give them a brief explanation of the four quadrants. Explain that over time, the windows change – as we learn more about ourselves and are willing to disclose more of our true selves to others.

Hand out paper and markers and ask each person to draw his or her own window. Each window will be different as the teens assess how much they know about themselves, etc.

Have them list in each window a few examples of each type as indicated below:

I’m happy I’m good at sports	Sometimes I feel really sad. I’m smarter than I show my teachers or friends.
Some people say I’m funny – but I just don’t see it.	What my future career will be My potential!

After everyone has had a chance to draw their windows, talk about what makes us want to reveal or disclose more of ourselves. Explain that psychologists generally attribute this to one of three needs that we all have: Affection, Inclusion or Control. As we perceive and develop ways in which these needs can be met or will not be met, we modify our level of commitment, our willingness to share ourselves and our willingness to trust.

Ask your group for definitions of each of the three words. Ask what they think of this idea that these three things motivate us. See if, as a group, you can come up with fictional scenarios of how each of these things might motivate us either to reveal more of ourselves to someone or keep hidden parts of ourselves from someone. Here are some questions for further discussion:

- Which of the three holds the greatest power for you?
- When would the desire to be included motivate you to change your behavior?
- Why is it so much easier to share who you are when you feel loved, liked and accepted?
- How can the desire for control keep us from opening up the Johari Window?
- How can the desire for affection or inclusion keep us from our potential?

### Reflection

After you have discussed some of the ins and outs of disclosure with your group, remind them that one of the tasks of adulthood is to integrate our *private* selves with our *public* selves. The more well-integrated these are, the greater our level of happiness and satisfaction in our lives. It is not always easy to disclose who we are, but it is necessary.

See if anyone in the group would like to share anything from their window or anything they have learned about themselves or others from today’s discussion. Try to use phrases like:

- “Who you are is a gift to me.”
- “If you don’t tell me who you are, I won’t know.”
- “The more chances we take in telling our stories and reaching out to each other, the greater the likelihood of our building a lasting bond between us. It’s worth the risk.”

Close by reminding them that the God of all Creation knows them and loves them – just as they are. If time permits, you may want to read as a group Psalm 139 (“Lord, you have searched me out and known me.”) and if your group has participated in Rite 13, revisiting this special psalm may spark another round of discussion!

### **Closing Prayer**

At the end, gather your group together – stand and hold hands. Use the prayer on the next page or one of your own choosing.

Lesson plan expanded August 2004 by Tracey Herzer

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## Handout: The Prayer of St. Denis

You are wisdom, uncreated and eternal,  
the supreme first cause, above all being,  
sovereign Godhead, sovereign goodness,  
watching unseen the God-inspired wisdom of Christian people.  
Raise us, we pray, that we may totally respond  
to the supreme, unknown, ultimate, and splendid height  
of your words, mysterious and inspired.  
There all God's secret matters lie covered and hidden  
under darkness both profound and brilliant, silent and wise.  
You make what is ultimate and beyond brightness  
secretly to shine in all that is dark.  
In your way, ever unseen and intangible,  
you fill to the full with most beautiful splendor  
those souls who close their eyes that they might see.  
And I, please, with love that goes on beyond mind  
to all that is beyond mind,  
seek to gain such for myself through this prayer.

from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 14th century

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# Why am I doing What I'm doing? Four Relational Stages

## Goal

To examine four relational styles and look at where we fall – as individuals and as a group

## Area

Self, Society

## Objectives

- To understand the four possible ways of relating to the ones closest to us: Dependence, Counterdependence, Independence, and Interdependence
- To discuss the steps that lead to altruism. (We cannot freely give of ourselves if we are not whole and secure.)

## Equipment Required

Poster board  
Magazines  
Scissors  
Glue or glue sticks  
Bibles

## Background

There are four stages in human relationships. We enter the world as helpless infants and, within the context of a healthy family system, we move through all four stages. Hand out the sheet that summarizes the four stages and then introduce the stages to the young people, one at a time.

### Stage 1: Dependence (age: 0 to puberty)

The child is relatively willing to be dependent since the basic needs (food, shelter, affection, socialization) are usually being met at this stage. We begin to shift out of this stage as we learn of more options in the world around us. For example, children begin to not want certain foods – once they are confident that other foods are available. Preteens begin to want to do different activities because they are more aware of what options are available.

- How do children express dependence? What are some things children have to depend on their parents for?
- What happens if people remain in this stage of dependence for too long?

### Stage 2: Counterdependence (age: 10 to 20)

The child resists dependence even though he or she is not yet capable of complete independence. This produces *anger!* Reacting against dependence is not the same thing as independence. In this stage, the child may see himself as being independent or self-sufficient, but the behaviors continue to be dependent and needy.

- How do we express counterdependence?
- What makes us resist dependence?
- Does our modern culture extend this stage (e.g., by delaying marriage, by extending educational opportunities)?

Remind the young people that this is often a time of projection. Questions like, “Why do you hate me?” “Why don’t you trust me?” “Why do you always make me . . . ?” are all examples of the resistance to dependence and the tendency to blame the ones on whom we are dependent for all the pain and discomfort in our own lives. Eventually we take responsibility for our own pain and joy – but not yet. Despite any protestations to the contrary, we are still dependent.

### **Stage 3: Independence (age: 16 on up)**

This stage begins with going to college and/or moving out of the home, but really comes when the young person is earning money – enough to do what he or she wants. The inner change which comes along with economic responsibility is inner responsibility. This doesn’t happen overnight, but the task is clear. We must withdraw our projections, claim and accept our own happiness and sadness, resist blaming others and take responsibility for our lives.

- What are some of the positives of becoming independent?
- What are some of the negatives of becoming independent?

### **Stage 4: Interdependence**

At this stage, a person has the drive and capability of doing many things alone, but also has the wisdom to ask for help when they need it. At this stage, we see our parents as individuals – people in their own right, and not just as someone in the role of parent. In this stage we are able to rely on others. We are able to stand independently, and we can welcome intimacy and true adult love into our lives.

- What do you think interdependence would look like in your life?
- What role might the church play in fostering interdependence?

### **Action**

Set out poster board, magazines, scissors and glue. Have teens work in four teams to create posters that illustrate each of the four stages. If you have less than 8 students in your group, have the entire group work on one poster, divided into four quadrants.

As you work, talk about what stages the group members have been through and what stage they think they are in currently. Ask what they imagine future stages will be like.

After the posters are done, have each group explain why they chose the pictures or words they chose and what they think their stage illustrates.

Set the posters up in the room where they can be seen during the discussion and reflection.

### **Reflection**

Ask the group to think about their own families. Then ask questions such as:

- Where do you feel you are in the stages of relationship with your family?
- If you have siblings, where do you think they are?
- What stage do you think your parents would choose for you? Why?
- What do you think will cause you to move into the next stage?
- How do you think your parents will react to you moving into another stage?
- How do parents move through stages, not just with their children, but also with their parents as well?

Pass out the handout on the four stages of group relationships and give teens a moment to look over the descriptions. Compare and contrast the characteristics as they relate to individuals and

then as they relate to groups. Here are some questions that may be able to help guide your discussion:

- In what ways do you think groups go through these similar stages?
- Can you think of examples of the different stages from different groups you have been a part of?
- How would you characterize our group currently?
- Where do you see us now? Where would you like to see us go?
- What do you think it might take to move us to the next level?
- At what stage would you characterize our church?
- What would have to change to move us into a different level?

## Closure

Today we have spent a lot of time talking about some basic psychological principles, but how does knowing these principles relate to us as a Christian community? In what ways do we behave and in what ways does our Christianity affect our behavior?

Think about some of the characteristics of the first-century church and of some of the very practical group advice Paul often gave to the churches he wrote letters to. If time allows, look up some of the following verses:

- Acts 2:42-47                      Description of the early church
- Galatians 5:22-23              The fruit of the spirit = characteristics of Christian community
- James 1:19                      Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger
- I John 3:18                      Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but in actions
- Ephesians 4:31-32              Put away all malice; be kind to one another

You may wish to choose one of these verses – or another verse your group agree on – to become your group motto, as a reminder of how we will treat one another.

- How can we remind ourselves to treat each other kindly, even as we move through different developmental stages?
- Have we already established some kind of covenant for how we will treat one another?
- If so, how do the items we have included in our covenant relate to what we have learned about groups?
- If we do not have a covenant, is this something our group could benefit from?

(NOTE: See Shared Provisions for sample covenants from other groups)

Close by reading one of the verses aloud as a group. One group used the phrase they so often heard in church as an Offertory Sentence (BCP, p. 376 – adapted from Ephesians 5:2)

*Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.*

## Closing prayer

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent  
Book of Common Prayer, page 218*

Lesson plan expanded August 2004 by Tracey Herzer

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## Handout: Four Stages of Individual Relationships

### **Stage 1: Dependence (age: 0 to puberty)**

The child is relatively willing to be dependent since the basic needs (food, shelter, affection, socialization) are usually being met at this stage. We begin to shift out of this stage as learn of more options in the world around us. For example, children begin to not want certain foods – once they are confident that other foods are available. Preteens begin to want to do different activities because they are more aware of what options are available.

### **Stage 2: Counterdependence (age: 10 to 20)**

The child resists dependence even though he or she is not yet capable of complete independence. This produces *anger*! Reacting against dependence is not the same thing as independence. In this stage, the child may see himself as being independent or self-sufficient, but the behaviors continue to be dependent and needy.

### **Stage 3: Independence (age: 16 on up)**

This stage begins with going to college and/or moving out of the home, but really comes when a young person is earning money – enough to do what he or she wants. The inner change which comes along with economic responsibility is inner responsibility. This doesn't happen overnight, but the task is clear. We must withdraw our projections, claim and accept our own happiness and sadness, resist blaming others and take responsibility for our lives.

### **Stage 4: Interdependence**

At this stage, a person has the drive and capability of doing many things alone, but also has the wisdom to ask for help when they need it. At this stage, we see our parents as individuals – people in their own right, and not just as someone in the role of parent. In this stage we are able to rely on others. We are able to stand independently, and we can welcome intimacy and true adult love into our lives.

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## Handout: Four Stages of Group Relationships

### **Stage 1: Dependence on Others**

The natural place for groups to begin. Group members attempt to clarify expectations and rules. There is often a strong need for group approval and conversation is usually polite, but distant. Conflict is avoided as much as possible. There are no clear goals or objectives and very little sense of group identity. There is a heavy reliance on leaders or authority figures

### **Stage 2: Counterdependence toward Authority**

As group members become more comfortable with each other, they begin to develop stronger opinions and a greater willingness to share them. Group members begin to want a greater voice in decisions and there is often a strong need for clear goals. Sometimes at this stage, some members may express dissatisfaction with the group's dependency on the leaders and some may begin to second-guess or challenge the decisions of the leaders. Some team members participate actively, but some begin to withdraw.

### **Stage 3: Independence of the Group**

At some point, the group may pull away from the leadership and attempt to do some things on their own. In this stage, the group may find that there are many different agendas and ideas and members may become frustrated because no one is following through or because the group can't seem to decide on a unified direction. For some groups, this stage destroys the group because it splinters the group into different cliques who do not communicate or work cooperatively.

### **Stage 4: Interdependence of the Group and the Leaders**

This is the most mature stage and when a group gets to this level, it has revised the relationship between group and group leaders, where all opinions are valued and everyone is encouraged to share in the leadership and responsibility of the group. At this stage, there is a strong sense of group identity and all group members are participating actively and feeling "ownership" in the group. The group is able to agree and negotiate to find common goals and objectives and the work to achieve those goals together.



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## TRYING ON A NEW NAME: An Exercise in Recreating Ourselves

### Goal

To present to each other our secret selves

### Area

Self

### Objectives

To come in costume as the person we hope to be

To share that self with the others through dialogue or role-play

To celebrate our new names and validate each other's dreams

### Equipment Required

Dress up clothes or costumes

Newsprint

Markers

Nametags – preferably the large hanging type

Crayons

Glitter, foam shapes, stickers, feathers, etc. (optional for decoration)

Glue

Plastic beads (optional for decoration)

### Guiding Scripture

Isaiah 62:1-3            "...you shall be called with a new name..."

Colossians 3:10        "... and have clothed yourselves with a new self..."

### Action

The group gathers together to discuss the following questions:

- How do you respond to the question, "Who are you?" How many ways can you answer this question? List as many roles as your group can think of.  
*Examples: I am a teenager, I am a man/woman, I am the son/daughter of \_\_\_\_\_, I am a brother/sister to \_\_\_\_\_, I am a human being, an American, an Episcopalian, a resident of Atlanta, a high school student, a soccer player, a choir member, a boy scout, etc.*
- How many of these things can you exert control over?  
*Can you control who your parents are? Your citizenship? Your gender? Your team memberships? Where you go to school? What activities you participate in?*
- How much control do you think you might have over what kind of adult you will be or what your adult life will look like?  
*Can you control what career you have? Where you work? Who your boss is? How other people act? Who you marry? When you have children? How your children behave?*
- Can you envision several different versions of your adult life?  
*Can you see yourself in different careers? Different kinds of romantic partners? How do you think different choices might lead you in different directions?*

One of the central tasks of growing up is finding and giving voice to the Authentic Self. We all have to learn to manage our lives within the constraints of what we cannot control. But deep down inside, we have a basic need to invent and re-invent ourselves.

We get to choose the kind of life we want to live. We get to choose the way we walk into a room, the way we stand, the way we speak. We get to choose the kinds of clothes we wear, the way our homes are decorated, the friends we entertain.

One of the ways we can figure out who we really are, deep down inside, underneath all the family norms and expectations of society, is by trying on a new self, a new identity, a new name with our friends. That is what this lesson is all about. We are going to take the supreme risk of showing our fantasy self to each other.

Remind the group that we all have parts of ourselves that we don't often show to others. This class is meant to have some light-hearted, silly moments, but it is important that we treat each other with respect and that we take seriously the responsibility implied when someone allows us into their dreams.

Send the group members off to change into their costumes. Agree to meet back together in ten minutes. No one would speak until all the group has returned to the room. Once reunited, each member will introduce themselves. They are to tell the group their new name and a little bit about their new self:

**Example:** "I used to be just an ordinary girl, but then I moved to L.A. and got a complete make-over at Elizabeth Arden and now I am a model. Actually, I have very little time to talk to you – I've got to get to a photo shoot."

"I'm Marine Sergeant Tom Smith. I follow orders. I never liked school all that much, but now in the marines I enjoy learning new things every day. I like being outside and I like learning things that can help keep people safe."

Leaders should encourage the kids to stay in character for as long as possible. Try to get the teens to ask questions or interact as their "new selves", instead of as their "normal" selves ☺ – for example, what would the model want to know about the marine; not what would Janie like to know about Matt.

## Reflection

Gather the group together and distribute the art supplies for making and decorating nametags. This activity will allow teens to focus on something they are doing with their hands, which may make it less scary to open up to the group about their dream identity. Because of this, it should be more than just a simple "write your name on a stick-on nametag" kind of activity. Encourage teens to decorate their new name as lavishly as they like – have supplies such as glitter, sequins, feathers, etc. on hand

If you have the plastic name badge holders that are worn around the neck, you can also have available plastic beads that can be strung onto the string. Remember, the more intricate the project, the more your group members will have to do with their hands and so the less vulnerable they will feel as they reflect on some of the following questions.

- How does it feel to try on a new name?
- How does it make you feel about your everyday name?
- In what ways do you feel different when you are portraying a different you?
- In what ways do you feel the same?
- Are there any small ways you can take aspects of your fantasy self and incorporate that into your everyday self?
- Would you want to do this? Why or why not?
- What is the Biblical significance of changing your name? (See how many your group can think of: Abram/Abraham; Sarai/Sarah; Saul/Paul; etc.)

Remind all group members that sharing our secret selves is a way that we honor the trust we have created within the group. Remind all members that it is NOT appropriate to ever call each other by our fantasy names or tease each other about what has been revealed today. This was simply a chance to try on a new name – and try on an experience as the person you dream of becoming!

### **Closure**

After the group has finished their nametags and their discussion, ask them to stand in a circle, holding hands. Each person should be wearing their new name tag.

Encourage your young people to hold on to their dreams and to remember that they will be able to make lots of choices that will shape the life they will have. We are not static beings; we change and we grow. But no change is possible without risk.

### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God: Thank you that you love us and know us, inside and out. Help us to be who we dream of becoming. Give us the strength to try on new ideas, new clothes, new attitudes. Help us to be true to that inner voice, however distant and hushed it may become. Remind us that we are made in your image and strengthened by your grace in order that we might live lives which satisfy our deepest longings; that being whole, we might be able to serve your people throughout the world. These things we ask in the name of your Son. *Amen.*

Lesson plan expanded August 2004 by Tracey Herzer

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## **ASSERTION: Personal Power & Self Esteem**

### **Goal**

To learn the techniques of assertion

### **Area Covered**

Self

### **Objectives**

To examine different methods of communication

To learn the difference between Assertion and Aggression

To learn how to be assertive

### **Guiding Scripture**

Genesis 18:16-33      Abraham argues with God about saving the city of Sodom

Matthew 18: 15-17      How to approach someone who has wronged you

### **Equipment Required**

Newsprint & Markers (by now they should be practically omnipresent!) ☺

Copies of the Assertiveness Inventory

### **Background**

Learning to be assertive is an important part of becoming an adult. You can expand this unit as much as you feel is appropriate with your teenagers, but this lesson plan will give you the basics. You may wish to see if there are therapists or trainers within your church or community who would be willing to do at least one additional session on Assertiveness Training.

If you are interested in providing this for your group, we suggest that you contact your local high school guidance office; many schools now provide mediation services, and they should be able to help you find someone who is not only trained as a facilitator but who is also trained to work with young people. If you do hire such a person, make certain that he or she is thoroughly familiar with the goals of the Journey to Adulthood Program.

### **Resources for Additional Reading / Research**

If you would like to do some additional reading on this subject, there are many good books available. One that we recommend is Your Perfect Right: Assertiveness and Equality in Your Life and Relationships by Robert E. Alberti and Michael L. Emmons Impact Publishers; Eighth Edition; 2001. Earlier editions may be titled Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Living. There are also workbooks that may be helpful such as The Assertiveness Workbook: How to Express Your Ideas and Stand up for Yourself by Randy J. Paterson, PhD.

### **Action**

Begin the class by writing the word ASSERTIVE on newsprint. Ask your teens what it means to be assertive and write down every response you receive. Then on another sheet of paper, write the word AGGRESSIVE and see what words come to mind for the group. Take one more sheet of paper and write the word PASSIVE and again, see how your group would define this term.

Point out that being ASSERTIVE is a balance on the scale where AGGRESSIVE is at one extreme and PASSIVE is at the other extreme. There is a wonderful comparison chart about these three characteristics that you might wish to print out: <http://mtstcil.org/skills/assert.pdf>

Assertiveness can also be defined as sticking up for yourself. Here are some more guidelines that you can print out or write up on newsprint.

Sticking up for yourself **means:**

- Being true to yourself
- Speaking up for yourself when this is the right thing to do
- There is always someone on your side – you!

Sticking up for yourself **does not mean:**

- Getting back at someone else
- Acting bossy or stuck up
- Saying or doing whatever you want whenever you want

Sticking up for yourself **means that you need:**

- To know who you are
- To be liking yourself
- Skills

### **Assertiveness Inventory**

To get a better idea of how you do with being assertive, we have included a short quiz on the following page. This quiz comes from a booklet called "Systematic Stress Management" by Don R. Powell, PhD and the American Institute for Preventative Medicine. This booklet has many practical tools for stress management. Single or bulk quantities are available from AIPM at 30445 Northwestern Highway, Suite 350, Farmington Hills, MI 48334. Phone: 248-539-1800. Email: [aipm@healthy.net](mailto:aipm@healthy.net)

Hand out copies of the quiz to your teenagers and give them 10-15 minutes to answer the 30 questions contained in the inventory. Then have them total up their scores. The range of scores will fall between 30 and 120. You can evaluate the score using the following scale:

- 30-65: You are generally assertive
- 66-85: You may need to practice to become more assertive
- 86-120: Your lack of assertiveness may be producing unnecessary stress

Encourage teens to look back over any of the situations they would evaluate as stressful and talk about methods for dealing with those situations. Also, Dr. Powell's booklet offers suggestions.

### **Communication styles**

There are many different ways of talking about the ways that human beings communicate, but one way is to look at communication styles. Here are some basic styles: (Again, you may want to write these on a piece of newsprint)

PASSIVE:

- I do not express myself.
- I back down or say nothing.
- I make myself invisible.

**AGGRESSIVE:**

- I blame, label, attack or otherwise behave disrespectfully to the other person while expressing myself.

**PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE:**

- I am silent and let things happen to me
- I let others make decisions for me, and then get angry at them for taking control.

**ASSERTIVE:**

- I express my thoughts, feelings, opinions and/or needs comfortably, without a lot of anxiety, while respecting the needs of others.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

What is my current style?

What style do I use under what circumstances?

What styles do I see others using? How do these affect me?

**Closing: Scriptures to Ponder**

How do you think assertiveness fits into a Christ-like lifestyle? Can you think of scripture passages to support your opinions?

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one." (Matt 18:15-17)

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1)

"Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching." (2 Timothy 4:2)

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## Handout: Assertiveness Inventory

*Using the scale below, circle the appropriate number for each statement. Answer how you would honestly feel, not how you think you "should" feel. Please try to be as honest as possible.*

**SCALE**      1 = At ease, very comfortable      3 = Uncomfortable  
                  2 = Slightly ill-at-ease                      4 = Extremely Uncomfortable

Returning merchandise to a store	1	2	3	4
Making a phone call to a business	1	2	3	4
Asking someone for a favor	1	2	3	4
Public Speaking	1	2	3	4
Talking to someone you consider very attractive	1	2	3	4
Complaining about bad service in a restaurant	1	2	3	4
Hearing feedback or evaluation on something you have done	1	2	3	4
Verbally disagreeing with non-parent adults like teachers or coaches	1	2	3	4
Interacting with people you don't know well	1	2	3	4
Handling personal criticism	1	2	3	4
Questioning someone's judgment	1	2	3	4
Expressing anger	1	2	3	4
Speaking up when you feel slighted or ignored	1	2	3	4
Dealing with rude people	1	2	3	4
Declining an invitation	1	2	3	4
Declining to buy an item from a salesperson	1	2	3	4
Asking someone to stop talking or kicking your seat while in a movie theater	1	2	3	4
Beginning a conversation with a stranger	1	2	3	4
Trying out for a sports team or taking an extracurricular class or activity	1	2	3	4
Telling a friend "no" when they ask you something unreasonable	1	2	3	4
Receiving a compliment	1	2	3	4
Offering constructive criticism to a friend	1	2	3	4
Speaking up in class when you disagree with what is being said	1	2	3	4
Moving to a new school	1	2	3	4
Asking someone for a date / Accepting a date from someone	1	2	3	4
Praising a friend	1	2	3	4
Talking to a friend about your inner feelings	1	2	3	4
Offering to loan someone money	1	2	3	4
Expressing your opinion in a group	1	2	3	4
Expressing anger towards my parents or teachers	1	2	3	4

*Inventory used with permission from Systematic Stress Management by  
Don R. Powell, PhD. and the American Institute for Preventive Medicine.*

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# IDENTITY AND VOCATION

## Goal

To consider how we define ourselves

## Area

Self

## Objectives

- To identify each of the objections (expressed as a negative identity statement) raised by Moses, Jeremiah and Mary in response to God's call on their lives.
- To describe how God helped each one overcome those misgivings and respond to the call.
- To identify, in a story, five common ways of thinking that damage our self-concept and limit our ability to reach our full potential.
- To suggest ways in which knowing God's love will help us to overcome these objections.

## Action

### 1. Opening prayer

Read the following prayer aloud:

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. *Amen.*

*Prayerbook, 5th Century*

*(You may wish to compare this to the Collect for Guidance in the Morning Prayer service, BCP, p 100)*

### 2. Bible study

a. Read Exodus 3:1-15; 4:1-17)

#### Key Questions

- What fears did Moses have, especially about himself, that made him hesitant to respond to God's call?
- How did God answer Moses' objections?
- Have you ever been afraid that you just weren't "up to" (didn't have the skills or experience for) a task that you knew you had to do? What did it feel like? What happened? Was it resolved? How was it resolved?

b. Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

#### Key Questions

- What negative feelings did Jeremiah have about himself that made him hesitant to respond to God's call?
- How did God answer Jeremiah's objections?
- Have you ever felt pushed into a situation by life that you just weren't ready for? What is it like going into new situations that frighten us because of their unfamiliarity?

c. Read Luke 1:26-38

#### Key Questions

- What reservations did Mary have about the role that God was assigning her?
- How did God answer Mary's objections?
- Have you ever felt God was asking you to do something that was going to be difficult for you?



### 3. Overcoming obstacles on the way to a healthy self-concept.

What do we mean by "self-concept"? Our self-concept is made up of the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves. These thoughts and feelings may be positive or negative:

#### Positive

I am attractive.  
I am clever and intelligent.  
I am fun to be with.  
I can do lots of things well.

#### Negative

I am unattractive.  
I am stupid.  
I am dull and boring.  
I can't do anything well.

#### **Key Questions**

- Why is our self-concept so important?
- How might the way we think or feel about ourselves affect our performance?
- Can you give some specific examples of the above?

Self-concept can be extremely important. The way we think and feel about ourselves will influence how happy we are and how much we accomplish in life. It will also predispose us to succeed or fail at a task; the likelihood of success is much greater when I am convinced I can do something than when I doubt I can.

### Five Ways of Negative Thinking

The following are five ways that lead us to a negative self-concept:

1. **All-or-nothing thinking.** You see things in black-and-white terms. If your performance falls short of perfection, you see yourself as a total failure.
2. **Jumping to conclusions.** You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion:
  - **Mind reading:** You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you – and you don't bother to check this out.
  - **Fortune-telling:** You anticipate that things will turn out badly – and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.
3. **Magnification *or* Minimization.** You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or somebody else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny and insignificant (such as your own desirable qualities or the other person's imperfections).
4. **"Should" statements.** You try to motivate yourself with shoulds and shouldn'ts (or musts and oughts), as if you had to be whipped or punished before you could be expected to achieve anything.
5. **Labeling.** Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself ("I'm just a loser!").

## Sample Stories

Have a member of the class read one of the stories. Then have the class identify the types of thinking being done (Alcoholics Anonymous calls these forms of thinking “stinkin’ thinkin”). After the members have correctly identified the form of thinking and explained their answers, ask them to tell how the person might think in a more positive, accurate (less distorted) way.

**Story #1:** Sue thought she had done pretty well on her history test. She thought she might get an A or a B. Instead, she got a D. As she looked at the paper, she thought, “I’m a total failure. I’m so stupid. I never do anything right! I work so hard in school and still *nothing* seems to work out right for me.”

*[Thinking involved: Labeling; All-or-nothing thinking; Magnification.]*

**Story #2:** Mike was lonely and decided to attend a school party. Soon after he arrived, he had the urge to leave because he felt anxious and defensive. He thought to himself, “They probably aren’t very interesting people. Why torture myself? They’re probably a bunch of losers anyway. I can tell they’re losers because I’m so bored. This party’s gonna be a drag.”

*[Thinking involved: Labeling; Magnification; Jumping to conclusions.]*

**Story #3:** Cindy was about to make a presentation before her class. Suddenly, she felt her heart begin to pound. She felt real tense and nervous and she thought: “My God, I’ll probably forget what I was supposed to say. Oh well, my speech wasn’t any good anyway. My mind will blank out. I’ll make a fool out of myself – as usual.”

*[Thinking involved: All-or-nothing thinking; Magnification; Jumping to conclusions.]*

**Story #4:** Matt’s friend, Sarah, called at the last moment to cancel the plans they had made to go to the movie. Matt felt angry and disappointed because he thought: “I’m getting jilted. She must be upset with me about something I did or said. She’s probably never forgiven me for not helping her study for that last test.”

*[Thinking involved: Jumping to conclusions. Magnification.]*

## Summary

The above represent ways of thinking that are basically *distorted*. They frequently arise when we are thinking or feeling negatively about ourselves. That’s okay, we all feel bad about ourselves sometimes, but if we can learn to recognize the distortions, we can learn to challenge them and to overcome them with more accurate and truthful ways of thinking about ourselves.

Knowing we are *known* (thoroughly) and *loved* (in spite of it all) by God can go a long way in helping us face the challenges that life presents us with. There is real security in knowing that God loves us unconditionally and that God offers us God’s strength especially in our weakness.

## Further Activity

- Hand out 3x5 cards to the class.
- Have each member write his or her name on the top of the card.
- The cards are passed around the room from right to left.
- Each member of the class writes on the card a gift, a skill, a talent, attribute or quality that they associate with the member whose name appears on the card. All of these *must* be both kind and true.
- When the cards have made a full circuit of the class (i.e., when each member gets his or her own card back), it will have a list of their own selves as other people see them.
- Each young person reads his or her list out loud.

[**Note:** This exercise will bring home to the young people the reality of their being known. As long as the young people understand that they are to use only *positive* aspects, this is a remarkably affirming exercise.]

### **Closure**

Use the following prayer:

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.*

*Collect for the First Sunday of Advent  
Book of Common Prayer, page 211*

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# USING OUR TALENTS

## Goal

To explore our God-given talents

## Area Covered

Self

## Objectives

To read the parable of the talents

To see how this parable applies to our lives

To identify our own talents and to see how these may be shared as holy gifts

## Equipment Needed

Bibles

3x5 cards

Scissors

## Guiding Scripture Passage

Matthew 25:14-30

## Read Scripture *(5 minutes):*

- Read the parable aloud.
- Ask for a paraphrase of the story. Use dollars or abilities and modern (urban) analogies.

## Discuss Story *(15 minutes):*

- Have a brief, free-flowing discussion of what this story might mean. Some possible ideas for discussion include:
- Resources: trading and bartering and investing.
- Developing talents: nurture, practice, discipline.
- How does fear of failure or punishment affect the ways in which we use our talents?
- What analogy might Jesus use if he were telling this story today? (Investment bankers, stock brokers, etc.)
- What would have happened if one of the stewards had lost all his talents by foolishness, wastefulness or bad investment? What might that steward have said to his master on the day of reckoning? What might the master have said to the steward?
- Is this a story of justice or injustice, fairness or unfairness?
- Why was the master so harsh with the third steward? Was it because of his actions, his attitude, or both?
- How do you think this story applies to the concept of stewardship -- both as an individual and as a church?

## Activity One

- Explain to the group that there are many ways that this story can be understood. The most obvious, of course, is that the abilities which we are given are meant to be used, risked, shared. One can infer from this that the very fact of using our abilities assures their growth.

- A second possible reading (see Frederick Buechner, "Adolescence and the Stewardship of Pain", or the summary in "Ten Teachable Moments") implies that our talents may be not only our assets but also our weaknesses, our liabilities, our sorrows. These are gifts from a loving God as surely as our strengths. If we hide them because we are shying away from the darker parts of ourselves or fearful of an angry God, they can never become our strengths.
- Ask the group what they know about Stewardship. Many people have a negative reaction to this, thinking, "Oh, the church wants money from me again." But in reality, stewardship is about honoring God by offering up small parts of who we are. Yes, some of that is money, but it is so much more! Talk about how we can grow the concept of stewardship to include "time, talent and treasure" – not just money, although that is also important so that the church has the needed resources so it can be equipped to be God's presence in the world.
- Hand out 3x5 cards or strips of paper. Ask the young people to write their talents on one side of the card and their sorrows and pains on the other. Allow five minutes for this activity. Encourage silent reflection on "life so far." Assure the group that no one will see this whole card and restate the premise of trust and responsibility.
- Ask the group members to fold up their cards until they are small enough to hide in the palms of their hands.
- Beginning with the leader, cut the paper in half, share one on your strengths or sorrows with one other member of the group. As you tell your the strength or sorrow, hand them one half of your paper. Invite the other members of the group to do the same. (For example, "I am good at soccer," cutting the paper and giving it away.) Each person should continue this process until every member of the group has received a handful of tiny pieces of paper: icons of the talents of their friends.
- Remind the group that these talents are *holy*. They must be treated gently and with respect. Don't drop them! Don't toss them!

## Closure

After this is completed, ask all the group members to hold the talents in their hands. Put all hands together, palms down, on the table or floor.

## Closing Prayer

Use the following Closing Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you for the generosity of your Spirit. You gift us with abilities and with sorrows. You shower our lives with experiences, each and every one of which invites us to know you. Grant that we, in our weakness may realize new strengths. Grant that we might have the wisdom and the courage to use our strengths to comfort, console, heal and bring joy to the world. Make us mindful of your call to serve and to sacrifice so that on this day and on the last day you will smile when you see us and you will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." All this we ask in the Name of your Son, Jesus. *Amen.*

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# MY PURPOSE STATEMENT

## Goal

To look at what our hopes and dreams are and to think about what our purpose is

## Area

Self

## Objectives

To identify the participants' strengths and desires for life.

To boil down the participants' goals and dreams to a simple statement.

To remind young people: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

## Equipment

Paper

Pens / pencils

## Guiding Scripture

Proverbs 29:18      "Without a vision the people perish..."

## Background

Most of us live very busy, overscheduled lives. When we spend so much time reacting to the everyday things that happen, it doesn't always leave us much time to think about the "big picture" and what we want our lives to be about. In other words, sometimes we spend so much time being reactive to the things happening in our lives that we are not free to be proactive.

The goal of proactive living is to work with a plan and a purpose. Without a purpose, we are left with only two options. We can conform or we can rebel. With a purpose, we can define our objectives and work toward our goals.

This exercise is designed to break down the task of establishing a purpose statement into three manageable steps.

It may be useful to tell the young people that all successful businesses have a "business plan." Banks and investors require it. It is simply not enough to say, "I want to make donuts"; you have to know what kind of donuts, how they're made, where to put the shop and what part of your business will require expert help. You have to consider your own personal strengths and weaknesses (for example, I am good with people, but bad with money – so I will have to hire an accountant).

Our purpose statements change over time. This is not a once-for-all experience. What we know changes over time. What we want changes as we are exposed to new places and things. But, as the Scriptures teach us, without a vision, people perish. And as the old folk adage says, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

## Action

1. Ask participants to describe their ideal world on a sheet of paper. It may help to give them key phrases: peace, food for all, security, an end to poverty, laughter, etc.

If the participants seem to be having trouble, try asking them to list what is wrong with the world as it stands: violence, AIDS, starvation, poverty, war. Once these words are listed, ask them to provide a word with the opposite meaning:

- "Violence" becomes "long life and safety."
- "AIDS" becomes "health."
- "Starvation" becomes "enough food" or "all are fed."

After they have written this down, ask them to underline the *two or three* most important words or phrases in their vision of the perfect world.

2. Ask the participants to list all the things you are good at. Tell them: "Be kind to yourself. Make it a long list!" Have them put the talents and abilities in an active tense (ie – walking, singing, talking, dancing, teaching, etc. instead of walk, sing, talk, etc.)

Ask them to underline the *three* most important words. Underline the words about which you have the greatest sense of assurance – the biggest inner "**Yes**, that's true, that's me. This gives me pleasure."

3. Have the participants list all the things that matter to them personally and for which they are willing to work.

**Examples:** nonviolence, spending time with family and friends, writing a book, working for justice, prayer, a relationship with Jesus.

Underline the two or three words or phrases that are most important to you, most central to your sense of well-being.

4. Using the following fill-in-the-blank sentence, have the young people assemble their Purpose Statement on a 3x5 card. Insert words or phrases from sections 1, 2 and 3 in the appropriate blanks.

The resulting statement will help young people know:

- This is what I want.
- This is how I will accomplish it.
- This is how it will benefit the world.

### Purpose Statement

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name)\_\_\_\_\_, by \_\_\_\_\_(3)\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_(3)\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_(3)\_\_\_\_\_, through my  
\_\_\_\_\_ (2)\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_(2)\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_(2)\_\_\_\_\_, will work so that all may (may have)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1)\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_(1)\_\_\_\_\_.

### Reflection

Below are examples of three finished statements:

I, Fred, by spending time with my family, doing creative writing and teaching, through my teaching, reading aloud and taking photographs, will work so that all people may have justice and peace, joy and laughter, respect for one another and no pain.

I, Daniel, by my contemplative presence, my nonviolence, and my friendship with Jesus, through my praying, my teaching and preaching, my caring and my organizing, will work so that all people may live together in peace and share in the goodness of creation.

I, Anna, by my prayers, my presence, and the clarity of my voice and vision, through my painting and my writing, will work so that all people may safely laugh and cry, work and play, and sleep deeply, knowing that they are loved and cared for.

Needless to say, these are the statements of adults, but this exercise works with young people. There are no right or wrong purpose statements. We offer to God who we really are, in all our idiosyncratic joy, and we ask for what we want. These are holy offerings. These are sweet incense to the throne of God.

You may invite the young people to read their statements to one another. If they agree, cheer, applaud and generally celebrate their purposes. Try to remember how risky it was to want to be or do or accomplish anything when you were 15. Celebrate their wisdom and their dreams.

### **Closing Prayer**

Grant, O Lord, that, with your love, I may be big enough to reach the world, and small enough to be one with you. *Amen.* *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*



**J2A Lessons**

**Society**

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## WALK IN LOVE: Creating a Community Covenant

*\*\* We suggest this lesson at the beginning of the first year. You will also need to revisit it at the beginning of the second year and possibly at times in between, as your group grows and changes. \*\**

### Goal

To work as a group and develop a code of behavior that will govern all activities and interactions of the group when they are together.

### Areas Covered

Society, Spirituality

### Objectives

To examine the nature of Christian Community

To agree on how we will treat each other in this Christian community

To set norms of agreed-upon behavior

### Equipment Required

Newsprint

Markers

CD or cassette player (optional)

Recording of Aretha Franklin's song "Respect" (optional)

Bibles

### Guiding Scriptures

Acts 2:42-47 (Description of the early Church)

I John 3:18 – "Let us love not in word, but in deed and in truth"

I Thessalonians 5:12-22 – Be at peace among yourselves; rejoice always; pray without ceasing..."

### Background

If your group was together previously in the "Rite 13" section of the program, the concept of developing norms on how we treat each other will probably have been something they have done before. In any case, it is always a good idea to start out each new year by looking at how this particular community wants to be defined and what behavior is appropriate or inappropriate.

In the Journey to Adulthood program, we are trying to help the young people grow into their responsibilities, and creating a community covenant is one way to do that. Instead of "class rules" that a teacher hands down, this is truly a group effort where the teen voices count equally with the adult voices. This means that if a teacher puts forth a suggestion of "The class should always remain completely silent while I am pontificating. Bowing is optional" the young people are free to say, "Um, we can't live with that." But then to be fair, if the teens think that having Sunday School in the dark or hanging from the rafters would make for a unique learning experience, the leaders can say, "Um, we can't live with that." The point is to communicate and negotiate to define your community.

### Action

One way you could begin this session is to play "Respect" by Aretha Franklin. We found this music virtually impossible to ignore and a surefire way to get some kind of a response from your teens. If

you choose to use this song, let it play in its entirety and then ask the group what the song is about... at the very least, they should be able to come up with "respect" 😊

While it is true that some relationships are better at inspiring respect than others, this is an important topic of conversation to have with your group. If you choose not to play the song, simply begin the discussion by talking about what it means to respect someone and what it means to be respected.

Pass out Bibles and have volunteers read the above scriptures. Ask what these passages indicate about the early church or about Christian community in general. See if the young people can think of other scriptures that give advice on how we are to treat each other.

With all of this as background, enter into a discussion about how this particular group is going to live together. Try to get your group to dream a little bit... how should a Christian community look different from a school or other kind of community? Here are some questions to help your discussion:

- In school, what are the things that determine if you are accepted or not?
- In church, what are the things that determine if you are part of the group?
- What are some of the pressures you find in your life – being cool enough? Smart enough? Rich enough? Athletic enough? Driving the right car? Having the right friends?
- What would it feel like to have a place where you could escape all that – to a place where you belong, as soon as you walk in the door?
- Does anyone remember that old TV show Cheers? Their theme song was "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name..." What would that feel like? Is that your experience of church? If not, where DO you experience that kind of acceptance?
- How can our group be an oasis from the rest of your day-to-day life? How can we mark this time as different, special, sacred?
- Are there rituals that might help us – such as lighting a candle, ringing a bell, starting with a song or closing with a special prayer? What else can you think of?

Take any and all suggestions from your group. Write everything up on newsprint – tell them they can evaluate everything later – for now, we are just brainstorming and we want to hear every idea.

After the brainstorming, begin to group similar ideas together and use that to create a written Community Covenant. Some groups have long Community Covenants and some groups have very short covenants. At the very least, here are a few things that need to be included in your discussions:

### **GUIDELINES ABOUT RESPECT**

- 1. Respect for each other:** listen to each other; treat each other kindly; welcome the stranger, honor boundaries and personal space, respect different opinions, this is a place where everyone belongs and is welcomed.
- 2. Respect for yourself:** say what you need to say – this is safe space; you are no longer children, so ask for what you need; don't be afraid to disagree with the rest of the group; be true to who you are – this is a safe place to find and use your voice!
- 3. Respect for God and for this holy place:** how can we make our time together a priority (remember the Sabbath); remember who you are and WHOSE you are; honor our space; be honest with God; "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)

## **GUIDELINES ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY**

- 1. Safe Space:** If this is going to be “safe space” for this group, we need to honor what is said here. Groups used to say “What’s said in this room, stays in this room”, but that can lead to a secretive atmosphere that isn’t necessary. What I usually used with my group was the phrase “You are free to tell your story (what you contributed, what your reactions were, what you learned, etc.) – you are not free to tell someone else’s story without their permission.” This seemed to be easily understood and worked well for my group.
- 2. Boundaries** – As a sidebar, it is always important for adult leaders to maintain appropriate boundaries and a certain transparency. I told my group right from the beginning that I was giving them permission to repeat anything I said in the group to anyone they chose. That made me stay very aware of what I was saying and also gave them an easy way to talk to parents about the class, without revealing specific stories of their classmates.

Whatever your group decides on, take the newsprint notes home and transfer them neatly onto a poster board that will hang in your room. (If you do not have dedicated space, find a safe place to store your covenant and bring it out each time your group meets.)

Bring back the poster the following week and have the group look it over to make sure it accurately reflects the group’s decisions. Ask each member to sign their name on the covenant, pledging their willingness to live by these guidelines. Having this in the room helps the group monitor itself and keeps the leaders from having to act so much like “behavior police”. When visitors come, ask someone to give a short synopsis of the covenant and ask the visitors to abide by the guidelines. If a new group member is added, they should be asked to add their signature to the covenant.

## **Covenants vs. Contracts**

You also may wish to discuss with your group the difference between a Covenant and a Contract. A contract is between two people – if one person fails to live up to their part of the agreement, the contract is broken. A Covenant is between one or more person and God – which means that even if one person breaks their covenant on a certain day, the rest of the group is still obligated to live up to their covenants. Also, it means that even if you broke the terms of the covenant on one day, you get another chance to try again. (“God’s mercies are new every morning” – Lamentations 3:23)

It is also important to realize that a covenant is a living, breathing thing that can be changed as your group changes. If you find that it’s not working, go back and revisit it. This is part of how we learn to be an authentic Christian community – even when we have to negotiate! ☺

## **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 with 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.

*Prayer for the Human Family, BCP, p. 815*

New lesson plan added August 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## SENDING A POSTCARD: Feeling the Faith

*\*\* This is a good way to begin the second year of J2A and help the group reconnect. It was originally in the "Sexuality" section when lessons were intended to be used in a precise order, but since that is no longer true and it has more to do with society than sexuality, we moved it back to this section. \*\**

### Goal

Helping the group reconnect by sharing stories

### Area

Society, Spirituality

### Objectives

To reinforce the role of storytelling in our common life

To understand that our memories fuel our faith

To reconnect with each other by telling our stories

### Guiding Scripture

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

### Background

Frederick Buechner, (pronounced "BEEK-ner") is a wonderfully witty and wise writer and minister, says, "Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat." (from *The Clown in the Belfry*) For most of us, these two sentences jar our whole conception of faith. We want to believe that faith is a magic property which infuses our lives with joy and strength, and perhaps it does; but according to Buechner, faith also shows up in the quiet ache we feel for things (or people) we can no longer see and touch. We hold them: alive, true and with us, by our feeling of faith.

For young people, this concept can be introduced by explaining that when we feel a longing for a place we've been, or a feeling we've had for a friend, a moment, a parent, when we wonder to ourselves about that other place or person or experience, we are feeling faith.

As we see in the scripture passage listed above, the writer of the Letter to Hebrews tells us that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." But that won't mean much to us until we identify an emotional marker for our experience, for our feeling. We need a lighthouse to assure us. We need a road sign to remind us we are on the right path.

Each of us has a memory, which when it comes up, brings with it the sense of longing. Whether it is mundane or sublime, we have it, and we know the feeling. Faith is what brings contentment to that longing. We read a story in the bible and we have faith that Jerusalem is still there. We remember a life-changing vacation near the ocean where we gathered up rocks that became touchstones for our memories. We think about the story with longing and we wonder with faith "Are there still rocks on that beach?"

Once we are removed from the original experience in time and space, we must believe, we must have faith that it still exists. This, then, is one of the fundamental problems of our religious experience. We must maintain a true faith in what we cannot see. We cannot see the historical Jesus, but we can hold onto the longing which that reality stirs in us by faith. It is not

so much that we want to live in endless longing – but rather, that our longing reminds us of the truth of our experience. And faith encourages us to hold onto the truth despite the distance of time and space.

There are many ways to encourage and nurture faith in individuals and in community, but the one we will be looking at in this lesson is participation in faith by telling its story.

As each member reveals their memory, in that sharing of the place they would like to have stayed, lingered, or return to, the young people recreate the moment for the group. By showing it to the group, they validate their true experience – much in the way that the disciples gave their testimonies of faith in the Acts of the Apostles – and as they speak, that funny feeling gurgling around the room can be defined as faith.

When the stories of the New Testament were first told, it was for this purpose: for faith. The men and women who had seen the Christ, walked with him, learned from him, all felt a certain lump in the throat, so they told their stories. And by telling their stories, they create a lighthouse for others to follow... even for generations not yet born. They put up sign markers and prayed that they (and those who were to follow after them) would always remember.

Faith comes, the King James Version tells us, by hearing. Hearing each others' stories builds community, builds trust, builds bridges of love and affection that span time and space and generation.

**[Note:** It is interesting to remember that the children of Israel were always being reminded to remember their God. One of the "enemies" of faith is forgetfulness. Our lives and our faith are enriched by the telling of our own stories and by remembering with others the rich details of their lives.]

### **Action**

Find a special way to welcome back your group to a new year.  
Share a meal. Play some music.

Tell your stories and reconnect.

Ask each group member to create a "verbal postcard" of something special from their summer vacation to share with the rest of the group. This should be the "The Reader's Digest Version" (condensed and to the point) but try to find a way to recreate for the group a moment which they would most like to return to.

Encourage them to carefully use their words to clearly describe the place, the scenery, the feelings.

If some of your young people have trouble with this exercise, you can ask some guiding questions to help them fill in details. Try questions such as:

- What did you do with your summer vacation?
- Was it a good break for you from school?
- What was your favorite day? (or best moment?)
- What made it a good day?
- What was the weather like?
- Who else was there?
- What did you do?

- How were you feeling?

In order to set the tone, a leader should begin and might say something like one of the examples below:

**Example:** I love to grow things, especially flowers and vegetables. I spent several hours a day in my garden. While I'm there, I forget about all my problems, and my mind is very still. I love the feeling of my hands deep in the cool earth, how it smells. I love to feel the warmth of the sun and how the breeze flows all around me.

**Example:** I went to London, and while I was there I went to the whispering gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral. While I was there I listened to the voices which wrapped around the gallery. I thought of my friends and the way that their voices wrap around my life.

**Example:** I stayed home this summer, but it was nice to just have everyone at home more. There were days when my husband and kids drove me crazy, but I remember one afternoon we were all home and we decided to get in the car and go get some ice cream. For once, no one was arguing about who sits where or where we had to be next. Everyone just laughed and enjoyed their treat. I loved how much we felt like a family.

It is important for everyone to participate in this reconnecting exercise, so make sure everyone gets the chance to speak. As always, leaders must remind everyone to listen carefully and encourage all present to give their attention to the one speaking. The group must imagine they have just received this postcard in the mail. It deserves their attention.

Leaders should encourage the long-winded to choose highlights and to get to the point – encourage them lovingly, but firmly. One of our students had “the best summer of her life” and wanted to enthusiastically share each and every moment with us! We reminded her that she only had a postcard, not a journal! And she only had postage for one! She laughed and did a good job editing!

Also, leaders need to help the less verbal or those who “didn’t go anywhere this summer” to share a moment when they laughed or cried or took a dog for a long walk or got a letter from a far away friend. Always encourage the Story!

After each young person has had a turn, the leaders are to do a wrap-up during which they engage the young people in the ideas expressed in the Background section of this lesson plan. It may be helpful to have the young people read the verse from Hebrews. It may also be worthwhile to ask them to consider which stories from the Bible they hold most dear.

In explaining the concepts above, the leaders should do their best to include examples from the stories the group has just told, thereby reminding them, actively, that their stories have been heard and will be remembered. This sort of reflective listening is very helpful with young people.

When a young person says, “I got a letter from my best friend in the world, and I can’t say why, but it made me feel really good,” leaders should be quick to respond with something like, “The letter made you feel good.” The young person will answer, “Yes, I felt good.”

This sort of exchange, so simple and so necessary, gives the young person the sense that what they say, you hear. And also, because it is nothing but a reflection – not a question, not an

interpretation – it reminds young people that their feelings and expressions are adequate. They do not need to be clever, and neither do leaders. They need to tell their stories, and they need to know we are listening.

### **Closure**

End the session with the following prayer:

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer, page 140*

Updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer



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# HOW TO GET WHAT YOU NEED: Power, Authority & Negotiation

## Goal

To identify the various types of power and authority and how people use them

## Areas Covered

Self, Society

## Objectives

To examine the nature and interrelationship of power and authority

To clarify our ideas about power and authority by reference to the teachings of Jesus

To develop negotiating skills that help us deal with power

## Equipment Required

Newsprint

Markers

## Preparation

Before you begin the following sessions that deal with negotiation, we recommend that you read this book: Roger Fisher, William Vry and Bruce Patton *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 2nd Edition, 1991).

Out of this reading, you may wish to do some straight didactic teaching. Pay particular attention to Chapters 2-5: "The Method" and Section V: "The 10 Questions". This is a wonderful book and we found it absolutely invaluable in preparing for this lesson.

## Background

Power may be defined as "the ability to make decisions." Another definition is "the ability to effect change." All of us have power at some stage of our lives. For example, the driver of a car has the power to decide where to go and at what speed to drive. However, the driver's power is circumscribed by the rules of the road – as he or she may find out when the police pull the car over for speeding or for driving on the wrong side!

Power also has a shadowy side; the decisions or the changes that power makes possible may be either good or desirable. The English statesman, Lord Acton, summed this up in a famous passage:

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favorable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against the holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. ***Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*** Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority. . . . There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.

The only being who is exempt from the corrupting influence of power is God. Nevertheless, God's power did change from an Old Testament God of wrath to a New Testament God of love. And God can show God's dark side. As the prophet Isaiah puts it: "I form light and create

darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things." (*Isaiah 45:7*) Ultimately God's power is manifested in the crucified Christ as well as the Christ resurrected in glory.

Because of the corrupting influence of power, all power has to be circumscribed and the genius of the United States' Constitution is that it does circumscribe, through a series of checks and balances, the power of any individual or any branch of government. The power derives from the authority which is conferred by the people. When one branch of government becomes too powerful, corrective measures generally come into play.

In dealing with power, one is almost always forced into a position of negotiation. The great abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, recognized this when he said in a speech on August 4, 1857: "Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never did and it never will." This need to negotiate derives from one salient fact: the person who has power can make the decisions that will bring about the kind of solution or program that the petitioner is seeking.

This exercise looks at some of the ways power and authority are expressed, both in Jesus' ministry and in the way we live out our lives.

### **Action**

Begin your discussion by seeing how many different kinds of power your group can name. Make a list on newsprint. Here are some of the types that we came up with:

- political
- economic
- sexual
- military
- spiritual
- physical
- moral
- emotional

Ask your group what kind(s) of power the following people might have:

- the bishop or judicatory head
- the clergy of a church
- the church's governing board
- your parents
- your teachers in school
- the principal of your school
- the CEO of a corporation
- a policeman or policewoman
- the governor of your state
- the President of the United States

### **Bible Study**

In this part of the exercise, select the questions that you wish to raise. (The only piece that we do feel is vital and which should not be omitted is the dialog between Jesus and Pilate. You might even consider reading this in a dramatic fashion by assigning different parts or have readers stand in different parts of the room to read their part.)

The following quotation from the autobiography of the brilliant Irish writer, Christopher Nolan, may be used to highlight Pilate's attitude about power. Nolan has been a quadriplegic since birth. In this passage he describes the efforts of his parents to get him into a normal school:

*Credited with an above average intelligence, he now sought a school masterful enough to accept a silent cripple on their roll call of normal, perfect-featured boys and girls. Ranted refusals sacked Joseph's lovely glad life of messaged massiveness when he heard his parents accept that assessed, crippled boyhood could not be hors d'oeuvre on the menu of a normal, flashy school. Dear oh dear, what would the parents think if they saw a cripple in the same cast as their darlings, chorused Joseph's fears as he desperately listened to Nora speaking on the telephone to the headmaster of a local comprehensive school. "I'm prepared to have him," said the headmaster, "but someone always vetoes his application whenever his name comes up for consideration at our board meetings." Someone always vetoes his application, thought Joseph, and his mind addressed the treasured sanctum of a board meeting: someone always vetoes; someone normal; someone beautiful; someone blessed by normality; someone administering the rusty mind's rules of yesteryear; someone male – cigar-smoker perhaps; someone ruddy-faced with health; someone female – a skeleton in her cupboard, never give a sucker an even break; someone Christian worst of all, boasted ascetic, one of the head-strokers – poor child, God love him, ah God is good, never shuts one door but he opens another; someone genuine not able to bend the rules to match the need; someone satanic reveling in the sufferings of others; someone versed in the art of saying no; someone who had too many nos in their childhood; someone able to say no to a dumb cripple...someone always says no.*

Christopher Nolan, *Under the Eye of the Clock* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pages 12-13.

- What limitations does power have?
- How do you understand power, in terms of accepting or rejecting it?
- Has there been a time in your life when you felt truly powerless? What did it feel like?
- Where do you have power?
- Where do you have no power?

## **Power in the Congregation**

Let's talk about how power works in the church. For example, if the J2A group decides to redecorate their room – who would they have to talk to in order to get permission:

- Clergy?
- The church's governing board?
- Junior Warden?
- Senior Warden?
- Church youth coordinator?
- Director of Christian Education?
- Sexton?
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
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- Who in the congregation has the power to make the decision to redecorate their room?
- Where does power, authority and accountability reside in the congregation?

- Regardless of who officially should have the most power, who do you see in your church as being “in charge”? Who has the most power?
- How do decisions get made or approved?
- Who has more power – the congregation or the clergy?
- Do you have a voice in your congregation?

## Role Play

To get the young people used to the concepts of power expressed above, have them do two role plays. The scenario is that they wish to redecorate their room and have to negotiate this.

### Role Play #1

The Rev. Dennis Decisive is the primary clergyperson and he is known for being a man of clear, decisive action. The trick in approaching him, however, is that he is very busy and often makes quick decisions, based on his initial gut reaction. How would the young people approach him?

### Role Play #2

The Rev. Peter Passive is the primary clergyperson. He has decided that the matter must be decided by the church’s governing board. The board, in its infinite wisdom, has appointed a subcommittee to examine the issue and to report back at next meeting. The subcommittee’s recommendation will be adopted by the board. The young people have to negotiate with subcommittee. The subcommittee is made up of the following people:

- **The Rev. Peter Passive.** Peter is always willing to go along with the majority. He supports the young people in principle but does not want to be seen to oppose the “powers that be” in the congregation. Decision making is not his long suit.
- **Ms. Susan Superintendent.** Susan is the Director of Christian Education and a strong supporter of the entire youth program.
- **Mr. Henry (“Hank”) Handyman.** Hank (and he likes to be called Hank) is the Junior Warden, and as such is involved in most decisions. He has his little control issues – he always wants to know how every renovation in the church fits into the “master plan” (which does not actually exist).
- **Mr. Edward M. Establishment.** This is Mr. Establishment’s sixth term on the board. He has served three terms as Senior Warden and confidently expects to serve a fourth. He is in his mid-seventies and was baptized, confirmed and married in this church and expects to be buried here – sometime in the far, far distant future. He still cannot quite get over the previous clergy’s moving the altar away from the east wall of the sanctuary. He has a beloved granddaughter who is currently in Rite-13.
- **Ms. Melinda Mysterious.** Melinda has been in the congregation five years and this is her first elected term on the board. She always listens attentively but asks very few questions on her own. She keeps her opinions very much to herself although, once her mind is made up, she generally will not budge from that position. She started to teach the previous J2A class, and enjoyed it, but decided to drop out of this activity when she was appointed to the board to fill an unexpired term.

## Reflection

- Did the J2A class get permission to repaint its room? Why or why not?
- What was the major difference between negotiations in Role Play #1 and Role Play #2?

- Who do you think was the principal person who had to be convinced in the second role play? Did that person's opinions affect the other committee members? What did the others do when that person was finally convinced (or when he or she refused to be)?
- How did the participants feel about the power they had been given? Did the ones who had to ask for permission feel that they had any power?
- If they had to do negotiation over again, what would they do different and why?
- How useful is role play in preparing for a genuine negotiation in the "real world"?

## Supplementary Exercise

### Monopoly: How to Play an Old Game in a New Way

Monopoly is a tried and true favorite. It is so much fun, and, for our purposes, seems to be able to engender an enormous amount of enthusiasm and emotional investment which are crucial in practicing negotiation skills. It would be easy to negotiate if the only issues were ones in which we felt little or no investment. But, in fact, we get caught up in the game (the game of life that is) and, before we know it, every move seems inexorably linked to our self-worth and well-being. Ah, see how important the skills of negotiation become!

In the J2A version of Monopoly, one leader agrees to be an absolutely and unequivocally Benevolent Benefactor; in other words, a loving Redeemer. This player willingly offers help: dollars, free rides on his or her own property, encouragement and advice. This player never criticizes any action of another player and never engages in escalating the arguments. Rather, this player works to maximize personal investments and shares the wealth. The individual should not reveal his or her own Benevolence too early in the game. Just play along, buy property and railroads, build houses and hotels. But, when the first player falls into financial difficulty, the Benevolent one might simply say: "Tell me what you need." For the Benevolent player, the goal is not to win but to share the wealth.

Allow for endless negotiation – even about how long the negotiations are taking. Free rides, private loans, trades and "wheeling and dealing" are all allowed. Put \$500 in the center. Put all payments through Chance and Community Chest cards in the center as well. Enjoy!

## Closure

Use one of the following prayers:

Remember, O Lord, what you have wrought in us and not what we deserve; and, as you have called us to your service, make us worthy of our calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Proper 1, Book of Common Prayer, page 228*

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.*

*Proper 17, Book of Common Prayer, page 233*

Lesson updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## Handout: Power and Authority

Have participants respond to two theme questions and then look up relevant Gospel passages and answer the other questions which follow.

### Theme Questions:

- What is the relationship between power and authority?
- How is that relationship expressed in your experience?

### Luke 7:1-10

- What is the centurion's concept of power and authority as expressed above?
- How does this fit in with Jesus' concept of power and authority?
- What kind of power does Jesus exert here?
- Can anyone have power if we doubt his or her ability to exercise it?
- How does this square with your experience in "the real world."

### Mark 6:1-6

- What kind of power and authority do all Christians have?
- Do you feel, as a Christian, that you have this power? Why or why not?
- If you felt you really had this power, how would you use it?

### Luke 9:1-6

- What kind of power and authority are conferred by Jesus on the twelve?
- How does this relate to your answers above?

### Luke 24:45-49

- What is the difference in the power conferred by Jesus here and in the above passage?
- What kind of power did Jesus possess?
- What kind of power did the authorities that crucified Jesus possess? The Sanhedrin? The Roman soldiers? The Roman governor, Pilate? The mob?

### John 19:9-11

- What is Pilate's concept of power?
- What is Jesus' concept of power?
- What is the difference between the two concepts?

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# **RULES, RULES, RULES: Who Makes the Rules?**

## **Goal**

To talk about the definition of good rules and bad rules and then to consider how rules or laws affect our roles and/or our place in the community

## **Area Covered**

Society

## **Objectives**

To examine the nature of rules/laws and who they serve

To remind ourselves that the best rules and laws serve both the ruled and the ruler

To begin a discussion of social justice, civil disobedience and avenues for effecting change

## **Equipment Required**

Bibles

3 x 5 cards

Pencils or pens

Newsprint and markers

## **Guiding Scriptures**

Deuteronomy 30:16

Psalms 19:7-14 (Caeli enarrant)

I John 5:1-4

Matthew 11:28-30

## **Action**

Pass out a 3x5 card and pens or pencils to each group member. Ask each person to write on one side of the card one or two "Good Rules" from his or her family. Then have them write one "Bad (I-can't-believe-this-is-a-rule) Rule" on the other side. Allow a few minutes for this activity. Discourage talking while everyone is thinking and writing.

## **Talking about "bad rules"**

Start by going around the room giving each member a chance to reveal the "stupidest" rule in their house. Ask for teens to tell a brief story about a time when they learned the rule or broke the rule. You will probably find that teens love this exercise and will eagerly explain their parents' "stupid" rules with great drama!

Teenagers often use derogatory words like "stupid" when they are frustrated about something or don't understand the reasoning behind it. As the adult, try not to get sucked into a long discussion about a particular family rule. Keep your answers somewhat vague and just reflect back what you hear (ie "I can hear how annoyed you are by that rule") rather than agreeing or fueling the teen's frustration (ie – "You're right! That's a dumb rule. I can't believe your parents made that rule!") Remember the point of this exercise is to help teens think through potential reasons behind rules. The point is NOT to bash a certain parenting style or the decisions a particular parent has made.

Use some of the following questions in your discussion:

- Who made this rule?
- Did you have any say in its origin or implementation?
- Who is served by this rule? Whose life is enhanced by its presence?
- 

**Example:**

"I'm not allowed to use the downstairs bathroom."

"Why?"

"Because my mom says so."

"Can anyone use that bathroom?"

"Only guests."

"What about your dad? Can he use it?"

"Nope. Mom says she doesn't want to clean it – which is pretty stupid because I'm the one who has to clean it every Saturday."

"Who is served by this rule? The ruler or the ruled?"

"The ruler!"

"Are you sure? Are you ever served by it? Like when your friends come over?"

End each Bad Rule by taking a vote. How many say it is a good rule? A Bad rule?

**Note:** You may wish to list all the rules on a chalkboard or newsprint. It is always good to write things down where all can see them so that ideas are reinforced silently. Make two columns, Good and Bad, and keep track.

After each member has shared his or her Bad Rules, ask the teens to open their Bible to the laws of Moses as expressed in Leviticus (Have the group research chapters 5, 11, 12, 15, 18, 20 and 25. If time permits, add chapters 6, 13, 17, 19, 23 and 26.)

Working in teams, ask teens to find what seems to them the strangest, dumbest, or generally most outrageous laws they can find in these scripture passages.

Read the laws they have selected aloud. Ask some of the same questions which were asked about the home rules, but you may want to add things like:

- These laws may sound strange and ridiculous to our ears, but in what ways did they unite the community?
- How did they work to define the Hebrews as a holy ("set apart") people?
- How do you think the people felt about these rules?
- Do you see any remnant of these rules in our society today?
- How do these rules relate to the Ten Commandments or to the greatest commandment that Jesus gave in Matthew 22:36-39?
- Do you think these rules are still valid today? Why or Why not? How does their validity influence your thoughts about the reliability or infallibility of scripture?
- Do you think this should be part of the discussion in deciding if the Bible is the literal word of God? Why or Why not?

**Ok, now let's talk about good rules**

You may find that the teens have trouble thinking of any good rules at all. Ask about:



- Curfew times?
- Bed times?
- Having members of the other gender in your homes when no one else is home?
- Can they spend time with you in your bedroom?
- Are certain rooms off limits in your house?

In what ways are these good rules? Who is served? What fears and concerns motivate the rule makers? (Leaders may want to share their own house rules, and the motivations behind them.)

**[Example:** For one particularly difficult semester when my daughter was in high school, I instituted the “Twenty-Four-Hour Rule.” Plans for a date or party couldn’t change radically in the last 24 hours. At the time, this seemed very reasonable to me because she couldn’t drive yet, and I was constantly having to re-arrange my schedule to accommodate her ever-changing social life. Ask the group to argue for and against this rule. My group argued that this was good for the ruler but awful for the ruled – she couldn’t help it if her friends kept changing plans, etc]

### **What defines a Good Rule or a Bad Rule?**

Remind teens that sometimes rules that seem bad are really motivated by good reasons, but that the best laws are good for both the ruler and the ruled.

Ask them in what ways is God served by our obedience to God’s rules? The answer is that God wants a relationship with us in which God’s true nature of love can be seen and experienced by us. Sin and disobedience breed fear; they keep us from a right relationship with God. (Adam and Eve would understand what it feels like to sneak into your house when you have broken curfew!)

### **Summary**

All social groups have rules. They make it possible for us to live together with some understanding of the expectations and requirements of community. Some rules are clearly spoken, some are not. In order to function well inside a system, participants must know what it is expected of them. This applies in families, churches, work places. It is wise to learn how to ask about the rules. What is expected of me?

Some management consultants say that the four most important questions a new employee can ask are:

- What can I do without asking?
- What can I do if I ask my supervisor?
- What tasks are completely outside the range of my responsibility?
- What benefit(s) can I expect if I fulfill all my responsibilities?

These same questions are useful in family life and in churches, where we often are not clear about responsibilities, boundaries and other expectations.

- How could the above questions help you in family or church life?
- What other questions do you think would be important to ask?

It may also be helpful in your discussion to remind young people that many families are now being labeled as “dysfunctional.” Ask the group what they think the word “dysfunctional” means

and what a truly dysfunctional family looks like. Point out that all families have problems and will sometimes hurt each other or fail to communicate effectively.

However, there is a distinction with clinically dysfunctional families who may be troubled by substance abuse – alcohol or drugs – or by a devastating illness. The best description of a dysfunctional system may be the anecdote in which the family has a dead elephant on the rug in the living room. Everyone knows its there, steps around it, ignores the smell and calls it a coffee table. This sort of systematic denial takes its toll on young people. (**Note:** Leaders are unlikely to ever get a confession of this sort in a group – but perhaps privately.)

This is a good time to consider inviting a member of Al-Anon or Al-a-Teen to come and speak to the group about these particular problems. If you decide to do so, be sure to allow the young people time to ask questions. We have found that handing out small pieces of paper on which they may write their questions, and hand them to the speaker or to the leader to be read and answered helps to break the ice of fear and silence.

### **Closure**

After all the discussion and listing and laughter, invite the group to stand and pray:  
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.*

*For the Human Family  
Book of Common Prayer, page 815*

Lesson updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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# GANDHI, KING AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

## Goal

To introduce the group to the lives, teaching, and work of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., emphasizing their teaching of non-violent action for social change

## Areas Covered

Society, Spirituality

## Objectives

- To examine why Gandhi and King opposed violence and used instead non-violence to effect change
- To examine the courage and the love required to practice non-violence
- To examine parallels between the teachings of Gandhi, King, and Jesus
- To engage their new understanding in a role-play on non-violent protest

## Planning

There is a lot of material in the lesson, and it will take far more than a single session to cover it. The elements of the lesson include study and discussion, viewing the movie *Gandhi*, and taking part in a simulation.

Here are a couple of scenarios you might want to follow:

### Scenario #1

- Introduce the topic of non-violent action at a regular meeting, hand out materials, and begin discussion.
- See *Gandhi* as a “movie night” shortly thereafter (see the movie section of Shared Resources for details). This is a long movie, running 3+ hours, so plan accordingly.
- Reflect on the movie and prepare for the role play during the next regular meeting.
- Conduct the simulation at the next regular meeting.

### Scenario #2: an overnight retreat

- Introduce the topic of non-violent action at a regular meeting, hand out materials, and begin discussion.
- Gather at the overnight location on Friday for supper.
- After supper, watch the movie and then go to sleep.
- Reflect on the movie after breakfast, then hand out the simulation materials.
- Allow some free time for thought-digestion and relaxation, then hold the role play.
- Debrief, lunch, and leave.

## Preparation

Open the topic of non-violence by explaining it has always been a difficult question for Christians. How do you respond to bad things that bad people are doing? How do you counter injustice? Doesn't the stronger side usually win, by imposing its will on the weaker side? But if you counter violence and injustice with violence, don't you run the risk of becoming unjust yourself?

Introduce two heroes of non-violence, Mohandas Gandhi of South Africa and India (“Mahatma”

is a nickname meaning “great-souled”) and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. of the United States. Explain where they lived and what they did – use the time-lines provided on the pages following as a handout.

Ask the group to find parallels between Gandhi and King’s lives and actions. What did they do that was similar? What was different? What was different in the forces they opposed and what was similar? (Note: although your group may understand racism in the United States, they may never have heard of “apartheid” in South Africa or the evils of British rule in India...or even that Britain once ruled India! Be prepared to lay out a couple of hundred years of imperial history in about six sentences)

Hand out the quotations from Gandhi and King on non-violence and read through them. What parallels do you see? Ask the group to bring the quotations back with them to the next sessions (and have extra copies for the folks who forget).

## **Second Section: Viewing**

Watch the movie. If you are showing the entire movie, take a break in the middle for pizza or snacks.

## **Third Section: Reflection**

- Have the group members bring the handout of quotations by Gandhi that you gave them at the first session.
- Divide the group into teams and assign one or two of the passages (see below) to each team. Make certain each team has at least one of the Gospel quotations.
- Have the team members look up the passage(s), discuss them, and be prepared to make a presentation to the class, based on the suggested questions, below.

## **Scriptures on Violence and Non-Violence**

Isaiah 2:2-4	John 15:12-13
Micah 4:1-5	1 Corinthians 13
Matthew 26:51-54	1 John 3:13-18
Luke 6:27-36	1 John 4:7-13,18-21

## **Key Questions**

- Can you find parallels between what the Bible has to say in these quotations, and the writings from King and Gandhi?
- Which part of the movie do you feel showed most clearly the acting out of the principles contained in these passages?
- Gandhi, a Hindu, was a profound admirer of Jesus Christ and of the Christianity that Jesus preached. He once observed: “I would be a Christian – if I ever met one.” How do you react to this statement? What do you think Jesus would have said?

## **Fourth Section: Simulation**

The suggested simulation will probably take a minimum of three hours to work through: one hour to set up the situation, to allow group members to read the material and prepare their positions and ideas; one hour to do the simulation; and one hour to talk about the experience. The scenario requires an adult participant who is not normally part of the group; if one of the parish clergy can take that part, all the better. (Note: be absolutely sure the “special guest” knows what he or she is getting into, and has time to prepare to play the part assigned.)

Detail one leader as “auditor”, to observe and note down interactions, things said, and suggestions made that are in or out of harmony with the principles of non-violence. During debriefing, the auditor can share his or her observations in a diplomatic, gentle way.

Significant revisions to this lesson contributed by Peter Hausman of St. Francis Episcopal Church. Added 11/00.

### **Alternative / Shorter Option**

Another way to introduce the concept of civil disobedience to your students might be to look at the life and actions of Rosa Parks. This 42-year-old black seamstress in Montgomery, AL began a revolution for Civil Rights when she refused to give up her seat so that a white man could sit on a row all by himself.

HBO has recently done a 40-minute film on Rosa Parks that is part documentary, part re-enactment, filmed with vintage cameras. The piece is called “Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks” and is incredibly well-done and produced to catch the attention of young people. You can find out more info at [www.hbo.com](http://www.hbo.com).

Suggestion contributed by Tracey Herzer. Added 09/04

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## Handout: Quotations from Gandhi and King

### Why they opposed using violence to effect change:

#### Gandhi

- "Violence can never bring an end to violence; all it can do is provoke more violence."
- "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."
- "I do not believe in short (violent) cuts to success....However much I may sympathize with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes....Experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence."

#### King

- "Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true."
- "Man was born into barbarism when killing his fellow man was a normal condition of existence. He became endowed with a conscience. And he has now reached the day when violence toward another human being must become as abhorrent as eating another's flesh."
- "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. The chain-reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."
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### Their Methods:

#### Gandhi: Using nonviolent means to accomplish change

- "Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man."
- "Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based on some well-understood principle, must not be capricious and, above all, must have no ill will or hatred behind it."
- *Satyagraha* (the name given by Gandhi to his technique of non-violent resistance – it literally means "holding on to the truth") is a force that works silently and apparently slowly. In reality, there is no force in the world that is so direct or so swift in working."
- "Select your purpose, selfless, without any thought of personal pleasure or personal profit, and then use selfless means to attain your goal. Do not resort to violence even if it seems at first to promise success; it can only contradict your purpose. Use the means of love and respect even if the result seems far off or uncertain. Then throw yourself heart and soul into the campaign, counting no price too high for working for the welfare of those around you..."
- "Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means putting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant."

### **King's method: The power of civil disobedience**

- "Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive."
- "Direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to dramatize the issue so that it can no longer be ignored."
- "When a man turns upon you and says, 'Punish me. I do not deserve it. But because I do not deserve it, I will accept it so that the world will know that I am right and you are wrong,' you hardly know what to do. You feel defeated and secretly ashamed. You know that this man is as good a man as you are; that from some mysterious source he has found the courage and the conviction to meet physical force with soul force."
- "In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action."

### **On the courage it takes to practice non-violence**

#### **Gandhi**

- "My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is no hope for a coward."
- "He who trembles or takes to his heel the moment he sees people fighting is not non-violent but a coward. A non-violent person will lay down his life in preventing such quarrels."

#### **King**

- "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live."
- "The religious tradition of the Negro had shown him that the nonviolent resistance of the early Christians had constituted a moral offensive of such overriding power that it shook the Roman Empire. American history had taught him that nonviolence in the form of boycotts and protests had confounded the British monarchy and laid the basis for freeing the colonies from unjust domination. The nonviolent ethic of Mahatma Gandhi and his followers had muzzled the guns of the British Empire in India and freed more than 350 million people from colonization."

### **On the love required to practice non-violence**

#### **Gandhi**

- "It is no non-violence if we merely love those who love us. It is no non-violence only when we hate those who love us. I know how difficult it is to follow this grand law of love. But are not all great and good things difficult to do? Love of the hater is the most difficult of all. But, by the grace of God, even this most difficult thing becomes easy to accomplish if we want to do it."
- "When another person's welfare means more to you than your own, when even his life means more to you than your own, only then can you say you love."

#### **King**

- "Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and

violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."

### **What if the practice of non-violence seems too difficult?**

#### **Gandhi**

- I have therefore said more than once . . . that if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering (i.e., non-violence), we must, if we are men, at least be able to defend all these by fighting."
- "I do believe that, when there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence ... but I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence [and that] forgiveness [is] more manly than punishment."



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## Handout: Life of Mohandas K. Gandhi

1869	Born in Porbandar, India
1889	Admitted to the English bar (attorney-at-law)
1893	Went to South Africa where there was a substantial Indian population. His reading at this time helped him formulate his non-violent concept of <i>ahimsa</i> .
1889-1902	Boer War. Gandhi formed an ambulance brigade to care for the wounded and was decorated for his war efforts by the British.
1905	Gandhi abandoned Western ways.
1907	Gandhi organized his first <i>satyagraha</i> campaign of non-violence in protest against oppressive laws.
1914	Received a promise from the South African government to change the oppressive laws as they related to Indians.
1915	Gandhi returned to India & actively supported the British in World War I.
1919	General Dyer's massacre of Indian protestors at Amritsar inflames the Indian population. Gandhi organizes further <i>satyagraha</i> campaigns but stops when they are disrupted by violence. He holds forth his vision of a united India which includes the revival of traditional cottage industries (especially weaving) and the abolition of untouchability. At this time he received the title of <i>Mahatma</i> ("great soul").
1930	Led the famous two-hundred-mile march to the sea to protest the salt tax.
1931	Represented Indian National Congress at London Round Table Conference on India.
1934	Gandhi withdrew from the Congress Party because of internal dissension. However, his protégé, Jawaharlal Nehru (later Prime Minister of India) became the party's leader.
1943	Gandhi offered to support the British in World War II in exchange for immediate independence for India. When this was refused, he launched his Quit India campaign and was interned by the British until 1944.
1945-47	Gandhi worked with the Governor-General, Lord Mountbatten, and the Muslim League's Mohammad Ali Jinnah on independence for India. He bitterly opposed the partition of India into Hindu and Muslim states (Pakistan).
1947	Despite considerable civil unrest, Indian independence was achieved. Gandhi's spinning wheel becomes the central emblem in the Indian flag.
1948	Civil violence directed at India's Muslim minority spurs Gandhi's intervention on behalf of the Muslims. Assassinated on January 30 by a Hindu fanatic angered by his actions.

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## Handout: Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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|-----------|--|
| 1929      | Born to a middle-class clergy family in Atlanta, GA – King’s father was a Baptist minister.  |
| 1940s     | Studied theology at Morehouse College and in the north. King ordained as a Baptist minister.   |
| 1955      | Bus boycott began in Montgomery, AL when Rosa Parks refused to yield her bus seat to a white person.   |
| 1960      | King supported student’s lunch-counter sit-ins to try to force equal rights for African-Americans in Greensboro, NC and Atlanta, GA.   |
| 1961      | Freedom Rides (campaign for voter registration and equal rights) began in Montgomery, AL.  |
| 1963      | King begins desegregation campaign against Birmingham, AL police chief “Bull” Connor. March on the Capitol, Washington, DC where he gave his famous “I have a dream” speech. |
| 1964      | King awarded Nobel Peace Prize.  |
| 1965      | King involved in voter registration campaign in Selma, AL. March from Selma to Montgomery.   |
| Late 60's | Violent protests in northern cities. King shifts focus to campaign to end Vietnam War, and Poor People’s campaign.   |
| 1968      | Assassinated in Memphis, TN – while supporting sanitation workers’ strike.   |

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## Simulation: A New Nonviolent Protest

Security officers in major department stores and mall landlords throughout the state have recently increased their complaints about what they claimed was a growing problem: teenagers who spend hours in their stores without buying anything, shoplift regularly, and are, according to the complainants, "a hostile presence that kept real customers away from the stores."

In response to the "retailing crisis", the state recently passed the most stringent law of its kind in the country: teenagers are banned from malls and department stores within the state. Violators of the new law can be arrested and, if convicted, sentenced to serve time in a closely-monitored "correction center". As part of their "re-education," teens in the centers are given "worthwhile social projects to do", such as cleaning up litter along highways. Teens employed in stores must wear green wristbands at all times while on store premises or in malls, and must carry an identity card. The card must be scanned by a security officer when the teens arrive at and leave work.

Reaction to the law has been vigorous, and mixed. Politicians, police spokespersons, school officials, business people, and wealthy consumers defend the law as necessary to ensure their safety and prosperity. Teenagers, some parents and teachers, and owners of stores catering to the teen market say the law is a violation of civil rights and a threat to the economic survival of small businesses. The majority of citizens disagree with the new law, but believe that once a law is passed, it's everybody's responsibility to obey it.

The Governor says, "Nobody likes restrictions like these. But our malls were in trouble. Continued economic growth in the state requires tough measures like these." The state Police Commissioner blames resistance to the law on "troublemakers, outsiders, and the lawless behavior that has been encouraged in our society since the 1960's."

Wealthier communities, such as *Richtown* and *Fancyland*, firmly support the new law, with mayors and councils agreeing that the law is necessary to keep "undesirable elements" out of their shopping areas. The mayor of *Richtown* said, "These kids don't have to shop. Let them ask their parents for what they want. When they get older, and settle down some, then they can have the right to shop."

Since the start of school in September more than 100 teens have been arrested for violating the law. In separate incidents, six teens who were in good health when arrested, were bloody and beaten when bailed out by their parents. The explanation in each case: "they were resisting arrest." One eight-year-old girl was killed when rubber bullets were fired at a crowd of teens approaching a record store. The state says the parents were at fault for letting the child join the crowd, and have started legal proceedings against the parents for neglect.

Tensions are rising rapidly. There are rumors of a mysterious teen-rights movement preparing a violent response to the law, with bomb threats (and perhaps actual bombs) timed to disrupt the holiday shopping season. State police cars have been firebombed, and hackers have been making ever-more frequent attempts to infiltrate the state computer system. The police have responded by detaining "likely troublemakers" in a pattern that civil-rights experts are calling "teen profiling." The governor has said that such incidents demonstrate that the situation is worse than was at first thought, and justify the law.

Clergy and church leaders generally oppose the law, but up to now no church official has taken

a public stand against it. The Rev. *Ken Gorman*, of *Holy Cross Church in North Plainfield*, is rumored to be strongly opposed to the law, but he is also known to oppose violent protests.

You have decided to launch a campaign of nonviolent protest against this unjust law, and you have asked *Gorman* to meet with you to discuss the situation (he does not know why you have invited him, and probably thinks it has something to do with the *church camp*).

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# SURVIVAL TACTICS

## Goals

To introduce the basic techniques of self-defense  
To learn about situations in which we are at risk of danger  
To learn about injury and techniques for survival

## Areas Covered

Society, Self

## Objectives

To train young people in the most basic techniques of self-defense  
To introduce a new voice – an expert voice – to speak to the questions of personal safety.  
*(Young people do a good job of silencing the "be careful" voice of their parents and guardians. By introducing an outsider and an expert, the questions can be raised in new ways, and the answers can be heard with renewed interest.)*

## Equipment Required

Bibles  
Materials on self-defense  
Instructor (optional, but recommended)  
Comfortable clothes (optional, but recommended)  
Space to move (optional, but recommended)

## Guiding Scriptures

Proverbs 11:8-9 – "...but by knowledge the righteous are delivered."  
1 Peter 5:8-11 – "Be sober, be vigilant..."  
Matthew 10:16-22 – "... be wise as serpents and harmless as doves"

## Background & Preparation

In today's world, it is important for us to know how to defend ourselves. This is especially true for teenagers. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, young people ages 12 to 24 are the group most likely to be victims of crimes such as rape, assault, and robbery.

Knowing how to defend yourself is more than just being prepared for a bad situation. It is also learning how to draw on your own resources and knowing when to fight and when to walk away. Obviously, there is no way that we can ever be prepared for all the situations that may arise in our lives, but having some of the basics of self defense in your toolkit can improve self-esteem and possibly someday help to keep you safe.

We suggest splitting this lesson plan into several sessions. Here is one way to do this:

**SESSION ONE:** During this first session on this topic, talk about risks and share some materials about options for self-defense. Allow teens to flip through the resources and share interesting facts they discover.

**SESSION TWO:** This will need to be at least a two-hour session where the teens can meet with the local expert to learn some basic self-defense techniques and principles.

**SESSION THREE:** Give the teens time to talk about the experience: what they learned, what felt fun, what felt difficult. Discuss times when these techniques might serve them well, and also when might they have been able to use these techniques in the past.

## Action

Begin your session by reading the scriptures listed above. Ask your group questions such as:

- What does it mean to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves”?
- What do you think of the roaring lion image in I Peter?
- What does our baptismal covenant have to say about resisting evil?
- How do we know when to fight evil and when to run away?
- Where is God in this discussion of violent things that sometimes happen in life?
- How can we be better prepared?

## Story – From Whence Cometh our Help?

Sometimes the help God sends can come from some pretty practical sources. Remember the story of the man who was convinced God would save him? The rains came and the flood waters rose. His wife encouraged him to leave with her in their 4-wheel-drive SUV, but he refused, saying that God would save him. Later, as water covered the impassable streets, a neighbor offered the man a place in his boat. Again, the man refused. Finally his house was submerged and the man was on his roof. Rescue workers flew overhead with a helicopter, but he refused to be evacuated, again citing his faith in God. The waters continued to rise until the man drowned. He arrived in Heaven quite indignant and asked God why He hadn't saved him when he put such obvious trust in God's ability to save. God replied, “I sent you an SUV, a boat, and a helicopter...”

## The Basics of Self-Defense

Our suggestion is that you hire an expert to come in and give a two-hour training session in basic self-defense. When you are looking for someone to teach this class, try the local police department, karate school or dojo, or ask at the library for a referral. Once you find someone, be sure to explain the whole program to the instructor. Explain that our goals are to train young people in skills of adulthood. Let the instructor know the kind of activities this group has been involved in, and the ages and genders of the participants. If there is an expense involved, ask the parents to bear the cost of this event. It is money well spent.

If you have any questions about why this is necessary, call the police station or your local rape crisis hotline and ask about statistics on assault in your community and surrounding areas. If that's not information enough, try calling the rape crisis center at the university you think you'd like your young person to attend. Ask any student – male or female – on U.S. college campuses if violence and assault are a problem, and they will tell you that they are. Parents may need some reminding and cajoling on this subject. Speak the truth in love. In love, we prepare our young people for scenarios we don't even want to imagine.

You may want to gather a collection of materials (see suggestions below) to have available. Pass out the books, pamphlets, etc. and have teens thumb through them, sharing with the class items that are of interest. It is important for teens to recognize that they are a high-risk group for crime, but it is also important for them to feel some sense of empowerment and have suggestions for safe ways to respond to dangerous situations.

## Guidelines for Discussion

If you cannot bring in an expert, this is still a topic you can discuss with your group. Use some of the resources listed below and go over some basic points of self defense.

## Reduce your Risk

Here are some basic safety tips from the National Crime Prevention Council to reduce your risk in a dangerous situation:

- If you're going to be out at night, travel in a group.
- Don't take shortcuts, especially at night.
- Be aware of your surroundings, and pay particular attention to possible hiding places such as stairways, alleyways, and bushes.
- Be sure your body language shows a sense of confidence and purpose.
- When riding on public transportation, sit near the driver or conductor and stay awake. Remember, attackers are looking for vulnerable targets.
- If someone begins to follow you, try to make it to a safe area, such as a police station, gas station, or other public place.
- If necessary, scream or yell as you run away to draw attention to the pursuer. Practice yelling things like "No!", "Go Away!" or "Back Off!" so that you will be ready.
- Use physical force to fight back only when it is your **only** hope. If possible, try to get away from the dangerous situation to a safe location where someone can help you.

## Effective Fighting

Donna Chalet, is the founder and president of Prepare, Inc., a national organization based in New York City that teaches self-defense techniques for children, teens, and adults. Prepare has a one-session workshop that includes peer pressure, bullying, dating violence and street crime. You can read more about her program at <http://www.prepareinc.com/>. Here are some of her tips on fighting effectively:

- If you are attacked from the front, kick the attacker in the shins or groin (straight up between the legs); jab the eyes or throat with your fingers all together like a bird beak
- If you are attacked from behind, stomp the foot with your heel; kick backward with your heel – aiming for the groin or knees; elbow the attacker in the head, throat, or area between the rib cage and stomach.
- Use your natural weapons – voice, hands, and feet – to stop an attack. If you're picked up, use your arms and legs to wiggle and resist. Grab and squeeze the groin and twist until you are let go. Once you've broken free, run as fast as you can to get help.

## Reflection

Talking about the dangers in this world can be unsettling and frightening. After you have finished your discussions and listened to the concerns and opinions of your young people, remind them that the point of this session was to help prepare them to deal with bad situations and that is part of journeying into adulthood. However, we can't live our lives being afraid all the time. Remind them that God loves them and wants the best for them. That even in our scariest, darkest moments – God is still right there with us.

Gather your group together in a circle. Remind them that they are strong and that they are loved. Have them hold hands and close your time together with the prayer below or with another prayer of your choosing.

## **Closing Prayer**

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers and dispose the way of your servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among the changes and chances of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by your gracious and ready help; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer, page 832*

## **Additional Resources**

### **Books**

Girl Power: Self Defense for Teens by Burt Konzak, Melina Konzak, and Sonya Konzak

The Safe Zone by Donna Chaiet

### **Websites**

Teens, Crime & The Community

<http://www.nationaltcc.org>

National Crime Prevention Council (McGruff the Crime Dog)

<http://www.ncpc.org/>

### **Free brochures**

NCPC has several brochures that can be downloaded and printed out at no cost, such as one called "Streetwise" that is geared to teenagers. You can check out the list of available brochures (look under Youth/Teenagers) at <http://www.ncpc.org/ncpc/ncpc/?pa=resCenter>

Lesson updated September 2004; additional material written by Tracey E. Herzer



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# ONE WAY TO WELCOME THE STRANGER: Decorating a Room

## Goal

To create a beautiful classroom, and invite Christ into the space as we welcome people from outside the class.

## Area

Society

## Objective

To examine the way in which we establish our homes and our work places as inviting expressions of our love for the Christ and welcome outsiders into our midst.

## Guiding Scripture

Hebrews 13:1-2 – “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers...”

## Background

Most church classrooms are sterile beige caves in which we talk and laugh and engage the Scriptures. In fact, one of the things that we do, every week, is entertain one another and thereby entertain the Christ. In thinking about how the young people want to rearrange and decorate their classroom, we recommend that words like “inviting,” “welcoming,” “comforting” and “safe” be used as part of the process of deciding what color to paint the walls. In the past, we’ve had requests for black ceilings and dark-green walls! This is not exactly what we had in mind. Our classrooms have ended up being painted in many colors. In one class, each wall is painted a different shade of blue and green, with the last wall dedicated to full-size outlines of each member of the class. Hand prints are scattered all over the wall. It may sound awful in this description, but in fact, it is gorgeous. And each and every member of the group made a point of inviting their parents in to see their masterpiece!

Allow some time for planning. Bring in color chips from the local paint store, remembering to allow the young people to choose. And go for it!

Young people should wear grubby clothes and bring a paintbrush. Make sure they do a good job! No sloppy paint jobs allowed! We are welcoming Christ in our midst, and the classroom ought to be a loving expression of the quality of this age group. They are fresh and full of energy and enthusiasm. Their classroom should reflect their hearts!

Ask the group if they would like to decorate the room together with the Rite-13 group, since that group may use the same classroom. Use this lesson to help bring the groups closer together.

## Action

- Allow a full Sunday afternoon for this task.
- Remind the teens that they are creating not only a comfortable home for themselves, but also a welcoming space for Christ and any others who might enter their room.
- Make sure the young people understand in advance that they are expected to clean up and to have fun. Maybe there is a house painter in your congregation who might be engaged to supervise the work. If not, just dive in.

- After the room has been painted and cleaned up, order pizza, settle in and dedicate the space as a “home” for the group, a “little corner of the universe” in which they can entertain each other and the occasional stranger.
- Leaders might even want to suggest that young people remember this exercise the next time it's their day to clean their rooms. Why do we do this? Clean and decorate? So that when the Christ comes to us, we will have a home, however humble, in which we are able to hold him in our midst, confident that our lives are a reflection of his grace.

**Optional:** Plan a party to celebrate the newly decorated space, asking the young people to invite friends (from school or elsewhere) who are not part of the group. Let them know that hospitality, to friends and strangers alike, is part of the Christian way of living.

### Closure

Use the following prayer form:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock, says the Lord. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into the house and eat with you, and you with me.

*V.* The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in:  
*R.* From this time forth for evermore.

Let us pray. (*Silence*)

Sovereign Lord, you are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end: send your servants our from this place on many errands, be their constant companion in the way, and welcome them upon their return, so that coming and going they may be sustained by your presence, O Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

from *The Celebration for a Home*  
*The Book of Occasional Services, 2nd edition, page 131*

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# LADY POVERTY, LOVE ME TONIGHT

## Goal

To use a modern parable to examine the blessing of living simply and consciously in the face of our affluent, consumer-based culture

## Area Covered

Society, Self

## Objectives

To discuss consumerism

To touch upon the notion of choosing our passions

## Equipment Required

Small slips of paper – post-it notes are ideal (if not, then bring tape too)

Pens or pencils

Bibles

## Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 5:1-3

Mark 14:3-7

2 Corinthians 8:9

Philippians 4:10-13

## Background

In our culture, poverty is often seen as wearing a hideous face. And because of this, we believe it is important to touch on the idea of the holiness of poverty. To this day, monastic communities continue to take vows of poverty.

While it is possible to be “poor in spirit” as we snuggle into our cozy and affluent lives, we are wise to ask at what cost do we insulate ourselves? Who is hungry in our community and in neighboring communities? What responsibility do we have to those less fortunate than ourselves?

These are important questions, but there is another way to consider these issues. In this exercise we ask young people to consider the idea of self-love, and of “self” in relationship to “things”.

What role does consumerism and seemingly endless acquisition play in silencing our sense of ourselves?

**(Note:** The young people will probably already done the exercise *I Need, I Want, I Have* in their Rite-13 years. Remind them of this lesson. It would be good for the leaders to review that exercise. If they haven't done that lesson plan or don't remember it – you might want to use it as an introductory activity to this lesson plan.)

Our culture places a high premium on having more, moving up. What, we might ask, would we think of a humble carpenter and his band of followers if they were to appear in the midst of our community? Would be able to listen to their message? Probably not.

The Puritan work ethic has been so thoroughly ingrained in the fiber of our culture that we believe, without reflection, that all people must and should work hard and by doing so they will undoubtedly get richer and wiser.

In addition, we are blinded by the fine and fancy messages of our media. Our slick magazines and sparkling movies show to us a world and a life-style available to only a privileged few. Our obligation as Christians is to look closely at our own values and expectations, and to look deeply into the face of the Christ. There can be no question but that he is calling us to lives of service.

### **Action**

Give each young person two post-it notes – or pieces of paper if you don't have post-its. Ask the young people to write two objects which they desire more than any others. Explain that money is not a factor in this exercise – so dream! It can be a diamond ring, a fancy car or a new stereo system.

Read the Parable on Poverty aloud and have the class help act it out. (For more info and directions, see the handout on following pages.)

After the parable has been read and enacted, ask the group to sit in a circle. Begin by asking the person who played the central character what their experience was like?

- What was it like having so many people covering you?
- As more objects (people) became attached to you, what did you find yourself thinking or feeling?
- How many objects (people) could you have carried with you without feeling burdened?

Continue to discuss the parable with the entire class, using questions such as:

- What is this parable really about?
- Who can give us a translation or an interpretation of the story?
- How does this relate to the ways in which we build our lives? Do any of the voices in our culture warn us that more may be too much?
- What would have happened to the Naked Man had he refused to take the first red leaf?
- Is it reasonable to think that the man could have lived his whole life without wanting to take anything with him?
- When he accidentally pricked his finger, he discovered he could carry the leaf by attaching it to his body. That first possession happened so easily – by chance. But as he gathered more and more things, it cost him something – his own blood. Why do you think he was willing to suffer the pain just to own these things?
- What do you see as the difference between picking up all these things at once and gradually adding more things over time.
- Can you see parallels in the way we acquire more possessions over time? Why or why not?
- Why do you think is it so hard for us to learn these lessons?
- How can we apply what we've talked about today in this parable to our own daily lives?
- How might this apply to us as a church? A community? A nation?

Read the following scripture passages aloud, or ask the youth to take turns reading them:

- Matthew 19:16-22
- Luke 12:15-21
- Matthew 16:24-26

Ask the group to consider the ways in which we are unable to be “set free” from our possessions.

- Can they imagine a situation in which they would be willing to sell all they possess? (Example: Before joining the armed services? Traveling abroad for a year? Joining a religious community?)
- What does it cost to maintain the lives we’ve grown accustomed to? What would it take to get us to give them up?

[**Note:** In one round of this exercise, the young people ended up asking each other which was more desperate: a man with nothing, or at least very little, or a man with a wife and four kids and a secretary and a membership at the club, car loans, mortgages and everybody counting on him to pay the tab? There was a lot of debate over this, including many exchanges in which stories were told about neighbors and parents who seemed so sad despite their rich lives... which led to a full-blown debate about whether we should strive to be “successful.”]

In your discussions, remember that material possessions, in and of themselves, are not good or bad – those determinations can only come from the ways in which we use them or are attached to them. Remind your young people that no matter what we may have or not have, we must be willing to follow the Christ when he calls to us.

## Closure

There are two resources which may be of help to you in pulling all of this together. Either of these options can reinforce your discussions and make for an effective way to end your class session.

- The first is a recording by John Michael Talbot, on an album called *No Longer Strangers*. The song is entitled “Lady Poverty.” It is a prayer by St. Francis, set to music by Talbot. (<http://www.johnmichaeltalbot.com/Albums/1075/1075.html>)
- Second, the Church World Service (This organization is the one that organizes the CROP Walks. They are listed in our Resource Guide – you can contact them at 1-800-297-1516 or <http://www.churchworldservice.org/resources.html> ) They have a couple of movies they can borrow at no charge. They have a cartoon movie called *More* which tells this same story in a witty and quite effective fashion. They also have a wonderful 56-minute film *Affluenza* which looks at our society’s tendency toward over-consumption and materialism, which would be a great addition or sequence to the above lesson plan.

Because of the highly-emotional nature of this discussion, we suggest you get hold of one or the other of these resources. Sometimes it is extremely helpful to add the witnessing voice of outsiders to these questions.

In the end, remind the young people that no one is telling them to reject the affluent American Lifestyle. What we are suggesting is that they carefully monitor their lives and their desires. Choose carefully the life which you wish to live. Be ready to answer the voice of the Christ when he calls to you. Eventually, we all choose what the life we live will look like. To be faithful to God requires that we live lives of “conscious integrity.”

## Closing Prayer

Use the following prayer or one of your choosing:

O God:  
Give me strength to live another day;  
Let me not turn coward before its difficulties  
    or prove recreant to its duties;  
Let me not lose faith in other people;  
Keep me sweet and sound of heart,  
    in spite of ingratitude, treachery or meanness;  
Preserve me from minding little stings  
    or giving them;  
Help me to keep my heart clean,  
    and to live so honestly and fearlessly  
    that no outward failure can dishearten me  
    or take away the joy of conscious integrity;  
Open wide the eyes of my soul  
    that I may see good in all things;  
Grant me this day some new vision of thy truth;  
Inspire me with the spirit of joy and gladness;  
    and make me the cup of strength to suffering souls;  
    in the name of the strong Deliverer,  
    our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*from: Forward Day By Day, February-April, 1994*

Lesson updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## Handout: Parable on Poverty

*Tell the group that everyone will have some part to play. Ask one member of the group to "play" the central character. Other group members will be added later as objects.*

Once upon a time in the jungle there lived a naked man. He didn't know he was naked, for as far as he knew he was the only man in the jungle so he had no way of telling. Life was pleasant enough for him, wandering about eating during the day and resting comfortably at night.

One dawn while he was eating from an apple tree he saw a beautiful, bright red leaf in the midst of a tree full of ordinary green leaves. Perhaps it was the way it caught the early light of the sun, or perhaps it was just because he was tired of seeing only green leaves that at that moment this particular leaf captured his attention. Well, for whatever reason, he eventually climbed the tree and took the leaf. Thus came his very first dilemma. How was he to carry this first possession with him? After all, naked men have no pockets to put things in. In the end he had no alternative but to hold it in his hand and carry it with him wherever he went.

It was quite by chance that he later discovered another way of carrying the leaf about. It happened that while he was picking some wild berries, a thorn pricked his finger. It wasn't much of a wound, just a pinprick, and it only hurt for a brief moment. But it brought a little blood to the surface of his skin. The man discovered quite by accident that his blood made the leaf stick to his finger. It was really quite a remarkable discovery, for now he could carry his leaf around with him without having to put it down and pick it up every time he reached for something. But it was not convenient to carry the leaf on his finger, so he made a small pinprick on his arm and stuck the leaf there.

*Have one of the other young people put their hand on the character's upper arm and hold it with gentle pressure. Now both characters will move together.*

The man had found a unique way of always carrying his captivating red leaf with him everywhere. He also discovered that there was room on his body for other acquisitions. Next came a pretty flower. Then an attractive butterfly. Just little pinpricks and he could get attached to all sorts of things. And he did. Soon his body was covered with pretty things.

*At this point, the leaders should ask about half of the remaining young people to read off their pretty objects, one at a time. As they read their object, the young person attaches their object to the main character. Remind them to be kind but they should press their object gently onto the main character and then keep holding the object there with gentle pressure. The back, lower legs, arms and the top of the head are all acceptable places to set hands.*

*This can be a bit tricky since inappropriate touching is a real danger here. One possible way to approach this, and avoid chaos, is for the leaders to take the hand of each member and place it on the central character.*

*(Be aware that someone may have a history of inappropriate touching – if anyone expresses a strong resistance to participating in the exercise, do not force them. Find another way to get the point across, or find another role – perhaps narrator – that person can play in the exercise.) As the number of items increase, leaders may suggest that the central character would be more comfortable with all the stuff if he or she sat down.*

Eventually, however, he ran out of available space. This was when he discovered another remarkable bit of knowledge. When he decided to remove the bright red leaf because he had long since grown tired of looking at it and he wanted to make room for something new, he found it extremely painful to remove it. Pulling it off caused him severe bleeding, so he immediately put it back on. But that was when he made the incredible discovery that the leaf had been nurturing itself on his blood. It had been living off him. When he checked the other accumulations he had put on his body, he found that it was the same with all of them too. They had all somehow leached onto him. His life's blood was sustaining everything he had attached himself to.

One would think that this would have been sufficient reason for the man to stop accumulating new treasures, but for some foolish reason known only to him, it didn't. Because removing what he had already become attached to was much too painful, he simply continued to add on to what was there. More pinpricks for more acquisitions.

*Leaders now direct the second half of the group to come and attach their objects to the central character, again following the cautions and instructions listed above. As more items are added, the central character should be virtually covered and surrounded by others – that's the point! The leader might ask, "How are you doing? Is it hard to move?" and then help the character lie down on the floor so that he or she will be more comfortable.*

Only the more he accumulated, the heavier all these things were to bear. And the more of his life's blood was being drained from him. The more he added, the weaker he became. Even this didn't stop him. He continued to prick himself and add to all that he had already had until he was completely spent and drained. Finally, he fell in a heap on the jungle floor.

Then one day another naked man walking through the jungle stumbled upon him. It was a remarkable discovery for him to find all these wonderful treasures just lying there in a heap. He would have liked to take them all with him, but since naked men have no pockets to put things in, he had to rummage about for just one thing to take with him.

At the bottom of the heap, there was a beautiful red leaf. He decided on that. But before he left this treasure trove he wanted to make sure there was nothing else beneath the leaf. There was nothing beneath it. Absolutely nothing.

So the naked man walked off into the jungle carrying a bright red leaf in his palm.

*"Pinpricks" story by John R. Aurel*



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## **ROLE PLAY ON POVERTY: Understanding the Economics**

### **Goal**

Rather than simply encourage young people to volunteer to “help those less fortunate,” our goal is to introduce the group to what it really means to be less fortunate.

### **Area**

Society

### **Objectives**

To research and investigate the facts of poverty and the limitations of meager resources.

To practice assertion and negotiation skills within the context of role play.

### **Background**

This lesson is broken into two sections. In part one, research is necessary. Much information is available through the public library or on the Internet. Certainly, this is one way to gather this information. Another may be to provide the young people with the phone numbers of the appropriate agencies and assign them the task of calling to ask. A third suggestion is to invite individuals who might be able to provide the necessary information out of their personal and professional experiences to come and speak to the group. Case workers from the local Department of Social Services, social workers, volunteers and staff from area shelters are often willing to tell their stories, and because of their work, offer more than the facts.

In part two, arrange for actual case workers and social workers and a secretary to come to the church and “set up their offices” in the building. Ask them to bring copies of the official forms which an individual would have to fill out in order to receive assistance.

Part two requires some real planning, but it is worth the effort. The young people will be given a family scenario (a sample is included in this lesson plan) which leaves them needing assistance. They will have to go to the various “agencies” to seek aid. They will need to present identification, social security numbers, etc.

In many ways, this will be a lesson in futility and frustration, but it teaches these lessons:

- Poverty wears many faces.
- Poverty is not simply that one has fewer possessions and little or no savings.
- Poverty is the state in which one has no security and no leverage to help improve one’s position in the world.

### **Guiding Scriptures**

Micah 6:6-8

Amos 5:18-24

### **Action**

#### **Session One**

In advance of the first session, give each student the assignment of finding out a portion of the information needed to bring back to the group. Each item should be researched by a different group member:

- Income figures for the poverty line.

- Income figures for AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children).
- Income eligibility figures for Medicaid.
- Income eligibility for Food Stamps / how much received at various income levels
- Gross income and after-tax income for minimum-wage earners.
- Cost of private health insurance policies.
- Rental costs in the local area.

Additional items can also be researched, depending on the size of the group. However, some information should be provided directly, since it is harder to find out, such as eligibility for Section 8 or Public Housing; the cost and availability of child care; actual availability of public housing; area transportation facilities; typical utility costs; etc.

Having all these figures in hand, the students are to assemble the information into a budget, and see how much one can actually buy, given a certain income and family size.

Use a Sunday paper. Find a job. Find an apartment. What about a car?

## **Session Two: Role Play**

After Session One, each student is provided with a sheet of information about an imaginary situation which includes a financial crisis such as an electricity shut-off notice. After taking some time to study their situations during the intervening week, the students will be interviewed by social workers recruited for that purpose, to find out available resources for emergency assistance and learn whether those resources are actually available in their particular case. Depending on the size of the group, members may work alone or form family units. Remind them that they will need to know their social security numbers and have some proof of identity.

After the exercise, allow each unit to tell their story and disclose what they learned.

## **Public Assistance Role Play**

Study the scenario outlined below and be prepared to provide information according to the description, when interviewed. Feel free to add details consistent with the scenario, withhold information from the interviewer and the like. Remember, however, that the information you give and the conviction with which you present it will affect the likelihood that you will receive the assistance you need:

You are a 25-year-old woman with an 18-month-old daughter. Her father is unknown and uninvolved. You have a learning disability that led to your leaving high school without graduating. Before your daughter's birth, you worked at various short-term jobs: waitressing, chambermaid, etc. A year ago you were in an accident that left you permanently disabled. You can function fairly well, but can't work and need supportive services. You have applied for Social Security Disability and have been informed that you will begin receiving \$375 per month in June. You just received a lump-sum payment retroactive to your application date for \$6750 (it took 18 months to process your application and appeal).

You just paid \$3000 in back rent to your landlord, who had been letting you stay in a room for \$250 per month for one year. He tells you that he now expects you to pay on time each month, or he will put you out. You also paid back your brother for all the groceries, clothes and other necessities he has been buying since you became disabled. You gave him \$2000, which doesn't come close to the amount he spent on you. You paid your pharmacist \$1500

in back bills. You have not previously applied for assistance because no one told you that you could do so.

You are applying for:

Public Housing

Food Stamps

Emergency Assistance

AFDC

Medicaid

### **Closing Prayer**

Use the following prayer in closing the session:

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people of 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 these 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, page 826*

This exercise was designed by the Reverend Katherine Bradley Johnson.

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## IT'S A LOVE THING: How Will they Know Us?

### Goal

To identify ourselves as a people whose primary characteristic is love

### Area

Society

### Objectives

To identify the dynamics of Group Identities

To explore our ways of labeling ourselves and each other

To question what works for us in our labels and what works against us

### Guiding Scriptures

John 13:34-3

John 15:12-17

### Background

Within the last few years there has been a growing use of labels in our popular culture. Factions, whether vocal or silent, all seem to be longing for a sense of identity powerful enough to sustain them in the face of the cultural cross-currents which flow through our times. In the midst of all this confusion, strife and labeling, it is useful to ask young people just what such labels accomplish. This exercise, which should be accompanied by food and fun, gives young people the chance to examine "The Group Thing." Understanding ourselves as part of a community, as part of a group, is essential to our well-being and to our effectiveness in the world, but the task of determining which group, and why, is one of the fundamental tasks of growing up.

As infants we are dropped into a family – our family. We usually share a last name. We have little or no choice. It's a Family Thing. Eventually, over time, our focus shifts to schools and places of employment, to churches (I'm a Baptist. I'm an Episcopalian). With every passing year, we have an increasing amount of control in choosing our affiliations. We make these choices, at least in part, by examining the reputation which the group carries.

For example, one might accept being an Episcopalian because Episcopalians are a liturgical community, with a sacramental understanding of God's working in history. One might choose to be Baptist because of the emphasis on the teaching. Whatever the reputation – whether true or false – we use the label to understand at least a part of what it means to be inside that particular group.

To be *included* in a group implies that it is possible to be *excluded*. When I say I am an Episcopalian, I imply that I had other choices and that other people are not part of my religious tradition. The flip side of any statement of identity is the exclusion of other options, other realities and other people. This is true in almost all cases. The most notable exception is our understanding of Jesus, in whom all "Group Things" are brought together in love.

### Action

Ask the young people to list off any groups they can think of that seem to possess a true identity. The young people may need a little help with this, particularly if it's used as an opening question. Some helpful starters may be the most obvious ones:

- It's a Black Thing.
- It's a White Thing.
- It's a Boy Thing (Man Thing).
- It's a Girl Thing (Woman Thing).
- It's a High School Thing.
- It's a Southern Thing.
- It's a Republican/Democratic Thing.
- It's an American Thing

There are lots to choose from – see what they come up with. The list can include historical groups, like slaves or aristocrats. Leaders should make every effort to include some "Group Things" that are peculiar to high school and college: It's a Cheerleader Thing; It's a Sports Thing; It's a Sorority Thing or Fraternity Thing. But leaders should also include more controversial ideas: It's a Rich Thing; It's a Poor Thing; It's a Lesbian Thing; It's a Gay Thing.

Once a good list has been established, ask the group to list off some of the stereotypical traits of each group. Of course, we always want to break down the stereotypes, and chances are you won't get far in this exercise before some wise one chimes in to say, "Wait a minute. That's not true! I know a (*fill in the blank*) who doesn't fit that at all!"

This raises the important question: Can you be a member of a group and retain a powerful sense of individuality? Can you retain membership status in the group indefinitely, despite a growing number of ways in which you are not in sync with the group as a whole? Hopefully, the group will have good examples of this without much prodding, but if not, ask them to consider the ways in which one retains status in a group. Ask them to identify what the necessary elements in each category are:

- Can a woman understand a Man Thing? How?
- Can a white person ever understand a Black Thing? How?
- Can a sighted person ever understand a Blind Thing? How?
- Can a straight male ever understand a Lesbian Thing? How?

The answer rests in relationships built not on compliance to group norms and stereotypes, but on love. The solutions to the divisions in our culture, and the answers to all of our questions of identity, reside in our capacity to build relationships which bridge our misconceptions and the realities of difference. Love is the only force strong enough to sustain us through the discomfort of embracing "the other." It is necessary for us to make that bridge, and the Christ is our model for doing so.

Ask the young people to identify ways in which we build relationships. Key answers are:

- **Time:** You cannot build a relationship without giving it time
- **Stories:** *Telling our own stories* and listening to the stories of others is one of the important ways in which we can engage each other and build relationships
- **Presence:** I can only know you if I am willing to be present with you in your life. You can only know me if you are willing to be present with me in my life

- **Patience:** It is a slow process. It takes years just to paint the Golden Gate Bridge! We are hoping to build a bridge which spans a greater chasm than the San Francisco Bay!
- **Shared Experience:** Until we share our lives and have a common heritage of experience, it will always be difficult for us to build a true relationship. Life offers us a rich playground for experience – there is so much to do and see – but unless we are willing to be together, work together, play together, our relationships will be nothing more than illusion and rhetoric.

Ask the group to assess themselves as a group:

- What has our own process been like?
- What have we done to build relationships and to establish common bonds?
- What more could we do? What could we have done a better job at in light of what we're talking about today?
- How would you describe the "J2A Thing"? What qualities are the hallmarks of our J2A group? (**Examples:** We're members of the same church; confidentiality; friendship; We eat a lot!; We laugh a lot; We talk about what matters.

*Historically, this has turned into a lively discussion of why "our youth group is so cool . . . ." The bottom line has always been that J2A is the only place many of the kids ever feel safe to tell what they know and talk about what matters. Most young people spend most of their time being taught. In J2A, we place a premium on listening to each other's wisdom.*

*Most young people have a lot of voices in their lives who are quick to tell them what's really important. In J2A, we make every effort to trust that the kids know a lot of "what matters" in the world and have only very rare opportunities to set the agenda. Just FYI - , this sense of "groupness" in our group produced a T-shirt that pronounced: "It's a Group Thing, you wouldn't understand!" Wow, did we generate a lot of looks and questions with that one!*

### **Ask: What does it mean to be a Christian?**

After the initial silence, most of the answers will probably focus on activities. "It means you pray." "It means you love God." "It means you have accepted Jesus as your personal Savior." "It means you come to church regularly."

### **Ask: How can you tell if someone is a Christian? What's the "Group Thing" for Christians? What would Jesus do?**

You may hear some criticism about hypocrisy or faults within the Church, but do your best to listen closely for anything that resembles love or grace and point it out to the group. Talk about the difference between how Christians might be portrayed in the media and the group's experiences of being a Christian. Is there more than one way to define a Christian?

### **Ask: How did Jesus say we would know who his followers were?**

- Look up the Scripture lessons listed above. Ask for the passage to be read aloud.
- Allow for a few moments of quiet reflection on the passage.
- Hand out the prayer form found at the end of the lesson.

## **Closure**

Remind the group that we are first and foremost called to be a people of love.

Remember that old song, "They'll Know We are Christians by our LOVE"... not by our language or our politics or our liturgical style... but by our LOVE.

As Christians, we may spend our entire lives trying to figure out exactly what it means to be loving as Jesus was loving – and we may even arrive at some drastically different answers – but nevertheless, that is what we are called to do. Jesus teaches that it will be our love which distinguishes us from the rest of the world. It will be our love which makes us recognizable to each other and to the world at large.

Leaders should remind themselves, and the group, that when all is said and done, for us, it is a Love Thing. It is not a Black Thing, not a White Thing, not a Gay Thing, not a Straight Thing. It is a Love Thing.

### **Closing Prayer**

Hand out small taper candles to each. Darken the room. Light a central candle and form a circle around it. Invite each member of the group to come one by one to the central candle in order to light their own. As they come, invite them to consider the love of Christ, which calls us to wholeness, to joy, which invites us to live in peace with one another because of his sacrifice for us. This should be done in silence. After all the candles are lit, say the following prayer:

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## Handout – Prayer

<i>Leader</i>	Blessed are you, Father and Creator.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be your name forever and ever.
<i>Leader</i>	Blessed are you, Mother of all life.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be your name forever and ever.
<i>Leader</i>	Blessed are you, Redeemer of the world.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be your name forever and ever.
<i>Leader</i>	Blessed are you, Sanctifier of life.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be your name forever and ever.
<i>Leader</i>	The blessing of God, Source of our salvation, be with us always.
<i>People</i>	Blessed be God's holy Name forever and ever.



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# CITY MAPS

## Goal

To see what we can discover about life in the city

## Area

Society

## Objectives

To explore the necessary elements for the development of a city

To look at urban planning to discover some keys to a "Good City"

To practice gathering and assimilating information

## Guiding Scriptures

Have the participants look up and read the following passages of Scripture:

Genesis 11:1-9

Revelation 21:1-5a

## Background

This exercise is a romp through the library, through history and through the streets of our hometown to see what we can see about life in the city. Ever since the days of Pharaoh and the ancient Greeks and Romans, human beings in the West have been building cities. Some scholars say that the first urban planners took their clues from nature, using the webs of spiders and birds' nests and beehives to get their ideas. Others, like the Greeks, used their understanding of proportion and geometry to design their buildings and their cities.

This exercise is designed to begin a discussion of the nature of urban life. ("Urban" may mean "small town" in some areas. The point is to look at life in a situation where people live together in one geographic place rather than in individual farmhouses scattered across the landscape.)

What makes living in groups appealing? What makes it difficult?

We also want to begin reading maps – this is a strangely necessary adult skill. It gives us a chance to determine where we are and where we want to go in preparation for the Urban Scavenger Hunt that will conclude the section on Society.

Using maps of ancient cities, modern American and European cities and a map of our hometown, we will attempt to assess the quality of life apparent on each map.

## Action

Gather at the public library. You may want to spend half your time at the library and then return to the church for the second half, or you may wish to look into using a conference room in the library for the whole meeting.

Divide the group into teams. Assign each of the teams a city from the following list (feel free to add cities which you know well or which seem to be geographically important):

**Ancient Cities:**      Athens

Imperial Rome  
Alexandria

**Modern Cities:** Paris  
London  
New York City (laid out in a grid, like Alexandria)  
Detroit (laid out in a wheel, think of the auto industry)  
Washington, DC (laid out in quadrants)

Each group is asked to find a map of the area they've been assigned to research, the population, the major industry or commerce, and a brief description of the life of the city.

Leaders should encourage the teams to get a sense of the life of these cities. They should ask leading questions while still at the library:

- Where's the water source?
- How does this location promote trade? Travel?
- Is this location defensible?
- How much space does each person have? (Some smart young person can do the arithmetic – the city is six square miles with 500,000 people.)

Encourage the young people to think critically and creatively about the life and the problems of their city. After the groups have done the research, ask one member of each team to make a presentation of their findings.

[**Example:** A little study of an ancient map of Rome at the beginning of the Common Era (C.E.) shows that the population of Rome lived within an area of six square miles. Experts say that only one building in 26 was a private home. Most people lived in tenements five to seven stories high! (Sounds like Brooklyn, doesn't it?) Between the second century B.C.E. and the second Century C.E., the population grew from 100,000 to half a million. What problems are created by that kind of growth? What is the growth of your hometown and what problems might that present later? Why would people have come to Rome? What problems arose from the lack of street names? There were many problems for Romans who had crowded into their city. One example is the problem of fires. The city's tenements were built from wood, and without street names it was difficult to get the fire-fighters – all *seven thousand* of them under Augustus – to the fire!]

After each team has shown their map and answered as many questions as possible, try to draw a few conclusions.

- What benefits are present in city life?
  - specialization
  - security
  - opportunity
- What deficits are present in city life?
  - lack of privacy
  - space
  - sanitation
  - crime
- What elements are common in all cities?
  - people, people and more people

- common language?
- some way of governing behavior or expectations?
- poverty

After these discussions, the leader should move the group toward a hometown map. There are three options to this part of the meeting. Choose your favorite – all three work.

### Option One:

Using a purchased map of the city/town, but cutting it or generally manipulating it so that the name of the city is removed, ask the young people to answer the same sorts of questions they've been applying to the foreign cities.

- Where is the center?
- Where is the seat of government?
- How many people live in this place?
- How much space does each person have? [**Note:** It may be fun to figure out just how much space it would take for the whole population of the United States, or the world for that matter, to live in the same density as people live in the Bronx. The leader may want to get the numbers for this at the library. This turns out to be quite fascinating!]
- Where is the water supply?
- How many roads lead in to the city?

### Option Two

The leader may choose to make a simplified drawing of the city. Leave out all street names. Include only generic place names: City Hall, the Mall, the Duck Pond, the Library – whatever. Add a compass rose. See if the group can recognize the city.

### Option Three:

The third and final option is to break the group into two teams. Provide enormous sheets of paper and pens and markers. Assign each team the task of drawing a map of their hometown. After some time, remind them to include the important "life-sustaining" elements of their city: water, government offices, schools, fire, food supplies. Encourage them to give an approximate scale and a compass orientation. Encourage as much detail as possible, including the home of each member.

After the groups have finished, hang the maps on the walls side by side and compare the results. The differences from one to another give us a glimpse into how powerfully our sense of space and direction changes from one person to another.

### Key Questions

- What does this city have to offer its inhabitants?
- What will history say about this area?
- What problems might this city be facing in the next 50 years? In the next 100 years? 250 years? (Population growth or decline? Traffic? Schools? Industry?)
- What industries support this area?
- [**Note:** As a follow-up for this exercise, invite someone from the Urban Planning Office of City Hall or a graduate student or professor in urban planning or architecture to come and discuss the problems inherent in designing a city or an airport or an office building.]

### Summary

The ability to read between the lines is an important capacity. At first glance maps tell us very little about the life of that area. Learning to ask questions which lead to more questions and more and more information takes practice. Leaders must remind young people (both by example and by precept) to gather information, to assimilate it into usable forms and to stay awake and aware of their surroundings.

In map-reading, it is always essential that you find out where you are and where you want to go before you try to get anywhere. This asking: "Where am I?" and "Where do I want to go?" will come in handy, not only in the Urban Scavenger Hunt, but in life as well.

## **Closure**

Gather in a circle, holding hands. Offer up the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*

*Collect for Cities, Book of Common Prayer, page 825*

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# **VOLUNTEER! Work in a Service Organization**

## **Goal**

To serve

## **Area**

Society

## **Objective**

To bring home the face of poverty by actively engaging in work in a local service organization

## **Guiding Scripture**

Matthew 25:31-40

## **Background and Action**

It is all too easy for us to think that poverty and human pain exist only “out there” – far away from us. It is also easy to depersonalize poverty – even to dehumanize people who are poor, never thinking of them as human in the same way that we are human. Easiest of all is to blame the poor for their own lot and neglect our own responsibility and complicity, albeit unconscious, in it. By scheduling a day or two of service, the young people are introduced to the human problem of suffering and reminded, by their hands-on experience that every little bit does help!

Schedule a time for service in a local social ministry establishment – a soup kitchen, food pantry, shelter, day care center, etc. – that ministers to poor people. We cannot stress enough the importance of this activity for the young people. It is essential.

## **Reflection**

After the service project, gather the class together to reflect on their experiences. Have them respond, as a class and as individuals to the following questions:

- What did you like about your experiences? What did you dislike?
- Which do you think is easier: serving lunch to someone or sitting down to talk and listen to someone who is homeless?
- Was there anything you saw today that showed a power differential between the people who were helping and the people who were being helped?
- Did anything shock you? Did anything surprise you? What?
- Were you pleased by anything? What?
- What do you think now about being “made in the image of God”?
- Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to “seek and serve all persons, loving [our] neighbor as [our self]” and to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” How has this experience made you more aware of what you promise in this Covenant?
- How can we continue to serve when we are not present? Prayers? What else?

## **Closure**

Close with the litany “For the Outcasts of Society” at the end of this lesson (you may want to make copies for the group, to distribute as a handout so that they can read along).

## For Further Reflection

However rewarding this exercise has been, we cannot emphasize too strongly that it does not really begin to address the systemic aspects of human poverty and need. Indeed, such enterprises as soup kitchens, food pantries, clothing cupboards and emergency shelters are decried by many critics as “Band-Aids” which do not address the underlying problems.

Furthermore, at least in some cases, it just emphasizes our differences. Think about this: Someone volunteers to serve lunch to homeless people at a soup kitchen. The volunteer washes their hands, puts on a nice clean apron and cooks or prepares to serve hot food from a working kitchen. They set out tables and chairs, as well as bowl or utensils – thereby effectively determining where the eaters will sit and where they will not be allowed. Often, the people who are coming to eat are then asked to stand in line where they move down a table... where more of the clean, well-fed people will serve up their bowl or plate, thereby determining how much food they will have to eat. Most of the time, the homeless people are then left to eat on their own, rarely being engaged in authentic conversation by the people who are trying to help.

Now obviously, the person who is volunteering has offered to do so out of a generous heart filled with good intentions. And also obviously, there need to be some boundaries so that everyone can be served and chaos won't ensue. But we can also see that even in our attempts to help, we still inadvertently advertise ways in which we are different from those we serve. In some ways, it's hard to escape these realities, but it's still an important part of the discussion.

(For more discussion of this topic, see the R13 lesson plan *Where True Charity is Found*)

We hope that this exercise will lead the participants into a consideration of the basic causes that underlie poverty. Begin with the following basic questions:

- Why are people hungry? *Because they do not have enough food.*
- Why do they not have enough food? *Because they do not have the money to buy it.*
- Why don't they have enough money? *Because they are poor.*
- Why are they poor?

The last question is the most critical, and there is no satisfactory single answer to it. Remind the young people that truly great and important questions rarely have just *one* answer. They open up further questions that challenge us to re-focus our attention.

Poverty is the root cause of hunger, homelessness and myriad other social ills that affect our society. Poverty explains why there are hungry people in affluent countries such as the United States as well as impoverished countries such as Haiti. But it is difficult to understand how and why poverty exists. This part of the exercise challenges the young people to ask about the nature and causes, as well as the politics of, poverty.

Christians are called upon to respond not only to the immediate human need but also to address the systemic, underlying causes of those needs.

Monika Hellwig, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, puts it this way:

*What we learn from the Eucharist when we reflect on its meaning in the context of scripture and tradition and in the light of our own human experience is that the Christian mission to the hungry is to enter into their need and find ways to satisfy their hunger, to challenge the structures of the*

*world that keep some peoples and some populations hungry, to question the sick and inordinate desires that maintain those structures.*

*The Christian mission to the hungry is to discern the substitute satisfactions that lead those of us in the wealthier nations to entrenched positions from which we cannot even see or hear the cries of the distressed. This in turn means the need to discern the real hungers behind the substitute satisfactions – the hunger for meaning in life, for appreciation and encouragement, for security, for beauty and goodness and truth, the hunger to be needed and have a task to do, the hunger for true human companionship and sharing of interests, and so on.*

*The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975)

Addressing of the root causes of social ills, whether hunger, homelessness, domestic violence, AIDS, alcoholism and other addictions, etc., is not only a spiritual problem but is also a political problem. This causes many people problems: "Religion and politics don't mix" – or do they?

Mahatma Gandhi observed, "Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means." Jesus Christ did not shy away from politics and showed no hesitation in denouncing such political figures as Herod ("that fox") and, even when faced with imminent death, confronting Pontius Pilate in a profound political (and spiritual) debate on the nature of power (*John 19:8-11*). As Dag Hammarskjöld, the great Secretary-General of the United Nations, noted, "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."

Because as Christians we are called upon to address the root causes of social ills as well as to minister to those afflicted, the checklist following the next handout seeks to move the participants into the realm of action, both personal and corporate.

While this was developed to help adults address the issues of hunger, it has a broader application to other social problems. We suggest that leaders copy the list, hand it to the participants for homework and be prepared to answer questions which it will inevitably raise. It may also be photocopied and sent home to the families of the young people or included in the church newsletter as part of a church-wide investigation of our need to address the struggle of poverty and hunger within the community at large.

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## Handout: A Prayer for the Outcasts of Society

For those who are the outcasts of our society, let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, have mercy."

For those who live on the street, in cardboard boxes, in railroad and bus terminals and in crowded shelters; we beg and entreat thy mercy, O Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For the mentally ill who receive no treatment and are utterly without hope; we beg and entreat thy mercy, O Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those whose bodies and spirits are devastated by AIDS, and for those who are HIV-positive; we beg and entreat thy mercy, O Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For families broken by drugs, alcohol addiction and AIDS; we beseech thee, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For all innocent children, homeless and in hotels, who, through circumstances beyond their control, have no family life; protect them, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For grieving mothers and fathers unable to change things for themselves or their children; give them strength, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who are victims of the family violence engendered by despair; we beseech thee, O Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who have gainful employment and are still hungry and without shelter; we beseech thee, dear Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For all the demoniacs of our time; we beseech thee, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who cannot read and are compromised in their daily lives; we beseech thee, O Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who do not speak the language of the land in which they live, and for all refugees; we beseech thee, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who cannot stand up for their rights as citizens of your kingdom; we entreat thy mercy, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*



For all of thy children everywhere who have no place to lay their heads; we beg thy mercy, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who, day after day, on the front lines or in the background seek to make a difference; protect and uplift them, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

For those who seek to minister in thy name; we beseech thee, good Lord.

*Lord, have mercy.*

Son of God, hear us.

*Son of God, hear us.*

Holy Presence, be wholly present.

*Holy Presence, be wholly present.*

*Celebrant*

O Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of thy people; in the multitude of thy mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to thee for help; for thou art gracious, O lover of souls, and to thee we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. *Amen.*

This litany was written by Bets Borries Crean. Used by permission.

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## Handout—Checklist on Hunger: What can my CHURCH do?

- ☐ What kind of community is my church located in?
- ☐ What does the location suggest about human needs within the community?
- ☐ What kinds of feeding programs exist within my community?<sup>26</sup>
  - ☐ Meals on Wheels
  - ☐ Senior Citizen Nutrition Center
  - ☐ Day Care Center
  - ☐ Soup Kitchen
  - ☐ Food Bank
  - ☐ Food Pantry
  - ☐ School Lunch Program
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Does my community's school system provide a nutritional lunch for children?
- ☐ Is breakfast available to needy children?
- ☐ Are children in the schools given nutrition education?
- ☐ How many persons in my county use food stamps? How many are estimated to be eligible? Where could I find out?
- ☐ If someone came to my door hungry, to whom in my community would I turn?
- ☐ What does my church already do about poverty and hunger?
  - ☐ A Food Pantry or fund here at the church
  - ☐ Have regular collections of food or money for the hungry.
  - ☐ Have a basket or barrel at the back of the church for food donations.<sup>27</sup>
  - ☐ Bring offerings of food for the hungry forward at the Offertory.
  - ☐ Support local feeding programs financially and with volunteer recruitment.
  - ☐ Participate in community Church World Service/CROP Walks to Stop Hunger
  - ☐ Have special services and regular prayers for the hungry. Use church buildings for any feeding or hunger-related program.
  - ☐ Have a board person responsible for hunger issues.
  - ☐ Have an Outreach Commission concerned about hunger issues.
  - ☐ Include hunger education in Christian education programs.
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Diocesan programs or initiatives
  - ☐ Support the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief
  - ☐ Support other hunger relief, education and advocacy agencies:
    - Church World Service
    - World Vision
    - Oxfam-America
    - Bread for the World
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ What opportunities for poverty and hunger education are there in my church?
- ☐ What study groups exist that might focus on hunger?
- ☐ What books or periodicals concerning hunger does the church have in its library? What other books or periodicals might be needed? How do we obtain them?

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<sup>26</sup> If they don't know, now is the time to find out. Use the telephone book to begin. It won't be easy to find what you're looking for. How does this affect the provision of services?

<sup>27</sup> The J2A Group might consider taking this on as a ministry.

- ☐ Does my church observe World Food Day (October 16)?
- ☐ Can poverty and hunger concerns be raised in the liturgy?
- ☐ Is my clergyperson aware of the special propers for Sundays devoted to hunger?
- ☐ Does my church have banners that reflect a concern for the poor and hungry?<sup>28</sup>
- ☐ Would the clergy be prepared to preach on poverty and hunger? Would he or she allow me (us) to address the congregation? When do feeding stories occur in the lectionary?
- ☐ Are there pauses for personal concerns in the intercessory prayers?
- ☐ Are people in my church aware of the connection between feeding *spiritually* hungry people *in worship* and feeding *physically* hungry people *in the world*?
- ☐ What other resources in my community should my church be aware of?
- ☐ Are there other churches known to be active in hunger concerns? Might they welcome my church's cooperation?
- ☐ What kind of ecumenical and interfaith groups exist? Are they involved in hunger issues?
- ☐ Does my community celebrate World Day of Prayer? How could the concerns of world hunger be included in such a day?
- ☐ What secular organizations exist that are concerned about feeding the hungry or aiding in development projects? How can my congregation relate to these?
- ☐ What is my judicatory office (such as diocese, synod, etc.) doing about poverty and hunger?
- ☐ Who is the diocesan or judicatory contact for:
  - ☐ Hunger \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Christian education \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Christian social relations \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Community Outreach \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Does my judicatory office have:
  - ☐ A resource center
  - ☐ Resolutions before the National Church Convention that deal with hunger
  - ☐ An ingathering for the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief?
  - ☐ A hunger booth or display at the National Church Convention?
- ☐ How can I or my church become involved with these activities?
- ☐ Are there hunger projects in the judicatory office or region that I or my church might become involved in? How can I find out?
- ☐ Has my bishop made any statements about poverty and hunger? How can I find out?
- ☐ Has the diocesan convention passed any resolutions about poverty and hunger? How can I find out?

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<sup>28</sup> If not, why not have the group design and make one as a J2A project?

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## Handout—Checklist on Hunger: What can I do?

- ☐ How much time and energy do I devote to working against hunger and poverty at a local level?
- ☐ What kinds of feeding programs exist where I might help?
  - ☐ Meals on Wheels
  - ☐ Senior Citizen Nutrition Center
  - ☐ Day Care Center
  - ☐ Soup Kitchen
  - ☐ Food Bank
  - ☐ Food Pantry
  - ☐ School Lunch Program
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ What skills do I have that I could bring to these programs?
- ☐ How can I study the problem of poverty and world hunger effectively?
- ☐ What books relating to hunger have I read? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ What periodicals do I read regularly that deal with hunger? \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Can I form a study group? Does one already exist that I can join?
- ☐ Are there groups I already belong to that might have an interest in or responsibility for being involved in hunger?
- ☐ What information about poverty or hunger does my local library have? My church library?
- ☐ What can I find out about local and world poverty and hunger by reading:
  - ☐ newspapers?
  - ☐ magazines?
  - ☐ my diocesan newspaper?
- ☐ What national organizations are working on poverty and hunger issues and provide information and action updates? How do I find these out?
- ☐ How can I share my views with others?
  - ☐ Letters to newspaper editors
  - ☐ Speaking engagements
  - ☐ Letters to public officials
- ☐ Are courses on poverty and hunger offered in my community's colleges?
- ☐ What other courses are offered elsewhere?
- ☐ What am I doing to become an effective advocate on behalf of the poor and hungry?
- ☐ What government policies affect poor and hungry people?
  - ☐ Food stamp legislation
  - ☐ Nutrition programs for women and children
  - ☐ Development assistance (AID)
  - ☐ Nutrition programs for the elderly
  - ☐ Agricultural policies
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ What is the current level of government funding for these programs? Do I feel it is enough?
- ☐ What state and local programs affect the poor and hungry?
- ☐ Who is/are:
  - ☐ My senators \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ My representative \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ My state senator(s) \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ My state representative \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ What are their records on recent food votes?
- ☐ What organizations exist where I may work with others to affect government policy?
- ☐ Does my life-style reflect my concern for the poor and hungry?
- ☐ God calls us to be stewards of creation (*Genesis 1:26-31*). Does the way I live reflect this?
- ☐ What kind of diet does my family have? Do we eat any meatless meals? How much of our income is spent on food? How much do we waste? Do we grow any of our own food?<sup>29</sup>
- ☐ What kind of transportation do we commonly use? Could some of our errands be accomplished by cycling or walking?
- ☐ How much energy do we use (electricity, gas, oil). Could we cut down on this use?
- ☐ How do we spend our leisure time?
- ☐ Do my clothing purchases reflect need or style?
- ☐ If I practice economy in my life, how would I use the money I save?
- ☐ Are prayers for God's guidance to help end world hunger a regular part of my prayer life?
- ☐ Is fasting a spiritual discipline that I have ever practiced?

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<sup>29</sup> **Note:** These questions are further addressed in the following lesson plans, *Money and Food*.

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# MONEY AND FOOD I: Baking the Bread of Life

## Goal

To increase our awareness of the time and energy necessary to feed a family

## Area

Society

## Objectives

To think critically about our own eating habits

To look critically at where our food comes from and what we do to procure it

To bake Eucharistic bread together

## Introduction

These lessons are about food and how food affects our lives. Why food? There are several reasons. First and foremost, we have to eat to live, and the food purchases we make daily say something about our priorities in life. Second, food is central to our Christian living. There is no book in the Bible where food is not mentioned. The petition for food nestles in the heart of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus left us the sharing of a simple meal as a paradigm of our live together and as his memorial. As the theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, says, "Food is the place of encounter with God."

## Guiding Scriptures

Exodus 16:2-18

Psalm 104:12-16,25-32 (Benedic, anima mea)

John 21:1-13

## Background Material

Johannine Haiku:

The Word became flesh  
and dwelt among us and said,  
"Come and have breakfast!" –  
Which is not  
exactly  
what we would have expected.

*Patrick Henry  
Theology Today*

To be human is to be hungry. Not to be hungry is to be dead. Yet in our contemporary way of life, many peoples of the world including almost all the Christians, have such a high standard of living that they (we) have long forgotten about hunger. In western, technologically-oriented society we frequently think of ourselves more or less as machines. Mealtimes come and we refuel. Perhaps we can calculate the need for protein, for certain vitamins and minerals, and we refuel accordingly. More frequently, eating is simply a matter

of habit and of tastes and preferences. Our hunger is satisfied so quickly, so easily, so continuously that we can easily forget that hunger is there at all, it does not intrude itself.<sup>30</sup>

Hunger is the most basic experience of dependence, of contingency, of the need for others. To be hungry is to experience oneself as insufficient, as having needs, as being unable to guarantee one's own existence. To be hungry is to know in a dark inchoate kind of way that we do not create ourselves, but are creatures, receiving our existence as gift. Never really to be hungry is to be in danger of forgetting that our very existence is a gift in danger of forgetting reverence and gratitude to the source of our being, the transcendent creator. It is not by accident that food, side by side with birth and death, has always been a central occasion for human communities to pray.<sup>31</sup>

It is not by any casual coincidence that the presence and saving power of Jesus is set forth in the Eucharist in the form of food, because it is a response to hunger, to hunger at many levels.<sup>32</sup>

## Background

Part A: Initially, our goal is to ask the young men and women in J2A to spend one week paying attention to their own eating patterns, the cost of the food they consume and the methods by which they receive their meals. This is not an experience that has any moral imperatives attached to it. For example, we are not saying by this exercise that families who eat all their meals at home are more responsible, or better family units, than those who take their meals in restaurants. Nor do we want to say that families ought not to eat meat or shop at certain stores. We are *only* trying to get young people to be aware of the rhythms in their families, to pay attention to the way they eat, and to think a little about the costs incurred in feeding a household.

To that end, the survey for this lesson is found in "Money and Food III." It should be given out to each member, at the end of the session and returned at the next meeting.

In order to prepare for the experience of watching their eating patterns, use the Scripture passages above and the following discussion questions to open up a dialogue on eating and hunger and feeling full.

- When were you last hungry? Really hungry?
- What is the longest period of time you've gone without eating?
- Where does our food come from?
  - Bread?
  - Bananas?
  - Mangoes, kiwis or other fancy fruits?
- How often do we complain about our food?
- When was the last time you prepared and cooked a meal for yourself?
- Where does our Eucharistic bread come from?

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<sup>30</sup> Monika K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, New York: Paulist Press, 1975 page 11.

<sup>31</sup> Hellwig, *op. cit.* page 15.

<sup>32</sup> Hellwig, *op. cit.* page 22.

## Action

Prepare a Eucharistic bread using the following recipe:

### Recipe for Whole Wheat Altar Bread

7/8 cup lukewarm water	1/4 cup honey
1/8 cup olive or salad oil	2/3 cup (more or less) white flour
1/4 teaspoon salt	2 cups whole wheat flour
1 package dried yeast	

Measure the water into a mixing bowl and add the yeast, stirring until it is dissolved; then stir in the honey, oil and salt. Add the flour (unsifted) and, with the hands, mix it in completely. If the flour does not completely dampen, add a tablespoon or more of water.

Turn the dough out onto a very lightly floured board and knead thoroughly for five minutes. This kneading is important. Replace the dough in the bowl, cover with a damp cloth or towel, and let it rise in a warm place until it has doubled in bulk (about 1 to 1½ hours).

Turn the dough again onto a lightly floured board again and knead for a few minutes. Roll into ¼" thickness and cut into round loaves with a circular cookie cutter. Press crossed lines on each loaf with a knife (being careful not to cut through) so that the baked loaves may easily be divided into quarters.

Place the loaves on a lightly oiled baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for 10-12 minutes. Cool on a rack. The loaves may be sealed in plastic bags and frozen for future use.

*Recipe from Sisters of the Community of St. Mary*

During the rising time necessary for this recipe, play! Use this time for light-hearted talk and laughter. At the end, remind the young people that laughter feeds the soul. Ask them to make a list of the things which we "feed on." The list might include such things as laughter, conversations, friendship, love, service. Let the discussion go where the young people lead. There are so many ways in which our need to be full and feed is satisfied by our common life. Even young men and women need more than food to feel indulged. They know. Give them every opportunity to tell the leaders how they find satisfaction in their lives.

After the bread has been made, celebrate a Holy Eucharist. Clergy will need to have been invited in advance. Perhaps they would even enjoy spending this whole afternoon with the group.

Include the following prayer litany of humility in your Eucharist.



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## Handout—A Litany of Humility

From the desire of being praised,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the desire of being honored,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the desire of being preferred,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the desire of being consulted,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the desire of being approved,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the desire of comfort and ease,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being humiliated,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being criticized,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being passed over,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being forgotten,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being lonely,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being hurt,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of suffering,

*Deliver me, O Lord;*

That others may be loved more than I,

*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*

That others may be chosen and I set aside,

*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*

That others may be praised and I

unnoticed,

*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart,

*Make my strength like unto thine. Amen.*

*DeKoven Foundation, Racine, WI.*

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## **MONEY AND FOOD II: It's not Easy to Feed a Family**

### **Area**

Society

### **Background**

Leaders must find a willing family to be participants for this activity. The family must be willing to give up control of both their weekly food budget and their meals for one week. The family should receive a Survey and a Food Intake Log. They should spend one week preparing for this activity. At the end of the week, the leaders must get from the family (see handouts at the end of this section):

- A completed Food Survey
- A Food Intake Log from each member of the family
- A check or cash in the amount of a week's food budget.

Using the information provided in the Survey and Log, as well as the Food for a Day Guidelines, the young people must design a week's menus and a grocery list. Remind them to make provision for lunches and snacks. This will not be easy for them. The willing family should be sure to make a list of all the non-food stuffs which they need to purchase with some of the week's food money.

The group must know exactly how much money they have to work with. The goal is not necessarily to save money, only to spend it wisely.

Young people should be encouraged to plan a week of food they themselves are willing to eat. In other words, no overdose of hot dogs or beans and rice to try to make ends meet, unless, of course, that's what the family is used to eating!

Depending on the size of the youth group, leaders may wish to find two families. In any case, the young people must do some comparison shopping. They will need a copy of the Wednesday Food Supplement from the local paper, as well as the Sunday coupons. After they have made the decision about where to shop, and they have written a list, arrange for all of the group to go shopping. They must come in under budget! No rescue maneuvers by leaders, please.

The young people are to deliver the food to the willing family. On the way to the delivery, stop at a convenience store, and ask several of the kids to go in and check the prices of milk, cheese, toilet paper and bread. Have them compare the prices with the price paid at the major grocery store.

When the young people arrive at the home of the family (be sure to warn the family that you are coming), each food item should be marked with a big red X to indicate that it was purchased by the youth group. Have one of the youth explain the menu to the host family, return any change from the food budget money and show them the cash register receipt. If the young people made any last-minute changes in the menu, while they were at the store (perhaps they found an unadvertised special on chicken wings and decided to switch their menu), be sure that they explain the change to the family.

If at all possible, allow the young people to unload the groceries and put them away under the supervision of the family. Remind the young people that they should bless the food as it goes into

the cupboards. The chances are good they won't have a clue what that means, but this makes for a good teachable moment, in which leaders might suggest that buying food for a family is, in fact, a holy occupation. In the past, when our food sources were not so far removed from our consumption, it was easier for us to remember that God has his hand at our tables, and easier for us to remember that it is God who gives us our daily bread. As they put the food away in the cupboards and refrigerator and freezer, the young people can and should give thanks for God's provision and ask a blessing on the food which has come from him, through their hands.

At the following meeting, invite the family to come and report to the group on the food for the week. Make sure that the family agrees to be completely candid with the group. What worked? What didn't? Did the family have to go to the store during the week because the youth group forgot something? Did you run out of basics? Milk? Eggs? Were they able to purchase the extras and stay within their budget? How did the quality of the food and the menu choices compare with the normal experience of the family?

With a little careful planning, this exercise works as a fine experiment in the responsibility of feeding a family. If the feedback from the family is positive, the youth group should celebrate! They have accomplished no small task.

**[Note:** Be sure to bring a camera on this outing. There is really nothing quite as delightful and comical as a dozen teenagers racing around the store in search of mustard and the makings for meatloaf!

**And another note:** This is meant to be fun. The biggest challenge for the kids will be to come up with a menu which satisfies the requirements of the family. The planning will take three or four times as much energy and attention as the actual shopping. But it is good for the kids to hammer this out. They will have to negotiate their best laid plans with one another and with the family's preferences. Leaders should be extremely patient and let the group muddle through the planning. After all, the point here is for them to feel the weight of this new responsibility and to manage it. Chances are that the leaders have been shopping and cooking for themselves for years. The challenge is long gone, and it is only a familiar task. Leaders should offer their expertise *only* when asked, and *only* in the smallest amounts possible.]

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## Handout: Money and Food – A Survey for Families

### Directions

This questionnaire should be answered by *all* members of the family. Extra care should be taken to include the answers given by the individual responsible for most, if not all, grocery shopping.

- How many times do you go to the grocery store during an average week?
- Where do you shop for groceries?
- Approximately how far from your home is the grocery store? \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you use coupons? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** \_\_\_\_\_
- How many members of your family eat at home regularly? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many people live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_
- Please indicate the ages of family members:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ over 20
  - \_\_\_\_\_ between 16-20
  - \_\_\_\_\_ between 10-16
  - \_\_\_\_\_ between 3-10
  - \_\_\_\_\_ under 3
- On the average, how much do you spend, per week, to feed your family? (Include grocery shopping and meals eaten in restaurants.) \_\_\_\_\_
- How many nights a week do you eat out? (as a family)?
  - ☐ once \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ two or three
  - ☐ almost every night
  - ☐ we never eat out
- Using a checkbook register or cash register receipts as a guide, what was the *average* amount spent at the grocery store, averaging the last eight visits?
- Does your family have a food budget? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
- If yes, how much do you budget for food per week?
- Do you include household products – laundry soap, toilet paper, sponges, etc. – in your food budget? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

- How many meat meals are consumed during an average week? *(A meat meal is defined as one which includes beef, pork, chicken or fish as a primary element of the meal.)*
- How many meatless meals are consumed in a week?
- Are there any vegetarians in your household? ☐ Yes ☐ No \_\_\_\_\_
- How many lunches are prepared in your home each week? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many lunches are purchased each week? \_\_\_\_\_  
Please list the cost of a school lunch \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Please list the average cost of a lunch purchased in a restaurant. \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Who does the shopping in your household? \_\_\_\_\_
- When was the last time you (member of J2A) went to the grocery store?
- If you had to, could your household get by for a week with the food that is currently in your house? *(Think about the freezer, the cupboards, etc.)* ☐ Yes ☐ No
- How long could your household eat from the current supply?
- How satisfied are you with your current food/grocery experience? *(Each member of the household should answer.)* \_\_\_\_\_

	Completely Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Completely Dissatisfied	Don't Know

Do you comparison shop? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you buy only brand name items? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Will you purchase generic foods if they are cost cutting? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### **To Be Answered Only by the Young People in the Household.**

If you had to, do you think you could do a week's shopping for your family? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you know all the brands? For example, if your parent asked you to go pick up dish detergent, would you know what brand to buy?    ☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**

When was the last time you were in a grocery store? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any say in meal planning?    ☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**

Are you ever expected to cook for your family?    ☐ **Yes**   ☐ **No**

If you had to plan a dinner party for six of your friends, what might you cook? *(No, you may not order pizza or get take-out Chinese food.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Can you make a list of the ingredients you will need?

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## Handout: Food Intake Log

For one week, please keep track of all the food you consume.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

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## **MONEY AND FOOD III: Food for a Day**

### **GUIDELINES FOR A DAY OF HEALTHY EATING**

Contact your local Cooperative Extension Office and get from them copies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture food pyramid. Distribute them to the class and discuss their families' diets in light of the recommendations implicit in the pyramid. What does the class think represents healthy and responsible eating habits?



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## URBAN/RURAL ADVENTURE

### Goal

To travel through a city using all the available means of transportation: taxi, bus, subway, train and walking...or, if you are an group of urbanites, to find your way around a small, rural community using whatever means you can identify.

### Area Covered

Society, Self

### Objectives

To practice map-reading skills.

To build confidence by facing the challenge and succeeding mastering the task.

### Background and Action

Every group will have to design this Adventure on its own, but here are some suggestions:

- **Form a committee** of individuals who are willing to research and develop this adventure.
- **Choose a city/town.** It should be far enough away to all for travel and a sense of being "away from home." It should also be large enough to provide several different modes of transportation. (We chose Washington, D.C.; others have chosen New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago.) If you already live in one of these cities and your youth have little or no experience with a rural area, pick a small, rural town that is big enough to occupy them for a day (about one square mile or a bit larger should do it!)
- **Determine how you will get there.** We opted for the train. Very few kids had ever been on a train trip. They loved every minute of it. It increased the sense of adventure, allowed time to talk, play cards and roam about.
- **Find a place to stay once you're there.** Local churches are often willing to house traveling youth groups. Try to find a place which allows you to cook and shower. There are also youth hostels in most American cities. Wherever you decide to stay, consider what assistance you may need from local churches: a car to get groceries, transportation to and from the bus station or train station. Think through what you will need in advance. Good planning makes for a good adventure. We recommend a four-day trip: Two days to travel and two days in the city.
- **Design the Orienteering/Scavenger Hunt.** There should be seven or eight sites which must be found. For example, in Washington, we used:
  - The Vietnam Memorial
  - A small Chinese grocery store in Chinatown
  - The National Cathedral
  - A funky-upscale combined clothing store and restaurant.
  - Dupont Circle

At each site, the travelers were expected to find something, see something or copy something down.

In designing the Hunt, vary the degree of difficulty from site to site. Some things should be easy and others as challenging as possible. Young people are told where to go, but not how to get there. They will need to be given accurate recent maps of the city, as well as train and bus schedules.

If you are going to a town in a rural area, you will likely need the help of local people. Maps may not exist – and the group will have to figure out how to find things by asking for directions. Ask the local people to pick out sites that are important to them and are located reasonably far apart but within walking distance. With no public transportation, your group will likely have to walk. The sites are likely to be things like the local movie theatre, the lake, the school, etc. Try to pick a town that has something unusual or interesting so there is a final destination that has some “Wow!” factor.

The youth group should be divided into teams of no more than three to five members. Each team will be assigned a Silent Shadow (an adult chaperone). The Silent Shadows are *silent!* They should speak and offer assistance only if they deem the team to be at serious risk. In other words, they can let the team get lost, but not if it means they are in any physical danger! Otherwise, Silent Shadows should remain as silent as possible, watch, and hold onto a stash of emergency funds!

- **Build in a service activity** at a local shelter or soup kitchen. The kids should have done this kind of service at home, now they can face the reality that these problems are nationwide.
- **Bring a few games.** Include fun and play in your plan.
- **Warn parents** months in advance.
- **If you go to Washington,** try to include a visit to your representatives in Congress.
- **Keep them moving,** but build a time of quiet reflection into every day.
- **Include time to buy and write and mail a postcard** to their parents. They’ll love you for it!
- **As a closing exercise,** have each member write a letter to themselves regarding their experience on the Hunt. They should put the letters into envelopes and put their names on the front. Leaders will mail these letters after about a year and a half – long after they’ve been forgotten.
- **Remember,** design a weekend you would enjoy and be challenged by, and you all but guarantee success.
- **Don’t forget permission slips** and emergency medical release forms!
- **Do not make this a luxury guided tour.** The kids should have to work, and work hard. That won’t get them to sleep any earlier, but it’s still the right thing

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## J2A Compassion and Mercy Weekend

### The First Weekend after Easter

In the Roman Catholic Church the Sunday after Easter is known as Divine Mercy Sunday and is a time to focus the church's attention on its ministry of compassion and mercy. It seems appropriate to invite youth groups to focus their attention on carrying out their ministry of compassion and mercy on this weekend. Over time, this weekend will become our "Make a Difference" weekend—a time when J2A youth groups across the country are engaged in acts of compassion and mercy. (One added benefit of engaging youth and adults in service ministries is that both adults and youth who participate in service ministries score higher in faith maturity and increased loyalty to the church. *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* by Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel describe and document this on pages 94-96.)

If you have large groups, each of the three groups might select a different ministry. If your groups are smaller, this is a good time for them to work together and an excellent time for the YAC group to provide leadership. They would, appropriately, select and plan the ministry, involving the two younger groups and the rest of the congregation.

Review the Compassion and Mercy lesson plans in the Rite-13 section of the program. Invite the youth to select a ministry they feel called to do. Remember to lead them in praying for God's guidance, rather than just picking something they think would be fun. Encourage them to look at their congregation and community, to pay attention to the new, to talk with their parents and other adults and, if they are a YAC group, to discuss it with the J2A and Rite-13 groups. All of these can help youth identify needs and ideas.

After the group identifies the ministry they feel called to do, help them plan what and how they will do it, what they will need and how they can obtain what they need. Encourage the young people to involve their families, the rest of the congregation, their friends and even the larger community.

"Make a Difference Day" is sponsored by USA Weekend Magazine and participating newspapers across the country. It has inspired groups to do a wide variety of projects that benefit their communities or those in need. They have a useful planning guide for organizing a project that you can download from [www.usaweekend.com/diffday/](http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/). While this secular event can help with ideas and planning aids, it is important to engage youth in reflecting on the difference between volunteering to do good thing and undertaking a ministry. The two lesson plans in the Rite-13 section of the program on True Charity (lessons 8 and 9 in the Compassion and Acts of Mercy series) are useful in identifying some of the questions you will need to explore.

Join J2A groups across the globe in making the weekend after Easter a time when our youth lead their congregations in ministries of compassion and mercy. Send an account of your youth group's ministry to [staff@LeaderResources.org](mailto:staff@LeaderResources.org).

**J2A Lessons**

**Sexuality**

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## THROW & CATCH: 15 Minutes on How to Talk to Anyone

### Goal

To practice the fine art of conversation

### Area

Self, Society, Spirituality, Sexuality – this lesson serves them all!

### Background

Learning to listen to one another is a skill. Learning to say what you mean is a skill. Making conversation is more like an art. In the course of these two years in J2A, the kids get a lot of practice listening to each other and responding appropriately. Consequently it comes as something of a shock when they say, "I can't talk to my parents," or when parents ask, "Does he really talk with you? I can't get two words out of him."

Present this lesson to the young people as a survival tactic. Remind them that when their parents ask them silly or boring or obnoxious questions, in fact, all they want back is a small conversation. Tell them to imagine that the parent has thrown them a Nerf ball. The parent wants to see them throw it up and down in the air for a few seconds and then toss it back.

### Action

Using a real Nerf ball – any size will do, and a few of different sizes may come in handy. Leaders should hold the ball, toss it gently in the air and catch it a few times. As they do this, they might talk briefly about their day.

**Example:** "I've had a very busy day" (gently toss the ball in the air and catch it) "I had to run all over town trying to find a widget for the dishwasher" (toss and catch) "What did you do today?" At this point the leader throws the ball to some poor, unsuspecting member of the group. Chances are good they won't even catch it. In that case, the leader races over, grabs the ball from the floor and does it again, using the very same, or only slightly modified words.

Again, at "What did you do today?" the leader throws the ball across to the same member. If they still don't catch it, the leader should comment on the fact that they keep missing their chance to have a conversation. Race over, grab the ball and repeat the action again, this time throwing it to another person.

As soon as someone catches it, the leader should remark, "Oh good, it's your turn, talk to me." Chances are the first words out of their mouth will be, "What am I supposed to do?" The leader, now looking and feeling somewhat dejected, responds, "Throw it back. Gee, I thought you were going to talk to me."

The group member throws the ball back. The leader says, "I am looking for someone to talk with me. I really want someone to talk with me," all the while gently tossing the ball up in the air and catching it. After a few moments of this, send the ball to someone else, asking, as it is thrown, "What was your day like?"

Eventually, some wise young person will see that the object of the game is to juggle the ball for a few minutes while talking to the leader and then to throw it back.

The goal? To keep the ball in the air. That's the goal in all social conversations. You don't have to be especially witty or wise, just keep the ball in the air.

OK, so what are some of the possible problems with this little game?

- Suppose you have a member who keeps the ball and refuses to throw it. Get out another ball, and begin again. Eventually the greedy ball snatcher will want back into the game.
- Suppose you have someone who simply refuses to catch the ball! Well, since it's a Nerf ball, you can throw it over and over and over right at their chest and it won't hurt them. In that case, you might ask them, "Is this the way conversations go at home? Someone just keeps throwing the ball at you and you refuse to pick it up and talk?"
- Suppose someone take the ball, juggles it endlessly, babbling on without regard for the rest of the group. Well, there are two possibilities. Leaders can reach in and try to take the ball in midflight. This is more difficult than it sounds. Or they may want to introduce another ball into the game, commenting that, "One of the rules of good conversation is that the ball moves around the room, with a certain rhythm and generosity. You can't keep the ball too long or it turns into a monologue or a lecture, but not a conversation."

Don't be surprised if a young person comments that one or both of their parents are given to hogging the ball. Laugh with them over how silly that is, if what you want is conversation!

Finally, introduce a basketball or a soccer ball into the game. Tell the kids that some conversations are harder than others. The topics are heavier and it is a lot easier to get hurt. We might be able to have an easy, quick conversation about a friend, or a game or even church – but some topics, like sex and AIDS and drugs and death are always difficult. You have to be careful how you toss the ball. Imagine how hard it would be to have this sort of talk at a distance, or over a long period of time. You'd be exhausted. And we all know some conversations are exhausting.

See if your group can think of other balls to represent different kinds of conversation. What would a ping-pong ball conversation be? (Maybe "Hi, how are you?" to someone you pass on the sidewalk) What would a bowling ball conversation be? ("Mom, Dad... I think I'm pregnant.") Talk about how different conversations need different amounts of attention – don't start a "bowling ball conversation" with your parents when they are busy doing something – you probably don't even want to try a "basketball conversation". Tell them you have something to discuss with them and wait until you have their undivided attention.

Leaders can also try this exercise with family and friends. It doesn't take long, and with willing grownups, it will stir up a lot of conversation about conversations: good and bad!

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# HOW DO I LOVE THEE: Let's Talk about the Ways

## Goal

To identify three of the ways we Love

## Area

Sexuality

## Guiding Scripture

I Corinthians, Chapter 13

## Background

There are many different kinds of love, and in other languages there are other words that help to draw the distinction. We are not so lucky. We say we love the color blue. We love our favorite sports team. We love our pet turtles. We love snow days. We love our spouses. We love our brothers and sisters. We make love. We love in all sorts of ways.

The Greeks had at least three different words for love and learning these three words helps us to distinguish different kinds of love. The Greek words are:

- **Eros:** romantic love; sexual or erotic love
- **Philia:** brotherly love; love for friends or family
- **Agape:** spiritual and sometimes sacrificial love, rooted in compassion and service

## Action

Introduce the idea of different kinds of love by asking the young people the following:

1. Ask the young people to tell you a love story.  
It can be a story of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl back or any variation thereof. In most cases, it will be a story of "Eros" – but see if the group can identify what kind of love is present: Is it brotherly love? Is it spiritual love? Is it romantic love?

### **Biblical examples of Eros:**

- David & Bathsheba (II Samuel 11)
- The Bride & Bridegroom (Book of Song of Songs – also called Song of Solomon)
- Jacob's love for Rachel (Genesis 29-30)

2. Now ask them to tell you a love story in which brotherly love is at play.  
Stories may include friends or family – possibly also the church or this particular group. Also, some of the young people may know that the city "Philadelphia" means "the city of brotherly love" – they may also have seen the movie by the same name.

### **Biblical examples of Philio:**

- Ruth & Naomi (Book of Ruth, esp. chapter 1)
- David & Jonathan (I Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-10; 20:1-42)
- Mary, Martha & Lazarus & Jesus (John, chapter 11)

3. And now for the hardest one – ask them to tell you a love story about *agape*. Of course, we think of Jesus and his death right away, but where else can we see this sort of special love? In some stories, *agape* seems at the very core of the action. Think back to some of the movies we have seen as a group. What about people like Mother Teresa or people who have dedicated their whole life to love? Can you think of examples of *agape*?

**Biblical examples of agape:**

- Jesus (“Love one another... Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” – John 15:12-13)
- Great Commandment (“Love the Lord you God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself” – Matthew 22:37-40)
- Early Church (“... they came together, sold their possessions and divided them among all, as any had need...” – Acts 2:42-47)

## **Telling a Story of Love**

Now your group is going to work together to tell a story, using the method where someone begins the story and then each person has a chance to take a turn and picks up where the last person left off. The point of this story is to allow all the characters to experience some kind of love and to make sure that all three kinds of love are present somewhere in the story.

This is a very old car game and a tried-and-true method of storytelling. It is likely that the story will become very silly and involved. Leaders should let the story move as it moves, but keep reminding the storyteller of the point of the story: Everyone gets some love. The leaders retain the right to appoint the next storyteller.

The story should have at least seven major characters and the list of central characters should be written up and posted where everyone can see it. Other characters can be added at will, but you must include these seven major characters:

- A poor man, homeless, living on the street
- A woman, about forty-five. She is tall and has beautiful red hair
- A brother and sister, both in their teens
- A priest (male or female)
- A seventeen-year-old homosexual
- A twenty-five year old secretary (male or female)
- Oh, yes, and God

One of the leaders should probably begin the story. Here is one way to begin the tale: Once upon a time in the city of \_\_\_\_\_, there lived a young boy. His name was Michael. He wanted to be a lawyer when he grew up. He had thought about it for a long time, years and years, and he decided it was the very best career choice for him. There was only one problem – his father. He said...

Continue the game until everyone has contributed something and all the story characters have experienced love. When the story is over, ask the group to identify the ways in which each of the characters experienced love and what kind of love they experienced.

## **Closure**



Have your group stand in a circle and hold hands. Designate one member of the group as the leader. Have a moment of silent prayer, and then use the following prayer form to close your time together:

### **LOVE PRAYER**

*Leader* Lord, we are here because we love you;

*Group* Help us and show us what to do.

*Leader* In my heart I heard Jesus say, "Love me as I love you."

*Group* Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

*Leader* In my heart I heard Jesus say, "I have chosen you and keep continual watch over you."

*Group* Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

*Leader* In my heart I heard Jesus say, "I am within you and you are within me."

*Group* Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

*Leader* In my heart I heard Jesus say, "If people listen to you, they will hear my voice."

*Group* Amen. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, lover of my soul.

*Margery Kempe (1373-?1438; The Mirror of Love*

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# WHAT THE WORLD TELL US ABOUT SEX: Fighting Media Myths

## Goal

To examine what our culture tells us about sexuality and to examine how much of it we truly believe

## Area

Sexuality

## Objectives

To see how much sexuality is a part of culture

To learn to "talk back" to the images we see

To remind ourselves that our self worth comes from God

## Guiding Scriptures

Romans 12:2 – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable..."

I Peter 3:3-4 – "Do not let your beauty be the outward adorning of hair, of wearing gold or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart..."

## Equipment Required

Magazines – lots of them

Glue

Scissors

Markers

Poster board

Music – CDs that the teens bring in (optional)

A videotape with pre-recorded commercials (optional)

## Background

We live in a world that is saturated with sexuality. All day, every day we are bombarded with messages that tell us which deodorant will make us irresistible or which shampoo will make us orgasmic. We have reality television shows that give us the best, but more often the worst, of human relationships. We hear music that celebrates all the glory of sex and laments the agony of love gone wrong. Whatever your take on it is, you can hardly debate the fact that "sex sells" and that sex is a huge part of our modern culture.

Some Christians have decided that the best way to keep the world's views of sex from permeating the minds of their young people is to limit their exposure to TV or current movies or modern rock music. The unfortunate truth is that even a measure as drastic as that still doesn't address the root problem. The world that we see in advertisements and television and music is often a world that is full of mythological elements and proportions. Keeping our teens from seeing certain movies or listening to certain music often just leads to a more intense curiosity about what they contain. An alternative way to help our young people learn to battle the images they are bombarded with is to help them learn critical thinking skills and teach them to evaluate and talk back to the messages they receive from the culture all around them. By doing this, we have helped to equip our young people with tools of real-world faith that can help them be a part of their popular culture, but not overwhelmed by it.

## Action

Begin the session by asking what messages the young people have heard about sex that week. It is very likely this question will be followed by blank stares that the adults have once again lost their minds. Try again. If you had time to make a videotape of commercials, play it. If not, use some of these questions to start the conversation:

- What do the songs you've heard this week tell you about love?
- What do TV commercials tell you about what is sexy?
- What do sitcoms or reality shows tell you about romance?
- What do magazines tell you about beauty?
- What does the Internet tell you about your relationships?
- 

Remind your young people that none of these entities (pop stars, radio stations, television producers, advertisers, magazine publishers, etc.) know them and teens have the right to talk back to the constant stream of messages they are bombarded with.

Of course, one way to "talk back" would be to write editors, producers, artists, etc. to express opinions. Another way, however, to effectively combat these messages and render them less powerful is to learn to talk back to the messages – literally at first and then later, figuratively.

**NOTE:** Don't forget to acknowledge that not all messages are negative. Sometimes messages from the media are life-affirming and positive. These messages are cause for celebration, even when they come from unlikely or inconsistent sources. For example, for all her hyped-up sexuality, Christina Aguilera sings these lyrics in her song *Beautiful*:

*I am beautiful no matter what they say*

*Words can't bring me down*

*I am beautiful in every single way*

*Yes, words can't bring me down*

*So don't you bring me down today*

See if your group can come up with a list of other positive images from the various media sources they interact with.

If you have made a videotape of commercials (or scenes from reality shows or soap operas) put this tape in again, but this time turn off the sound. Ask the group what they are looking at and what the advertisers (or producers) want us to believe. Help them create a dialogue with the silent images by asking questions that guide them, such as:

- Ok, so if I buy this car, will I immediately be invited to Hollywood premieres and surrounded by rich and glamorous people?
- Will using this shampoo make me more irresistible to the opposite sex?
- Will shopping at this store make me happy and popular?
- Why is this woman so ridiculously happy just eating her yogurt?
- If I go to this theme park, will everyone really dance in perfect choreography with me?
- Will men stop and turn around to stare if I wear these particular pantyhose – or could it possibly be the amazingly long legs and shapely body (not to mention the short skirt) of the model wearing them?

Obviously, these questions can become quite silly very quickly. The goal here is not for the teachers to ask the mostly-rhetorical questions and the teens to respond, although you may have to begin there. The goal is to have the teens be able to figure out what subliminal messages they are being sent and for your young people to be able to pose the questions – out

loud and in response to what they are seeing. They are learning critical thinking skills and learning to ask questions about what they are seeing, what the advertisers are intending them to believe, and what they think are realistic expectations of using a certain product.

### **Closing Activity**

After you have done this, pass out the poster board, magazines and art supplies. Ask young people to draw a line down the middle of the poster board and then create collages of positive media messages on one side and negative media images on the other. Depending on the size of your group, you may even want to create different collages on different subjects, such as Sex, Sex Appeal, Relationships, Beauty, etc.

After your group has finished their work, have them share the results with the entire group.

### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you for loving us exactly as we are. Thank you for giving us minds to use and voices to raise when we see things we disagree with. Help us to look at images we see with your eyes and see things clearly. Remind us that we are your unique and special creations and help us learn to be gentle with each other and with ourselves. Amen.

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# DO OPPOSITES ATTRACT: What Makes a Good Relationship

## Goal

To examine what it means to have a healthy relationship

## Area

Sexuality

## Objectives

To discuss the things which “attract” us

To examine the ways we choose and our reasons for choosing our partners

## Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 85:10                      Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Titus 2:1-8                      Characteristics of men and women

I Corinthians 13                      Description of Love

Romans 12:9-21                      Description of a loving community

## Equipment Required

Newsprint

Markers

## Background

Teenagers spend an enormous amount of time and energy attracting and being attracted to each other. They spend very little time thinking about what attracts them and why.

It would be presumptuous at best, dangerous at worst, to try to quantify and qualify what it means to be attractive. However, some basic guidelines and discussion may help young people survive the turmoil of their first years of dating and longing and wistfully dreaming of the “right one” for them. Over the years, the question, “Do you think there’s just one ideal partner out there for me?” has been voiced many times. The right answer is No. But the best answer may be to ask another question. “Do you think you are only perfect for *one* person?” The rhetorical question begs the answer: “Of course not! You are a delightful, engaging, wise, happy soul and a fitting partner for many people. You get to choose. You get to make that selection.” One of the reasons we date at all is to sort of “try on” different types and personalities and to see where and when there is a good match. But the point remains, we must choose. Choose wisely, we hope, but we must choose. In the throes of the teen years, the concept of choosing is completely alien. It all seems quite magical and mystical. Falling in love, by its very construction, implies that we are taken over, head over heels, unable to think, unable to choose. Young people need to be reminded at every turn that they are in control. They can choose who they want as friends and as romantic partners.

In addition, the effort put into becoming attractive, when seen as a critical part of being whole and being alive, becomes an effort of true love. True love seeks wholeness. It is a wholly Christian activity to engage in loving oneself enough to take good care of this body – the temple of the Holy Spirit; good care of this mind – the playground of ideas and dreams; and good care of the soul – the most essential part of our selves which is united to the Christ.

Despite our current cultural fads of healthy eating and exercising, in fact, caring for ourselves is a fundamental way in which we love God and care for the Christ in our midst. Any body type, any personality, anyone, beautiful or plain, can take care of themselves to the degree they are able. Being cared for and loved by your own self is the first step to being loved and being able to love another person.

### **Action**

Divide your group into two groups: males and females. (If you don't have at least 3 males and 3 females in your group, keep the whole group together.) Give each group a sheet of newsprint and some markers. Have the females make a list of attributes for the "perfect boyfriend" and the males make a list of attributes for the "perfect girlfriend".

Have each group present their list to the whole group and allow the other gender group to comment or discuss what attributes made either or both lists. Here are some questions to help guide your discussion:

- What are the qualities that make someone attractive?
- Physical beauty?
- Nice smile?
- Energy?
- Personality?
- A good sense of humor?
- Someone easygoing?
- How do we balance the desire for certain physical attributes with the desire for certain personality traits? Which ones are least important to you? Which ones are essential?
- When a blind date is described as a "really nice person with a good sense of humor," why do we inwardly cringe?
- 
- 
- Now talk about what a relationship looks like. Here are some questions to get you started:
  - How long does it take to get to know someone?
  - What does the beginning of a relationship look like?
  - What does the end of a relationship look like?
  - How do our perceptions of the other person change over the course of the relationship?
  - Have you ever met someone whom you felt you had always known? What is going on that makes that possible? Is it chemistry? Are you willing to show different parts of your self to different people?
  - How would the timeline for a healthy relationship look?
  - What does the Bible have to tell us about love and/or relationships?

Have members of your group read the scripture passages from Titus, Corinthians and Romans. After each reading, have your group try to list what that particular scripture has to say about the qualities of a good relationship. Make a list on newsprint of the qualities found in a good relationship.

After the three readings, see if your group has any other qualities they would like to add. Describing a good relationship will quite possibly end up being a rather long list. Leaders should watch for words which point to the following list of essentials. This is at the core of what we are trying to teach young people about love and fidelity:

- **Mercy** – Compassion and affection are both significant steps to understanding the concept of mercy. There should be a feeling of forgiveness and kindness that runs through the relationship. Without it, there will always be unnecessary pain.
- **Equality** – Perhaps more than any other thing, equality is essential. If one member of the relationship has significantly more power and/or status, true intimacy is not possible. This is the main reason for avoiding, especially as young people, relationships with people significantly older or younger, and others such as teachers, clergy, etc. If there is not an equality of power and status inside the relationship, it is very likely there will be trouble. If one member of the partnership is not free to grow and express opinions and question and lovingly challenge the other, then there can be no intimacy.
- **Truth** – The best relationships are built on the truth. This doesn't necessarily mean that you tell all, all at once, or that you endlessly discuss everything, but rather that little by little the truth of who you are and what you know is exposed to the other and that inner truth is respected.
- **Trust** – Relationships work on trust, and one of the ways we give our trust and earn the trust of another is by living faithfully to our inner experience of the Christ in the context of community. It might be interesting to remind young people that the label "con man" is a contraction of "confidence man." The thing you give away in a con is your confidence. Don't give it too soon. Let that decision be made over time.
- **Peace** – The best relationships, despite what it might feel like in the moment, are ones which give an inner sense of peace and assurance. Again, remind the young people that they are the best monitors of their own well-being. You can only be "sick with love" for so long . . . then what you want to find is peace.
- **Joy** – The final key element of a healthy relationship is joy. Our Creator meant for us to live with joy. If our friendships and love relationships don't bring us joy, we have every right to ask, Why not? In the heat of the passions of the teen years, it may be difficult to place joy high on the priority list – but reminding young people that joy is not passive or dull, but dynamic and vibrant, richer than happiness, may help to pave a path for the experience of joy in their lives.
- A good relationship is a healthy relationship that affirms the very best of who we are and invites us to be more, and experience more, of life's riches. This affirmation is part of what any loving parent wants for us. How much more does God, our heavenly parent, have in store for us?

Lesson Plan updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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# **PASSION IN THE BIBLE: Singing the Song of Songs**

## **Goal**

To examine what it means to have a healthy relationship and to realize that sexuality is a special gift from God

## **Area**

Sexuality

## **Objectives**

To read passages from the Song of Songs (more than likely a first time experience for the kids – see handout at the end of this lesson plan)

To discuss the things which “attract” us

To examine the ways we choose and our reasons for choosing our partners

## **Guiding Scriptures**

The Song of Songs (also called the Song of Solomon)

## **Equipment Required**

Copies of the handout – Excerpts from the Song of Songs

## **Background**

Many teens have never read the Song of Songs even if they are aware that it is in the Bible. This book is a passionate (even sexual) love story between a bride and groom. While this book has also been used as an allegory of how God loves us, it is clearly a celebration of love and adoration of a beloved. Much of the book is filled with the admiration and desire that this couple has for one another and, at the very least, your young people may be surprised to find such passion within the pages of Holy Scripture.

In reading aloud the Song of Songs, young people may be reminded of these key things:

- The God who made them is a Lover – passionate, fiery and full of energy
- The Holy Scriptures are rich with feelings and thoughts close to the experiences of being young and in love
- God is aware of – and indeed, the creator of – our sexuality
- When the gift of sexuality is shared appropriately, it is cause for joy and celebration
- 

The handout we have included here is from the book of The Song of Songs from the Bible. We have cut some repetitive verses or long-winded descriptions just to make the reading a little shorter, but we have tried to keep intact the emotions and beautiful language of the original. If you would rather do the reading directly from the scriptures, please feel free to do so. We used the New Revised Standard Version.

## **Action**

Open your session by asking some of the following questions:

- What does it feel like to be in love?
- How do you think your parents would describe being in love?
- What does the church say about passionate love?
- What do you think God thinks about passionate love?
- What do our scriptures say about passionate love?



- Does anyone know what book in the Bible is devoted entirely to a passionate love affair? (Answer: The Song of Songs)

Pass out copies of the Song of Songs handout. Ask the group to take turns reading this aloud with everyone participating. Encourage them to read with confidence and feeling, enjoying the richness, listening to the evocative language and paying close attention to what's going on here. The lover and the beloved are engaged in an elaborate dance: seeking each other, celebrating their own and each other's uniqueness and loving every minute of it.

After the reading, use these questions to discuss the Song of Songs:

- What is going on in this story?
- Why would the poet call this the Song of Songs? Is Love the ultimate song?
- What words are used to describe the beloved?
- What do their friends have to say about what they witness in this story?
- How do the main characters feel in each other's presence? When they are separated?
- What language or lines sound true to you? Can you imagine saying any of this to someone you wanted to date? (This is sort of a trick question – the answer is invariably, No way! But, what about the feelings behind the words. Haven't we all felt, or wanted to feel that our beloved is leaping over the mountains – so alive? So filled with energy?)
- The bride repeatedly warns her companions to "not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!" What do you think she is warning against? Do you agree or disagree?
- In today's world we would rarely compliment our beloved for having hair like goats or cheeks like pomegranates. What are things that are important in our society? What are the images we use to describe someone we love?
- At one point, the groom says "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." How does this depict the early stages of romantic love?
- How do our opinions change, grow, deepen as a relationship progresses?

A good relationship is a healthy relationship that affirms the very best of who we are and invites us to be more – to be all that God created us to be and to experience more of life's riches. The bride and groom in the Song of Songs seem to know this. Young people need to be reminded of it, as well.

This lesson plan and this reading are full of evocative images. If possible, give young people a little bit of downtime to process some of what they have heard and gather their thoughts. One way to do this is to have them lie down on the floor and close their eyes. Play some soft music and ask them to think about what it means to be as much in love as the couple in Song of Songs seems to be. Spend some time thinking about what it means to wait for a relationship that is complete and whole and nurturing – a true gift from God.

### **Music Suggestion**

One piece of music that I have found to be especially moving is an album (ok, CD now ☺) from John Michael Talbot called "The Lover and the Beloved". It was originally produced in 1989 but the soothing guitar music and lovely words are fairly timeless.

### **Reflection**

After some quiet time, gather the group back together. Ask if anyone has any insights or new thoughts they would like to share with the group. Don't be surprised if no one volunteers to share their reflections – that is understandable: today's lesson has probably pushed at some boundaries and blurred the line a bit between sexuality and spirituality. This is a good thing

because we want teens to see that decisions they make about their sexuality are intrinsically linked to decisions about their spirituality.

Part of our job as mentors is to remind young people (and ourselves) that we want to continually strive toward a life that is integrated and balanced and whole. All four areas of our life – self, society, spirituality and sexuality – are important parts of who we are and God cares about all of the areas, not just spirituality.

### **Closing Prayer**

Blessed are you, heavenly Father,  
*you give joy to the bridegroom and to the bride.*

Blessed are you, Jesus our Redeemer,  
*you have brought new life to all.*

Blessed are you, Holy Spirit of God,  
*you bring us together in love.*

Blessed are you, Creator, Savior and Giver of life,  
*one God to be praised for ever. Amen.*

*Prayer from New Zealand Book of Common Prayer  
Marriage Liturgy, p. 796*

### **Additional Suggestion**

One thing we did in my youth group that the teens seemed to really like was to bring in a wedding veil and a tux jacket that adults in the parish donated to us. Different teens took turns wearing the “costumes” and reading the parts of Bride or Bridegroom. We brought in a mini-wedding cake and served punch. We even took pictures. Many of my teens cite this lesson plan as being one of their clearest memories from J2A.

Suggestion contributed by Sarah Carper (Church of the Good Shepherd, Augusta, GA). Added  
09/04

Lesson Plan updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## Excerpts from The Song of Songs

*(Definitions of unfamiliar words are italicized and in parentheses)*

*Bride*

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine, your name is perfume poured out; and the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste.

*Companions*

We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine.

*Bride*

I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?

*Bridegroom*

If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow the tracks of the flock. I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.

*Companions*

We will make you ornaments of gold and silver.

*Bride*

While the king was on his couch, my nard (*ointments*) gave forth their fragrance. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-gedi.

*Bridegroom*

Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are like doves.

*Bride*

Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely.

*Bridegroom*

Our couch is green; the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.

*Bride*

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

*Bridegroom*

As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.

*Bride*

As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love. O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

*Bridegroom*

I adjure (*solemnly command*) you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!

*Bride*

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on

the earth; the time of singing has come.  
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

*Bridegroom*

O my dove, let me see your face, let me  
hear your voice for your voice is sweet,  
and your face lovely.

*Bride*

My beloved is mine and I am his; he  
pastures his flock among the lilies. Upon  
my bed at night I sought him whom my  
soul loves; I sought him, but found him  
not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

When I found him whom my soul loves, I  
held him and would not let him go until I  
brought him into my mother's house, and  
in the chamber of she who conceived me.

*Bridegroom*

I adjure (*solemnly command*) you, O  
daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or  
the wild does: do not stir up or awaken  
love until it is ready!

*Companions*

What is that coming up from the  
wilderness, like a column of smoke,  
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,  
and all the fragrant powders of the  
merchant? Look, it is the litter (*ornate  
wedding procession*) of Solomon with sixty  
mighty men of Israel, each with his sword  
at his thigh. King Solomon made himself a  
palanquin (*a chair or bed carried by pole  
bearer*) from the wood of Lebanon. He  
made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its  
seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with  
love. Come out, O daughters of Jerusalem.  
Look, O daughters of Zion, at King  
Solomon, at the crown with which his  
mother crowned him on the day of his  
wedding, on the day of the gladness of his  
heart.

*Bridegroom*

How beautiful you are, my love, how very  
beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your  
veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving  
down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like

a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from  
the washing, all of which bear twins, and not  
one among them is bereaved. Your lips are  
like a crimson thread, and your mouth is  
lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a  
pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is  
like the tower of David. Your breasts are like  
two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed  
among lilies. Until the shadows flee, I will  
hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill  
of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful,  
my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with  
me, my bride; come from Lebanon. You have  
ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes,  
with one jewel of your necklace. How sweet is  
your love, my bride! How much better is your  
love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils  
than any spice! Your lips distill nectar, honey  
and milk are under your tongue; A garden  
locked is my bride, a garden locked, a  
fountain sealed. Your channel is an orchard of  
pomegranates with all choicest fruits and all  
chief spices.

*Bride*

A garden fountain, a well of living water. A-  
wake, O wind! Blow upon my garden that its  
fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my  
beloved come to his garden, and eat its  
choicest fruits.

*Bridegroom*

I come to my garden, my bride; I gather my  
myrrh with my spice, I eat honeycomb with my  
honey, I drink my wine with milk. Eat, friends,  
drink, and be drunk with love.

*Bride*

I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! my  
beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my love, my  
dove, my perfect one." I had put off my  
garment; how could I put it on again? I had  
bathed my feet; how could I soil them? My  
beloved thrust his hand into the opening, and  
my inmost being yearned for him. I opened to  
my beloved, but my beloved had turned and  
was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I  
sought him, but did not find him; I called him,  
but he gave no answer. I adjure (*solemnly  
command*) you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if  
you find my beloved, tell him this: I am faint

with love

*Companions*

What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

*Bride*

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, fitly set. His cheeks are beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His speech is sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

*Companions*

Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Which way has he turned, that we may seek him with you?

*Bride*

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.

*Bridegroom*

You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem. Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me! There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy; the queens and concubines also, they praised her. "Who is this that looks forth like dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?"

*Companions*

Return, return, O Shulammitte! Return, return, that we may look upon you.

*Bridegroom*

How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden! Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly.

*Bride*

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded. There I will give you my love. O my beloved, if I met you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me. I would give you spiced wine to drink.

*Bridegroom*

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!

*Companions*

Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

*Bridegroom*

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. It flashes like fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

*Bride*

Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices!

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# GENDER PROVING: How Do Pop Stars Influence Culture?

## Goal

To see gender proving in action and understand the effect that stars can have on our culture and our perceptions.

## Areas

Sexuality, Society

## Objectives

To examine modern culture for stylized examples of gender proving

To discuss a few of the methods of cultural manipulation which impact our self-concept

To open a discussion of ways to manage these manipulations

## Guiding Scriptures

Ephesians 4:14-16 "... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with the wind of doctrine, by the trickery of those who lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow in all things..."

## Equipment Necessary

- Television and VCR or DVD player
- Videos such as:
- Madonna's *Truth or Dare* video
- One of Michael Jackson's videos: *Dangerous*, *The Short Version*, *Moonwalker*, *Video Greatest Hits – HIStory*
- Videotape of 2003 MTV Video Awards show – kiss between Britney Spears and Madonna
- Britney Spears' music video *Not that Innocent*
- Copies of old magazines that feature lots of info about television, music or entertainment stars and lots of glossy pictures
- Magazine pictures of stars such as: Dennis Rodman, Jennifer Lopez, OutKast, stars of *Sex & The City*, Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Heche, etc.
- CDs of popular music – ask your teens to bring in some of their favorites

## Background and Action

In our modern day culture, we have lots of people offering different representations of gender and what it means to be a "real man" or a "real woman". To prepare for this lesson, leaders will need to spend a few hours immersing themselves in popular culture. Call your local video store to see what's available, and rent the videos. Watch them.

Listen carefully to what is said and not said. Watch how these performers use language, body motion and costume to shout, "See, I'm a real man," and "Hey, I'm a real woman!" to an audience. Spend some time thinking about how these pop icons are perceived by our young people and what effect these entertainers have on our culture.

Michael Jackson grabs his crotch. Madonna wears golden cones as a brassiere. Britney Spears went from being a sexy youth in a school girl uniform to dancing provocatively with a snake while wearing transparent clothing. Much of what our young people see in music videos is

sexually provocative, and at times, suggestively violent. Leaders should make note of a few scenes and examples to show to the kids. Choose a few scenes or songs to show the group. Ask them to identify other examples of gender proving by celebrities in their culture.

Here are some questions to contribute to your discussion:

- What messages about gender do we hear from our pop icons?
- Who in our culture works at blurring lines defining gender?
- Note: In some ways, this battle was fought with previous generations of teens. Boy George, k.d.lang, and many others pushed our definitions of gender so that today's teens often don't have such rigid definitions of what is distinctly "male" or "female"
- How does gender identity affect our perceptions of sexuality?
- What about homosexuality: Does being gay make you less of a man? Does being a lesbian make you less of a woman? What about people like Anne Heche who first was in a homosexual relationship and then a heterosexual relationship?
- What messages about sexuality do our pop icons send?
- In what ways do you agree or disagree with some of the pop icons we have talked about today?
- Who in pop culture models good boundaries or healthy definitions of sexuality and/or gender?

Experience tells us that the young people "get it." Once you point out to them the nature of the game: As androgynous as Michael Jackson may look, everything he does tells us he wants us to know he's a man! And Madonna is busy showing us over and over that she knows how to be sexual. Big deal! Why does she do that? – the young people will leap in, ready to show some other examples.

Remember that most of the youth were babies when these two performers were at their peak. How might that have affected them as children? What perceptions might young parents have had of these two performers?

This lesson requires leaders to both lead and follow.

- Ask the young people to help you understand what might have allowed these two performers to become so internationally famous. What effects might still linger in our culture today?
- Could it be that Michael Jackson and Madonna are speaking, in their own way, to the very same issues which the Rite-13 Ceremony speaks to? Is Gender/Sexuality really a gift from God? If we are not assured of that gift, how might we prove what we have?
- Is the act of sexual intercourse a way to prove something? Manhood? Womanhood? Love?
- Do we need to prove our love?
- What about the clothes we wear? What about the way we speak? Do we prove something when we use foul language? Sexually provocative language? Why are there so many curse words which have to do with sexuality?
- 
- Watching these video clips and talking about issues of gender proving and sexuality really gets to the heart of what some young people are struggling with. Don't be surprised if this discussion takes on a life of its own. Just take a deep breath, say a quick prayer and try to listen carefully to what's going on in this group.

## **More about Gender Proving**



What are the areas in which we feel the greatest pressure to prove our gender?

**Example: Sports.** Certain sports appear to be more “manly” than others. Our culture seems to assume that football players are “real men” and dancers are “gay” (the term is used as a derogatory comment, as if to say, not real men). The same can be said about women in dance: They are “real women,” while women in rugby are sometimes seen as “not real women.” These labels are all based in fear and in stereotypes. What qualities make someone a “real man” or a “real woman?”

**Example: Clothing.** Does clothing play a role in proving gender? How? Are some clothes masculine? Feminine? Baby boys are wrapped in blue and girls in pink – why? Who are people in our culture who have pushed at these boundaries? Boy George in the 80s... Dennis Rodman in his white wedding dress... OutKast in their outrageous costumes. Has clothing become less of an issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Why or Why not?

**Example: Dating and Sexual Behaviors.** If a boy doesn't date or have sex by the time he heads off to college, our culture worries that he is a “geek” or “gay.” But a “good girl” doesn't have sex. Can you be a “real woman” and be celibate? Can you be a “real man” and a virgin? Can you go on a date, have the female pay for the whole thing and avoid “bruising the ego” of the male? Who made up these rules?

**Example: Housework and Childcare.** Why do women still do more than half of the housework in most families in America? Are they innately better at it? When was the last time you saw an ad for a toilet bowl cleaner in which a man is doing the task? What does our culture (or our televisions) tell us about who does the nurturing and raising of children? Are we moving away from the “June Cleaver” model of motherhood where she vacuumed in heels and pearls? Who pushes this boundary?

The goal of this lesson is only to raise awareness and to speculate on faulty logic which lies buried beneath our gender stereotypes.

Remember, at least in part, gender is a social construct. It is defined by the mores and attitudes of a culture. What we are given by God is the free gift of creative and procreative energy. Society wants to control that gift by limiting its expression to socially acceptable demonstrations. So what's the problem? Well, if you deviate from the “norm” – that dangerous, and often not clearly defined sense of what is expected of you – you are left having to rant and rave and prove yourself worthy of the title of man or woman.

If the only way to be a woman is to do “womanly things,” we are all in trouble. And if the only way to be a man is to do “manly things,” once again, we are in trouble. The goal is to do human things: filled with compassion, joy, strength, wisdom and grace. We do these things through the filter of our gender. The gender stereotypes are caricatures of who we are meant to be. They try to put us all into pre-prescribed boxes. They hold us in fear and tell us we aren't enough. God reminds us that we are part of His beloved creation. God calls us to be free and to be one in Christ.

Remember, also, the underlying key questions are:

- Who is telling us that we have to prove our gender and why?
- What does the Scripture have to say about how we are made?



## Closure

Have someone from your group read Ephesians 4:14-16 aloud. Remind each other that part of what we are doing with these kinds of lessons is helping us speak back to the images our culture hopes we will accept without question.

Dismiss by saying:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

Lesson Plan updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## AIDS and STD AWARENESS: Guest Lecture

There are three parts to this exercise:

- Invite a local expert to come and speak to the group on the subject of AIDS. We encourage you to ask that they bring with them someone who is living with HIV.
- Order copies for everybody of the *Surgeon General's Report to the American Public on HIV Infection and AIDS*, available from the Episcopal AIDS Coalition, 1925 K Street NW, Suite 220, Washington, DC 20006 (• 202-628-6628 or 202-872-1511; [www:\neac.org](http://www.neac.org); email: [neaction@aol.com](mailto:neaction@aol.com)) (offered in collaboration with the Center for Disease Control National AIDS Clearinghouse).
- Also, contact the Center for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)), which has excellent resource material on STD's (sexually transmitted diseases)
- Allow the young people to ask their questions freely.
- 
- The only two stipulations we make are:
- Make sure that they hear the facts: how you get AIDS, HIV-disease, and sexually transmitted diseases, how you live with AIDS or HIV, and how you can die.
- Make sure that they hear the truth: Death from AIDS is a terrible waste of life, there is no cure and they don't have to get it.

Close with the following litany (make and distribute copies for a handout).

The Episcopal Church Center in New York City is the national headquarters for the Episcopal Church. They have created a new resource called Youth Ministry in the Age of AIDS (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Each parish can receive one free copy; additional copies are \$6 each. To get your copies, contact Gary Williams at 1-800-334-7626, ext. 6257 or [gwilliams@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:gwilliams@episcopalchurch.org). Please make sure to tell him you are a J2A congregation.

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## Handout—A Litany of Healing

God of grace, you nurture us with a love deeper than we know. Your will for us is healing and salvation;  
*We praise and thank you, O God.*

God of love, you enter into our lives, our pain, our brokenness. You stretch out your healing hands to us wherever we are;  
*We praise and thank you, O God.*

God of strength, you fill us with your presence and send us forth in love and healing among those we meet;  
*We praise and thank you, O God.*

Touch and heal our bodies suffering from sickness, injury and disability, make us whole again;  
*Hear us, O God of life.*

Touch and heal our minds from darkness, confusion and doubt, and fill them with your light;  
*Hear us, O God of life.*

Touch and heal our hearts burdened by anguish, despair and isolation, and set us free in love;  
*Hear us, O God of life.*

Break the bonds of our imprisonment to fear, compulsion and addiction;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

Give us liberty from old hurts and painful memories;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

Fill us with peace in our grief from separation and loss;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

Take our hands in dying, and bring us through death into your loving presence;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

Work through all who share in your ministry of healing, renew us in compassion and strength;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

Restore to wholeness all that has been broken by our sin;  
*Come with your healing power, O God.*

We lift before you all who have died from AIDS and HIV-disease;  
*(NAMES MAY BE OFFERED AT THIS TIME, EITHER SILENTLY OR ALOUD)*  
Receive them more and more into your joyful presence.

Rejoicing in the presence of \_\_\_\_\_ and all the saints, we entrust ourselves and one another,  
*And all our life to Christ our God.*

O God, in you all darkness is turned to light and all brokenness made whole: Look with compassion on us and those for whom we pray, that we may be recreated in our Savior, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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## MEANINGFUL ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH: How to Decide When to "Do It"

*\*\* For the most part, J2A lesson plans can be used in any order. However, we do suggest that this lesson plan and "Be Yourself and Stay Alive" happen somewhere in the second half of the second year of J2A. You want your group to be both as bonded as possible and also as mature as possible.*

*Also – before you do ANY lesson plan that is this specifically about teenage sexuality, we strongly suggest that you hold a parents' meeting and make sure the parents know what is coming. You might even make copies of your lesson plans or have available the resources you will use.\*\**

### Goal

To talk about the decision to be sexually intimate

### Area

Sexuality

### Guiding Scriptures

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?... You were bought at a price... your body is God's.

### Background and Action

This lesson could well have been placed into the list of "ten little teachable moments," but it is too important for that. At some point in the section on Sexuality, it is essential that the leaders ask a few really hard questions, listen to the answers and make a strong statement for responsibility and care.

The only way this lesson will work is if the church is empty of all other groups and the classroom door is shut. You can then enter into the following dialogue:

- Tell me about sex – that's the opening line.
- What do you know about it? How much sex education have you had?
- Where did you learn about it?
- How reliable do you think the information you have is?
- Where could you go to find more information?
- If necessary, depending on the dynamics of your group, the leaders may have to break the ice, telling a story about their own sex education.

**Example:** When I was in high school in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, in the early '70s, public school teachers were not allowed to mention contraception in any form. So our sex education included pictures and descriptions, but no mention of contraception.

- What do your parents think about sex outside of marriage?
- What does the Church think about it? (That's a hard one, we know – but it needs to be asked.)
- What do you think about it?
- How can you know if you are ready to be sexually intimate with someone?
- What would you have to feel? Safe? Private? Secure? Committed?

The bottom line is that young people need to hear that “meaningful” is not a good enough reason to have sex. Neither is private. Neither is safe. They are all necessary, but by themselves, they are still not enough.

- What’s the best sex scene you’ve seen? (Remind the kids that the sex they see in movies is a scene acted by paid actors – it is not real.)
- What’s the worst? (How about the rape scene in *The Accused*? That was meaningful, *per se*, but obviously not enough.)
- So what is enough? How can we know when it’s time?

Remind young people that there are many things that need to be present in a sexual relationship. Here are six key elements that we believe ALL need to be present:

1. **LOVE** – The kind of love that allows you to be who you are. If you can’t relax and be yourself with the other person, if you can’t grow and change in the context of the relationship, you aren’t ready to have sex.
2. **SAFETY** – In the age of AIDS and all the fear of death which it brings, you have to know how to use contraceptives and how to use condoms. And the relationship has to be one in which you feel safe enough to say No. Wait. We need to talk. We need to think this through. We need to use a condom. If it is not safe enough for you to ask those questions, it is not safe enough for you to be intimate.
3. **PRIVACY** – Sexual intimacy is a very private exchange between two consenting individuals. But it is not a secret activity. If you have to hide everything about your intimate life from everyone – family, friends, doctors, teachers – then you are not ready to have sex.
4. **EQUALITY** – There must be a basic level of equality. Relationships that bridge enormous power differentials are likely to fail. Don’t give yourself away to anyone who has significantly more or less power or prestige than you.
5. **COMMITMENT** – True commitment can only be demonstrated over time. Give yourselves lots of time. Require more from a sexual partner than just their body. Require them to share with you their heart and their mind as well. Remember that you are one of God’s most precious creations and YOU are worth the wait!
6. **AWARENESS** – It may sound a bit old-fashioned, but it is worth asking, “Do I want to carry this person in my body forever?” The Scriptures teach that when you are sexually intimate, you join yourself with the other person forever. A responsible adult chooses very carefully, knowing that what happens inside our hearts and our minds and our bodies is not easily undone when we allow another person into that most sacred exchange. Sex is a very special, sacred gift that God gives us to share, but it is a gift that once given, cannot be taken back. So choose wisely.

## Reflection

Have someone in your group read the scripture from I Corinthians. Talk about what it means for our bodies to be holy temples. Many groups have found a teachable image by talking about the role that an altar guild plays in the church. Remind young people of the care that the altar guild gives to the altar cloths and the chalice and paten. Remind them that they do these endless rituals of cleaning and pressing and polishing because they recognize and revere the

holiness of the sacrament. Young people should be admonished to do the same thing with regard to their sexuality.

Close by reminding your group that when the appropriate criteria has been met, sexual intimacy is a precious, holy and wondrous thing – a very special gift that God has given us to share with one another.

### **Additional Information**

There are many sources of information for additional help in discussing sexuality with teenagers. One resource we found to be especially helpful was ***Our Whole Lives***, put out by the Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ churches. We also highly recommend their supplemental material called ***Sexuality and Our Faith***.

Lesson Plan updated September 2004 by Tracey E. Herzer

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## **BE YOURSELF AND STAY ALIVE: Feedback on Sexuality**

*\*\* For the most part, J2A lesson plans can be used in any order. However, we do suggest that this lesson plan and "Be Yourself and Stay Alive" happen somewhere in the second half of the second year of J2A. You want your group to be both as bonded as possible and also as mature as possible.*

*Also – before you do ANY lesson plan that is this specifically about teenage sexuality, we strongly suggest that you hold a parents' meeting and make sure the parents know what is coming. You might even make copies of your lesson plans or have available the resources you will use.\*\**

### **Goal**

To list what we've learned about Sexuality

### **Area**

Sexuality

### **Action**

Leaders should simply write **BE YOURSELF** and **STAY ALIVE** on large sheets of paper. Ask the young people to tell you what these two mandates mean to them and why they are so important to our understanding of Sexuality.

Ask for examples from movies, discussions, lessons and their own life experiences.

At the end of this time together, remind the young people again that you love them and you want more than anything for them to be who they are and to stay alive.

If your group is willing, put on some music, dance and celebrate. Order pizza; sit around and talk. You are almost at the end of the line.



# **J2A Lessons**

# **Spirituality**



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## A Look at Repentance and Salvation

### Goal

To look at what it means to be “born again” and acknowledge that we have to be able to admit our weakness in order that God may be our salvation and our strength.

### Area

Spirituality

### Objectives

To tell the stories of our own birth and share baby pictures

To look at the conversion experience of Nicodemus

To ask ourselves what it means to be “born again.”

To look at where we are on our own personal faith journey

### Equipment Required

Baby pictures – each person brings at least one  
Bibles

### Guiding Scripture

John 3:1-16

### Background

When Nicodemus approached Jesus, Jesus told him “You must be born again.” We live in a culture where the phrase “born again” has taken on a life of its own. By looking into scripture, we hope to investigate this weighty phrase and realize that the phrase “born again” does not belong only to one group of Christians. We will look at what it means to be born, and what it means to be born again and find signs of new life within ourselves.

### Before the Meeting Time

In advance of this meeting, ask teens to bring to the meeting one of their baby pictures. They also will need to spend a few minutes asking their parents to tell the story of their birth or, in the case of foster parents or adoptive parents, to tell the story of their joining the family. Teens should come to the meeting ready to share some of the stories they have heard.

### Action

Begin your class time by asking each member to hold up their picture and pass it around the group. Ask them to tell the stories that surround their birth or entry into a new family. Even if someone forgets to bring a picture, this should not exempt them from telling the story. And even if they have not asked their parents, they should tell whatever they know about their own birth or entrance into the family.

### Reflection

After everyone in the circle has had a chance to share some of their stories, ask the group some of the following questions:

- In what ways is the church like a family?
- What does it mean to be “born again”?

- Do you think the phrase “born again” has come to mean something different in our time than it did when Jesus first said this to Nicodemus?
- What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?

Have one of the group members read John 3:1-16. After the reading, ask:

- What do you think Nicodemus was seeking when he spoke to Jesus?
- What does Jesus want him to understand about a life of faith?

In the midst of our liturgical community, and in the long process of faith, it is easy to forget that each and every faith journey begins with a longing. We long for something that is missing from our natural and mundane lives. We all know stories of individuals who appear to have everything, and yet find their lives unmanageable. They turn to alcohol or other substances to numb the longing. Some turn to cults and other forms of highly structured and demanding lifestyles.

It may also be useful to ask the young people about cults. What do they know about cults? What makes something a cult and not just another religious stream? (Generally, cults rely on very specific and individual revelations given to a leader. They also depend heavily on separation from the world and its temptations.)

- What are people seeking when they find themselves in these dilemmas?
- How is this similar or dissimilar to what was Nicodemus seeking?
- 
- When we say that one has been “born again,” in part, what we are saying is that this individual can mark the moment at which they entered the journey of faith.
- Can you mark an entrance point in your life?
- Was it your Baptism? Was it your First Communion experience?
- Can you remember a time when this all began to mean something to you?
- Do you believe that you are “born again?”

Leaders should be prepared to encourage young people to experience their own their own religious conversion, if they haven’t already done so. Leaders need to walk very gently here and speak with both passion and compassion, carefully planting some seeds, but trying not to slam any doors. They might say something akin to the following:

*In every life, there are moments when it all seems to matter. The questions of meaning and purpose, which we dismiss so easily in our busy lives seem to jump up and shout in our faces. We want to know why. We want to know how. And most importantly, we want to know who God is.*

*There are a great many people who say that our God is unknowable, but that is not what God says. There are people who say that we can never really be certain of our salvation, but that is not what Jesus said of a faithful life. There are people who want you to believe that if you give your life to God, you do so at your own peril. We want to tell you, clearly, once, that if you give your life to the One who made you, the God and Creator of all the universe, then, in that moment you will begin again, be born again into a new life in which the deep and abiding presence of God is yours to enjoy.*

*The Scriptures tell us over and over again that God wants you. God wants to talk with you. God wants a living relationship with you. God wants to be intimately involved in your day-to-day awareness and experience. And the only thing it takes is that you ask.*

*The Scriptures teach us that we must admit our own weakness and sin – but if we do, God will come to us and restore us through the grace of Jesus.*

*It may not be easy for you to come to this kind of repentance and dedication, because it will cost you something. It will cost you the illusion that your life belongs to you. It will cost you the pain of thinking through what it means to be faithful. And it will expect of you a true and honest attempt to live in accordance with the life and example of Jesus. It will not be easy, but in order to be a mature Christian, it will be necessary.*

After you have finished your invitation, leave a few moments of silence. Ask the young people to spend a few minutes imagining themselves in the story with Nicodemus. Encourage them to imagine that they are watching as a bystander.

- What do you think of Nicodemus? Is he a good man? (Encourage them to think of themselves, saying the words of Nicodemus to the Christ.)
- If you were in Nicodemus' shoes, what would you say to the Christ?
- What can you imagine that the Christ would say to you?

**\*\*NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Of all the lessons in this section of the curriculum, this one may require the greatest faith on the part of leaders. As leaders we are reluctant to press the point, wanting never to force our religious convictions on anyone. But, once in the course of this two years, it is *essential* that the questions of birth and rebirth be addressed. Take the chance. Tell them the truth, as best you can. In inviting people to come and meet the Savior of the world, you join your voices with the saints of old. The Holy Spirit will move in your midst in unpredictable and delightful ways.

It is also important to recognize that the Episcopal Church values conversion both as an individual event and as an ongoing process. Some people will never have a "moment" in their lives when they can say they have "accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior" – to use the language that some other denominations use. They may have been raised in the church and grew gradually into a relationship with Christ. The Episcopal Church recognizes that the process of rebirth often is just that – a process. We often speak of "conversion of life" or "our spiritual journey" as a way to talking about God working in us, sanctifying us (making us holy) and making us the holy people of God. We understand and value the role of the community in this process – the importance of being active participants in the Christian community. "Praying shapes believing" is another common Episcopal expression that voices our understanding that it is especially our participation in the prayer (both private and corporate) that creates an environment in which God can convert us, an environment in which we are reborn.

This distinction is especially important in regions of the country where young people may be told they are "not saved" if they are unable to name a specific time and place when they accepted Christ.

**"When Were You Saved?" A Funny Story:** Thanks to the Rev. Timothy Murphy of Trinity Episcopal Church in Florence, AL who received this advice from his dad (also an Episcopal priest) and passed it along to me. It was some of the most significant advice I ever received as a young youth minister, living in the heart of the "Bible Belt". I had two teenagers who had been invited to a local revival at another church. They went with a big group of their friends, but then came home that night upset and in tears. They told their parents that they had learned they were going to hell... their family, their church, their youth minister, their rector,

probably the whole Episcopal Church. They were frustrated because they couldn't answer the question, "When were you saved?" and were told that if they couldn't remember a specific date or event, it probably hadn't happened. They had been asked, "Have you ever responded to an altar call?" And with a mixture of confusion and pride, they responded, "We are acolytes – we serve at the altar almost every Sunday!" I talked with the girls and their parents for a long time and we talked about the fact that sometimes different denominations use different words to describe their relationship with God. The next day, Father Tim checked in with the girls to make sure they were okay. When they told him they were concerned about not being able to give a date when they had been saved, Father Tim said, "If anyone ever asks you that question again, here is what you tell them... Say, 'Hmm... I know I've been saved, but I'm not sure of the exact date. I do, however, know for sure that it was a Friday... a long time ago... gosh, about 2000 years ago... right before the first Easter!'" He smiled at the girls and said, "On Good Friday, we were all saved."

*Story contributed by Tracey Herzer, August 2004 – story used with permission*

If you live in a community where this is an issue, it is very important for you to talk about the different ways different denominations understand how one comes into a relationship (and a deeper relationship) with God in Christ. Episcopalians, in particular, cherish the process of becoming in community, the concept of being converted, being sanctified over time, in the midst of and through our life in the Christian community.

FINALLY, see the article: *How to Lead a Young Person to Christ* for additional ideas and thoughts on this subject. If you do not have the Articles section of the program, ask your coordinator or go online to download them.

### **Closing Prayer – Short Option (or when time constraints are an issue)**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise: that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found: through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Collect from the Fifth Sunday in Lent, BCP p. 219*

### **Closure – Expanded Option**

If you are doing this piece in an expanded timeframe, end your meeting with **Daily Evening Prayer Form: Rite Two** – found on pages 115-126 in the Book of Common Prayer. Encourage the group to pay close attention to the many references made to our need for God and God's willingness to supply our needs. Some additional suggestions:

- If possible, these prayers should be said in the church, with minimal light.
- Ask the young people to set their baby pictures somewhere near to them, and visible, so that they might reflect on their lives during the prayers
- Assign the readings to the young people
- Include the confession
- Leave spaces of silence
- Include music, such as simple choruses or Taize chants – singing or listening
- Take your time, this is a long liturgy, but it is one which many young people have only rare opportunities to engage in

If you used the lesson plan as a Sunday morning piece, you could also use this worship piece to close out the following afternoon or evening piece.

*Lesson updated August 2004, Linda L. Grenz & Tracey Herzer*

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# PRAYER AND FASTING: The Nature of Spiritual Discipline

## Goal

To experience the spiritual discipline of fasting

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Society, Self

## Objectives

To have the group participate in a structured fast

To have the members experience a sense of dependence on God.

To help us remember those who go hungry by necessity instead of by choice

## Guiding Scriptures

Isaiah 58:3-7

Daniel 10:3

Joel 2:12-13

Matthew 4:1-4

Matthew 6:16-18

Acts 9:9 and 13:1-3

## Background

A structured fast needs careful preparation. For example, one runs into such criticisms as:

- "I understand that fasting is injurious to your health."
- "Won't fasting weaken you so that you can't work or concentrate?"
- "Won't fasting destroy healthy body tissue?"

The answer to all of these is a firm "no." However, there are some people who should not fast from food (although they can fast from other things – such as television/radio/music and other manufactured sounds). People who should not fast from food without professional supervision include those who:

- take insulin for diabetes, or suffer other blood sugar problems such as hyperglycemia
  - are pregnant or are nursing
  - have a tendency to (or history of) anorexia, bulimia, or any other eating disorder
  - are physically too thin or emaciated
  - suffer from weakness or anemia
  - have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or have heart disease
  - suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs

With all of this in mind, we recommend first that you consult with a physician in your congregation and have him or her draw up a set of guidelines for your group.

Having dealt with these matters, it has been shown that fasting confers certain benefits:

- Fasting helps us keep our balance in life.
- Fasting has been shown to give increased effectiveness in intercessory prayer.
- Fasting provides guidance in decision making.
- Fasting helps with concentration.
- Fasting promotes a sense of physical well-being.

- Above all, fasting reveals the things that control our lives.
- The following are reflections by two spiritual leaders on the benefits of the spiritual discipline of fasting. You can use these readings to help prepare you to discuss fasting with the youth or you may want to read parts of these quotes in your discussion.

Along with silence and introversion . . . belongs fasting. In introversion we turn our minds and spirits away from occupation with the outer world; in fasting we turn our bodies away from the world. It is so easy to be self-indulgent, to take exactly what we want, when we want it. If we are to go on the spiritual way, we might as well, like Jesus, expect this self-denial. He did not say in the Sermon on the Mount "if you fast," but "when you fast," assuming that anyone who took his message about this way seriously would be fasting. It is true on the other hand that He was not noted for His abstinence, as were John the Baptist and his followers. The fact that one fasts does not mean that he cannot enjoy a good meal.

It simply is an actuality that persons who have seriously entered upon the spiritual way find that a period of fasting is a great aid to them. It clears the mind and heart; it opens avenues of realization and thought which before were closed. I do not know why it is true, but those who try fasting find it liberating and helpful. Somehow as the body and mind both give up the expectation of business as usual, it becomes easier to enter into the reality which is not physical. Fasting also helps us to develop discipline and self-control, qualities which are highly important on the religious journey. Real self-indulgence, which makes a one-sided person more one-sided, is one of the easiest ways to cut the religious journey off short.

But for Americans there is one excellent reason for fasting, which I have come to see is also a religious reason. We are the best fed and the most poorly nourished nation on earth, according to physicians, heart specialists included. Over-eating is probably responsible for ten times the death caused by drinking or narcotics, and the man who has eaten himself to death is no longer in a position to undertake the religious encounter in this life; even more, I doubt if he is in the most favorable condition to continue it in the next. *Morton T. Kelsey*<sup>37</sup>

Fasting is not easy in a nation where TV ads, billboards, endless strings of food stores, restaurants, and food magazines entice us to eat and drink wherever we turn. It is made more difficult by the down-playing of fasting by the churches . . . The only power fasting seems to maintain is in the doctor's mouth when s/he tells us we've been eating too much and it's ruining our health.

Yet fasting can be enormously instructive and beneficial: to ourselves as well as to others through the food we save and example we set.

The body seems to naturally fast when we are sick; it knows that the first cells eaten when no new food comes are the old and sick cells. Fasting literally cleanses the body of unneeded and "complicating" cells.

Fasting also can simplify the compulsive, distracting, grasping nature of our appetites. When we fast intentionally, one of the first things we notice is how little food we really need, yet how much we have been wolfing down . . .

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<sup>37</sup> *Encounter with God: A Theology of Christian Experience* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 2nd edition, 1975), pages 184-185.

Fasting, finally, is ordinary, very human, simple, and found in virtually every religious tradition the world has know. Mindless gorging of ourselves is much more the abnormal, complicating, self-defeating way. *Tilden Edwards*<sup>38</sup>

Fasting is not an exclusively Christian exercise. Indeed, there are few religions in the world where fasting is not an integral part of the spiritual discipline.

Richard Foster says that, for Christians, "Fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained. . . . Every other purpose must be subservient to God."<sup>39</sup> Spiritual guides also tell us that fasting should take place in a group setting to be most effective: If you want to undertake a fast, it is easiest to do so with others. . . . When all fast together, it not only reinforces our sense of capacity for it, but it frees us a bit from the temptation to see what we are doing as something very "special."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Living Simply Through The Day: Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pages 176-178.

<sup>39</sup> *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) page 48.

<sup>40</sup> Edwards, *op. cit.* page 178.



## Action

Prepare the group for the fast by reminding them of the role of fasting in the Christian tradition. Divide the Scripture passages above among the youth, with each young person taking one passage. Ask them to read their passage when it speaks to one of the discussion questions. Ask:

- What is fasting in the Bible?
- How did people fast? (Daniel refrained from meat and wine; Paul from everything)
- Why did people fast?
- What does the Bible say about God and fasting?

## What is fasting?

Fasting is abstaining from food and drink for a *spiritual* reason. In the Old Testament, the Hebrews fasted frequently, though there was only one fast prescribed by the law – on the day of Atonement, the Hebrews were to “afflict” their souls (Lev. 16:31), which meant fasting (cf. Isa. 58:3).

Although Christians are not required to fast, the New Testament seems to take for granted that they would see the need to fast occasionally. When the disciples were criticized for not fasting, Jesus responded by suggesting that it was hardly appropriate for them to fast while he was yet with them. The time would come, however, when he would be taken away from them; then they would fast (Lk. 5:35).

Also, in cautioning against improper motivation in worship, Christ warned: “Moreover when you fast, be not, as hypocrites . . .” It is significant that he did not say, “if,” but, “when” ye fast – reflecting the expectation that they would.

Fasting, for the Christian, is strictly a *voluntary* matter. It should arise out of a feeling of intense need, not as a result of mere formality.

When, then, might fasting be of value?

- Fasting may be beneficial in times of personal sorrow. David and his men mourned and fasted upon hearing of the death of Saul (2 Sam. 1:12), and Nehemiah did similarly when he was informed of Jerusalem’s decimated condition (Neh. 1:4). Fasting and prayer would certainly seem to be fitting when a loved one is critically ill (2 Sam. 12:16).
- Fasting frequently accompanied repentance as an outward and genuine indication of contrition for spiritual rebellion (1 Sam. 7:6). The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast when brought to a recognition of their sins (Jon. 3:5).
- Fasting was practiced in connection with great and important religious events. Moses fasted during that period when he was receiving the Law (Ex. 34:28). Christ fasted prior to his encounter with Satan in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2). The church fasted before sending Barnabas and Saul on that perilous first missionary campaign (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting was certainly a component in the dynamic ministry of Paul (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).

Admittedly, however, fasting can be abused. The practice must never be employed as a substitute for personal godly living. Isaiah delivered a blistering rebuke to those who fasted, then pursued their own worldly pleasures (Isa. 58). Moreover, fasting must not be an occasion for the flaunting of one’s religion. The Pharisees were guilty of this very thing (Mt. 6:16-18).



Finally, the rigors of fasting must not be allowed to ignite a spirit of religious smugness and self-righteousness. This certainly could be a temptation (cf. Lk. 18:9-14).

In the final analysis, there does seem to be some spiritual benefits in voluntary fasting at certain times.

Reflect upon the following:

- The Scriptures seem to suggest that God honors fasting when performed as a token of deep and sincere dedication.
- Physicians indicate that *moderate* fasting can be a benefit to health, having the effect of allowing our systems to occasionally cleanse themselves.
- The mind appears to be able to plumb greater depths of contemplation during periods of fasting.
- Fasting can help one hone a keener edge on self-discipline.
- Fasting can also have the added effect of reinforcing our appreciation for those things of which we're deprived during the periods of abstention.

This section adapted from <http://www.christiancourier.com/questions/fastingQuestion.htm>

Discuss the concept of fasting with your group. Ask them when, where and why they or others in the congregation might fast. If it doesn't come up, you might point out that many people fast from sweets and other foods during Lent or as part of a spiritual retreat. Talk about when your group might fast together, as a spiritual discipline. Pick a time – Lent would be a good time (maybe a full fast on Friday's in Lent or on Good Friday). Or set up a weekend retreat and have the group fast as part of the retreat. Let the group make the choice as to when and how they will fast.

My own and others' experience leads me to recommend not a full fast, but a "juice fast": vegetable juice (preferably freshly made) and especially fruit juice (which will provide more energy sugar) three times a day. The juice provides a basic, simple, appropriate nourishment. It can save you from the complicating distractions of headaches and hunger pangs that more easily accompany total fasting. Take plenty of water throughout the day to prevent dehydration.<sup>41</sup>

## Preparing to Fast

It is important that the group prepare for its time of fasting by prayer and reflection on what they are about to undertake. It also is important to discuss what will happen.

If you plan on fasting for several days, it will be helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable. Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. You also should wean yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast. Caffeine withdrawal, in particular, causes headaches that are not relieved by medication. So, if you drink any amount of caffeinated drinks on a daily basis, start cutting back about ten days in advance.

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<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *op. cit.* page 178.

It will be helpful to adjust your schedule at least during part of your fast. Part of the reason for that is physical: you may feel somewhat weaker than normal or need a nap in the middle of the day!! During the first few days (if you are doing more than one day), you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale. If youth want to do more than one day, it would be best to start on Thursday and end on Sunday so most of the fast time is over the weekend when they can be together as a group and their regular can be suspended.

The second reason to adjust your schedule is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be very essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed.

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating delicious food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a 3-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self" to rise up and say, "This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough."

Some physical effects you can expect:

- Hunger Pangs: usually strongest during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.
- Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea)
- Changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and pains.
- A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins.
- Frequent urination (you will be drinking lots of water!)
- Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal.
- Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating
- Light-headedness or dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

Above all, always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours. This is the best way to handle most of these physical reactions. If the reactions become extreme or even uncomfortable, choose some light food – crackers or something that gives you nourishment but doesn't take away the sense of "fasting" like having a cheeseburger with fries and a super-sized soda!

### **Spiritual and emotional impact**

Talk with the group about some of the spiritual and emotional things that may happen during a fast. For example, in the morning you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening

you may be wrestling the temptation to raid the refrigerator, counting how many more days are left in your fast and feeling discouraged or even depressed (or angry with yourself if the refrigerator wins!) If you spend time in silence, prayer, spiritual reading and reflection, you may experience a wonderful closeness to God (a great thing!) or you may feel empty, lost and alone – or become aware of some aspect of yourself or your life that is disturbing.

It is best for everyone, adults as well as youth, to have a spiritual director nearby to talk about these things. The clergy or lay persons trained in spiritual direction should be available and/or gather the group to talk what's happening and to or pray together. It is normal during a fast for emotions and spiritual experiences, both high and low, to be emphasized. The idea is not to dwell on what is happening excessively but rather to ask: Why am I experiencing this? Is this something about my relationship with God, with others or with myself that I need to tend to? How might I respond to this on a daily basis after my fast? Make sure you tell the group that it is important for everyone to talk about each decision they have made because the way we check to see if we are following God's leading, is first to seek confirmation from the Christian community and second, to try it and see if it bears fruit (bring you and/or others into closer relationship with God and each other in Christ). The reason this is important is because you don't want a young person to decide something unhealthy ("God is calling me to stop eating." – a possible teenager response that would indicate a need for a discussion about anorexia.)

Periodically during the fast, gather the group for prayer and reflection. Consider gathering them five times, the first session focusing on adoration, the second on confession, the third on thanksgiving, the fourth on intercession and the fifth on petition.

The J2A section on Christian Meditation and Prayer may offer you more suggestions.

Have a member of the clergy celebrate the Eucharist with the group at the end of your fast. The group might design the liturgy during the fast. Following the Eucharist, share a light meal together. This provides a means of teaching about the *agape* meal, which was a common practice in the early Church. You can read more about *agape* in the lesson plan on the different types of Love in the Sexuality section.

There are several national programs where youth groups all over the country will fast and pray. One of these is "The 30-Hour Famine" sponsored by World Vision. If you call or visit their website, they will send you a kit for how to plan a fast with your youth group. Check out their website at <http://www.30hourfamine.org/Display.asp?Page=Home>

Lesson updated August 2004, Linda L. Grenz & Tracey Herzer

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## **BUILDING COMMUNITY: We Worship and Serve!**

### **Goal**

To WORK! and to PRAISE!

### **Area**

Spirituality

### **Objectives**

To raise money for the pilgrimage

To link our hard work with our worship

### **Guiding Scripture**

"And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father." (Colossians 3:17)

"...You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you." (2 Thes. 3:7b,8)

### **Background**

Years ago Dorothy Sayers wrote, "(Work is to be seen) not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God. It should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of work itself; and man made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing."

Martin Luther on the sacredness of work: "Just look at your tools...at your needle and thimble...your goods, your scales...everything our bodies do, the external and the carnal, is and is called spiritual behavior if God's Word is added to it and it is done in faith."

Christians value work, not just because we earn money for our labors. We value work because in our work we join with God in creating the world. Even mundane or repetitive work can be sacred if it becomes a way for us to meditate on God's presence or God's gifts to us. In the midst of our busyness, it is important to stop to simplify things. Focus on the pleasure of doing a simple task well. Become aware of the gifts God has given us to do whatever work we do. See how the work you do contributes to God's creation, to the well being of your family or simply to keeping the creation clean and in order (e.g., taking out the trash!).

Invite the group to think and talk about the place of work in the Christian life. Ask some of the following questions to get the discussion going:

- How is our work sacred?
- What does the quality of our work have to do with Christian living?
- How do you see God in your work?
- How might one's work nourish one spiritually?
- What difference is there between work and a job? Between a vocation and a task?
- How is work a vocation? A calling from God?

- Why do we think God calls us to do certain kinds of work?

### Activity

Invite the group to think of a task they can do together that will help them reflect on the connection between work and our faith. Get them to brainstorm a list. It can include simple things, like making a collage of pictures from a magazine showing people at work to doing something – helping build a Habitat for Humanity house for a weekend, cleaning up the churchyard, doing homework together, raking leaves, cleaning windows, washing cars, etc. They might, in fact, pick two different kinds of work – something that feels “noble” (like building a house or feeding the poor) and something that feels “mundane” (like homework!) and see how each of them might be sacred.

Ask them to think about what they need to do to become aware of the sacredness of that work and let them take the lead on whatever they decide. It might mean starting with prayer or having certain music playing in the background or visual aids. Or it might just mean taking a couple of minutes to center themselves in meditation and offering the work to God before starting to do it. Different youth might even choose different things to try. Encourage them to try out something they otherwise might not do just to see what happens.

Schedule a full day of work and make arrangements to meet midday for lunch and at the end of the day for a worship service. Plan for singing and a celebration of the Eucharist, if possible. The more we can link work with our life in the Church, the more we can express our faithfulness by lifting our hands to work and to prayer, the greater our chances of living full and satisfying lives.

- After the work time, take a few minutes to talk about the experience. Ask:
- What was this experience like for you?
- Was it different in any way? If so, how? And why?
- What things did you try that worked for you? What helped you become aware of God’s presence or see the sacredness of what you were doing? What didn’t work

Close with a prayer that affirms our work.

Lesson updated August 2004, Linda L. Grenz

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# YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST

## Goal

To affirm our life as a body made up of many members with different gifts

## Area

Spirituality, Self

## Guiding Scriptures

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Ephesians 6:10-17

## Equipment Required

3x5 cards

Bibles

Pens or pencils

Newsprint or a roll of butcher paper

## Action

Read the passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 aloud.

Hand out 3 x 5 cards and pens. Have each person write their name on one side of their card. (The leader will need to write their name on one card and also write another card that has the name "Jesus" on it.) Have teens then flip the card over and write one positive characteristic, trait, gift or skill for themselves on the back of the card.

Everyone passes their cards to the right and then that person needs to write down something positive about the person whose card they have just received. This continues so that every person has the opportunity to write something positive about each member of the group on their respective card. Hold onto the Jesus card until the exercise has begun and then slip the card into the flow of cards. Remind your group that this is an exercise in affirming each other's uniqueness in the most positive terms possible. When all the cards have circulated around and they've returned to their owners, ask each member to read some items from his or her card aloud to the group.

Use the cards to create some kind of stick figure in the middle of the floor or on a tabletop. Jesus gets to be the head, of course! Do not be surprised if no one wants to be the calves or the shoulders! Remind them that this is a body in which every member has an important role to play and that our body wouldn't be complete without using all the cards.

## Discussion:

Remind the group that we all play different roles. It wouldn't work if we all had the same gifts. We need many different gifts in our group and in our congregation. Ask:

- How would our congregation be different without these particular gifts?
- How would our group be different without these particular gifts?

Now that we have talked a little about how each individual person contributes their gifts and plays a role in the body, let's talk about what we can do when we work together.

- Draw an outline of body on newsprint. You can draw just a simple “gingerbread” style person or you can have a volunteer lay down on several sheets taped together and trace a rough outline of their body. Label the drawing “The Body of Christ” – you could even label the drawing “St. John’s” or whatever the name of your church is. Have the group brainstorm ways this body acts together – ie, mouth = singing hymns, encouraging, smiling; eyes = watching for newcomers; hands = healing ministry, sharing communion, arms = hugging, caring for children, etc.

Lay the stick figure of cards over the newsprint body. Have the group hold hands and stand in a circle around the two representations. The leader reads aloud the passage from Ephesians. After the reading, tell the group you are going to close with a litany to which their response is “Thanks be to God.” Encourage them to respond emphatically with true thanksgiving!

### Closure

You may wish to begin by saying the name of the other group leader so the first, half-hearted response, is for a leader rather than a young person. Go around the circle saying each person’s name. So the leader would begin by saying, “Jane, you are the Body of Christ.” And the group responds “Thanks be to God”

The leader continues around the circle always calling the person by name “\_\_\_\_\_, you are the Body of Christ.” And the rest of the group always responds “Thanks be to God” as strongly and with as much meaning as possible. Continue until all have been recognized.

Finish with a prayer of thanks to God for the wonderful gift of this particular group of people. Be as specific as possible in your prayer, mentioning the qualities and attributes of each, aloud, as you pray – ie *“Thank you, God, for Brett – for his wonderful sense of humor. Thank you for Ruth who always notices if someone is upset and is quick to offer comfort. Thank you for Jonathan who so often is here early and helps us get ready for our group activities. We are grateful for Rebecca who shares with us the gift of laughter and for Marti whose quiet insights add so much to our group. Help us to nurture the group we are together and to reach out and draw others in. These things we pray in the name of your son. Amen.”*

Lesson updated August 2004, Tracey Herzer

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# BOWING DOWN & STANDING UP: True Humility & False Modesty

## Goal

To examine the ways in which we approach one another and our Maker

## Area

Spirituality

## Objectives

To draw the fine line of distinction between modesty and humility

To question whether we must be humble before God, or modest

To encourage members to bow down before their Maker and stand up before their lives

## Equipment Required

Newsprint & Markers

Dictionary (more than one would be great!)

Bibles

3x5 cards or small slips of paper – write one scripture reference on each card for each of the references listed under “Who was Humble?” and “What the Bible says about Humility”

Copies of the litany (see following pages)

## Guiding Scriptures

Mark 11:15-18

Hebrews 4:14-16

James 4:1-3

## Background

Many years ago, Maya Angelou said in an interview, “I have no time for modesty, but I have all the time in the world for humility.” “Humility,” she explained, “acknowledges the One who is greater than all. Modesty is more or less a farce, and a waste of energy.” Below is an excerpt from an interview she did in December 2000 with Oprah Winfrey:

**Oprah:** The big question I have for you is this: Where did your confidence come from? I've never seen anybody who exudes more confidence than you, and I don't mean false, modest bravado, but from the inside out, you've got the stuff.

**Maya Angelou:** There are so many gifts, so many blessings, so many sources that I can't say it's any one thing – unless that one thing is love. And by love I don't mean indulgence. I do not mean sentimentality. And in this instance, I don't even mean romance. I mean that condition that allowed humans to dream of God. To make it. To imagine golden roads. That condition that allowed the "dumb" to write spirituals and Russian songs and Irish lilts. That is love, and it's so much larger than anything I can conceive. It may be the element that keeps the stars in the firmament. And that love, and its many ways of coming into my life, has given me a great deal of confidence about life.

**Oprah:** So when you hear someone being modest....

**Maya Angelou:** I run like hell. The minute you say to a singer, "Would you sing?" and they



say, "Oh, no. I can't sing here," I say, "Oops! I wonder, where is that train to Bangkok?"

**Oprah:** Because?

**Maya Angelou:** Because that person is not reliable. She may not know it, but modesty speaks volumes about falseness.

**Oprah:** Pretending.

**Maya Angelou:** It's lying – lying about who you are, about the gifts you have been given. It discredits you and it discredits the One who made you.

*Interview from [www.Oprah.com](http://www.Oprah.com)*

Modesty and Humility are two words that we often use as though they were interchangeable. We say, "She's just being modest." Or, "She's just being humble." But looked at from this angle, they really are not the same thing. Modest clothing is not the same as humble clothing.

**Modesty is rooted in the need to refrain from boasting. Humility is rooted in the need to acknowledge those greater than ourselves.**

Jesus may be said to have been both modest and humble. We might argue that he was being modest when he asked his followers not to speak of their miraculous experiences of his healing powers. We might argue that he was being humble when he went into the Temple and overturned the tables of the merchants. He was acting out of his understanding of the God he loved and served. It is possible to be both humble and bold. Humble and powerful. Humble and strong.

## **Action**

On a board or a large sheet of newsprint and write the words HUMBLE and MODEST. Ask the group what they think these words mean and write their responses on the newsprint. Some ideas might include, "not proud, not vain, shy, unpretentious, lowly," etc.

Ask the group what they think the differences are between the two words. If you have a dictionary (or dictionaries!) look up both words and see what the differences are. In many of the dictionaries we looked at the words could be interchangeable, so some confusion may result. To clarify things, you may wish to read the piece about Maya Angelou from the Background Info – then ask the group what their reaction is.

## **True Humility vs. False Modesty**

Explain that what we are really talking about is the difference between true humility and false modesty. Ask the group for examples of modesty and humility. Begin with stories from their own lives, or lives of the leaders. See if they can recall any examples of someone being truly humble or falsely modest. Ask them to think of modern-day celebrities – can they think of one they would categorize as truly humble?

## **Who was Humble?**

Then see if you can move your group toward some of the examples we have in scripture. You may want to list the following scripture references on pieces of paper and hand out different slips to members of the group to look up. Talk about who was being modest and who was being humble.

- Moses saying he couldn't talk to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:1-17)
- The Tax Collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14)

- Mary's response to Gabriel (Luke 1:38-55)
- John the Baptist (John 1:25-27)

### **What the Bible says about Humility**

After you have looked at some stories or come up with some possible examples, help your group look at what else the Bible teaches us about humility:

- Matthew 11:28-30 "...for I am gentle and lowly in heart..."
- Matthew 18:1-4 "... whoever humbles himself like a little child..."
- Luke 14:8-11 "... he who exalts himself will be humbled..."
- Romans 12:3 "...let no one think more highly of himself than he ought to"
- Philippians 2:5-11 "... He humbled himself and became obedient..."

After you have looked at the passages, ask some of the following questions:

- Can we be too (falsely) modest?
- Can we ever be too humble?
- What happens if we get too proud? (see also Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goes before a fall)
- What happens if we get too sure of ourselves?
- Do you think there is a danger of being "too sure of God" or at least too sure of what we think God might do? Are there times when we think God will do one thing and then something totally different happens?
- What about groups who seem to think they know who God will let into heaven and who will be left out?

### **Bowing Down and Standing Up**

As young people prepare themselves to face their adult lives, it is essential that they learn how to bow down before God and how to stand up for what they believe. Practicing assertion skills is certainly a part of the task, but there is also the need to be brave and confident in who God is. Without some assurance of the nature and character of God, it is very difficult for us to bow before him or to stand up for our belief in his love.

Talk with your group about who they think God is – here are some questions:

- When you think of God, what images spring to mind?
- What are some attributes of God's character?
- In what ways is God worthy of our humble response?
- What has God done for us?
- What can we rely on God to do in the future?
- Does praying feel different when you are on your knees in church versus lying in your bed or driving in your car?
- Have you ever felt "in awe" of God or God's creation?

Some of these questions are quite difficult and there really aren't easy answers. Remember that the goal is to engage in a discussion of the nature of God and our responses to God's nature. Rather than focus on right or wrong responses, encourage the young people to think critically about the God they met in Sunday School – in what ways did those images paint an accurate picture? In what ways were those images inaccurate or incomplete? Remind teens that our God is big enough to withstand our questions, scrutiny and concerns.

### **Closure**

To bring closure to this discussion, remind the group that each and every one of them is wonderfully and fearfully made for the glory of God. It is important for each of us to risk failure, to be brave, to stand up and say "yes" when we have done a good job. At the same time, it is

important for us to acknowledge the omnipotence of God. Encourage them to be quick to be humble before God, but not so quick to be overly-modest. Remind them to come boldly before the one who loves them.

There is never a need for us to pretend to be something we are not, or less than we are, with God. God does not need our modesty. Our humility, on the other hand, heals us and brings us into right relationship with God and with each other.

### **Prayer**

Have the group join in the following litany (make copies to distribute as handouts):

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## Handout—A Litany of Humility

From the desire of being praised,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the desire of being honored,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the desire of being preferred,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the desire of being consulted,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the desire of being approved,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the desire of comfort and ease,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*

From the fear of being humiliated,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of being criticized,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of being passed over,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of being forgotten,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of being lonely,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of being hurt,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*  
From the fear of suffering,  
*Deliver me, O Lord;*

That others may be shown love more than I,  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*  
That others may be chosen and I set aside,  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*  
That others may be praised and I unnoticed,  
*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it;*  
O Jesus, meek and humble of heart,  
*Make my strength like unto thine. Amen.*

*DeKoven Foundation, Racine, Wisconsin*

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# **FRIENDLY SILENCE: What Will I Hear if I Am Silent**

## **Goal**

To “touch a friendly silence” and experience silence as good and desirable

## **Area**

Spirituality

## **Objectives**

To engage in a brief exercise in silence

To examine our expectations and our experiences of silence

## **Equipment Required**

Copies of the Quotes on Silence

Copies of the Litany (if you are going to be outside)

A collection of “sacred objects” – crosses, icons, pictures, rocks, prayer beads, etc.

## **Guiding Scriptures**

James 3:1-12

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

Psalm 46:11-12 (Deus noster refugium)

## **Before your Meeting Time**

You may want to read over the J2A lessons on Christian Meditation and Prayer for additional ideas to incorporate into this session. For example, you might want to start or end the session with Christian Yoga or Tai Chi exercises – done in silence, of course!

You will need to decide if you want to do this lesson plan as a Sunday morning activity when your time may be limited or as an afternoon activity. Both options are equally valid, but you will need to have this in mind when you plan your lesson.

## **Opening Action**

Distribute copies of the quotes page to each member of your group. Give them a few moments to read through the quotes. Ask them some of the following questions:

- When, where and how do you experience silence?
- When are you and your environment almost completely silent for at least 15-20 minutes?
- What is silence like for you? Do you like it? Dislike it? Look for it? Avoid it?

Invite the young people to read aloud the quotes you gave them... ask them to leave a bit of silence between each reading so the group can absorb what they heard.

## **Reflection**

Invite the group to say what stood out for them, what caught their attention. Let silence between comments stand...don't rush to fill it with another question. When you feel the group is ready to move on, say the following in your own words.

## Background

In stillness, silence and solitude we are given the blessed opportunity of engaging God in new and unexpected ways. For us, as products of a Western culture that emphasizes noisy and busy lives, this concept can be frightening. As members of a liturgical community, it becomes all too easy to imagine that words and liturgies are the only ways in which we may communicate with the God who loves us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Like our Eastern brothers and sisters who have raised being silent to an art form, we too are invited to realize the silence of God. In our modern culture, silence is a rarity. The noise of our cities, construction, radios, televisions, telephones, even the hum of the appliances in our homes, all add up to a dull, but deafening, drone.

The Desert Fathers, as described in Thomas Merton's *The Wisdom of the Desert*, felt much the same frustration that we sometimes feel in our noisy lives. They wanted to engage the silence and thereby meet their true selves and their Maker. The Desert Fathers say very little about their experience of God. Merton explains that the Desert Fathers have little to "say" about God because, ". . . They know that when one has been somewhere close to His dwelling, silence makes more sense than words." (*The Wisdom of the Desert*, page 14.)

One of the important ways we encounter God is in silence. Since our culture is so noisy, it is important to find times of silence in which we can be alone with ourselves and God without the intrusion of unnatural noise. [Finish by explaining what you are going to do for your action.]

## Action

Bearing these things in mind, the following exercise is to be engaged in lovingly and gently and does not require that the young people "tell" or "talk about" what they experience. Leaders are only to introduce the notion of holy and friendly silence and then the whole group will experience at least 15-20 minutes of silence. (It will take at least half this time for their bodies to settle down and their minds to stop racing – please don't try to shorten the exercise or you will also minimize its effect.)

### Sunday morning option

If you are doing this lesson plan on a Sunday morning, ask the group members to find a comfortable position – sitting or laying down. If the weather permits, you might also want to go outside somewhere. If you have been able to collect some sacred objects such as crosses, rocks, prayer beads, icons, etc. – you may wish to invite teens to choose an object to help focus their attention.

Invite them to enjoy the moment in that place....to wait quietly for God to speak to them. It is not necessary for them to pray. Nor is it necessary for them to meditate on ideas or words which they might describe as pious or holy or religious. They are only to sit with themselves and enjoy the silence. They may, if they choose, focus on their beautiful object . . . but it is not necessary. The goal is to enjoy silence in the presence of our friends and fellow travelers on this journey.

### Afternoon option

Alternatively, you could do this as an afternoon activity. Plan a hike through a local "beautiful place." A state park or wildlife refuge is ideal. Plan to bring a lunch or snack. Spend the afternoon hiking. Sing songs. Talk. Laugh and enjoy one another's company. Ask each member to find a leaf or a stone or some other treasure to remind them of their day.

Halfway through the hike, gather together. Explain to the group that you are going to spend twenty minutes together in silence. Ask them to find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Invite them to enjoy the moment... to wait quietly for God to speak. It is not necessary for them to pray. Nor is it necessary for them to meditate on ideas or words which they might describe as "holy" or "religious". They are only to sit and enjoy the silence. They may, if they choose, focus on their beautiful object . . . but it is not necessary. The goal is to enjoy silence in the presence of our friends and fellow travelers on this journey.

### **Other options**

If weather doesn't permit your group to be outside, the church itself is often a very quiet place, especially at certain times. You might want to arrange to do this in another church, just to give the group a change of scenery. In any case, you will have to make arrangements ahead of time to ensure silence, lest you be interrupted by the custodian's vacuum cleaner or the pre-schoolers play group! Once you have "secured" the building (and the leaders can roam the halls to make sure no one enters the sanctuary), invite the youth to find a comfortable place in the sanctuary and then follow the instructions for the walk in a beautiful place, above.

### **After the Period of Silence – for either setting**

After some twenty minutes, leaders should invite the young people to regroup. At this time, leaders should read the following:

Psalm 62:1-2

Psalm 63:1-9

If you will be meeting in "a pleasant place," you may wish to use the Litany for the Earth which follows (make copies of this handout if you wish). One of the leaders can be the litanist with the participants joining in the italicized portions. Alternatively, assign different people to leading. After the litany, exchange the peace.

Afterwards, share your snack or luncheon. And then be on your way, rejoicing.

**[Note:** Again, leaders should resist the urge to "take temperatures" after the silence. It will be enough that the group has done it. Leaders do not need to be "mood-makers." We want only to engage the young people in an ancient and a holy practice.]

Lesson updated August 2004, Linda L. Grenz & Tracey Herzer

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## Handout—Quotes about Silence

### Quotes:

A day filled with noise and voices can be a day of silence, if the noises become for us the echo of the presence of God, if the voices are, for us, messages and solicitations of God. When we speak of ourselves and are filled with ourselves, we leave silence behind. When we repeat the intimate words of God that he has left within us, our silence remains intact.

*Catherine de Hueck Doherty – from Postinina: Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man*

(Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1974), page 23.

One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If we are silent who will take control? God will take control; but we will never let Him take control until we trust Him. Silence is intimately related to trust.

*Richard J. Foster – from Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*

(Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1978), page 88.

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness.

*Meister Eckhart*

Outside of God there is nothing but nothing.

*Meister Eckhart*

Think of the soul as a vortex or a whirlpool and you will understand how we are to Sink

eternally

from negation

to negation

into the one.

And how we are to

Sink

eternally

from letting go

to letting go

into God.

*Meister Eckhart*

The Father uttered one Word; that Word is his Son: and he utters him forever in everlasting silence, and the soul to hear it must be silent.

*John of the Cross (1542-1591)*

We are all one silence, and a diversity of voices.

*Thomas Merton*

How tragic it is that they with nothing to express are continually expressing themselves, like nervous gunners, firing burst after burst of ammunition into the dark, where there is no enemy. The reason for their talk is: death. Death is the enemy who seems to confront them at every moment in the deep darkness and silence of their own being. So they keep shouting at death. They confound their lives with noise. They stun their own ears with meaningless words, never



discovering that their hearts are rooted in a silence that is not death but life. They chatter themselves to death, fearing life as if it were death. *Thomas Merton*— from *No Man Is An Island*.

Souls of prayer are souls of great silence.

*Mother Teresa*

"Silence is not a thing we make; it is something into which we enter. It is always there."

*Sister Maribel of Wantage*

Silence . . . protects the inner fire. Silence guards the inner heat of religious emotions. This inner heat is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus, silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive.

*Henri Nouwen - The Way of the Heart*

Our lives are so cluttered with words that we don't know how to handle silence well. We have long since accepted as a fact that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by words. In our society, at least for many people in it, silence is not seen as a value, but simply as the fruitless and sometimes uncomfortable pause between words. We are a society of men and women sated with words and starved for silence. But we do not realize that silence is what we need, and so the little silence we have we fill with the noise of our stereos and our televisions.

Our age – the age of widespread and relentless media communication – needs, perhaps more than any earlier generation, to learn the meaning of silence and its place in our lives. Silence is the necessary ground for words that have something to say. Authentic silence is pregnant with words that will be born at the right time. But unless our words are born out of a reflective silence, they are apt to be curtains that cover reality rather than windows that reveal it. Words cannot hold the totality of your silence.

Silence is especially important if I want to learn to pray. For prayer, at least at its deepest level, is not so much conversation with God, but my silence communing with the silence of God. In this silent encounter I experience that God is ALL and that apart from God I am nothing.

*William H. Shannon - Seeking the Face of God, page 2.*

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## Handout—A Litany for the Earth

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.*

O God, Creator of the world,  
*Have mercy on us.*

O Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world,  
*Have mercy on us.*

O Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the world,  
*Have mercy on us.*

O Holy, Blessed and Glorious Trinity, one God,  
*Have mercy on us.*

O God, your love created the universe from chaos; You said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

*Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light.*

O God, you said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."

*Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is strong and humble and precious and pure.*

O God, you said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."

*Praised be you, my Lord, through our Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.*

O God, you said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night."

*Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and dazzling and beautiful.*

O God, you said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."

*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.*

O God, you said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness," and you created us, male and female, in your own image.

*Blessed are all those who endure in peace for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

O God, you saw that your creation was very good and gave the whole of creation into our charge.

*Forgive us, O God, for neglecting our obligations.*

Renew in us a sense of our responsibility.

*Help us to love the earth and your whole creation as you love us.*

Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks,

*And serve him with great humility.*

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.*

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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# WALKING THE LABYRINTH

## Goal

To pray our way through adventure

## Area Covered

Spirituality

## Objectives

To explore the time-honored concept of the labyrinth

To remind ourselves that at every crossroad we can choose to seek God's mercy and guidance

To draw, walk, pray and experience a labyrinth

## Equipment

A ball of yarn

Sidewalk chalk (regular chalk will do, but asphalt is very hard on chalk and you will need a lot!)

Copies of Mazes

Markers

Copies of the Prayers of the People, Form IV (*Book of Common Prayer*, pages 388-389)

## Guiding Scripture

Psalm 23

## Background

This session will either need to be done as an afternoon session, or broken up into several weeks of morning sessions.

In this session, we will explore the ancient symbol of the labyrinth in order to find in it a strength for our own unique and modern struggle to define our experience. Mircea Eliade was a scholar and a wise man whose work with primitive cultures and whose interest in the symbols and rituals of religious systems is well known and well regarded. (One of his books is cited in our Resource Guide.) Now may be a good time to take a peek at what he has to say about creation and recreation in tribal religions. While it is not necessary for the young people to read Eliade, or to delve into the ancient myths in the context of this curriculum, it is helpful to remember that all cultures have myths of challenge and change. It may be useful for the leaders to read the myth of Theseus walking the labyrinth with the aid of Ariadne's thread. Another strange but delightful resource is the March 1992 edition of *European Travel and Life*. It contains an article by Martin O'Brien entitled "Garden-Variety Puzzles." The photographs of English garden mazes and labyrinths are worth the search for this magazine.

The most important context, however, for this lesson, is our own life experience. Listen to Eliade's own journal in which he defines the human adventure and the experience of the labyrinth:

*These thirty years, and more, that I've spent among exotic, barbarian, indomitable gods and goddesses, nourished on myths, obsessed with symbols, nursed and bewitched by so many images which have come down to me from those submerged worlds, today seem to me to be the stages of a long initiation. Each one of these*

*divine figures, each of these myths and symbols is connected to a danger that was confronted and overcome. How many times I was almost lost, gone astray in the labyrinth where I risked being killed, sterilized, emasculated (by one of the terrifying mother-goddesses, for example). An infinite series of intellectual adventures – I use the word "adventure" in its primary meaning of existential risk. These were not bits of knowledge acquired slowly and leisurely in books, but so many encounters, confrontations, and temptations. I realize perfectly well how all the dangers I skirted during this long quest, and in the first place, the risk of forgetting that I had a goal, that I was heading toward something, that I wanted to reach a "center."*

10 November 1959; Mircea Eliade  
as printed in "Journey to the Center" *Parabola*, Summer 1992<sup>49</sup>

The transition from child to adult can be described in much the way Eliade describes his own journey. It is a time when we look to giants and goddesses and myths, even in our own culture. Our heroes wear sports uniforms. Our giants live in our television mythology where all situations are resolved in 30 minutes to an hour. We look to our culture to provide us with answers and experience – but our young people run the same risk in their adventure that Eliade describes in his own adventure. Adolescence can be a time in which one forgets what they were after in the first place. For young people, the goal is to grow up, to get wise, to get started on their own lives. In the miasma of their experience – rich, delightful, demanding and often overwhelming – it is easy for them to feel at risk and in danger.

### **Why use a labyrinth?**

The transition from child to adult can be seen as an experience of the labyrinth. A labyrinth is *not* a maze. There is not one path which must be taken in order to reach the end. *A labyrinth is a circling, spiraling, balanced path which reaches both in and out.* It is a pathway which moves us to the center of who we are as individuals, and moves us out to the world at large upon which we will have some amount of effect. Our goal is always to find ourselves and to serve the Christ.

### **What is a labyrinth?**

A true labyrinth, such as the ones described in the myth of Theseus or the lines on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, is a spiral of experience. It is based in the form of a knot, representing both strength and cohesion. A true labyrinth is not walked in the darkness, but is the light of an awakening sense of self, of God, and of the world in which it is placed. Remember: The traditional pattern of the labyrinth is not a maze. It is unicursal (can be passed over in one course), and therefore impossible to get lost in it.

"The Geometry of the Labyrinth" Patrick Conty, *Parabola*, 1992

If we can see the labyrinth as a metaphor for life and growth, then we can be consoled by the notion that we are never lost in it the way we might be lost in a tangle or a maze. Our lives are like the labyrinth. We move through them, make choices about when and where to turn and when to turn back. At every point, we must decide how we will proceed, how many times we want to make the same mistakes and when we will turn to God. In our exploration of the labyrinth, we will turn to God at every crossroad. We will practice the prayerful surrender of our lives.

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<sup>49</sup> This piece was excerpted from *No Souvenirs: Journal 1957-1969*, Fred H. Johnson, Jr., translator, HarperSanFrancisco.

## Action

To begin, hand out copies of the mazes. Give one to each participant. There will be some who are extremely fast at traveling the maze and others who hate it. As they are working away, remind them that there is only one path through. All our efforts must be applied to finding the solitary path. Encourage them to work alone. Work the maze in brightly colored markers.

After all have completed the mazes, hang them around the classroom. There should be varying levels of success in making it easily through the maze. The pictures made by the participants' travels may be said to symbolize our efforts to "find our way" through our lives.

Ask if anyone has ever walked through an outdoor maze. Have you been to a fun house? A house of glass? What was the experience like? Fun? Frustrating?

Explain that, as often as not, our lives are not so much a maze as a tangle. Have all members stand in a circle. Using the ball of yarn, beginning with a leader, state where you were born, "I was born in . . .," and, while holding on the one end of the yarn, gently toss the ball to another member of the group. Ask them, "Where were you born?" As they answer, they should toss the yarn again, holding onto a spot on the line with one hand. Continue to toss the yarn, asking and answering a simple question with each toss:

- Where were you born?
- What would you like to do next summer?
- Where have you traveled?

Continue until each member is holding two corners of yarn. This should make a tremendous crisscrossed mess in the midst of the group. (Leaders should comment that this looks more like grown-up life: a tangle of commitments, desires, experiences.) It may be useful to ask if anyone can see a way to untangle the mess.

[**Note:** This has gone both ways in the past. Sometimes an industrious young person will figure out that if one carefully lays the mess down on the ground one can retrace the path of the yarn. This takes patience and diligence and can be a shared experience if the group recognizes that the members will have to help hold things in place while they take turns rewinding the yarn. If this happens, it is a good time to make note of the fact that sometimes it is a wise thing to lay down the tangled mess of our lives, to look carefully at the path we've taken and do our best to restore order. Chances are good that the effort will fail miserably! In this case, as in the second scenario, where they refuse to even try, this is the time to remind them that when our lives become unmanageable, we can make an offering of our chaos to the one who loves us. The first step in all Twelve-Step programs is the recognition that our lives have become unmanageable. Admitting defeat can be the first step to success.]

After the group has determined how to deal with the yarn, ask them to take a moment and quietly reflect on the times in their own lives when it has been absolutely chaotic, or remarkably calm and ordered. Divorce? Moving? Vacation? First days of a school year? Ask if anyone is willing to share a time like that with the group. Don't be surprised if they decline this opportunity. And don't be afraid of the silence.

## Describe a Labyrinth

A labyrinth is a closed path of corners and curves. By its design, it moves us in and out. The labyrinth is a symbol for exploration and true contemplation. As a symbol, it holds no intrinsic

power. It is both a puzzle and a game. One cannot get lost. One cannot win or lose. The goal is not to get in or get out. The goal is the experience every corner of the path.

Move the group outside. Find a large, open space of sidewalk or parking lot. The church parking lot is ideal. Ask the young people to draw the labyrinth on the ground. The larger the better! Explain to the group that the labyrinth must be large enough for all members of the group to walk it. Make certain as they draw it, that they are making it large enough. (For groups larger than twenty members, divide in two teams, if desired.) After the drawing is done, encourage the members to walk it a few times, to understand its patterns.

Distribute copies of the following prayer form. The participants are to enter the labyrinth. When everyone is ready, the leader, or one appointed by the leader, will begin the prayers. As each prayer is spoken, the group walks the pattern. At the end of the prayer, they are to stop at one of the cross-points and offer, silently or aloud, their own petitions. The call, "Lord, in your mercy," is answered by, "Hear our prayer." At these words, the group is free to move again to a new corner. There should be a bit of silence between each spoken prayer to allow the participants to walk to labyrinth.

### **Closure**

At the end of the Prayers of the People, the leaders should add one of the following prayers:

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.*

*For the Human Family  
Book of Common Prayer, page 815*

or

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel [in particular those who travel the Labyrinth this day]; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them safely to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*For Travelers  
Book of Common Prayer, page 831*

### **Additional Notes**

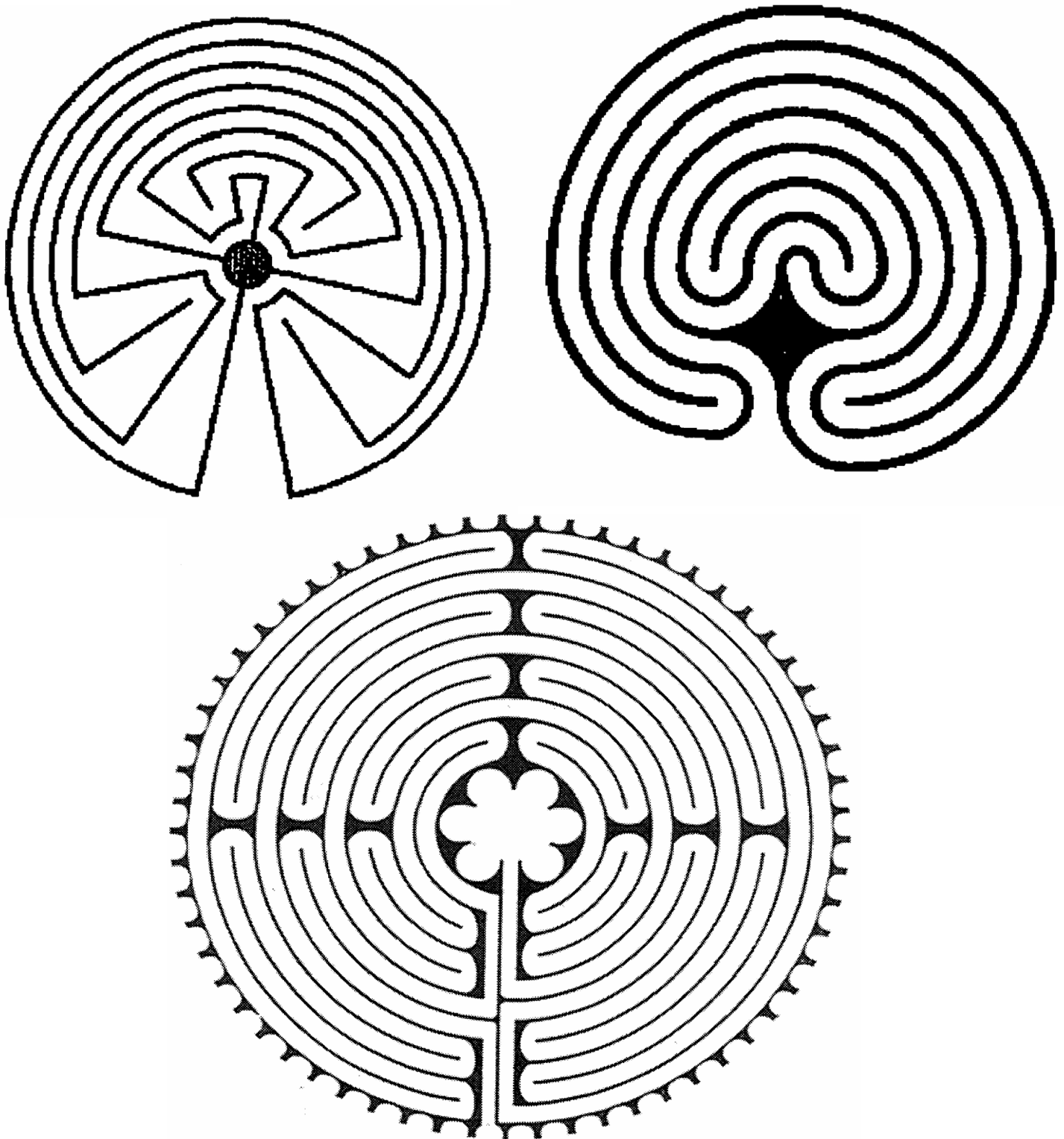
Snacks may be provided at the end or before going outside to draw the labyrinth.

Beware of the desire to make this "meaningful." It is enough for the young people to have the experience of moving through a physical pattern at the same time that they move through a pattern of prayers. At every turn of our lives, we do not have to feel the presence of God, but God is with us, nonetheless. In other words, don't take your group's temperature too often. The chances are good that things are just fine!



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## Handout—Mazes vs. Labyrinth



Only the bottom figure is a labyrinth  
This model is drawn on the floor of Chartes Cathedral in France



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## FOOT-WASHING: The Role of the Servant

### Goal

To examine how Jesus modeled servant leadership and to experience being a servant to one another

### Area

Spirituality

### Objectives

To share a meal together

To allow leaders to model servant leadership

To have the group members experience having their feet washed

### Guiding Scripture

John 13:3-15

### Background

There are only a few things which our Lord assumes we will do as a part of our life as Christians. One of them is being a servant. Usually we think of a servant only as one who serves (a humble, maybe even demeaning concept), and perhaps even the idea of a servant as being “owned” or at least “controlled” by someone who is greater, richer and perhaps more worthy. But there is a concept of “servant-leadership” in which one leads as well as serves and serving is a gift, freely given, rather than something demanded from the servant.

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve – after leadership is established.

The difference manifest itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?”

From the *Servant As Leader* published by Robert Greenleaf in 1970.

### Discussion

Share the above reflections with the group and then ask:

- When and where have you experienced someone serving you? Being a servant-leader?
- When and where have you served? Been a servant-leader?
- Jesus modeled being a servant leader – what does that model mean for us today?

### Preparation

Leaders are encouraged to read over the text in which Jesus washes his disciples’ feet. If the leaders have never participated in a foot-washing, then we recommend that they speak to the clergy and perhaps try washing the feet of a spouse or a friend in an effort to prepare for the

task of washing all the feet of the J2A group. It takes a sort of determination, which is hard to describe, to do this. Some of the kids will be uneasy with this, and some will seem quite able to understand the dynamics. By the time leaders are ready for this lesson, they will know each of the kids extremely well and thereby be able to predict who will need the most comforting.

### **Action**

Prepare a simple meal together – spaghetti and salad. Eat and enjoy each other's company. After dinner and cleanup, move into the sanctuary or another space you can prepare ahead of time and where you can control the lighting. Invite the young people to sit in a circle. Read or say the following in your own words:

*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 – to literally be on equal footing. 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. We are going to explore and celebrate servant-leadership by participating in the footwashing ceremony that Jesus did with his disciples.*

This may seem a bit risky to us. 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.

Invite the group to share stories of how they have been served by each other in this group and/or in the congregation. Be prepared to start by telling a couple of stories about how the group's member (or a leader) have served you and expressing what that meant to you, how it related to your own spiritual life, etc.

Have one of the group read the Gospel passage aloud. You might also have someone read the Love Prayer, which follows this lesson plan.

Dim the lights. And do it. It is easier to do this sort of thing if there is only enough light to allow you to do the washing, and not so much that anyone feels they are in the spotlight. It may be

scary at first, but we promise you, neither you as a leader, nor the young people, will ever forget this night.

Use warm water and soap. Ask one of the young people to help you refill the pitcher of warm water and empty the basin filled with the dirty water as often as necessary.

Do your best to do this in silence. It may be that leaders will wish to speak a word of encouragement or guidance to the individual as they wash their feet, but it is not necessary.

### **Closure**

After all have been washed and dried. Join together in the following prayer form (make copies to distribute):

Lesson updated August 2004, Linda L. Grenz

As we prepare to leave  
and embrace the challenges  
of our lives and our world  
let us ask for God's blessing.

May God bless us with  
strength to seek justice. *Amen.*

May God bless us with wisdom  
to care for the earth. *Amen.*

May God bless us with love  
to bring forth new life. *Amen.*

from *Building a New World*, Share Lent Project, 1991  
(Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace).

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## Handout—Prayer

Bless to me, O God,  
Each thing my eye sees;  
Bless to me, O God,  
Each sound my ear hears;  
Bless to me, O God,  
Each odor that goes to my nostrils;  
Bless to me, O God,  
Each taste that goes to my lips;  
Each note that goes to my song,  
Each ray that guides my way,  
Each thing that I pursue  
Each lure that tempts my will,  
The zeal that seeks my living soul,  
The Three that seek my heart,  
The zeal that seeks my living soul,  
The Three that seek my heart.

A Celtic prayer

**J2A Lessons**

**Prayer  
&  
Meditation**

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# An Introduction to Christian Meditation: Be Still And Know That I Am God

## General Background

Many people would define prayer as conversation with God. Yet the word “conversation” seems to imply speech. Perhaps the word “communication” – which includes both speech and all forms of wordless communication – may be a more accurate term. But even that word falls short of including the idea of prayer as a “state of being.” For our purposes, meditative prayer may be most helpfully thought of as consciously putting oneself in the presence of God. Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish religious philosopher, wrote, *“A man prayed, and at first he thought prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer was listening.”*<sup>1</sup>

Meditative prayer is an incredibly creative form of prayer. It can involve scripture or music or artwork or nature or being still or moving or chanting or imaging – and, above all, silence. This makes it particularly appropriate for youth, who as a rule are open to the concept of thinking “outside of the box.” Meditative prayer is definitely “outside of the box.”

Contrary to popular belief, the practice of meditation is not limited to Eastern religions. However, Christian meditation *is* different from the Eastern method. Richard Foster explains that: *“Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind of distractions in order to fill it more with God.”*<sup>2</sup> As Christians, we have always experienced the love of God through soaking ourselves, or filling ourselves, with that love. Meditative prayer may well be thought of as immersing ourselves in the love of God.

From the desert mothers and fathers through Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich, and Thomas Merton, the saints have never hesitated to leave the well worn paths of verbal prayer and plunge into the deep shadows of what has been called the mysterious prayer of silence. Teresa of Avila, the medieval Spanish mystic, explained that since her intellect did not permit deep thought, instead she began to picture Christ within her. *“I did many simple things of this kind....I believe my soul gained very much in this way, because I began to practice prayer without knowing what it was.”*<sup>3</sup>

Teresa's meditative prayer was both *creative* (experimenting and picturing Christ within her) and *simple*.<sup>4</sup> We also can strive to be both creative and simple in our prayer. What we hopefully do **not** strive for is “perfection” in prayer – whatever that might mean. Prayer, meditative or otherwise, is not some deeply hidden theological secret which we have to “get right.” As Jesus reminds us, prayer is not dependent upon fancy words, an appreciative audience, or an important location in the pews. (See Matthew 6:1-1)

Prayer is a reciprocal gift. God delights in the gift of our intentional presence. And we delight in, and are deeply changed by, the awareness of God's presence. This awareness takes place in our hearts and spirits, and it changes us in ways we cannot completely understand.

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<sup>1</sup>Kierkegaard, Soren, *Christian Discourses*, Oxford University Press, 1940, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup>Foster, Richard J., *Celebration of Discipline*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1978, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Keating, Thomas: Online at [www.centeringprayer.com](http://www.centeringprayer.com) ; click on “Centering Prayer”; click on “Method.”

<sup>4</sup>Radcliffe, Lynn J., *Making Prayer Real*, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952, p. 214.

In the attentive silence of meditative prayer we invite God to move us, to teach us, to heal us. Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, reminds us that walking hand in hand with God can give us the courage to look deep inside ourselves, and the ability to change. To pray is to change. While psychotherapy can be a valuable tool for integrating and changing the personality, the Holy Spirit is the best psychotherapist there is!

By opening our whole selves to what Father Thomas Keating calls the “Ultimate Mystery of God” – beyond thoughts, words or emotions – we also open ourselves to a process of interior purification which results when one comes into contact with the divine. Keating, a Trappist monk and founder of Contemplative Outreach in Snowmass, Colorado, feels that a twenty-minute, twice daily, soaking in the prayer of silence can help us unload the false selves which we have created in order to cope with the emotional traumas which afflict every human being. Like psychotherapy, the Holy Spirit works over time, requires our disciplined, active involvement and in many cases, requires the help of a skilled professional. Someone trained to guide others in their prayer life is called a spiritual director. A spiritual director can provide valuable assistance to individuals and groups as they seek to change and be changed by God.

In addition to the spiritual and psychological benefits derived from union with God, there are also physical benefits to be found in such meditation. A deep sense of relaxation is the most quickly noticeable of these, and those who meditate regularly find that the lessening of tension is a benefit which lasts. A slowed heart rate, and regular, deep breathing are measurable physiological changes which can occur both during the actual prayer time, and often for some period following. In these times of hurried living and everything “to-go”, the physical benefits of meditation should not be overlooked.

Also important are effects such as: the intimate knowing of scripture which results when you live through a biblical story, a new appreciation for God's creation, the ability to learn to sit peacefully in reflection, or the change which can be brought into a life situation by imaging (imagining) Christ in the midst of it. As you and your youth begin to practice meditation, you will be able to add to this list, drawing on your own experience.

### **Why Meditate with Youth?**

Young people stand to benefit from meditation – as much as adults do. Today's adolescents are rushed and overburdened by heavy schedules – emulating the schedules of the adults in their lives. Juggling classes, jobs, studying, sports, church activities, music lessons, and social lives is more than a full time job – and their general “wiredness” reflects the frenetic pace of their days. Once they've been introduced to the idea of meditation, they may find in that experience the opportunity to slow down physically, relax, and unwind in a safe place – a “sanctuary.”

The visual imaging used in meditation offers new possibilities for changing a young person's difficult life circumstances, or at least new possibilities for healing and for coping. Meditating on nature can help to broaden the extraordinarily narrow focus of adolescents' “me-oriented” lives. And simply sitting and immersing oneself in the presence of God has a healing power beyond our rational understanding.

Young people are naturally curious. They are open to examining new ideas, and if they aren't given fresh, uncharted territory to explore, they may well strike off in search of excitement on their own – and find it in inappropriate or even dangerous places. Their interest in ghost stories, psychic phenomena, New Age theology, and Ouija boards is a reflection of their thirst for the spiritual realm. Through meditative encounters they can develop in spiritual matters one-on-one



by the greatest Teacher in our midst – the Holy Spirit.

Enormous individual rewards can be reaped by the solo practitioner of meditation. But there are also benefits which come from group meditation. Because there is something very intimate about allowing yourself to be open and vulnerable in a group setting, the result can be a gradual development of trust among the people in the group. Open discussion of one's prayer life in a nonthreatening and nonjudgmental situation is one way in which youth can develop intimacy and build community among themselves.

## **Making Meditation Part of Your Meetings**

This section offers lesson plans that are designed to be incorporated into the J2A section of the *Journey to Adulthood* program and are especially useful in preparation for and during pilgrimage. These lessons will be useful to the YAC group. They are encouraged to use them in their weekly meetings and to consider ways to incorporate these prayer methods into congregational life, use them to lead a Quiet Day for the congregation, or for J2A youth and parents as preparation for pilgrimage.

After you read this brief introductory material and spend some time on your own in meditation, you may feel ready to explore silent prayer and meditation with your group. If you are unfamiliar with meditation, it may be helpful to find someone experienced in leading meditation to introduce the first couple of lessons to the group or to work with you before you begin using the lesson plans with the group.

Although each lesson plan is designed to be self-contained, we encourage you to try them in the order listed rather than randomly as they somewhat build on each other. **However, a word of caution: it is best to mix your group's meditation experience in amongst your other activities – several weeks of nothing but meditation may leave your class somewhat bored and restless.** You can include one of these lessons with a longer sessions – an overnight event, trip, evening session, etc. Some of them (e.g., sacred movement) might be stretched over several sessions.

Once you have introduced a prayer form, use it for several weeks so the group becomes familiar with it. Or, if you are on pilgrimage, introduce these before you leave and then choose some (or all) of them to practice at various points on your journey. In all cases, you need to include both regular practice and reflection. Periodically ask the group to reflect on the prayer method they are now using.

- What is helpful or not helpful?
- When, where and how do they think this method might benefit the church, your group and/or themselves?

Each group and often each individual will have certain methods they especially like or don't like. Point out that prayer is a way of communicating with and being with God. We are all different – we all have different personalities and we all communicate with each other differently.

Therefore, it is natural that humans have found many different ways to be in God's presence and relate to God. In addition, we change as we grow older, as our relationship with God deepens and our life circumstances change. So, a prayer method we find helpful today might not "work" tomorrow and, likewise, a method that seems strange or silly might become the primary way we pray next year. Encourage the group members to learn and practice many different methods, but use the method that works best for them as they pray on a daily basis.

The goal of all these lesson plans in Rite-13 and J2A is for the youth to learn many different ways of praying and to gain an appreciation for these different ways. Most individuals and groups will gradually progress in their spiritual life – contemplative prayer at the end of these lessons is generally a prayer methods one “grows into” while most anyone can read a collect.

Adjust what you do and when you do it according to the needs of your group. However, teaching youth how to pray, praying with them, encouraging them to pray with each other and in their daily lives is one of the essential components of the *Journey to Adulthood* program. So, it is important to find ways to teach your youth how to pray.

### **Creating Sacred Space**

Whether meditating alone or in a group setting, it is helpful, appropriate, and fun (!) to give your imagination free rein in creating a sacred space for your prayer time. This can be done quite simply, by placing a small arrangement of specially selected objects on a table in the center of your meeting space, or in a corner shielded by screens. This can become holy ground set aside from the normal busy meeting area. Invite the youth to create sacred space of their own. They might drape the table with a scarf or interesting piece of cloth, and then add candles, a cross, an icon, or piece of art to the arrangement. In this way the table functions as a focal point – like a tiny altar. Including something from the natural world in the table top display – e.g., stones, shells, tiny plants, fresh or dried flowers, seed pods, driftwood, etc., somehow opens the space and summons the whole of God's creation. But these, of course, are *enhancements, not necessities*. One of the beauties of meditation is that, with practice, it is possible to discover one's sacred space anywhere – at a rowdy party, a noisy sports event, during a bitter family quarrel, or even in the middle of Grand Central Station.

### **Relaxation and Posture**

Most adults are somewhat self-conscious about their bodies. But by comparison, young people can be absolutely off the charts in this area, being afflicted with both self-consciousness and self-obsession about their physical attributes – or their perceived lack of them. A teenager's shaky sense of identity or self-acceptance can be almost annihilated at the appearance of a new pimple. Having the group go through the steps of physical relaxation together – a process which involves letting down the defenses in all kinds of ways – encourages a conscious and matter-of-fact acceptance that bodies just “are.” Some bodies are more tense than others and may take longer to relax, while some can fall asleep practically the minute they stop moving. Some are long and don't fit comfortably into certain kinds of chairs – and some are so short that their feet may dangle off the floor (not a posture encouraged for meditation!). And every body has a stomach which may growl, or a cough or sneeze or burp may come when least desired. Facts. Another fact: when it comes to meditation it doesn't matter what shape or size we are. As a part of God's creation we stand before the divine on equal footing. Although some sorts of meditation can be done while moving, it is more common to sit.

If your group is very small, or if you have a large room or uncomfortable chairs, it is possible to lie down. The drawbacks to this posture are both the condition of most floors – dirty! – and the fact that the prone position encourages sleep. Sitting on the floor cross-legged, with legs stretched out in front, with the legs tucked underneath the body (though in this position legs may tend to fall asleep, especially at first), or sitting in a chair – any of these are good ways to begin. You might also consider building prayer stools or seiza benches (say-zah). Directions are included in *The Word is Very Near You* by The Rev. Martin Smith (Cowley Publications, available through LeaderResources, 800-941-2218). This is a very simple, low bench one uses to support

your body while kneeling – the bench fits between your legs and your posterior while kneeling, taking the weight off your legs and allowing you to kneel for long periods of time.

The important thing is that everyone find the position which will most enhance their physical comfort. Constant readjustment or wiggling due to cramping is not conducive to freeing the spirit for meditation!

Father Thomas Keating, one of the great proponents of Centering Prayer, says that the goal is to sit comfortably enough to avoid thinking about bodily discomforts. He also notes that during prayer a persistent itching, twitching, restlessness, or even slight pains are “usually due to the untying of emotional knots.” These may be welcomed as signs of the healing action of God.

Some people prefer to meditate with their eyes open. With a group of young people – unless you are actually contemplating an object such as an icon or a sunset – it is wiser to have them close their eyes, thus shutting out possible visual distractions.

There are a variety of ways to “set the stage” for meditation. In the beginning, you may find it helpful to use the relaxation process outlined on the following page to move the group into a relaxed state. After some time and practice, your group will probably be able to move into a meditative space simply by inviting them to find a comfortable posture and a few moments of silence. Some groups use a gong to signal the beginning and end of meditation time. Others begin by singing a simple, Taizé-type chant. Try several ways and see what seems most effective or ask the group what they prefer.

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## Handout: Steps to Relaxation

Once the group is settled quietly in a comfortable position in the designated space – and you may have to wait calmly for the fidgeting, coughing, whispering and giggling to subside – take them through the following steps to relaxation:

- Tighten all the muscles in your feet, including your toes. Wait a second or two and then relax.
- Tighten your leg muscles from the knee down, hold a couple of seconds...and relax.
- Tense up your thighs – including the sit-me-down muscles – hold...and then relax.
- Tighten your stomach muscles, hold... and relax.
- GENTLY arch your back and lift your chest, hold... and relax.
- Extend your arms in front of you, clench your fists and stretch...hold... and relax.
- Slowly raise your shoulders high up toward your ears...hold... then gently relax.
- GENTLY and slowly roll your head from shoulder across your chest...to the other shoulder...then back the other way...and relax.
- Scrunch up your face muscles, hold for a second or two...and relax, gently smoothing out the facial muscles.

Hopefully, by now breathing has slowed and deepened. If chests are rising and falling, high and shallow breathing is still happening. When people's abdomens are rising and falling as they breathe, you'll know they have relaxed into deep breathing. Nothing can be done to hurry this; it will simply come naturally. If your group has disintegrated into giggles or chaos – simply and calmly say, “And, once more...” and start over at the top. That generally gets them settled down – and the giggles usually only occurs the first time or two.

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# Christian Meditation: Sacred Movement: Part I and II

## Goals

To provide the young people and the leaders with an opportunity to participate in a spiritual experience which is physical

To encourage youth and leaders to recognize that worshiping our Creator in a way which includes the whole self – body, mind, and spirit – is a valued part of our Christian tradition

To provide an opportunity for young people to learn experientially that the body is inextricably linked to the spirit

## Guiding Scriptures

Exodus 15: 20-21      Then the prophet Miriam... and the women danced...sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

2 Samuel 6: 12-15      David danced before the LORD with all his might.

1 Cor. 6: 19, 20      ...therefore glorify God in your body.

## Suggestion for Introducing this Unit

Show a short clip from the 1984 movie "Footloose" where Ren (Kevin Bacon) appears before the town council to convince them to allow teenagers to have a Prom. He quotes some scripture and talks about the different kinds of dancing found in the Bible. It is a climax of the movie and very well done. Yes, it is a dated film – but it just may help your teenagers get ready to MOVE! 😊

## Background Information

Sacred movement may be defined as any movement which puts you in touch with God. It may be executed individually or in a group; it may take place in or out of a formal worship setting. But if it opens your heart and connects you with the divine – that is what makes movement "sacred."

There are ample historical precedents for movement or dance in worship. Ancient peoples danced to communicate with each other and with their gods. In the book of Exodus, Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, leads a victorious celebration dance in honor of God, who has miraculously brought the Israelites across the Red Sea. In 2 Samuel, King David dances to honor the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. The psalms use dance, music, and song over and over to praise the Lord.

In the Aramaic language which Jesus spoke, "dance" and "rejoice" were signified by the same word. So where we read "rejoicing in the spirit," dance may be understood.

Jesus recognized dance as a normal means of expressing joy. In Luke 6:23 he tells the crowds, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven." And in the story of the prodigal son, (Luke 15:11-32) Jesus mentions dancing as an expected part of the celebration and feasting. "...and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And (his father) said to him...It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

Paul reminded early Christians that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit and instructed them to glorify God in their bodies as well as in their spirits (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

And in 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul expects that prayer will involve movement: "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands...."

The apocryphal Acts of John<sup>5</sup> describes the disciples performing a mysterious circle dance around Jesus. And a sort of line dance symbolizing the movement of life – the "tripudium" – was performed in the early church. Clement of Alexandria, in the third century, believed that what was regular, rhythmic, and harmonious was also divine. And Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, claimed that King David's dancing in 2 Samuel 6:14 signified "intense joy," and that David was publicly showing his inner state of soul through the rhythmic motions of his body.

The late medieval and Renaissance periods were ages of enormous dramatic expression during which mystery and miracle plays – sometimes astonishingly bawdy – were created by and for the church. During this time monastic orders also found dance to be of religious value. Franciscans sang, danced, and were called the singing servants of Christ. Other monastics found that pacing or around their cloisters was a physical act that freed the spirit to soar more easily into prayer.

But following the Renaissance the Roman Catholic church became ever more centrally authoritative and forbade sacred dance during worship services. Protestants followed suit, believing that the spiritual world must be approached seriously and with the mind, not the senses. They forbade dance not only during their worship services, but often the stricter groups also forbade dancing in the daily lives of the people. The coming of the Age of Reason only reinforced this body-mind split, and in our western society the result has been increasing estrangement from our physical selves. In some ways we're not at ease in our own bodies.

Our youth – trapped between society's taboos concerning the body and their growing sexuality and the power which that brings – can fall victim to this disconnect between the physical and the emotional or spiritual. Add the fact that their bodies are changing so quickly that from season to season they may literally feel like strangers in their own flesh, it's no wonder that confusion reigns supreme both in the minds of our youth and in the adults who try to understand and support them.

So what can we do? We can explore sacred movement as a means of learning how the spirit resides in both the body and the mind. This exploration can help us to understand that the process of re-integrating our minds with our bodies is tremendously important for all who seek to find a healthy and whole (holy) self. Perhaps your group will be able to see how disconnecting the physical from the mental can result in a dangerous disconnection of the spirit.

Movement can be healing – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Like music, movement can circumvent the brain and move straight to the heart, where we can discover God available to us in fresh ways. The very newness of sacred movement can startle us into unaccustomed awareness.

God sent his only son to us in flesh just like ours. He endowed us with five senses – to deny these is to deny the gift. To accept and use the gift is to strive toward health and wholeness. If we wish to honor the miracle of God's creation, we must honor the whole self as the

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<sup>5</sup>This is one of many books that were not accepted as part of the canon of the Bible but circulated in the early Christian church and are still studied as part of gaining an understanding of life at the time of Jesus.

wonderfully interwoven and interconnected creation that it is.

### Some Ground Rules

- Be sensitive. For some people, physical movement in front of others – especially if it involves touching – is very threatening. Avoid making anyone the center of attention in a way that feels uncomfortable to them or to the group.
- Never allow insulting comments about anyone's appearance or performance to be made about a group member – no matter how amusing the comments may seem. This will help create a safe environment in which young people can feel free to experiment in the space. Establish this as a norm before you even begin any movement.
- Sacred dance is not a performance, but rather a shared, inclusive experience. Encourage the group to set aside the urge to critique oneself, or others. Sacred dancers are involved in a mutual experience of God, and that is always the focus.
- Remember, we all know how to move! We do it all the time. Invite the dancers to do their best to ignore any inhibitions or expectations and just enjoy the experience.
- Cautionary note: when this lesson is used with adults, it usually is helpful to invite them to sit outside the circle and observe until they feel comfortable joining in. Mostly this is because some people – especially victims of any sort of physical abuse – may feel overwhelmed at the thought of being touched in any way. With young people, this is trickier, since offering the option to observe may result in – at the very least – every single boy refusing to participate! So it's a good idea to encourage them to participate while keeping an eagle eye open for anyone who seems genuinely uncomfortable, and dealing with them discreetly and compassionately as your good sense deems fit.

### Planning Your Time

**Part I** is designed to introduce your group to various types of sacred movement. The order of activities was deliberately chosen for the way in which one movement leads to the next, and for their relative simplicity. Each activity has a suggested time frame. You can spend more or less time as you think wise. The activities in Part I are designed to take approximately an hour.

**Part II** includes a few simply choreographed presentations which could be offered during a worship service anywhere – including being on pilgrimage at a church or cathedral. The suggestions chosen incorporate liturgical pieces which are often found in typical services such as the Gloria, the Doxology, the Lord's Prayer, and a "Scripture Sculpture." Part II is designed to be used only after the completion of Part I. It is also approximately one hour, though it can be extended.

You may choose to use this as one, two or more lessons. This would be an appropriate activity as part as a lock-in experience or as part of a pilgrimage. It also would be a good lesson plan to use if you wanted to involve entire families as this is something everyone from young children to older adults can learn and enjoy.



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## Part I: Exploring Movement

### Materials Needed

An area large enough for your group to move about freely. Participants should be advised to wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing. Bare feet are preferable, as socks can be dangerously slippery. The floor should be clean, smooth, and free of debris, splinters, etc.

### Opening (10-15 minutes)

Briefly review the background information and ground rules outlined above. Don't spend too much time on unimportant details. Speaking longer than 5-7 minutes is probably a mistake. During this short opening overview you probably want to highlight the following:

- There is a long tradition of sacred dance associated with Christianity, and it is only in modern times that we have gotten away from the inclusion of this form in our worship.
- Encourage in them an eagerness to discover for themselves that movement can be freeing and healing.
- Help them to understand that God created every part of us and that it is appropriate that we use every part of us to worship and thank God.

Encourage them to begin moving as quickly as possible. The activity will not only engage their attention, but will provide its own best argument for its importance. If you are not able to cover all of the material that you would like, you can intersperse bits of information between the various movement activities as you go along. Make your introduction interactive by asking:

- In what ways do we move during our church services?
- Possible answers include: walk, stand, kneel, genuflect, share the peace, hold hands, process, postures that the priest uses at the altar with raised hands, etc.
- Points you can make during discussion: We mostly sit, which can feel sluggish. And when the body feels sluggish, the spirit can feel heavy. In the middle ages it is believed there was applause after sermons and songs. Christians actually danced to carols. In fact, in French-English the word "carol" means "dance". During the verses or stanzas of the hymns, the people stood. ("Stanza" means "stand.")
- How do you think our church spaces and worship services discourage our moving?
- Possible answers: pews bolted down, static aisles, fixed altars.
- Points you can mention: In the early church, there were no pews. In the first few centuries, people worshipped in "house" churches (people's houses). And even when cathedrals and churches were built, the worshippers stood. This didn't really change until the Middle Ages.
- How do our own attitudes prevent us from moving?
- Possible answers or points you can raise: We have inherited the western church's spirit/matter disconnection; our church leadership suffers from this also and so does not encourage dance/movement.
- Lack of trust may also prevent movement – a place must feel safe psychologically before people will move or dance. Otherwise we fear looking silly.
- We have no strong folk dance tradition here in America.

### Exercise 1. The Scrunch (5 minutes)

If chairs are available, have the young people sit in them in their typical fashion. In other



words, slumped down, hunched over, legs crossed, etc. Most likely they will have naturally adopted this stance during the discussion above and you can just call their attention to how they are sitting. Have them take note of how this position does not promote the flow of energy!

Now, have them stand in their favorite position. In other words, weight on one foot, or as if they were holding a heavy book bag, or in a stooped posture. If they don't cooperate, have them stand around and wait while you fuss over chairs, materials, music, whatever. Then catch them and call "Freeze!" when they assume their normal stances. Holding this position, have them again take note of how restricted and lacking in energy this posture is.

Last, have them "freeze" their facial positions – with no warning. Just the way they are. How many look alive and happy? Annoyed? Sad? Tired?

Explain: these positions – often called "the scrunch" – are how we are used to carrying our bodies. These physical attitudes reflect our feelings. If you change your body attitude, you can change your feelings.

### **Exercise 2: Warm up (5 minutes)**

This should be geared toward the ages and abilities of the participants. Children and youth need less warming up than older adults. So if you are doing this with a mixed age group, gear the warm up time for the adults. Invite the group to gently roll their neck from side to side, roll their shoulders forward and backward, loosely swing their arms, swivel from the waist, gently bend down to touch hands to toes, and take a few high steps in place. This is all that's required. It is best to do this together as a group, with the leader standing facing the group.

### **Exercise 3: Back Rubs – OPTIONAL<sup>6</sup> (3 minutes)**

Have everyone – including the leader – form a circle. All should face counterclockwise. For one minute, every person should rub the shoulders and back of the person in front of them. Then all face the other way; repeat.

### **Exercise 4: Get the Rhythm (5 minutes)**

Put on a musical selection with a really good beat – anything with a good solid rock 'n' roll beat will do provided the lyrics are reasonably acceptable. Have the group stand absolutely still for 30 seconds while the music plays. At the end of the time, talk about how hard that is!

- Next, for 30 seconds ask them to move just their fingers. (That's a little bit better.)
- Next, for 30 seconds keep feet planted but rock and swing in place. (That's a lot better.)
- Now encourage them to move their feet and dance freely in their own area until the music ends. That will feel great after the earlier restrictions. Sometimes we NEED to move!
- 

Discuss how they felt at each stage. Do different feelings seem to go with different positions? Can you create a feeling by creating a position?

### **Exercise 5: Direct walk (10 minutes)**

- No music is needed for this exercise.

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<sup>6</sup>Use your judgment on whether to use this exercise as some people may find this type of contact intrusive. Omit it if there is any recent history of or concern about sexual misconduct in your congregation.

- Ask each person to choose a place and walk toward it – strongly and with intention. When you arrive, turn, pick another place, and walk strongly straight toward it. NO eye contact should be made. Cross back and forth, up and down, wherever each person wishes.
- After everyone has crossed the room a few times, ask them to choose a place and walk toward it as before, staying on the move at all times. However, this time whenever someone comes near them, they are to give the person full eye contact, and pause and gently grasp one another's wrists.
- Encourage them to try to send a welcoming/joyful message with their body, using eye contact and firm touch – and then move on to the next destination they chose. Again, ask them to stop after a few moments of trying this.
- Next, ask them to move back and forth, up and down, wherever – except this time move softly and gently. Encourage them to whisper words of greeting or encouragement as they pass people, whirl by them, and move on. Urge them to be lightfooted.
- Finally, ask them to slink past one another as they pass each other – touch each other's arms very furtively – and move on.

Gather the group and discuss the various modes of crossing the room. Ask:

- Did no eye contact feel strange?
- Did people bump into each other, or not? If not, why not?
- How did it feel to have someone hold your wrist firmly and give you direct eye contact?
- How did the whispering whirling walk make you feel? The slinky and furtive walk?

*The idea here is just to reinforce that different motions produce different feelings, and vice versa.*

### **Exercise 6 - Free Skate** (5 minutes)

Put on some sort of upbeat music. "Bless the Lord" from *Godspell* works very well.

Instruct the group that they are to "free skate" – in other words, pretend to be ice skating, using legs and arms fairly vigorously (although not violently). They are to move back and forth across the room in any direction. The first time they are NOT to collide with one another. The second time they are allowed to collide firmly (shoulder to shoulder only). The object is to note how we respond to other people's entrance into our space, what it feels like to intrude into someone else's space, and also just to take note of various feelings as they arise. Did they notice how hard it is to give direct eye contact when they were colliding? Why is that? Discuss these things at the end of the exercise.

### **Exercise 7 - The Tripudium: an Early Christian Line Dance!** (7 minutes)

Have the young people stand side-by-side in lines – there should be no more than 3 or 4 people per line. Link arms. Dancing to the song, "I Don't Know How to Love Him" from the film version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* works well. Each line should take three steps forward to the beat, then one back, then keep repeating until the music ends. If you have time, it's interesting to see what a different feel you get if you do the dance to an upbeat song – for example,

"Hosanna" from *Superstar*.

When the music has ended, ask: What was this experience like for you? Explain: the Tripudium dance symbolizes Christian life – we feel we're moving ahead and then something happens to pull us back; we hesitate and then move ahead again, etc. And, of course, the number is always sacred – an indivisible number symbolizing the Trinity, for example.

### **Exercise 8 - Closing - The Sacred Circle** (5 - 10 minutes)

Invite the group to form a circle, approximately arm's length apart. Face center. Do not hold hands. The music should be a gentle, slow piece – one of Hildegard von Bingen's chants would be perfect, and also long enough! Music from Taize community would also work, as would one of the Psalms chanted by the Order of St. John the Evangelist (a CD is available through LeaderResources, 800-941-2218 or from Cowley Publications). Or find something of your own. Start the music and stand in the middle of the circle – ask the group to mimic your motions. Give the directions verbally while you are doing the action. Pause while they complete the action and, at your invitation, reflect on it (text in italics below).

- Bow, slowly and solemnly – to the middle, and to the person on each side.
- Slowly turn your head right, then center, then left. *Note how the others look while in worship.*
- Raise your arms into the "orans" position – that classic position of supplication with the arms out to the side, and slightly raised, palms up (this is the ancient, Hebrew prayer posture used by many clergy while celebrating the Eucharist). Look up. Hold.
- Slowly kneel. Fold hands. Look down. *Note how different it feels to pray in this way rather than in the orans position.*
- Lie full length, face down. Your forehead should touch the ground, your hands out to the side, palms down. Hold the position. Breathe slowly. *This "prostration" prayer posture is the ultimate position of submission and repentance before God. It is used to venerate the cross, and sometimes during ordination. Think about how this posture feels.* The leader can lead the group in the Jesus prayer several times through, until all have it memorized: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen."

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Sit in a circle for final discussion of each position and the different ways each felt.

- Which felt most comfortable? Why?
- Most uncomfortable? Why?
- What was the difference between kneeling and standing to pray? You may want to explain that many churches have moved to standing for prayer since we have discovered that Christians in the early church used the Hebrew tradition of standing for prayer and that kneeling only became common in recent times. It was, in fact, illegal to kneel in Eastertide, in particular. Kneeling is what one did to show subservience to the ruler. But Christians, adopted heirs, have been made "worthy to stand before" (from Eucharistic Prayer B, *BCP* p. 367) through Christ's sacrifice.
- How did it feel to lie on the floor and implore Christ to forgive you, a sinner?
- How might we use posture to make our worship more meaningful?

**Next Time** (if you are doing this in two sessions; if not, go directly to the next section)

Explain that at the next meeting you will be experimenting with choreographed movement to the Gloria, the Creed, the Doxology, and The Lord's Prayer.

### **Closing prayer**

Join hands in a circle, standing. Bow. "May the Lord bless us and keep us, may the Lord make

his face to shine upon us, and give us peace. Amen.”

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## Part II - Ideas for Use in A Worship Experience

### Suggestions for Inclusive, Creative Preparation:

Please note that, unlike the Ten Commandments, the choreographed pieces found below are not in any way carved in stone. Leaders may wish to use these pieces “as is,” modify them for your purposes, or use them for inspiration, and then create something entirely new. You might also divide everyone into smaller groups and have each group choreograph a different piece of the liturgy – then when you come together the young people can teach each other. You also might divide into small groups and have each group work on the same thing. Then when you come together to show each other what you have come up with, there will be mutual understanding at a much deeper level – you will have all grappled with the same issues! Creating any art form is a **process** and you should feel free to experiment, evaluate, and make changes as the group sees fit.

The key question to keep in mind and to discuss as you work and evaluate is: *WHY are we doing this?* As long as you keep focused on your goals – both the ones listed at the beginning of this section and/or any others which are specific to your group – the “how” becomes much clearer. You may choose to do these activities as a creative worship for your youth group or you may prepare part or all of the activities to be included in a service with your whole congregation. Either way, keep your goals in mind.

For example, if you are hoping to create a more accepting atmosphere for innovative worship among a fairly conservative congregation, you probably don't want to do anything which might make people extremely uncomfortable. A small and gentle beginning is the compassionate approach. People assimilate change slowly and people who are offended are often not inclined to change at all. And it's useful to remember that God accepts us and works with us where we are so, of course, we want to try to do the same for others!

### Making the Most of your Space

If you will be doing sacred movement during a service, work in the space where you will be during the service. If you are rehearsing for a public service you will attend while on pilgrimage, ask for a floor plan of the space you will be using. If you absolutely can't be in the “performance” space, try to find a large uncarpeted space whose floor you can mark with masking tape to indicate steps, levels, aisles, etc. Even if you do not plan to be part of a public worship service, it is still best to do this part of the lesson in the sanctuary.

The following are the questions you may want to ask as you study the area and plan what you might do in the space:

- How many aisles are there? Where do they come from and where do they go? Are they suitable for entrances or exits by the dancers? How long are they? How wide are they – i.e. how many people will they accommodate at one time? Are they level or slanted?
- What is the floor type (carpet, wood, stone, etc.) in the aisle and main area?
- What pieces of furniture, if any, are nearby?
- What is the actual square footage of the main area?
- Are there steps or different levels involved?
- How elevated will you be – i.e. will the congregation be able to see you if you are not standing at all times?
- What sort of lighting is available?

- Who else will be in the space? Where will they be? What will they be doing?

You get the idea! And remember that moving around, using different areas and different levels, can be visually interesting, especially in a long piece. But try to avoid moving for movement's sake – a good theological or practical reason should ideally be behind everything you do.

The following are some ideas which will allow you to sample the wide possibilities for sacred movement suitable for the formal worship setting. They can be presented with musical accompaniment or without, spoken or sung. These presentations are quite simple and very beautiful in their simplicity. And while you are welcome to use any of these outlines as you desire, it is hoped that these will merely be a guideline and that you and your youth, through discussion and experimentation, will develop your own patterns of movement. You might want to experiment with more intricate patterns, including moving from place to place on the floor, rather than staying in one position the whole time. Adding percussion or using props is another simple way to change the dynamics.

Clothing worn for rehearsal and the service should be loose fitting and comfortable. You can reverently perform wearing (loose!) jeans and red T-shirts, black jeans and black turtlenecks, or white jeans and white turtlenecks. You can wear surplices (large, white overgarment) or robes from the choir. If you do this regularly, you might want to design and sew a simple tunic. Use your imagination but try to keep it simple.

### **The Warm Up** (10 minutes)

If you are using this section as a separate lesson, use Exercises 1-3 from Part I to get the group warmed up and ready.

### **A Scripture Sculpture - the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)** (10-15 minutes)

Ask the group to stand in a circle. Explain what will happen:

- The leader will slowly read the parable once through. Then the parable will be read once again. On the second reading, the participants are to listen intently to the story, and to stand and enter the circle's center **when they feel moved**. They are to take up any position they would like, the only restriction being that they must be touching someone else. Once in place, "freeze" that position until the end.

Try it first with people remaining "frozen" once they have chosen their initial position. Then, the second time, see what it feels like if everyone is allowed to change their initial positions as they feel moved – still with the requirement that everyone must be touching someone.

At the end, discuss what you were thinking and feeling while you were waiting for the moment when it was time for you to enter the circle and move.

- How is that like trying to discern God's will in your life?
- What was it that impelled you to enter the circle and join the sculpture?
- How did it feel once you had found your position?
- Was it more helpful to stay in one position all the time? Or did it feel better being free to move as you wished to?
- When one person moved, what happened to everything else?
- How did it feel when the father embraced the son?
- How did it feel when the older brother complained?

- Are there any conclusions you would draw from all of this?

NOTE: This could be done with any scripture being read in the service, but it is especially effective with a story-telling scripture.

### **The Gloria** (10 - 15 minutes)

Ask the group to form a sacred circle. As you do so, you might mention that there is something about the never-endingness of a circle which has appealed to humanity for millenia. The circle is a symbol in Christianity meaning that which is ongoing or endless. The wedding ring – a marriage lasting forever – is one example of the use of the circle.

Now, while the words are read, the members of the circle quietly follow the simple movements of the leader. By the second and third time through, people will probably have the movements memorized and can concentrate on reciting (or singing!) along with the leader, and on worshiping with more focus. Try it slowly and gently at first, then with more energy and vigor. If a musician is available, one of the settings of the Gloria from the Episcopal or any other church hymnal can be played along on the piano or organ.

After the dance, discuss how it felt. For example:

- How was it different when the Gloria was performed slowly and gently as opposed to triumphantly – or perhaps with one interpretation leading to the other?
- What feelings did it bring up?
- How was your worship changed from its usual pattern? Etc.

### **WORDS**

### **MOVEMENT**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.

*Face center of circle, slowly raise arms  
waist high, and outward, towards the sides*

Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.

*Continue raising arms until they  
are up high in "orans" position*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;

*Lower arms towards the front  
and cross over your chest*

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.

*close eyes  
and bow slowly and gently forward*

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

*slowly unfold arms,  
hold out in front, palms up;  
continually lift, till fully extended up;  
move arms out enough to grasp neighbor's hand;  
Bow heads on "Amen", arms still up and linked.*

### **The Doxology** (5 - 10 minutes)

Again, use the circle formation – though a straight line across the front of the sanctuary, facing

the congregation, would work too. Or form two lines of dancers facing one another. This works with music or without. It can be spoken – or sung either *a capella* or with music – by all, performers and congregation. As usual, at the end of your rehearsal, discuss how moving to the familiar words affects the prayer. Begin standing straight, facing center circle, arms at sides.

## **WORDS**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him all creatures here below,  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

## **MOVEMENT**

*Slowly raise right arm straight up, palm forward*  
*Bring left arm slowly up to waist and out*  
*Bring left arm up high with right arm, palms out*  
*Slowly fold arms across chest and bow.*

### **The Lord's Prayer** (3 minutes)

A circle is fine, or a line across the nave, or any formation which appeals. Can be spoken or sung by the group/congregation, or sung by a soloist using the traditional "Lord's Prayer." Begin kneeling, arms at sides, eyes closed.



## WORDS

## MOVEMENT

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

*Hold opening pose  
slowly bring palms together at chest*

Give us this day our daily bread.

*forearms forward, palms up "earth;" "look up "heaven"  
slightly raise forearms in supplication*

And forgive us our trespasses,

*bow heads*

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

*all grasp neighbors' hands; look at left neighbor*

And lead us not into temptation,

*left arm in front in "push away" motion*

but deliver us from evil.

*right arms crosses left arm in same pose*

For thine is the kingdom,

*look forward, begin to rise, slowly bringing arms*

and the power, and the glory,

*up and out high*

for ever and ever.

*all grasp hands high on "for ever"*

Amen.

*still hold hands high, slightly bow*

*bodies and heads on "Amen"*

Again, take some time to reflect on and talk about the group's experience. Ask:

- What was this experience like for you?
- How does sacred movement help you worship or pray? How might it help others?
- What ideas do you have for what we might do?
- What other parts of the service do you think would be enhanced by sacred movement?
- What about including other people? Could we teach this to the children? To adults?

If there is interest, encourage the group to invent their own sacred movement routines. You might, for example, do this as one lesson and at another meeting. Give time for small groups to create and perform their own routines. If some or all group members are interested in preparing a piece for service, make arrangements for them to do so. More time will, of course, be needed in order for the group to plan and prepare for this. While they may need encouragement, encourage the boys to be part of this as a mixed group is often more powerful than a single sex group.

## Closing Prayer

Use the Lord's Prayer with movements as outlined above or another circle dance you choose.

## Some Musical Resources

Your congregation's hymnal

Hildegard von Bingen chants

Gregorian Chants

Chichester Psalms

Handel's "Messiah"

Gospel Music Recordings

Paul Robeson – Any Gospel Recording

Connie Dover – any CD

Enya – any CD

Bach Mass in B Minor "Gloria"

"What If God Were One of Us?" – Joan Osbourne

"Like a Prayer" – Madonna

"Wind Beneath My Wings" – Bette Midler

"From A Distance" – Bette Midler

"The Prayer" – by Andrea Bocelli, Celine Dion



"Angel" – Sarah McLachlan

Celtic chant

Taize music

"Godspell"

"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"

"Jesus Christ Superstar"

Anything which you and your group feels appropriate. The opportunities are endless!

### **Sources Used for Historical Research**

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*The Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*

Matthew Black, London: Clarendon Press, 1967, p. 158

*The Spirit Moves: A Handbook of Dance and Prayer*

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# Christian Meditation: Prayer Cycles and Prayer Beads

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To introduce the young people to prayer beads  
To encourage spiritual growth through the creative process

## Guiding Scriptures

John 1:3 ...all things came into being through him.

1 Tim. 4:4, 5 ...provided it is received with thanksgiving...it is sanctified by God's word and prayer.

## Background

For millennia people have used repetitive prayer cycles as a means of entering into a deep place of meditative silence. The repetitive rhythm of praying the same prayer or prayers over and over again occupies the conscious mind in a way that helps silence the "chattering" in our heads that often occurs when we want to be still and rest in God's presence. These prayer cycles help us move into another, deeper level of communicating with God.

Early Christians kept track of their prayers by counting beads, by tying knots, or by discarding pebbles. Because beads on a cord had the advantage of being reusable, over time strings of prayer beads, "rosaries" became widely used. Although today the term "rosary" has narrowed to signify a particular type of prayer bead most commonly associated with Roman Catholicism (see Lesson Plan Two), there are other forms of prayer beads (rosaries) which deserve a moment's examination.

In terms of praying with young people, one of the appealing aspects of prayer beads is that it is possible to create a worship resource which is entirely personal and original to the user. Inexpensive beads are available from craft shops and catalogues in all sorts of shapes, sizes, colors, and materials. It is a simple matter and an enjoyable group activity to thread them onto a cord, **heavy** thread, or **sturdy** elasticized string (available wherever the beads are sold) in various patterns as the spirit moves, knotting between the beads. Generally prayer beads contain between ten and fifty beads knotted onto a string. The beads and/or knots are then counted off between the thumb and forefinger as the prayers are said, silently or aloud.

Before stringing the beads, the group will need a few moments of quiet time to prayerfully decide how he or she might best use such a length of prayer beads. Done in a quiet setting, with the available materials spread out in an orderly and attractive fashion before them, there is a surprising sense of joy which the young people will experience as they allow the whole self – body, mind, and spirit – to become unselfconsciously engaged in the task of thoughtful creation.

A starting point might be to give consideration to the sort of prayer which most draws the person creating the prayer chain.

- Is the prayer which Jesus taught the apostles – the Lord's Prayer – a favorite?
- Or the Jesus Prayer? ("Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.")

- Combinations of prayers can be used – e.g., alternating the Gloria Patri (“Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit”) with the Trisagion (“Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us.”)
- Or perhaps a multi-functional string of prayer beads could be created to be used for praying through particular scripture stories or psalms, for praying for one's family or the needs of others, for simply sitting in praise or thanksgiving, or for praying in any way at all, including simply holding the beads and opening one's heart to the Lord. The possibilities are endless.

Simple practicalities need to be considered when deciding on the design of the beads. For example, tiny beads are probably an impractical choice for someone with larger fingers. And a string with fifty beads on it may be the wrong choice for someone who wants to carry the prayer chain with them at all times. Some types of cord are too large for certain sizes of beads – and glass beads which might break easily might not be a good idea.

The idea of using objects from the material world to enhance spiritual consciousness is not new. The sacramental use of “signs” has been appreciated in worship and personal piety since time began, whether in the form of water, wine, bread, candle light, etc. Jesus' teaching utilized the surroundings of his people: vineyards, sheep, shepherds, oil lamps, fig trees, etc. So it is very appropriate to give serious consideration to things like what shapes and colors of beads might best be chosen for the prayer string, since the string itself can become an important resource, a tool for devotion.

### **Materials:**

- Beads in various shapes, sizes, colors – enough for at least 25 per participant. The holes should be big enough to permit the cord to pass through easily. The cost of the beads – available at most local craft shops – can vary greatly
- Cord or string **strong** and thin enough to string beads; minimum 24" per participant
- The handout with various prayers printed on them – enough to give a copy to everyone.
- Scissors for cutting cord
- Needles for clearing bead holes when necessary; also for threading when needed
- Tables and chairs to provide sufficient working space

### **Preparation:**

Set up the room with the materials attractively displayed on one table. Have a string or two of prayer beads on display as samples.

### **Activity: Making Prayer Beads**

Introduce the lesson by explaining the highlights under “General Background” in the introduction and from “Background Information” at the beginning of this lesson. Pass around the sample prayer beads and the prayer sheets. Discuss any questions which arise. Ask:

- Where have you seen prayer beads before?
- Why do you think people use prayer beads? What is their value?

Take the sample prayer beads from the table and demonstrate one or preferably, two ways, to use it. You will need to actually practice this ahead of time so that you can authentically pray! If you have 20 beads you might not want to pray through all 20 of them, but do enough repetitions so the group understands the process. Repeat the process, using another prayer. So, for example, you might do the Jesus Prayer (“Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”) and the Lord’s Prayer.

Tell the group they will each have an opportunity to make their own prayer beads but that each person needs to think about how he or she might use the beads. So you will give them several minutes of silence to reflect on *how they might use their prayer beads*. Lead the young people through the steps of relaxation found in the introduction. Then say: Think now about how you might use your prayer beads. What prayer or prayers might you pray? Allow for a few minutes of silence.

Then allow a further few minutes of silence for the young people to think about the design of their prayer beads. Ask: How many beads do you want? How will you arrange them?

After a couple of minutes of silence, ask the young people to ask God to guide them as they create their own prayer beads. After another minute of silence, invite the young people to slowly become aware of the room, open their eyes and, when they are ready, quietly move to the table where you have laid out the beads. Tell them to select the beads and string they want and find a place in the room where they can work in silence. As they begin to move, remind them of what they learned about icon-painting in Rite-13 – that the icon writers do their work as a visible expression of prayer. Invite them to work in silence, praying as they assemble their prayer beads. Tell them there are no rules for making knots between the beads – anything goes as long as it's bigger than the hole in the bead, for obvious reasons! Nor is there any set number of beads although they might want to think about the finished size and how they might use it. If they plan to put it into their pocket, it can't be too big!

Allow at least 20-30 minutes for the group to create their prayer beads. You might want to play chants or other meditative music in the background during this time. Set the tone by walking around and speaking quietly. Absolute silence isn't necessary but an atmosphere of quiet prayerfulness is appropriate.

When the first group members finish, invite them to gather in the area where you will do closing prayers – in the group's regular sacred space or in a circle on the floor. Encourage them to use their prayer beads to pray while they wait for the others to finish.

When all are finished and have gathered ask: What was this experience like for you? What did you learn? What will you take home with you – how can you use what you learned?

### **Closing Prayer**

Use the prayer beads as a group for your closing prayer. Decide *what kind* of prayer to pray (e.g. the Jesus Prayer, which is short) and decide *how many times* to pray it. Have the young people sit in a circle and, with their eyes closed or open, pray a cycle of 10 or 15 prayers together. Be creative – there is no wrong way to do this!

(Alternative closing) If a clergy person is available, bring the beads in to the sanctuary altar, where they can be placed before him or her and blessed with a slight adaptation of the form found on p. 204 in the *Book of Occasional Services*. After the prayer, the clergy person can pick up each string of beads and the young person who created it can come forward to receive it. The clergy person can then end by saying: "Go in peace, and the God of peace go with you." or a dismissal of his or her choice.

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## Blessing Prayer Beads

*Antiphon by Congregation:*

Christ is the icon of the invisible God; all things were created through him and for him.

Clergy: Let us pray.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior manifested your glory in his flesh, and sanctified the outward and visible to be a means to perceive realities unseen: Accept, we pray, these prayer beads, and grant that as we use them, our hearts may be drawn to things which can be seen only by the eye of faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*Antiphon by Congregation:*

Christ is the icon of the invisible God; all things were created through him and for him.

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## Handout: Prayers for Use with Prayer Beads

### Lord's Prayer (two versions)

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.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
and deliver us from evil. but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
now and forever. Amen. forever and ever. Amen.

### 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.

### 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.

### **Gloria Patri**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

### **Jesus Prayer**

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

OR

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.

### **A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis**

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. 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. (p. 833 *BCP*)

### **For Those We Love**

Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never\_failing care and love, for this life

and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (p. 831, *BCP*)

**A Collect for Grace**

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (p. 100, *BCP*)

**Prayer for Mission (from Compline)**

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen. (p. 124, *BCP*)

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# Christian Meditation: Praying the Rosary

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To introduce the young people to the tradition of the rosary

To help the young people begin to find the way into true meditative prayer

## Guiding Scriptures

Luke 1: 30-33, 38 ...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son

Luke 1: 46-49 The Magnificat

John 19: 25b-27 ...When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

## Background

Prayer takes many forms, and the rosary is one of them. Rosaries in many patterns, with varying numbers of beads, are found in all major religions. From earliest times people have counted prayers with beads or strings or knots or pebbles. The beads on a string had the advantage of being convenient, and evolved into the rosary in perhaps the fourth century.<sup>7</sup>

The rosary is not exclusively for Roman Catholics, nor is it a form of worship of the Virgin Mary. Rather, it is used with a cycle of prayers, centered around praying the life of Christ, (found in the Mysteries) and flanked by prayers to God (the Our Father, also known as the Lord's Prayer), to Christ, and the Holy Spirit (the Gloria Patri). During the praying of the rosary we ask Mary – Christ's mother – to pray for us, just as we might ask a friend to pray. Mary, as the Mother of God, nurtures and loves us in a unique way, and it is perfectly acceptable for any Christian to solicit her prayers during the rosary or, in fact, at any time.

While we associate the rosary with Roman Catholics, some Episcopalians pray the rosary as part of their daily life and many Episcopalians are discovering and developing an appreciation of this prayer form. Episcopal churches known as "high church" or "Anglo-Catholic" congregations – i.e., congregations whose practices and theology are similar to the Roman Catholics – are most likely to use the rosary.

However, there are also Lutheran and Methodist churches in the United States that incorporate many "Catholic" practices (use of incense, votive candles, rosaries, etc.).

Time and tradition have shown that the rosary is a very effective prayer. The repetition of the set prayers occupies our minds, thus preventing distraction and allowing us to soak in the grace and love of God.

Tradition has established a pattern for praying the rosary – take a moment now to review the directions in the handout. There are three groups of Mysteries: Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious. Each group has five events in Christ's life that serve as focal points. These can be used all at

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<sup>7</sup> Schultz, Thomas, O.H.C., *The Rosary for Episcopalians*

once, on selected days of the week, or a specific Mystery can be prayed during certain seasons. Although tradition has determined a set pattern for praying the rosary, it can be adapted to particular situations. For example, special requests (intercessions) might be prayed for by substituting different gospel stories for the usual Mysteries. Or additional prayers can be added in any place, as the Spirit moves.

Some people may be uncomfortable with the lack of scriptural foundation for the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin Mary included in the Glorious Mysteries, and may wish to use alternatives (i.e., Baptism of Jesus, The Transfiguration, The Resurrection, The Ascension, and The Coming of the Holy Spirit). Also, be aware that you and/or the young people may be uncomfortable with the very idea of praying the rosary – especially if you belong to a congregation or denomination that is more accustomed to Protestant practices and theology. Remind yourself and the group that you are learning prayer methods that have been used in the Christian church for centuries and while all are useful to some, not all are useful to everyone. Each individual will find one method more or less helpful to him or her. The goal of the *Journey to Adulthood* program is to introduce youth to the prayer traditions of the church and invite them to adopt those that best fit their personality, their life circumstances, and their place on the journey (remembering, too, that what fits today will change as we travel along).

### **Materials:**

- Chairs placed in a circle in the room
- Enough rosaries to pass around to the group. Plastic ones are available at most religious supply houses for a minimal cost.
- Enough “prayer rings” or “pocket rosaries” (sometimes called *chaplets*) for each member of the group to have one. These are simply rings designed with a cross on the top and ten roses around the edge. Some people prefer the pocket rosary or prayer ring to a standard sized rosary because it is unobtrusive and easy to carry in a pocket or purse. These are also inexpensive and available at most religious supply stores.
- Enough sets of “Instructions for Praying the Rosary” for each member of the group.

### **Preparation:**

Purchase rosaries and/or pocket rosaries well in advance of the scheduled session. Copy the Handout: Praying the Rosary. Have the group create a sacred space with a candle, pictures, etc., in the middle of the circle if they have not already done so. And most importantly, both leaders need to spend some time in the days and weeks before the session praying both the complete rosary, and the prayer ring, in order to be a knowledgeable role model for the young people.

### **Activity**

Present, in your own words, the information found in the Introduction above. Include a brief review of the Introduction to Lesson One, especially if you skipped Lesson One earlier or used it many weeks ago. Ask for any questions. Remember that it's possible to respond with an honest, “I don't know, but let me see if I can find out for you,” and then remember to follow through with the answer the following week. Ask:

- What is your reaction to the idea of praying the rosary?
- Why do you think Christians practice this prayer method?
- What do you think is its value?

Distribute the handout, review it and read the Hail Mary aloud together. Explain that you will be

using this prayer later and that they will be praying it with their eyes shut, so you may want to go through it a few times so they begin to memorize it. Answer any questions the group may have.

Distribute the prayer rings, if you are using them, and demonstrate how to use them. When placed on either index finger, the thumb can manipulate the prayer ring in a circle so that a decade of the rosary (i.e., the Lord's Prayer, ten Hail Marys, and one Gloria Patri) can be prayed. Explain that you begin by placing the prayer ring on either index finger. Placing the thumb on the cross, pray the Lord's Prayer once. Then, using the thumb, turn the prayer ring slightly by pushing the cross to a sort of "1:00 o'clock position" on the ring, and then move the thumb onto the first rose found in the circle of ten. You then pray ten "Hail Marys," one on each of the roses (repeat the Hail Mary once so they hear it again) and the Gloria Patri (Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...) when you arrive at the cross again. Ask them to say the Gloria Patri with you so you can see if they know that by memory. If not, rehearse that a couple of times. Explain that you will lead them through the prayers and they can join in softly, leaning on your voice if they don't know the words, or they can just listen in the beginning and then join in when they feel ready to do so. If your group has a great deal of difficulty with learning the prayers or seems uncomfortable, you can invite them to read the prayers from the Handout or just listen to your voice and pray them mentally. It is not uncommon for groups to have one person leading the prayers, much like the celebrant leads the Eucharistic prayer.

If you are using rosaries, distribute them. Holding the beads is a very individual decision, but they are either looped over one hand, with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand counting off the prayers, or held in one hand with the thumb and forefinger of the same hand counting off the prayers. There is no wrong way to do it. Again, review what prayer is offered on each bead (see the instructions above and use the same method of teaching the group the prayers). Many people begin by "crossing themselves" as they begin the prayer cycle. In the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and some Protestant churches (e.g., Lutheran and Methodist) this is done by holding the rosary in your right hand and touching your forehead ("In the name of the Father..."), then your chest ("...and the Son"), then your left shoulder ("...and the Holy..."), and your right shoulder ("...Spirit. Amen."). In the Orthodox Church you touch your right shoulder first and then the left shoulder. There's probably a reason why that difference developed, but mainly it points out how different traditions have evolved and have been passed down through the ages.

Ask the young people to either place the prayer ring or rosary nearby where they can easily reach it when ready. With their eyes closed, take the young people through the "Steps to Relaxation" found in the introduction, a deep breathing exercise, or some other way to move the group into a meditative space.

### **Pray with the prayer ring**

Invite the group to place the prayer ring on their index finger and their thumb on the cross. Wait until everyone is ready. Then invite them to "pray as our Lord taught us, saying: Our Father..." Ask the group to "turn to the first rose and pray with me: Hail Mary, full of grace..." Then say "turn to the second rose and pray with me: Hail Mary, full of grace..." After the first couple of roses they should have the idea and you can just go directly into praying the Hail Mary. After ten Hail Mary's on the ten roses, you will reach the cross again. This time, pray a Gloria Patri on it. This cycle of 12 prayers can be repeated as many times as desired. You will probably want to pray the cycle twice to help the group learn the prayers. When you are

leading, remember to pray slowly and to actually pray, rather than read the prayers!

Other prayers than the ones mentioned can be substituted as need arises. This is simply the traditional “decade” (ten Hail Marys) of the rosary. The important thing to note here is that while the “Mysteries” are not necessarily a part of the pocket rosary cycle, they are the backbone of the traditional rosary cycle. These Mysteries are the meditations on the Life of Christ.

### **Pray with the rosary**

After moving into silence, and following the directions on the Handout, pray one “decade” of the rosary. Each decade begins with an Announcement (or in our case a reading) of a Mystery and is followed by the Lord's Prayer, ten Hail Marys, and ends with the Gloria Patri. One whole rosary consists of Five Mysteries – see the Handout for the listing of Mysteries. Usually each Mystery is simply “announced,” or recalled, but for young people who may not be as familiar with the stories, it's a good idea to actually read the scripture story cited on the Handout. Time may permit the reading of only one or two of the Mysteries, after which the group can skip to the Closing Prayer at the end of the directions.

While the scripture stories are read, invite the young people to sit quietly with their eyes closed, holding the beads and letting the words soak in. Perhaps even reading the same Mystery two or three times, rather than two or three different ones, would help immerse them in the scene. And, of course, after each Mystery is read, a decade of the rosary follows.

This may all seem very complicated, but the best way to become familiar with the rosary is to practice praying the whole thing several times before presenting it to the young people. It is really quite simple and organized after you have practiced it.

Following the final amen, ask the group to leave quietly. Tell the young people that they may keep the prayer rings and/or rosaries and the directions and encourage them to practice this form of prayer at home. Ask them to bring their prayer ring and/or rosary to group meetings for the next several sessions and pray the rosary together as your closing prayer for a few weeks. The full rosary takes 15 minutes or more so you may want to pray just one of the Mysteries. You might also want to set up a time in the church sanctuary where you either pray the rosary together in that space or invite the group to pray the rosary silently. Then invite the group to reflect on their experience.

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## Praying the Anglican Rosary

(the following is taken from the website of St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church, Oakwood, GA;  
<http://www.saintgabriels.org/frames.html>).

The Anglican Rosary is a relatively new form of prayer which uses a blending of the Roman Catholic Rosary and the Orthodox Jesus Prayer Rope.

Since the earliest of times, people have used pebbles or a string of knots or beads on a cord to keep track of prayers offered to God. Some form of a rosary or prayer beads can be found in virtually every major religious tradition in the world.

### **Sacred Symbolism**

The configuration of the Anglican Rosary relates contemplative prayer to several levels of traditional Christian symbolism. Contemplative prayer is enriched by these symbols whose purpose is always to focus and concentrate attention, allowing the one who prays to move more swiftly into the Presence of God.

The circle of the Anglican Rosary symbolizes the wheel of time. Prayer, which moves around the wheel of the Rosary, represents the Christian's spiritual pilgrimage through time following Christ as Lord.

The Anglican Rosary is made up of thirty-three beads divided into four groups of seven called weeks. Between each week is a single bead called a cruciform bead.

In Christian tradition the sacred number four represents the four quadrants of the church's year. In theology there are also the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance which are the four corners in the moral foundation of all human life. In addition to these there are four weeks to a lunar month and the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west, as well as the four primary elements: earth, water, wind, and fire.

The number seven is repeated four times in the Rosary to create a conventional month. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the number seven represents spiritual perfection and completion. Prayer is the Christian's cry for completion. Symbolic completion is represented by adding together the four weeks of seven week beads to the four cruciform beads plus the additional entry bead representing the divine Unity at the beginning of the Rosary. The full number of the beads, thirty-three, the number of years Christ lived (a multiple of three), prayed three times (signifying the Trinity) equals ninety-nine, which in the Middle Eastern traditions is the complete number of the Divine Names. Adding the crucifix at the beginning or the end, brings the total to one hundred which is the total of the Orthodox Rosary and represents the fullness of creation.

### **How To Use**

The use of the rosary or prayer beads helps to bring us into contemplative prayer, really thinking about and being mindful of praying, of being in the presence of God by use of mind, body, and spirit. The touching of the fingers on each successive bead is an aid in keeping our mind from wandering, and the rhythm of the prayers leads us more readily into stillness.

To begin, hold the Cross and say the prayer you have assigned to it (most often The Lord's Prayer), then move to the Invitatory Bead. Then enter the circle of the rosary with the first Cruciform Bead, moving through the Weeks and the other Cruciforms, saying the prayers for each bead, and then exiting by way of the Invitatory Bead and the Cross. It is suggested that you pray around the circle of the beads three times (which signifies the Trinity) in an unhurried pace, allowing the repetition to become a sort of lullaby of love and praise that enables your mind to rest and your heart to become quiet and still. A period of silence should follow the prayer, for a time of reflection and listening. Listening is an important part of all prayer.

### **Saying the Rosary**

Begin praying the Rosary by selecting the prayers you wish to use for the cross and each bead. Practice them until it is clear which prayer goes with which bead, and as far as possible commit the prayers to memory.

Find a quiet spot and allow your body and mind to become restful and still. After a time of silence, begin praying the Rosary at an unhurried, intentional pace. Complete the circle of the beads three times.

When you have completed the round of the Rosary, you should end with a period of silence. This silence allows you to center your being in an extended period of silence. It also invites reflection and listening after you have invoked the Name and Presence of God.

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## Handout: How to Pray the Rosary

1. Cross oneself.
2. On the crucifix, say the Apostle's Creed:  
I believe in God, the Father 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.
3. On the next bead, pray 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 and we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.
4. On each of the next three beads, pray the Hail Mary:  
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.  
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.
5. On the next bead, say the Gloria Patri:  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
6. On this same bead (the single bead before the medal), announce or recall the Mystery (see next page) you wish to offer, then pray the Lord's Prayer.
7. Moving past the medal, say ten (a decade) Hail Marys, on the next ten beads.
8. On the single bead, say one Gloria Patri, announce/recall/read the scripture for the second Mystery, and pray the Lord's Prayer. Then continue with ten more Hail Marys.
9. Continue this pattern, Mystery, Lord's Prayer, Hail Marys, Gloria Patri until the rosary is completed. To close, pray the prayer for the Feast of the Annunciation:

Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer, p. 240*



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## Handout: The Mysteries of the Rosary

The rosary tells the story of our salvation, the story of the life of Christ. This is done in three groups of five mysteries. Each group is generally prayed twice during the week. On Sundays the rosary is prayed seasonally:

- The Joyful Mysteries are prayed in Advent, Christmas and Epiphany
- The Sorrowful Mysteries are prayed in Lent
- The Glorious Mysteries are prayed in Eastertide, Pentecost and the Sundays after Pentecost (known as Ordinary Time in some churches)

### **Joyful Mysteries** (Mondays, Thursdays)

The Annunciation€ Luke 1:26-38

The Visitation Luke 1:39-56

The Nativity Luke 2:1-20 or Matthew 2:1-11

The Presentation Luke 2:22-40

The Finding in the Temple Luke 2:41-52

### **Sorrowful Mysteries** (Tuesdays, Fridays)

The Agony in the Garden Matthew 26:36-46 or Luke 22:39-54 or Mark 14:32-42

The Scourging Isaiah 53:1 or Luke 23:13-16 or John 19:1

The Crowning with Thorns Matthew 27:24-31 or John 19:2-3 or Mark 15:16-20

The Bearing of the Cross Lk 23:26-32 or Jn 19:17 or Mk 15:21 or Mt. 16:22

The Crucifixion John 19:17-37 or Mark 15:22-38 or Matt. 27:33-55

### **Glorious Mysteries** (Wednesdays, Saturdays)

[The Baptism of Jesus] instead of Assumption Mt. 3:12-17 or Mk 1:9-11 or Lk 3:21-22 or Jn 1:29-34

[The Transfiguration] instead of Coronation Matt. 17:1-8 or Mark 9: 2-8

The Resurrection Matt. 28:1-10 or John 20

The Ascension Luke 24:50-51 or Acts 1:1-11

The Coming of the Holy Spirit Acts 1:13-14 or Acts 2:1-13

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary Traditional Catholic belief that Mary was taken up, body and soul, into heaven<sup>8</sup>

The Coronation of the Virgin Mary Traditional Catholic belief that Mary was crowned by her Son in heaven.

Optional Closing Prayer: Hail Holy Queen

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our Life, our sweetness, and our hope. To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you we send our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, Most Gracious Advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us; and, after this our exile, show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.

(Traditional Roman Catholic prayer or hymn also used in some Anglo-Catholic Episcopal Churches)

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<sup>8</sup>The Assumption is a long-held belief described in apocryphal stories in the fifth century and is reinforced by the lack of scriptural mention of Mary's death. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Assumption was officially defined in 1950 and the Coronation in 1954 by Pope Pius XII.





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## Handout: The Anglican Rosary

Two Sample Collections of Prayers: Mix and match or put together your own.

### **The Cross**

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.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

### **The Invitatory**

Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in you sight,  
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

### **The Cruciforms**

Oh, Lamb of God that taketh  
away the sins of the world  
have mercy upon us,  
Oh, Lamb of God that taketh  
away the sins of the world  
have mercy upon us,  
Oh, Lamb of God that taketh  
away the sins of the world  
give us Thy Peace.

(from the website of St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church, Oakwood, GA)

### **The Weeks**

Almighty and merciful Lord,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
bless us and keep us.  
Amen.

### **The Cross**

Glory to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be for ever.  
Amen.

### **The Invitatory**

Open my lips, O Lord,  
and my mouth shall proclaim  
Your praise.

### **The Cruciforms**

Guide us waking, O Lord,  
and guard us sleeping;  
that awake we may watch  
with Christ, and asleep  
we may rest in peace.

### **The Weeks**

Jesus, lamb of God,  
have mercy on us.  
Jesus, bearer of our sins,  
have mercy on us.  
Jesus, redeemer of the world,  
give us your peace.

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# Christian Meditation: Praying the Scripture Stories

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To offer a method of engaging the scriptures other than Bible study  
To encourage the use of imaging in prayer

## Guiding Scriptures

Deuteronomy 30:14 But the word is very near you...in your mind and in your heart.  
Matthew 4:4 Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

## Background

One of the best ways to increase young people's familiarity with Bible stories is practicing guided scripture meditation. This approach also opens up the scriptures in a way which traditional study methods may not. This is not a cognitive (thinking) method only; it is a feeling (heart) method as well. In a guided meditation, each person hears or reads the passage a couple of times and then re-plays the story in his or her mind, choosing a character or even an object to be in the story. When a person imagines that he or she is one of the characters in the story, it becomes possible to live and breathe the story through all of the senses which God has given us.

This prayer approach not only gives us a new appreciation for the scripture stories which are a part of our faith tradition, it also, like all prayer, has the power to change and heal us. Whenever we place ourselves thoughtfully in the presence of the living God, we open ourselves up to new possibilities for becoming whole (holy) persons.

The gospels, with their stories from Jesus' life and the parables with which he taught, are a primary source of stories for guided meditation. In this lesson we will use the story of Mary and Martha, since it addresses a common problem of youth (and adults!) today – allowing busyness to overrule the need for sitting at Jesus' feet, worshiping, listening, and growing.

A story can make the teaching of a hard lesson, such as the one in the Mary and Martha narrative, more palatable than a sermon or a lecture might. We drop our defenses and become emotionally involved in the plot, unconsciously beginning to look for clues in the scripture which might guide us in our own lives.

NOTE: *The Word is Very Near You* by Martin L. Smith, pp. 93-113 is very helpful background reading for this lesson and gives you another description of how to lead a guided meditation. It also discusses Lectio Divina in depth so is a good source for leaders wanting to expand their understanding of the process normally used on Sunday mornings. You can obtain this book through LeaderResources, 1-800-941-2218 or from Cowley Publications.

## Materials

- A comfortable seating arrangement, either chairs or the floor around the sacred space created by the group
- A copy of the story of Mary and Martha for the leader (Luke 10:38-42)
- Enough copies of Suggested Scripture Stories for Meditation Handout for each person

## Preparation

Read through the story of Mary and Martha several times and become very familiar with it; this includes following up the reading with your efforts to pray yourself into the story. Carefully study the steps below, as you will need to have a good feel for the rhythm and timing of the guided meditation. If you go too quickly, you will lose people; if you go too slowly, their concentration may break. You will need to follow along with the meditation in your own mind in order to estimate how much time may be needed. And you will need to carefully observe those engaged in the meditation, as they will give clear signs if they are frustrated or if their attention is beginning to wander.

## Activity: Guided Meditation

Briefly explain that today they will be meditating on a scripture story, but not in the traditional Bible study sense. Today they will actually time travel and enter the story as one of the players. Don't forget to explain how you hope that this will make the story come alive for them, and how this in turn can provide enormous opportunities for spiritual growth and healing as they reflect on what they experienced.

Tell them that you will be reading the story twice and then inviting them to pick a character and place themselves into the story. Tell them they shouldn't think too much about this – just choose one who appeals. There is no wrong choice. You will then give them several minutes to re-play the story in their minds – with themselves in the story, not just hearing about it. It will unfold before them like a movie. Caution them to avoid thinking about it much, but just to try to go with feelings and reactions as the drama takes place. The best question for them to note as they go is, HOW am I feeling now? Tell them that they can speculate as to WHY they might have felt that way later on.

Ask: Have you ever experienced something like this before? If so, where and what was it like for you? Respond to any questions they may have and then ask them to find a comfortable position and begin.

- When everyone is settled lead them through the relaxation process in the Introduction, deep breathing or another focusing mechanism.
- Ask God aloud (on behalf of the group) to work through the scripture story which is about to be read.
- Slowly read aloud the story of Mary and Martha. *Pause.*
- Read the story aloud, slowly, a second time. *Pause*
- Gently suggest that each listener choose a character whom they will “be” in the story. Invite the group to close their eyes and begin to enter more fully into the setting of the story. Do this by asking quiet questions such as:
- Can you smell the scent of cooking in the house? *Pause for a few seconds.*
- How many people are there? *Pause again.*
- Is it hot or cold? *Pause.*
- Morning, afternoon, evening, or night? *Pause.*
- What are people wearing? What are YOU wearing? *Pause.*

- Look around you; what else do you notice? *Pause*.
- Next, invite the group into absolute silence while they slowly replay the story – being the character they chose and being aware of what they are experiencing and how they are feeling.
- Remain in silence for several minutes (3-4 minutes; less if people get restless).
- After several minutes have passed (and especially if you can see several of them getting restless), suggest that they quietly begin to end their meditation, bringing the story to a close, and then sitting in silence for a moment or two. They can signal when their meditation has ended by *slowly* opening their eyes. All, however, should remain quiet until everyone has come back to full awareness.

You (or the other leader) can initiate a discussion by sharing any insights or feelings which were notable in your own meditation. After you have shared your experience, invite the group to share their experience.

- Who did you decide to be?
- What was this experience like for you?
- How were you touched?
- Are you thankful? Sad? Joyful?
- Did you want to stay in the story?
- What was it like being in the story with Jesus? If you were Jesus, how did that feel?
- Do you feel you have any new insights?
- What is new or different for you now in this scripture story?
- Are you changed in any way? Do you see anything in your life differently?
- After the discussion, distribute the handout (Suggested Scripture Stories for Meditation) and encourage them to explore these scripture stories on their own. Talk about how you will or might use this approach in the weeks ahead. For example, you might use this method instead of the regular Lectio Divina method normally used on Sunday mornings. Or, the group might want to use this method at an event you are planning. Or, they may want to gather on Sunday mornings a few minutes before the service and use it to reflect on the Gospel lesson of the day as a way to prepare for worship.

This is a good time to remind young people that prayer does change us – but that change is likely to be gradual and subtle. It may be sudden and dramatic but usually it takes time. And often, it changes us in ways we don't expect. This is because the essence of meditative prayer is to "let go" and to let God take over and guide us in the ways God wants us to go. This takes time and repetition. So, encourage them to practice this or other prayer methods and be patient. Also, encourage them to become aware of *how* God is guiding them. It is also helpful for you, as a group, to periodically stop and reflect on your prayer life, how you have changed, and where you feel God is leading you as a group.

## Closing Prayer

Close with the following prayer or your own prayer:

O holy and gracious God, thank you for giving us the wondrous gift of imagination. Please continue to open our hearts to your word, not only through meditative prayer, but through service to others, sacramental worship, and through listening to Your Spirit, the wisest teacher of all. Amen.

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## Handout: Suggested Scripture Stories for Meditation

Creation stories – Genesis 1:1-2:4 or 2:4-3:24

Abraham's offering of Isaac – Genesis 22:1-19

Passover and escape from Egypt (Exodus) – Exodus 12:1-13:16

Samuel's call – I Samuel 3

Elijah and widow's unending flour and oil – 1 Kings 17:8-16

Valley of dry bones – Ezekiel 37:1-14

Shadrach, Meshach and Abendnego in furnace – Daniel 3:1-30

Jesus heals:

- a person with leprosy – Matthew 8:1-4

- a paralytic – Matthew 9:2-8

- a man with withered hand – Mark 3:1-6

- Jairus' daughter – Mark 5:21-43

- a deaf man – Mark 7:31-37

- a blind man – Mark 8:22-26; Luke 18:35-43

- blind Bartimaeus – Mark 10:46-52

- ten lepers – Luke 17:11-19

- cripple on Sabbath – John 5:1-18

Jesus calms the storm at sea – Matthew 8:23-27

The Annunciation – Luke 1:26-28

Jesus is tempted – Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

The Beatitudes – Matthew 5: 3-12; Luke 6:20b-23

The unappreciated prophet – Matthew 13:54-58

Jesus feeds thousands – Matthew 14:13-21; 15 :32-39; Mark 6:30-44; 8: 1-10; John 6:1-14

The Transfiguration – Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8

Rich young man – Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-30

Woman anoints Jesus – Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14: 3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12: 1-8

James and John seek honor – Mark 10:35-45

Widow's offering of all she had – Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

Peter denies knowing Jesus – Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62

Jesus amazes teachers at age 12 – Luke 2:41-52

Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37

Martha and Mary – Luke 10:38-42

The Prodigal Son – Luke 15: 11-32

Jesus and the money changers – Luke 19: 45-48; Matthew 21: 12-13; Mark 11:15-16

Raising of Lazarus – John 11:1-44

Jesus washes disciple's feet – John 13:1-20

Paul's conversion – Acts 9:1-19

Last supper, in the garden, crucifixion, resurrection passages, especially during Lent and Easter

Jesus and prayer – Matthew: 14:13; 14: 23; 26: 36-46; 27:46; Mark 1:35; 6:46; 14:32-42; 15:34;

Luke 5:16; 6: 12; 9: 18; 9:28-36; 11: 1-4; 18:1-14; 22:31-32; 22: 39-46; 23:46; John 6: 15

For a list of select verses grouped by themes see Martin Smith's, *The Word is Very Near You*, pp. 156-213 (Cowley Publications)

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# Christian Meditation: Visual Imaging & Healing Prayer

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To continue utilizing the imagination in meditative prayer

To introduce youth to a way of addressing life situations through consciously inviting Jesus, or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit, to be present

## Guiding Scriptures

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God...and it will be given him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD...do not rely on your own insight...he will make straight your paths.

## Background

Visual imaging, like praying the scripture stories, is a form of meditative prayer which relies upon a person's ability to "see" pictures in his or her head. Obviously some people may find this considerably easier than others, but with practice it is a skill which is relatively easy to learn. For most young people this skill comes naturally.

Like other forms of meditation, visual imaging takes place at what is often referred to as the "alpha" level of brain function. This level of brain activity is the one we tap into when we daydream. We also pass through the alpha level as we are falling asleep. And it is the level of brain activity which is employed for self hypnosis.

In fact, visual imaging, like self hypnosis, can be used to help bring healing or change into a life situation. However, unlike self-hypnosis, Christian visual imaging *consciously uses the power of the Holy Spirit as the source of change or healing*.

Teresa of Avila, the 16th century Spanish mystic, had said that she practiced picturing Christ within her, and that as a result of this "my soul gained very much...." We also hope that by picturing the divine as a part of a given situation, our souls can gain very much. We can gain from a sense of the presence of God at a deeper level than that of "thinking." And the power of the Holy Spirit, through the mystery of prayer, can be released for healing and spiritual growth. As Christians we believe that the Holy Spirit which "proceeds from the Father and the Son" is already present in every situation, no matter what the circumstances. Our visual imaging acts as a reminder of that fact, and is a prayerful way of opening our hearts and helping to remove the "blocks" in a situation, so that the Spirit can act more freely.

Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, says that imagination opens the door to faith. He describes helping a small boy to imagine Jesus sitting with the boy's seriously ill baby sister. Together they "saw" how the light of Christ could fight and kill the bad germs. "...we prayed in this childlike way and then thanked the Lord that what we "saw" was the way it was going to be. Now, I do not know whether this created a posthypnotic suggestion in the child or

whether it was divine fiat, but I do know that the next morning Julie was perfectly well.”<sup>9</sup>

There are, in general, two sorts of situations which seem especially appropriate for the prayer of visual imaging. The first type of situation is that of physical malaise, whether of mental illness, injury, some sort of disease, etc. And the other is a life situation which may need healing or change, such as a marriage, family squabbles, someone's inability to study or take tests effectively, overpowering shyness, fear, anger, etc., the whole gamut of life's challenges.

### **Physical malaise**

The first question that tends to arise when someone is injured or ill is the role of God. Some people will say that God has given the illness or injury as a test of faith. Others will say that it is God's will for some unknown reason. Others will feel abandoned by God when their prayers for healing are not answered with a miraculous healing.

If the question arises in your group, it is important to help young people develop an appropriate understanding of God's role in healing.<sup>10</sup> One way to do this is to ask them to think of someone they love very dearly. Then ask if they would give this person cancer or injure them to test or strengthen their faith. Most of us would not! How, then, can we say that God, who is more loving than we are, would deliberately hurt people. Explain that illness or injury occur because they are a natural part of our world. If a car runs into a tree, the laws of physics decree that its occupants are going to be injured if the car is damaged in a way that crushes the soft bodies inside. If a virus or bacteria invades our bodies and multiplies, we get sick. If our genes mutate, we are born with birth defects. These are not things *caused* by God, they are caused by how our world operates. God's role is that God is present – no matter what happens or why it happens.

The next likely concern is why God doesn't just automatically heal everyone or why some people are healed and others are not. This is more difficult to answer. We do believe that God heals but how and why are in the realm of mystery. Sometimes God heals us through the gifts of medicine, the skill of surgeons and the care of psychiatrists. Sometimes God heals us in ways we didn't expect. Sometimes it seems as if God does not heal or the healing seems to be taking forever! While we do not understand how God works, we do know that God is with us. Our role is to be open to God's presence in our lives and to receive whatever is given to us. The fact that one person is healed and another is not does not mean that the first person had more faith (a common assumption). It simply means that is what happened.

Sometimes there are blocks to healing – our sin (our brokenness – being out of relationship with God, others, creation or ourselves). But the block can also be communal – the brokenness of the larger community that blocks the fullness of God's presence at a given time or place. Toxic waste or pollution that results in cancer, war, or hatred of other peoples are all examples of communal brokenness that result in individual illness or injury. So, while it is important for the ill or injured individual to be open to God's presence in his or her life, it is also important for the world to be open to God's presence. That is where intercessory prayer comes in. Our prayers for those who are ill and our prayers for peace, love, and wholeness make us a part of the entire human community becoming more open to God's action in all of our lives.

In Christian theology, healing is not just an individual event – it is communal. We are all

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<sup>9</sup>Foster, Richard J., *Celebration of Discipline*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1978, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>The theology of healing which follows is by The Rev. Linda L. Grenz and is used with permission.



involved in creating brokenness and we can all be involved in seeking and receiving healing.

In healing prayer one might begin by invoking the power of the Holy Spirit into the situation, remembering that we are created by God, and that wholeness and wellness, now and through eternity, are God's hope for us. Then one might focus on the actual physical area (and it may be the whole body) in which healing is desired. See it clearly: color, texture, what is wrong, etc. This will take a minute or two. Then imagine that the shadows/evidences of illness in the area are being dissolved by the gentle light of Christ. Or imagine there is fresh, clean blood flowing to the injured site, bringing healthy cells, and washing away the injured or diseased matter. Or picture the radiance of divine love beaming down on the site from the outside from above or from all directions, like a halo, perhaps. Or imagine Christ present and laying his hands on the spot and praying. Or imagine the cold, diseased area being warmed, heated, energized, and cleaned by the bright, hot light which emanates from the radiance of the Holy Spirit.

In all of these instances, allow plenty of time to picture the situation as it is, in all its detail. Then call in the presence of the divine healing power, and again, take as much time as is needed. Let the scenario play itself out, until every vestige of injury or illness has disappeared in your mind. Take a moment, rest in the peace of the situation, and give thanks to God, the Great Healer.

### **Consciously Bringing the Divine into a Life Situation**

The second type of healing prayer is directed to a life situation. In this case there may be no physical manifestation of the brokenness, but it is still evident in the relationships between the people in the situation. Relationships that are broken by strife, fear, anger, hatred or even just distance, discomfort, or difficulty are all appropriate situations for healing prayer.

In this case, call the situation into your mind – see the location clearly. Perhaps it is the living room, with all of your quarreling family present. Or it might be the lunch room, where day after day that senior who is such a bully sits and teases you. Or it might be your desk in the classroom where you'll soon be taking a tough exam. Or perhaps it's your desk at home and peace and focus is needed during your study time. Whatever it may be, picture the location as if it were a scene in a movie. Except that now, Christ (or the Father or the Holy Spirit if that is your inclination) will be present in the situation.

Of course we know that the Divine is already present in the situation but sometimes it helps to consciously recall that, and to consciously ask for help. In your scenario, Jesus might put his arm around you (or someone else), he might pray over you (or someone else). He might talk to you, speak to others in the scene around you, hug you, hold your hand, make some eye-opening suggestion, simply sit in the corner and smile. At any rate, in your prayer, see how his presence changes the whole situation and offers the possibility of healing.

### **Unanswered Prayer**

In either of the situations described above there is the likely experience that our prayers will be unanswered – or at least we believe them to be unanswered. It is important to discuss this with youth to help them understand that praying for something does not cause it to happen. If our prayers could do that we would be God, or we could manipulate God into doing what we wanted, in which case we would be greater than God! Neither of those is theologically sound. Our prayers do not cause things to happen – they prepare us and others to be open to God's action in our lives, and to become aware of what *is* happening. Because we tend to expect God to act in the way we can imagine and pray for, we often miss how God is acting. So, part of

what the group can learn is the ability to reflect on God's presence in their lives. How is God acting in their midst? How has God guided them? How is that related to their prayer life?

The steps below can help guide your group through a visual imaging session. The meditation is designed so that each individual, although praying in sync with the larger group, will be imaginatively focused on the presence of the Holy Spirit in his or her own particular situation.

### **Materials**

A space which contains a circle of chairs, or, if your group prefers to meditate on the floor, there should be enough floor space so that people can sit down without feeling crowded.

### **Preparation:**

The leader of this session should have spent considerable time alone practicing the process outlined below.

### **Activity**

Begin by sharing some (not all) of the information in the background section above. Ask the group questions to engage them in a discussion and respond to the questions with some of the information. For example, you might ask:

- Have any of you prayed to be healed or that someone else would be healed?
- What happened?
- Do you think that God heals people?
- If so, how?
- Why are some people healed and others not?
- Why do people get sick or injured? Is it their "fault"? Does God do it?
- What about life situations where there is trouble?
- Where is God in troubled situations?
- What happens when we pray for those situations?

Describe visualization prayer to the group so they understand how it works. Explain that visualization prayer is one form of intercessory prayer whereby we bring ourselves or others into God's presence and seek healing and wholeness. Invite the group to try this prayer form.

- Settle the young people into the chairs, or on the floor.
- Ask them to think of some situation either in their own lives, or a situation which they know about, that they would like to pray over. Give them a moment or two to come up with something. This is private and not shared.
- Next, remind them that they will be consciously bringing God the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit into the situation, in order to heal it in some way. Then, aloud, pray the following or a similar prayer:
- God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and Holy Spirit our inspiration – we thank you for your presence here with us today as we prayerfully raise these situations up to you for healing. And we give you thanks for always being available to us, at any time, and in any place. Amen.
- Invite the group to become centered – "close your eyes...take several deep breaths, hold it and then exhale slowly...become aware of the center of your being...become aware of God's presence in the room."
- When the group is relaxed and focused, invite them to "see" the scenario they are asking God to change. Encourage them to take a few moments to really imagine the details of the scene, whatever it may be. Remind them that this does not need to be

real in the sense that it has actually happened. It is real only because their imagination is giving life to it.

- Now, suggest that they begin to introduce the presence of the divine into the situation, through light, warmth, energy, color, wind, or in any way which seems appropriate to them. Or, alternatively, they can imagine Jesus' presence. And he might pray, speak, touch, smile, or simply stand and emanate love. Give them a few moments to see in their minds how the divine enters into their situation.
- As soon as they have "seen" the divine healing force come into their situation, suggest that they now begin to imagine how the situation is being changed. They can allow this to play out, just as though it were on film. Allow enough time to visualize it all.
- Quietly remind them that they will know instinctively when their prayer has moved toward a natural resolution, and that they needn't feel hurried in any way. When they have finished, suggest they silently offer thanks to God. They can signal when they are finished by slowly opening their eyes.

### **Reflection**

When the group has finished their meditation, ask if anyone would like to say anything about what happened during their prayer time. If no one speaks up, the leader might share something which felt important as he or she prayed. Or you might ask questions like:

- How did this feel different from praying a Bible story?
- Was it hard to come up with a situation that you wanted to pray about?
- Could you see how this sort of prayer might be useful for you and for others?

These things can be discussed in a respectful and general way, without specifics needing to be offered. Use your own sensitivity and judgment about your group here.

### **Closing**

At the close of the session, ask the group to try an experiment during the following week. As any difficult situation arises, encourage them to imagine the Divine Presence (any or all of the three persons of the Trinity) entering into the situation. Ask them to take note of what impact they felt this had on the situation, including what impact it had on them (the one who was praying). At your "check-in" time at the beginning of the next session, ask what happened. Encourage them to continue this for several weeks (or, if you learned this on pilgrimage, during the next few days). Incorporate this prayer form into several sessions so it becomes familiar to them.

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# Christian Meditation: Contemplative Prayer

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To introduce youth to the practice of contemplative prayer

To give them an opportunity to explore a new way of “looking” at and appreciating the Creation and the Creator

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## Guiding Scriptures

Psalm 145:5      On the glorious splendor of thy majesty and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate.

Psalm 121: 1, 2      I lift up my eyes to the hills

John 3:2      We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

## Background

Contemplative prayer is contemplating – looking at – an object or concept and, in that “looking at,” resting in God’s presence. Most of us rarely stop and allow ourselves to just “be” in God’s presence. And, when we do, our minds are only too ready to present an endless stream of distractions that can pull us out of the contemplative space and into problem-solving, worrying, or musing. So, this prayer method can be difficult for some while others find it a natural way to pray. Most people, however, need to practice contemplation for some time to begin to see its impact in their lives. In this lesson, we will look at two ways to practice this prayer form.

1.      The first form of contemplative prayer that we will examine is one in which some object – a sunset, a leaf, a seashell, an icon, a piece of sculpture (or a piece of music for that matter) is looked at (or listened to) very deeply. The one praying begins by choosing something which moves his or her heart in some way. The person then relaxes, and begins to gaze at the object – or, in the case of music, listen to it. As one looks, the thing gazed at may begin to recede, the eyes close, and a sense of deep thanksgiving for objects of such beauty may pervade the spirit. Or perhaps the mind gently probes “some Divine Mystery, only dimly felt and less understood,” that presents itself for quiet examination through the object contemplated. Yet again, a phrase or word may spontaneously spring to mind, and be repeated over and over, as one basks in the lovely sense of peace and gratitude which envelops us as we allow ourselves to gaze deeply and to be penetrated by the gaze of God. Or possibly God’s presence may manifest itself in a sense of love or deep satisfaction, or in a sudden burst of illumination and understanding regarding life, God, a problem, etc.

2.      The second sort of contemplative prayer does not focus on a material object, but rather on an intangible image. This might be a concept, such as peace, grace, forgiveness; or it might be a visual image. The visual image might be something from scripture, some frozen moment in time which summons us to further exploration. This differs from placing oneself in a scripture story and letting the plot play out like a film, as we did in an earlier lesson. In this case the image is a single, particular picture, or a piece of that picture which is “zoomed” in on, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For example, perhaps group discussions indicate that your group is intrigued by a moment in one of Jesus' healings, as described in the Sunday morning gospel. What is it about the reading which seems to demand further exploration? Is it the expression on the face of the one he's healing? Or perhaps the look on the face of someone in the crowd as Lazarus emerges from the tomb? During Lent, what about a closer exploration of the face and body language of Mary, Jesus' mother, as she stands at the foot of the cross? Have we ever felt the pain of watching someone we love suffer? Or there is the image of John the Beloved disciple putting his arm around Mary, and, in obedience to his Savior, taking her as his own mother. Or what about that wild scene in the Temple in Jerusalem, just before or after Jesus cleansed it – is there anything there which calls out to the group? E.g., what does it feel like to see the one who allowed himself to be nailed to a cross strike out with outraged zeal against those who profane his Father? Or perhaps this previous example seems to suggest a meditation on the concept of forgiveness. Or holiness. Or humility. Or violence.

Whatever the young people would like to see more closely, wherever they would like to be, it is possible for them to go there and gaze and contemplate to their heart's content. And it's entirely possible for each person to choose a different image from the same Gospel reading. Or you might want to remind them of several different Bible stories, refreshing their memories and inviting them to choose one.

The seeming formlessness of this type of meditation may disconcert the neophyte, and especially an inexperienced and impatient young person, because there is no clearly stated list of things to do and things to expect. There are no set prayers, no scripture story with a plot to follow, no holy words to listen and respond to – although, arguably, the object or concept contemplated serves as a holy word in that it becomes a doorway into God's presence. Perhaps the strongest temptation which might arise during contemplation is the urge to falsely “steer” the thoughts, rather than to trust and to let the Spirit within guide. (Does anyone else remember, in their days of youthful folly, shoving the Ouija board marker around? Not that one would really have expected the thing to move any other way, but the analogy regarding almost overwhelming temptation to gain spiritual results is a good one!) However, in this case, be sure that the meditation will proceed in its own perfect rhythm, guided by the Holy Spirit, and that the one meditating will know when the prayer has “peaked” and begins to move naturally to a close.

The leader can assure the group that the sense that “nothing is happening” is not unusual at the start, and certainly does not signify “failure.” The benefits of meditative prayer are to be seen in the way daily life is lived, not just in the good feelings which may or may not arise during the quiet prayer time.

## **Materials**

Have a number of objects available from which the young people can choose their object of contemplation. If possible, have more than enough so that everyone will be able to find something that appeals. It's even better if you can provide attractive objects which are not expensive (free is best!) so that each person can then take their object of contemplation home with them in order to rediscover again at a glance the wonder which unfolded to them during their meditation time. Some examples of inexpensive (or free!) objects are postcards of famous artwork (including icons), pebbles, rocks, driftwood, shells, sculpture, prayer cards, leaves, flowers, seed pods, etc. You might also find crosses in various sizes and types, small statues (e.g., of St. Francis or Jesus). You can order inexpensive prayer cards of various saints from

LeaderResources (1-800-941-2218) or Bridge Building Images (1-800-325-6263). These cards are also available at most Roman Catholic bookstores. Put all of these objects on a table where the group can see and handle them as they enter.

## **Preparation**

As always, the leaders need to be familiar with this type of prayer through practice. Be ready to share from your own personal experience. And don't be afraid to share the struggles you've had, as well as the wonderful insights you may have gained.

It's important to plan ahead in gathering up the bag or box full of objects for contemplation – an hour before the meeting is way too late!

The steps below provide a guided meditation for the contemplation of objects. It can easily be adapted, however, if you prefer to have the group “gaze” at a particular concept, at a moment from, or image found in a particular Bible story.

## **Activity**

Describe contemplative prayer, using the background information provided. Encourage the young people to share any experiences they have had or questions that arise. You might ask:

- Have you ever done this spontaneously – like being “transfixed” by a spectacular sunset?
- What do you think will happen if you sit and just look at something for ten minutes or more? (If they say their minds will wander, affirm that this is normal and that they should just gently let go of their thoughts and return focus to the object or concept whenever they become aware that their mind has wandered off somewhere else.)
- Are you aware of other religions that use contemplative prayer? Some teens may be in yoga classes or have knowledge of Eastern religions, some of which teach contemplative meditation – although generally they focus on “emptying” the mind of everything.
- As I describe this prayer method, what attracts you? What do you worry about?

After you have thoroughly discussed the method and their reactions to it, ask them to try it. Remind them that not everyone will find every method you try helpful. We are all different, have different personalities and relate to each other differently. So, we will all relate to God differently. You are asking them to give each method a try and then use those methods that work well for each of them in their personal prayer life. It might be a good idea to clarify for the group that this particular meditation session may be more of a challenge than some others, because it is less directed than previous sessions. Encourage them with assurances that sometimes it is hard for beginners to feel that anything is “happening.” On the other hand, beginners with their open hearts and lack of expectations may have the most unexpected experiences of all.

- It's helpful here to consider taking a few minutes to briefly give them a description, explanation or appropriate history about the objects. An object for contemplation can be more fascinating with a bit of meaningful background associated with it. (Of course it's also possible that contemplating a given object will be more meaningful to a person if it comes to them fresh and without any baggage. You'll need to make the call on this.)
- Allow them a few moments to select one of the objects for contemplation. If two people desire the same object, try not to interfere, and let them work it out for themselves. (Though do take note of the dynamics of the situation and how it's resolved.) Having all



the objects of one kind, such as leaves, herbs, flowers, etc., is a good way to avoid this sort of tangle.

- Let them get settled comfortably, and then take them through the steps to relaxation, deep breathing, or some other way to focus.
- When the group is ready, offer one of the following prayers or one of your own:
- Holy and gracious God, today we once again come into your presence to be taught by You. Enter our minds, our spirits, and our bodies, and give us the gift of concentration. As you speak to us quietly, help us to listen attentively. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.
- Creator God, our Teacher and our Guide, illumine our prayer time this morning. Show each of us what you would have us learn. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.
- Quietly invite them to simply gaze at the article, not trying to force their thoughts in any way, but rather allowing their thoughts and feelings to lead them. If they feel any distractions, they should simply re-focus on their object of contemplation, once again silently asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate and to teach. If and when they feel moved to, they can close their eyes and simply soak in the presence of the Spirit. Each person's contemplation will be different, and the leaders need to trust in the Spirit within each young person to guide the situation.
- After several minutes have passed, gently remind the group that they may come out of their contemplation in their own time. They can signal that their meditation is at an end by slowly opening their eyes and sitting quietly until the rest of the group is finished. If their eyes have been open, they can fold their hands in their laps. Invite them to give thanks to God during the remaining minutes of silence.

When the group has returned to awareness, invite them to share their experience. Begin by speaking softly and gently lest you jar the prayerful atmosphere just created! Remind the group that there is to be no judging of what anyone says as each person's experience is valid as it stands. And remind them that they don't have to share – they can always "pass." Ask:

- What was this experience like for you?
- What did you learn about God or yourself?
- While it will take much more practice before you know, do you think this may be a way you are called to pray?
- When, where or why might this be a helpful way for you to pray?

Encourage them to take their objects with them to put in a special place as a reminder of their experience, and as an encouragement to pray during the week. Invite them to try different objects or words/concepts. Tell them you will be doing this again in the weeks ahead.

You may want to consider trying contemplative prayer in a location other than your regular meeting room – something that is useful for all of these methods, but especially contemplation. For example, you might end your regular afternoon or evening J2A session by gathering in the sanctuary/nave and asking each young person to select an object in the sanctuary or nave area as an object for contemplation. Encourage them to sit or kneel on the floor, a pew or step so they are directly in front of their object. When everyone has settled in, begin the contemplation time. If you can find a small Chinese gong, it is quite effective to chime it three to five times, very slowly, to signal the beginning and end of contemplative prayer. In this case, you may want to suggest that they simply get up and leave quietly whenever they are ready. You can ask them about their experience when you next meet and have your "check in" time.

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# Christian Meditation: Centering Prayer

## Areas Covered

Spirituality, Self

## Goal

To introduce youth to the practice of centering prayer

To remind young people that prayer is not only asking, but also receiving

## Guiding Scriptures

Psalms 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.

1 Kings 19:12 ...and after the fire a still small voice.

## Background

Centering Prayer is arguably the most difficult simply because in it the practitioner does not use a holy reading, an image, or an object to achieve closeness to God. And a style of prayer in which nothing is consciously asked for and no outcome is particularly sought, may feel to the beginner as though absolutely nothing is going on. Don't be fooled; something very important indeed is going on.

In the Middle Ages monks and nuns would sometimes pray as they walked about their cloisters. Today's revival of the labyrinth also uses physical movement to free the spirit for prayer. In a similar way, the use of prayer beads (see Lesson One) keeps both the hands and the mind busy, and this too, can allow the spirit to soar, undistracted, into deep prayer and communion with God.

Centering prayer employs a "mantra" for much the same purpose as one walks the labyrinth. While the mind is focused on the repetition of the one word, other mental distractions cease, and a deep oneness with God becomes possible. This is possible, not inevitable, because beginning practitioners may arise with a sense that absolutely nothing has happened. And young people might well be inclined to shrug their shoulders and declare that they only like guided meditation, the more directed variety which is covered in a previous lesson plan. But if they are willing to persevere, young people are likely to discover what millions already know – that centering prayer is relaxing, refreshing, healing, and grace-filled.

One of the great contemporary proponents of this type of prayer is the Rev. Thomas Keating, a Roman Catholic Trappist monk. (For more information see: [www.centeringprayer.com](http://www.centeringprayer.com))

Keating's method is for each person to choose a sacred word to symbolize "your intention to consent to God's presence and action within." He points out two things of utmost importance.

1. One is that during centering prayer we must avoid excessive thinking. When we find ourselves distracted, we simply return to the mantra (sacred word) without judgment, reaction or undue concern.
2. Second, and most important, he points out that the benefits of centering prayer – **when practiced on a regular basis** – are felt less during prayer time than they are during daily life. Therefore we are to avoid basing our conclusions about the effectiveness of centering prayer on how we "felt." The results unfold over time and will be reflected in how we live.



## Preparation

The leader(s) should have explored this type of prayer for a period of time before trying to present it to the young people.

## Activity

Outline the background material above, emphasizing that how you feel during the meditation is not necessarily a key to whether it's "working" (!) or not. Answer any questions and allow time for discussion or explanation as needed.

- Get the young people settled in their favored positions for meditation. This may mean staying in the discussion circle or moving around the room to find a space of their own. This prayer form, in particular, is private, so they may prefer having some space.
- When the group is ready, quietly take the group through their favorite method for relaxing and focusing.
- Gently invite the young people to take a moment and silently offer a prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance in the choosing of a mantra. They can choose a word (e.g., peace, love, light, Jesus, etc.) or a short phrase such as: "My Lord and My God," "Through Him, with Him, in Him," or "Jesus, my light." Encourage them to select a word or short phrase they have heard, perhaps in a scripture reading or in a worship service, that attracts them or that makes them feel connects to God.
- After each one has a mantra, suggest that they simply sit quietly, focusing prayerfully on the mantra as they repeat it over and over. Encourage them to redirect their thoughts back to it when they stray. As they focus, exciting things *may* happen to them, such as the discovery of psychological insights or solutions to problems. Or nothing may happen. Nevertheless, they are not to spend time analyzing, but rather simply soaking in the presence of God. They may feel spiritual comfort, a sense of peace, an overpowering feeling of love – or they may not. Urge them not to analyze but simply to take notice.
- Allow them at least five minutes of silence for this exercise. (An experienced practitioner will need about twenty minutes, and Father Keating recommends two twenty minute periods daily, one in the morning and one in the evening.)
- Watch body language signals to help you know when the time of meditation is moving to a close. Then invite the young people to gently allow their meditation to come to an end. They can signal their readiness to join the external world again by slowly opening their eyes. Have the group sit quietly, giving thanks to God, until all are ready.
- Lead the group in a discussion about their experiences. Again, respect for others' experiences (or seeming lack of them) is crucial. Nonjudgmental responses will set the tone for a healthy and open discussion. Ask:
  - What was this experience like for you?
  - What did you find helpful? Not helpful?
  - We only spent about five minutes in silence. Most experienced practitioners spend at least 20 minutes in prayer – often twice a day. Do you think you could do that? That you would like to do that? After a couple of sessions – Would you like to try a longer period of silence?

## Closing

Invite the group to end your time together by praying together. You might join hands and do a circle prayer of thanksgiving (each person prays one sentence or "passes" by squeezing the next person's hand). Again, encourage the youth to practice the centering prayer during the week and include it in your meetings for several sessions.

NOTE: J2A Pilgrimage groups have used this prayer method at least once while on pilgrimage – giving each young person 45-60 minutes by themselves. On more than one occasion the youth have identified this time as their spiritual “highlight” of the pilgrimage. While we may not think so initially, many young people crave silence and are drawn deeply into contemplative prayer. So, we encourage you to practice these meditation methods and include them in your pilgrimage plans.

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