

The Spirit at Work



Parents & guardians, start here.
Read these numbered instructions
to yourself throughout the process.

1

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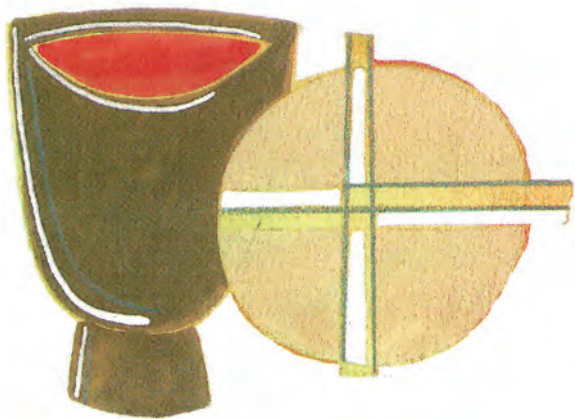
The Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, may be a difficult concept for young persons. The Spirit was given to us by Jesus so we would continue to be aware that God loves us and has a Plan, the Reign of God, for how we should live. We are called to love God, to love ourselves, and to love others. As the doxology in our Sunday Mass reminds us, we live *through*, *with*, and *in* Jesus, and in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

3

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

4

Getting started. Discuss together: Who are some of the people you love? How do you show your love? How do they show their love to you?



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Whom do you love? Take just a few moments right now and think about the people you love. Why do you love them? Do you think about them and miss them when they go away? Are you happier when they are around?

We know whom God loves—*us*! God created us and our world to be beautiful and peaceful. When humans decided not to listen to God, then God reached out to us to make a covenant. The covenant, a special promise, claimed us as children of God forever. This is why we think of God as a parent, someone who gave us life and who takes care of us.

As part of the Plan of God, Jesus came to live with us. Jesus is both human and divine. God chose to understand and love us by becoming one of us. Jesus taught us how to be a part of the Reign of God. We are builders of the Reign of God when we work toward a better world here and now and toward our afterlife in heaven. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we were all saved. Jesus is the reason we think of God as Savior, someone who shows us that God loves us and helps us to love one another.

Jesus lived like any other human and died as all humans must. But Jesus also rose again. That was a very special message to us. Jesus was telling us we will all live again with God, even after death! Jesus didn't stay here physically with us, because now it is our turn to live as God's children. Jesus ascended into heaven and there someday we will meet him face-to-face. But he didn't leave us alone!

Remember when you were thinking about people you love? There's something about love that we can't explain very easily, isn't there? Love is something we experience, something we feel, but words don't fully capture what it is.

Jesus left us his love, God's love. God's love is still with us. God still takes care of us, guides us, strengthens us, forgives us and helps us be the best people we can be. This presence of God is what we mean when we think about God as the Holy Spirit.

These three unique experiences of God show us three ways God is with us. We call these three presences the three Persons of God: God the Father (Creator, Yahweh), God the Son (Savior, Jesus), God the Holy Spirit (Sanctifier, Guide). These three experiences of God are why we call God the Trinity, that is, three persons in one God.

When we talk about how the Spirit was left by Jesus to be with us, what does that mean? How does the Spirit help us today?

The Spirit helps us to know God as a parent, as a friend, as a guide. With the Spirit we have sacraments. The sacraments are special times when God is with us in a special way and we are with God. These times are moments of grace. Grace is our friendship with God. It is how God cares for us.



Jesus himself is a sacrament. Jesus is “Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.” Jesus was God in a form people could touch, listen to, and love as one of us.

Jesus gives us another gift, the Church. The Church is a gathering of people who are trying to continue living as Jesus lived. We celebrate and serve as Jesus taught us. We help build the world according to God’s Plan; a world where people love God and one another.

The Church has seven unique ways to remember that God is with us and we are with God. These are called the seven sacraments. They are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony (for married couples) and Holy Orders (for priests and deacons). In this book we will look at four of these sacraments through stories: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation.

The Church helps us to understand and love God. The Spirit has a lot to do with how the Church started. It all began on a day we call Pentecost.

God is in your life, even when you aren’t aware of God. When you look at the world with an open heart as well as with open eyes, it’s easier to find God. Where can you see grace (God’s love) in your life right now?

The Spirit is with us now, today! As you read these stories, say a simple prayer to the Holy Spirit. Ask that the Spirit of God be with you and help you be the best person you can become. Then, just listen. The Spirit will be there in your heart!

2

Ask your child to retell the reading to you in their own words.

3

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What do we mean when we talk about the Plan or Reign of God?
2. Who are the three Persons in the Holy Trinity? How do we see the actions of these three Persons today?

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page.
(The matching flames are numbers two and seven.)
Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: The Reign of God happens whenever we live with love for God.

There are three persons—Father, Son and Spirit—in our one God. This is the teaching we call the Holy Trinity. Just as we live in relationships, so God lives in relationship both within God and with us. This is a central belief and a deep mystery, something we know through God's revelation but do not completely understand. God creates us, redeems us and saves us.

These three actions show us God's love and grace.

Familiar Flames

Fire can remind us of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to disciples on the road to Emmaus, they said that their hearts were “burning within us.” The Holy Spirit continues to give us passion and power to do what God calls us to do.

Below, find and circle the two flames that are exactly the same.



Spirit Stories

1

Together, read through the titles of the stories we will be reading during these sessions. What do you think these titles say about how the Spirit is with us?

The Spirit at Work



◀ Pentecost:
The Day the
Spirit Came

Spirit of Belonging



◀ Philip and
the Ethiopian

The Maiden
Who Finally
Came Home ▶



Spirit of Prayer



◀ The
Church That
Began at
Home

The Woman
who Laughed
with God ▶



Spirit of Forgiveness



◀ The Man Who
Made Trouble

The Soldier
Who Had No
Enemies ▶



Spirit of Action



◀ A Letter of
Good News

The Bishop for
the Poor ▶



The Not-the-End



◀ The Spirit
Is With You

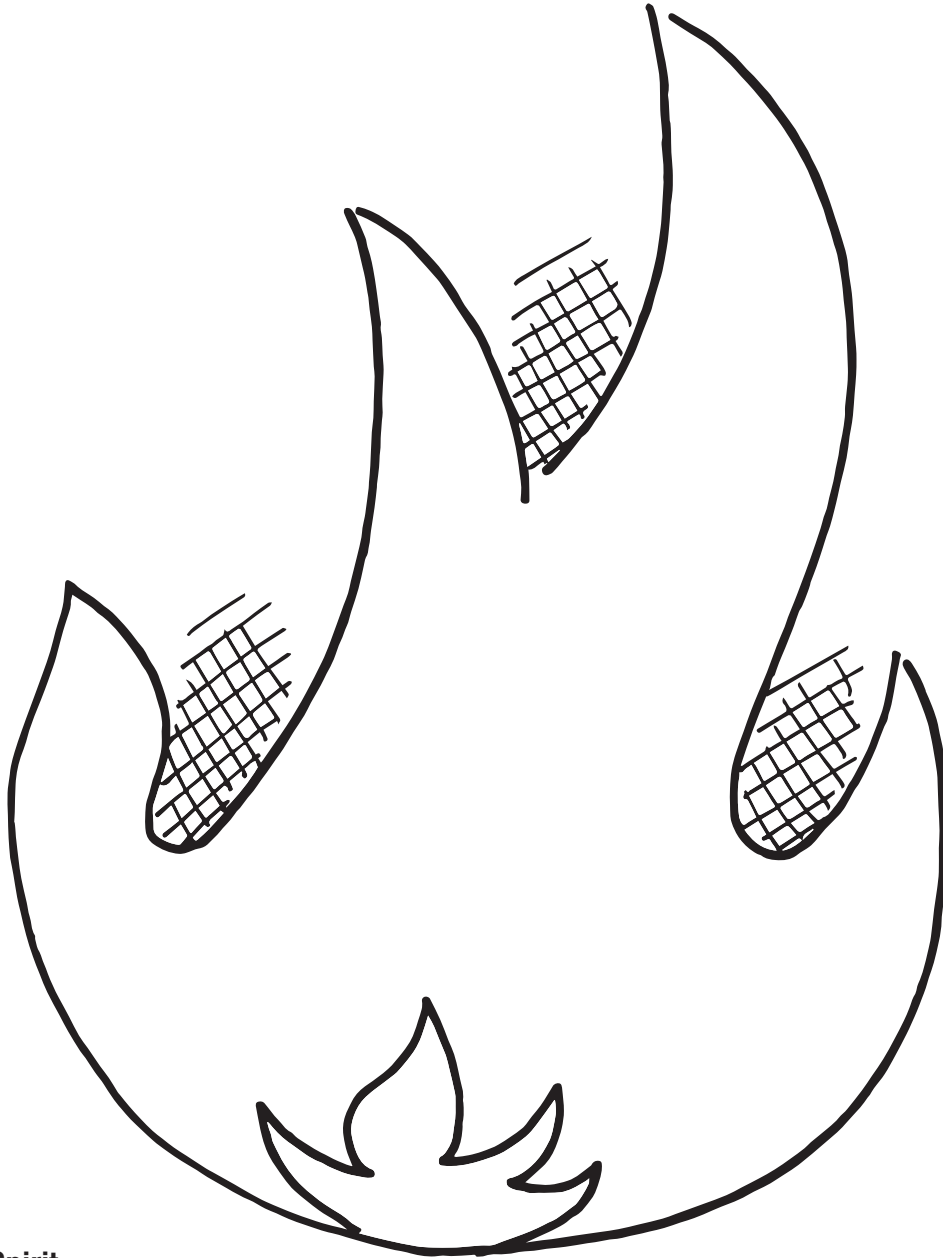
2

Now move on to the next page and complete the activities together.

My Story of God's Spirit

Think about what in your life brought you to this day and this time. Are there times when God was obviously present to you through community? With forgiveness and action? In prayer? When are the times when you are aware of the Spirit at work?

Adults: Write a word or a phrase inside the flame reminding you of one of the times when you knew the Holy Spirit was present. Ask your young person to do the same in the space around the flame.



Petitions to the Spirit

Finish the sentences below together.

Spirit of God, we know you work through us when we _____.

Spirit of God, we know you are present with us when we _____.

Spirit of God, we know you are alive in our world when we _____.

Draw God

1

Go through the pictures in a children's Bible, Bible storybooks, or other such books to find images of Jesus and God. Ask your young person to draw God however he or she best imagines God to be. These drawings may be symbolic rather than portraits of God.



Closing Ritual

2

Pray together the petitions you wrote for the Spirit of God on pg. 7. Finish by praying together the doxology.

The Doxology

"Through Jesus, in Jesus, and with Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father,
forever and ever. Amen."



Pentecost: The Day the Spirit Came



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With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

4

Getting started. Discuss together: What makes a special event “special” for you? What everyday events do you make special? How?

This retelling of the event of Pentecost comes from the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Pentecost is often called “the birthday of the Church” because receiving the Spirit enabled the apostles to preach and build community. God wants us to continue being a Church family. The Church helps us grow ever closer to God and to each other through the sacraments.

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long time ago, Jesus died and rose from the dead. He spent some time with his friends, the disciples and apostles, after his resurrection. Jesus continued to teach them about the Reign of God, God's plan for harmony and justice. And Jesus told them that they needed to go out to the whole world and let people know that God loved them. Then Jesus ascended into heaven.

Days passed, and the disciples and apostles met often to talk and pray. What Jesus wanted them to be, witnesses to the whole earth, seemed impossible to them. They were uncertain about what to do, but they stayed in Jerusalem as Jesus had told them. "Think of all that has already happened," they would remind each other. "We must keep holding onto our hope and faith in Jesus."

On the day of Pentecost, Jerusalem was filled with visitors coming to celebrate the feast together. Jesus' mother Mary and the disciples were gathered to pray when a loud rushing noise, like a strong wind, filled their room. Tongues of fire appeared over each one's head.

As amazing as all this was, the truly wonderful thing was happening inside of each person's heart. All the power of the wind and all the passion of the fire was nothing compared to how people felt as the Spirit filled them!

These were people who had never traveled far from their own homes. They had never studied another culture or language. Just minutes ago they had been frightened and confused. Now they were courageous and sure. They found they could speak in foreign languages. They immediately rose from their seats and went out into the streets of Jerusalem. The message they had to share was too important to be held inside any longer.

The loud noise of the wind had been heard out in the crowded streets, and many people had come to the house to investigate. When they heard the disciples speaking, the strangers outside became very confused. "I am from Asia, a land far away. How can this Galilean be shouting



in my native tongue?”

“No one preaching is an Egyptian like me, yet I understand every word being said. How can this be?”

Others could not accept what their own ears told them. “These men are just drunk—and so early in the morning, too!”

No one could explain what was happening, but they were all hearing their own language being spoken. The friends of Jesus, simple people with little education, were teaching better than anyone else they had ever heard.

Peter stepped before the crowd and held up his hand, rough from his years with the fishing nets. He opened his mouth, and beautiful ideas poured out of him. “My friends, what you see happening was predicted by the prophet, Joel. He said that God’s Spirit, when poured into us, would change our lives. The young will see visions, the old will dream dreams. Many will prophesy. And all this will happen so you may know God has saved you.”

Peter showed how the prophets and teachers of Judaism had predicted the Messiah. He told the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. He told them that Jesus was this very Messiah, the Anointed One who had come to save God’s people. All there listened intently to Peter.

When Peter finished speaking, many wanted to change their lives and follow the ways of Jesus. “What shall we do?” they asked Peter and the other disciples.

Peter answered, “Be sorry for what you have done that was wrong. And be baptized in the name of Jesus the Christ. Your sins will be forgiven and you will receive the Holy Spirit, just as we have today. This promise is for you, and for your children and for people very far away from here, for God is calling all of us.”

The Bible tells us that 3,000 people were baptized that day, people who heard and welcomed Peter’s message. These new followers of Jesus began to do as the earliest friends of Jesus did. They broke bread together (as Jesus asked them to do in remembrance of him) and prayed. They shared things with each other, so no one would be hungry or poor. This was happening because the Holy Spirit filled their hearts with God’s great love.

The apostles and disciples who had been uncertain how to do what Jesus had asked them to do were no longer mixed up. On this



Pentecost day, the Spirit showed them exactly what was needed. This was the day when the Good News that Jesus was—and is—Lord and Messiah began to spread. This was when people joined together to live in community and to break bread together. This was the birthday of the Church.

The Spirit fills us today as well. We are still called to pray together, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to help each other. The Holy Spirit made the Church a sacrament, and made all of us sacraments, too.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. How did Jesus' friends feel after Jesus ascended into heaven? How did that change after the Holy Spirit came?
3. Pretend you were in the crowd listening to the disciples and Peter at Pentecost. What would you have thought? What would you have done?

2

Get your child started on the activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. (The answers are: 1. apostles 2. Holy Spirit 3. Reign of God 4. Pentecost 5. salvation 6. ascension 7. disciples 8. Peter. 9. Mary.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: The Spirit of God is with us. Great things happen when we are open to the Spirit.

Peter promised those who listened to him at the first Pentecost that great things would happen. This promise is with us today! Peter used Old Testament stories and the stories of Jesus' life to convince those around him that the Messiah had come. We are saved by our Messiah, and we are called to do great things. Our present lives continue to teach us this, whatever our age.

Speaking in Tongues

At Pentecost, the disciples amazed everyone by speaking in many different languages. Each listener could understand what was being said.

Below are some words that come from the Pentecost story. Can you unscramble them to make sense?

SLEPASOT _ _ _ _ _

YHLO TIPSIR _ _ _ _ _

GIREN FO ODG _ _ _ _ _

CEPSENTOT _ _ _ _ _

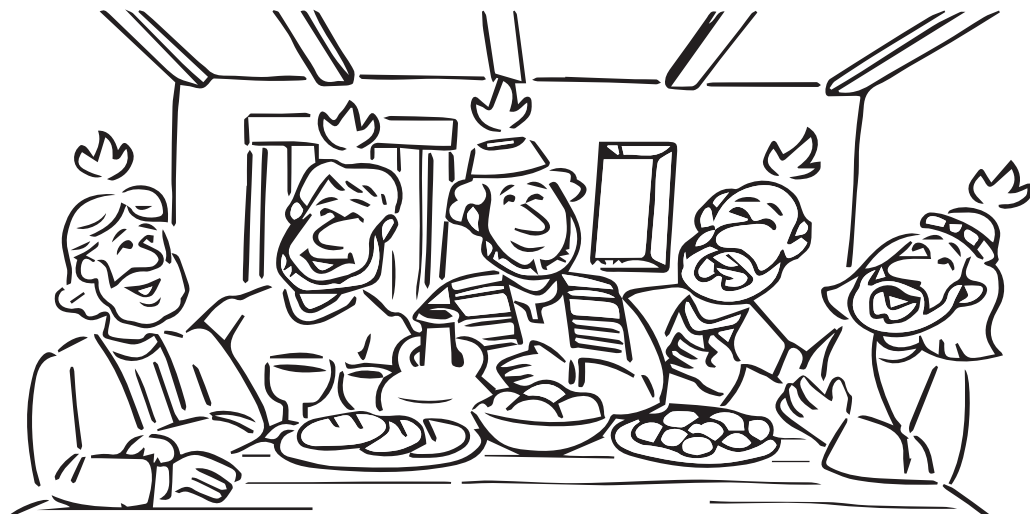
TALSAONIV _ _ _ _ _

SONCINEAS _ _ _ _ _

PLICESSID _ _ _ _ _

REPTE _ _ _ _ _

RYAM _ _ _ _ _



The Spirit Weaves With Our Lives

1

Help your child get started on their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

Our stories, woven in with the stories of our faith family, form the fabric of salvation. In the blank spaces on the horizontal strips below, write down faith events that occurred through the years in your own family, including past generations. You could include sacraments received, when you joined a parish, or other ways your family has lived out its faith. Leave the last strip empty for events related to your child.

3

Talk to your child about how you each did your activity. Work with your child to write in faith events from their own life, such as their baptism, on the last strip.

The diagram shows a weaving loom with 5 horizontal strips and 5 vertical strips. The vertical strips contain the following text from top to bottom:

- Elijah the Prophet
- The Spirit Came on Pentecost
- Abram and Sarai follow God
- Mary and Martha welcome Jesus
- St. Kateri Tekakwitha Becomes Christian
- God leads Hebrews out of Egypt
- Jesus Dies... and Rises!
- God Creates the World
- Jesus Is Born
- Saul Becomes Paul the Apostle

There are empty boxes at the ends of each horizontal strip and in the intersections of the vertical strips.

The Spirit Weaves Our Lives Together

You wrote a story about how God and the Spirit have already acted in your life in our last session. Think about that story again. This activity is going to ask you to look even deeper into that story. This is called “reflection,” and it is a way for us to stop and identify when God is with us.

In your story:

How old were you?

Who was with you?

Where did you live at that time?

What school did you attend?

Who was your best friend?

How did you feel at the time this happened?

How did it turn out?

Special Events

1

Look at family pictures of weddings, Baptisms, First Communions or Confirmations. Notice how special we make these moments with fancy clothes, flowers, rings and so on. Make note also about who we invite to be with us at such cherished events.



Closing Ritual

2

Thank God by naming all the people related to the events on the weaving page. Finish with the closing prayer.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, forever and ever.
Amen.



Spirit of Belonging



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

We all need to belong to someone or something to feel connected and not alone. First and foremost, we all belong to God. This section of stories deals with the desire we all have to be part of God's family. The Catholic Church recognizes this desire, and receives new members through the Sacrament of Baptism.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you felt truly accepted or appreciated? What happened as a result? How did it feel?



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

No one likes to feel all alone in the world. Sure, sometimes we like to have a little time alone to listen to music, to read, to think, or to pray. But there is a big difference between being alone and being lonely.

Being with others helps us know who we are. When you introduce yourself (“Hi, I’m Maria Estevez.” “I’m Leon Johnson.”) you are already saying you are a part of your family just by saying your name. “I go to P.S. 59.” “I live just down the street from you.” “I’m a Canadian citizen.” “I play for the Eagles.” All these statements give some idea of who you are by telling what groups you belong to.

Jesus knew we need other people to live and grow and love. That’s why we have churches, so we can gather together in community. We show each other how to live as Jesus did. We teach each other and help each other.

The sacrament that makes us members of Jesus’ community is Baptism. Baptism is how we come to belong to God and to each other. Parents have their children baptized, sometimes as babies too young to speak, because they want them to belong to the Church. Older children and adults choose Baptism for themselves, but the reason is the same.

We use water to baptize because water is a sign of new life.

After all, how long would earth last if it never rained again? Water is also a sign of how God takes care of us and saves us. Remember how Moses and the Hebrews were saved when the Red Sea parted to let them escape the Egyptians?

Baptism is the first time we join with the Catholic community fully. We receive the Spirit that Jesus promised all of us. And each time someone is baptized, it is as if we have all received a precious gift. That's why baptisms are such happy times in the Church.

Make a list in your head of all the groups to which you feel like you really belong. Is the Church one of these? If you are now preparing to be baptized, what about the Church makes you want to belong?



2

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. When are you most likely to feel lonely? Why?
2. When are you most likely to feel accepted and/or wanted? Why?
3. How can you show others in your life that you welcome them?

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. (The answer for the Bible verse is “...the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him.” Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: The Sacrament of Baptism gives us new life and makes us members of our Church family, the Catholic community.

Once we feel welcome some place, we are free to be our true selves. Acceptance provides us with the strength to act in kindness and with justice. Belonging isn't simply a “warm feeling;” it is the foundation upon which we build our lives.

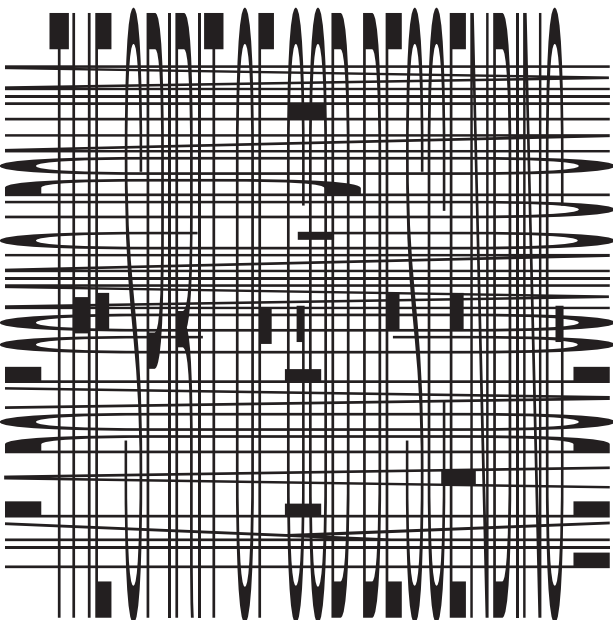
Belonging & Accepting

List all the groups that you can think of that you have been a part of at some point in your life, for example, family groups, clubs, teams, classes, parishes or ministries, scouts, or other organizations. Next, put a check mark next to the ones you are currently still a part of. Finally, put a star next to those where you feel most comfortable, loved, and accepted. Write a sentence describing why you feel most accepted in the group(s) you starred above.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I feel accepted because:

Baptism with the Holy Spirit



Complete this Bible verse that describes what happened. Tilt the page so it is almost at eye level to read the words, then turn the page sideways and do it again. Fill the answers in below and to the right.

After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw...

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

—Matthew 3:16

Within a Circle of Friends

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

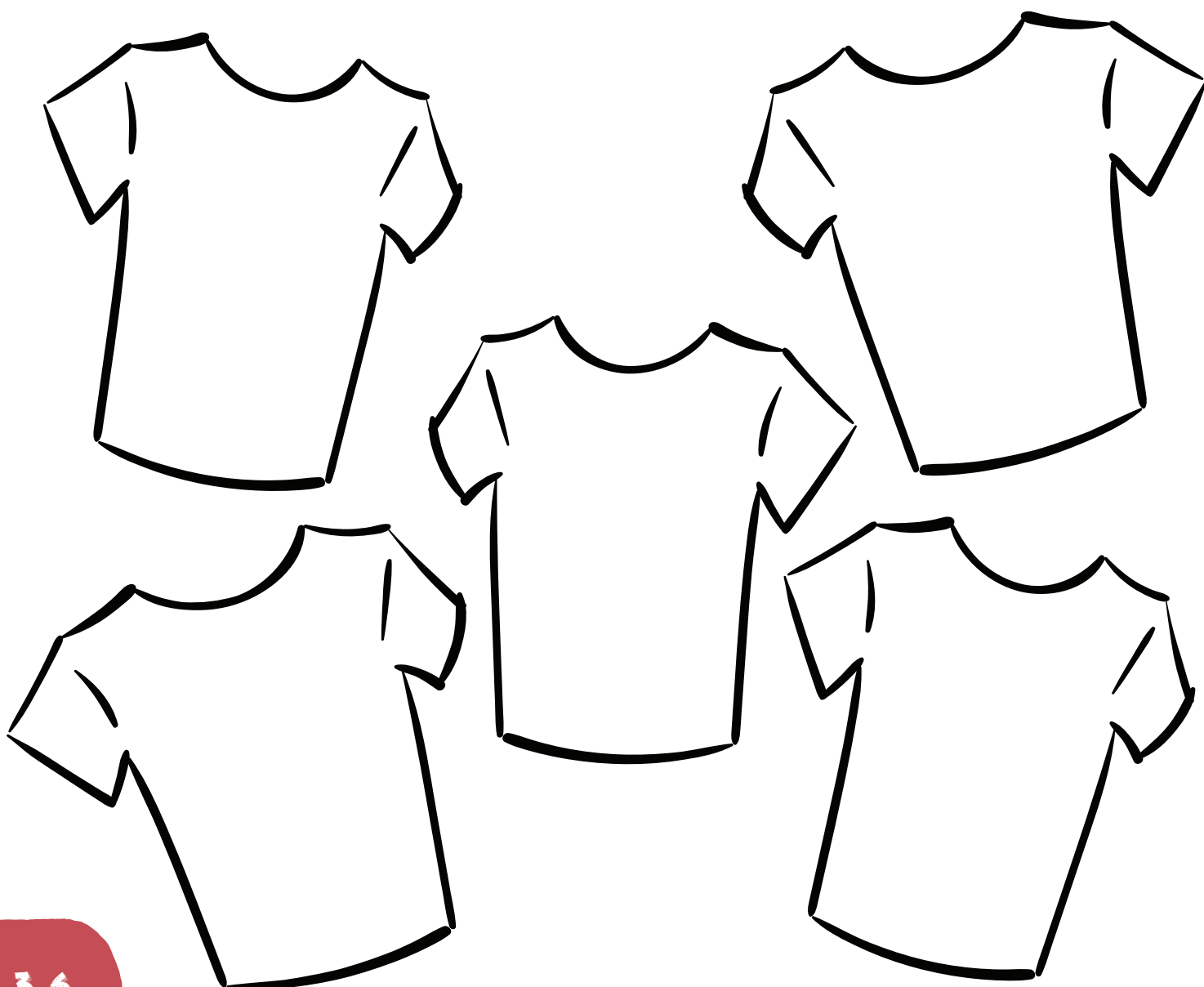
Read the questions below. Write the words answering these questions on the T-shirts.

3

Now discuss with your child each of the activities you completed. Discuss why you chose those words you wrote below.

What are some words that describe how you feel when you know you belong?

What are some ways you can help others feel like they belong?



Being an Upstander

When we belong to a community or group, it can be easy to focus on the friends we know and to ignore new people who want to join. Read the descriptions below of how bullies, bystanders, and upstanders can make outsiders feel. Then write in the boxes below about times when you remember yourself or other people acting in these ways.



Bullies can make people feel *unwelcome*. Even if they don't actively hurt someone, they can make them feel that they don't belong.



Bystanders just watch when others are feeling unwelcome, and don't do anything to help. Even if no bullies are around, people can feel that they don't belong.



Upstanders go out of their way to make others feel welcome and that they belong. Jesus was always an upstander, and wants us to be one, too!

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Groups

1

Tell your child about groups you have belonged to in the past or still belong to. Your young person did the same on page 3-5. Discuss together what have each of these groups done for you.

Watch television shows to see how groups form and how people relate to each other as family or friends.



Closing Ritual

2

Place a pitcher of water and an empty bowl on your table. Pour the water into the bowl, saying, "Spirit of God, wash me in love." When the bowl is full, use the water to bless yourselves and each other with the Sign of the Cross.

Close with the doxology, on the right.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, forever and ever.
Amen.



Philip and the Ethiopian



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Who was the first person to tell you about God? Or who was your favorite teacher? Why?

The first Christians were Jews. They were awaiting the Messiah, and it was the Hebrew Scriptures that the disciples used in their preaching. But Jesus' message soon reached outside the Jewish community. Disciples like Philip traveled to many lands. This story tells of a time when that message went all the way to Ethiopia, where a vibrant Christian community developed. The story can be found in Acts 8:4-40.

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long time ago, a man named Philip became a follower of Jesus. Philip was a wonderful teacher and healer. The apostles picked Philip as one of their seven special helpers. Because he was so filled with the Spirit of God, many people wanted to believe in Jesus after they met Philip. One man who was changed by Philip was a talented magician named Simon. “Even I cannot do what you do,” Simon told Philip. “You are indeed from God.”

Philip was so open to God’s love that he trusted God with everything, including his own life. Everything Philip did was for Jesus. Perhaps, then, Philip was not as surprised as you or I would be when an angel came to speak with him.

“Philip,” the angel said, “get up. You are to travel down a new road, a road in the wilderness. Take your journey south toward Gaza.”

Philip did not ask why and did not have to think about it first. He got up immediately and left. He trusted that he would find out what was needed from him as he walked. Another man was traveling that same road. This man was an important court official, a treasurer for Queen Candace of Ethiopia in Africa. The Ethiopian had been in Jerusalem to worship and was now returning home. He was seated in his chariot, reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah when Philip met him.

Philip was pleased to see the Ethiopian reading the word of God. He called to him, “Good day, sir. I see you are reading. Do you understand all you have read so far?”



Remember, Philip was a teacher, and good teachers are always ready to explain.

The Ethiopian raised his eyes and examined Philip. Then he shook his head and responded, “How can I? No one has ever explained it to me. If you have time, come sit with me in my chariot and guide me as I read.”

Philip did not have to be asked twice. He knew that this was why the angel had sent him down this road. Philip was always looking for ways to bring people together with Jesus. He wanted everyone to know that all belong to God’s family. He quickly sat next to the Ethiopian and read the words from Isaiah with him.

“Is Isaiah talking about himself when he speaks of someone suffering and dying without justice? Is Isaiah the lamb that is killed?” The Ethiopian had many questions.

Philip was delighted. Philip knew that asking questions is often the beginning of faith. So, beginning with the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, Philip spoke about God. Then Philip told the stories of Jesus. “Jesus,” Philip assured the wise treasurer, “is the Messiah promised to God’s people. God has never forgotten us. We are saved and we are loved.” Philip and the Ethiopian traveled together, listening and speaking to each other. Philip talked about how Jesus wants all people to belong to him. He explained how followers of Jesus were baptized with water and the Spirit. “Baptism is what makes you a member of our community,” Philip said.

Just then, the two riders noticed that the chariot was passing by some water. The Ethiopian grabbed Philip’s shoulder. “Look, there is some water. Why can’t I be baptized right here and now?” He then commanded that his chariot stop, and he brought Philip to the edge of the water.

Philip was deeply impressed by the Ethiopian. Philip knew that his desire to join the followers of Jesus was very strong. Together the two went to the water, and Philip baptized the court official.

When they came up out of the water, Philip disappeared. The



Ethiopian looked for him but was not concerned. He knew God had sent Philip to him to call him to Jesus. The Ethiopian knew where he belonged now, in the family of the Christians. So the treasurer found wealth beyond any he imagined.

Philip, for his part, found himself in another place named Azotus. He shrugged, thinking, “God knows where I am needed,” and went on his way preaching, teaching, and healing.

Philip continued to reach out to new people. They, too, wanted to follow Jesus. The Ethiopian went back to Africa and many people there joined the Church. The Christian community grew larger and larger throughout all the world.

The Holy Spirit is always with us to remind us where we need to be. Baptism is the sacrament that makes us members of God’s gigantic family.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. Do you feel more like Philip or more like the Ethiopian? Why?
3. Who talks to you about God? To whom do you talk about God? What are you saying?

2

Get your child started on the activity on the next page. (The answers to the word search are on page 8.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: We need to risk talking about God so we and others can grow in faith and love.

We learn about God in many ways, but certainly the most common way is by listening. We listen to parents, teachers, clergy, and other committed Christians. After we learn about Jesus, then we have another responsibility: we have to speak to others and share our faith! Talking about God is what disciples do.

Searching for the Right Words

The Ethiopian was reading Scripture, but he wanted to understand even more. He was willing to search for meaning, and Philip was very happy to oblige!

How good are your “searching” skills? Can you find the words in the puzzle below?

BELIEVE
PHILIP
ETHIOPIA
AFRICA

BAPTISM
SCRIPTURE
ANGEL

WATER
CHARIOT
ROAD

R	O	A	D	O	R	E	T	A	W
K	R	C	S	T	I	V	J	S	A
B	M	I	E	S	E	P	H	C	I
E	L	R	L	P	T	I	P	R	P
L	E	F	T	P	H	I	L	I	P
I	B	A	P	T	I	S	M	P	E
E	R	R	O	G	O	E	R	T	J
V	A	C	O	B	P	N	I	U	C
E	C	H	A	R	I	O	T	R	H
O	L	A	S	J	A	N	G	E	L

Building a Church of Belonging and Welcome

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2

2

Just for you: Many times we are greeted and welcomed at church on Sunday. There may be particular people you recognize who help to make Mass a welcoming and prayerful experience (for example, the greeters, musicians, lectors, priest, altar servers, eucharistic ministers, etc).

In the space below, list some things that happen at your church to make you feel welcome.

3

When your children have finished the activity on the next page, come up with a common list of five things or people that make you feel welcome. The more we feel like we belong, the more real the Church becomes to us!

Building a Church of Belonging and Welcome

Below is a survey, a way for you to measure the way you feel about something. Check the answers that are right for you. (Please remember that a survey is *not* a test. There are no wrong answers!)

1) I feel welcome at my church

___ always

___ sometimes

___ never

2.) Someone greets me at the front door of our church

___ always

___ sometimes

___ never

3) People extend the Sign of Peace to one another

___ with smiles

___ with straight faces

___ with frowns

4) After Mass at my church

___ people race to their cars

___ some people stay and talk

___ we often have coffee and donuts or some other treat



What did this survey tell you about how welcoming your church is? How can you help your church become more welcoming?

Can you name at least five ways (people, events or things said to you) that make you feel welcomed at your church?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

What We Know About God



1

Prepare a small notebook by writing on it “What we know about God.” Then use it as a scrapbook, a place to save pictures, articles, stories, jokes—whatever.

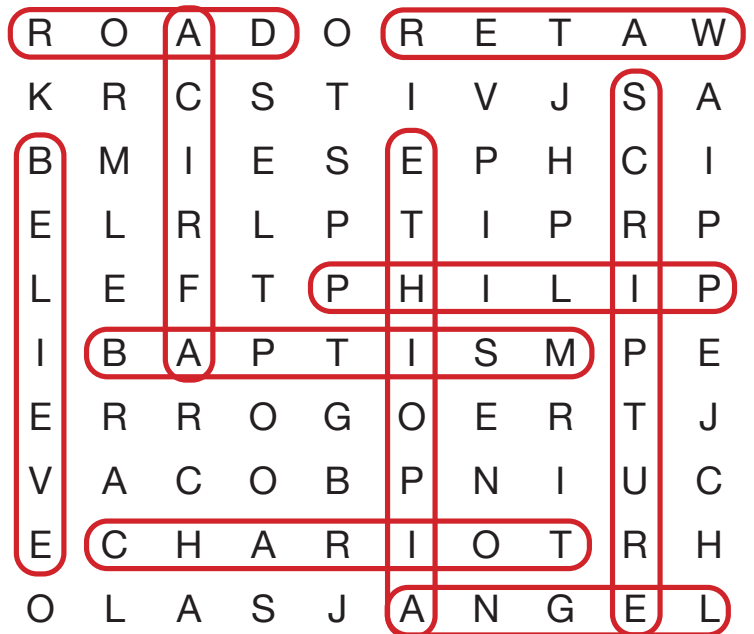
Add to your memories of God anytime you recognize them.

Closing Ritual

2

Read together the very same passage from the prophet Isaiah that the Ethiopian was reading, Isaiah 43:1-7, in your Bible. What promise do you hear in this reading? End with the Our Father.

Answer to activity on page 5



The Maiden Who Finally Found a Home



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha's life is known through a combination of journals written by Jesuit missionaries and stories told and retold by admirers. She blended the Native American ways of her people with the Christian teaching of the Blackrobes (Jesuits). Kateri Tekakwitha was a young woman of strength, faith, and courage. She overcame much adversity to belong to the Christian family.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Who makes you feel safe and "at home"? Why? Where is your true home? Why?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long time ago, a young girl was a member of the Algonquin nation, Native Americans from Quebec. She was captured by a band of warriors from the Mohawk tribe. She was going to become a slave. Instead, one of the young warriors, a chief, fell in love with her and took her as his wife. This young Algonquin woman had been baptized and raised as a Catholic while still in Canada. She continued to live as a follower of Jesus in her new home, a village in the state of New York.

The woman had two children, a son and a daughter. She wanted to have them baptized as well, but could not. Maybe her husband did not want the children to become Catholic. The Mohawks had their own beliefs and practices, and the Christian way often contradicted them. As a chief, it was his responsibility to lead his people, both in peace and in war. He would have wanted to defend the ways of his nation, and the Mohawks were very powerful and proud.

One sad year a terrible plague struck the Mohawk village. This disease, smallpox, caused many deaths. The chief died, and his wife and children became ill soon after. Only the four year-old daughter survived the sickness. She did so with scars on her face and limited eyesight. Her appearance kept her in the shadows of her village. And since strong daylight hurt her eyes, she often walked holding her arms out in front of herself. Her name became Tekakwitha, which means “one who advances and who casts something before her.”

Tekakwitha was adopted by her uncle, another chieftain. Her uncle had no children, so Tekakwitha soon proved herself to be valuable. “I will take care of getting the wood for tonight’s dinner,” she would often suggest to her aunt. Then off she would go into the woods to gather the firewood and stones for cooking. Tekakwitha loved these times by herself. She would work and think and enjoy the silence of the forest.

One day, some missionaries came to the village. These men were priests and members of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. The Mohawks welcomed them with great hospitality. They stayed with Tekakwitha’s family while trying to rebuild a mission that had been destroyed in a war years before.

Tekakwitha served them with the same dignity and quietness that she showed her own family. She watched them as they prayed together and as they taught the members of the tribe who were already baptized. “How long are you staying?” she asked them.

“Only three days this visit,” one of the priests responded. “We have much to do to begin rebuilding the mission.”

Tekakwitha already knew what she really wanted to ask. She wanted to be baptized and to become one of the Christians in her tribe. But three days would not be long enough for her to be taught and prepared. So she patiently continued to serve her family and longed for the day when she could learn more about this Jesus.

The next set of missionaries came and left. Still another set of missionaries came and left, but Tekakwitha never asked to be baptized.

Her uncle, the chief, did not like or trust the Christians. “They take our young away from us to other lands. They make them forget the ways of our people,” he reminded Tekakwitha.

Something inside of Tekakwitha wanted to be both a good member of her tribe and a member of the Catholic mission. She believed that God wanted her to live in both worlds and serve all people. So, even though she was afraid of her uncle, she watched for a chance to speak to one of the priests.

One Jesuit, Father Jacques, loved the Mohawk people. He spoke their language fluently and lived among them for many years. He often passed by Tekakwitha’s cabin, but was never invited in.

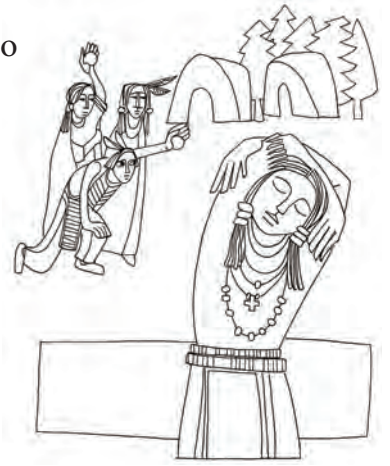
Father Jacques also knew how the chief felt about the Christians. Yet one afternoon, the missionary walked by the chief’s cabin and then paused. “It looks like no one is home, but perhaps I will try to stop by anyway.” Father Jacques wasn’t sure why he wanted to go back. When he did get to the cabin, however, Tekakwitha was home. She had injured her foot and was unable to work with her uncle and aunts that day.

For Tekakwitha, this was the answer to her prayers. She greeted the priest warmly and opened her heart to him. “I have for so long listened to you and other Christians speak about your faith. I have tried to live a good life as part of my family and my nation. I now want also to live as a part of your family and nation, the followers of Jesus.”

Father Jacques was impressed by Tekakwitha’s intelligence and passion. He agreed to instruct her. A year later, on Easter Sunday, he baptized Tekakwitha. Her Christian name was Catherine, Kateri in her language. She was twenty years old when her dream finally came true.

Not everyone felt as Kateri did. Not everyone thought she could be both Mohawk and Catholic. Some members of her tribe tried to change her mind. Her uncle and her aunts threatened and pleaded with her. One young warrior, furious because Kateri did not marry as most young women did, came to her while she was sewing beads. “Christian,” he shouted at her with a war hatchet in his hand, “turn away from your beliefs or die.”

Kateri sat calmly sewing. Her people had always valued courage and dignity. She would accept even death rather than betray either the Mohawk or the



Christian ways. Her attacker was so startled by her strength that he left her and never bothered her again.

Kateri eventually had to leave her tribe because the priests feared for her life. Two men helped her slip away and escape to Canada, where her mother had been baptized. There she joined a community of Catholic Native Americans. She still had moments of suffering and struggle, but she also found the family she so desired. Kateri was a wonderful addition to this community. Her tribal dignity and her Christian faith blended together in service to God. But her health, never very good, failed her. She died there, in the midst of her friends, when she was only twenty-four years old.

In these four years between her baptism and her death, Kateri touched many lives. She prayed constantly and never complained of her own pain. She reached out with love even when others hated and abused her.

Kateri Tekakwitha showed us that God loves all people, all cultures. Baptism in Jesus joins us with each other as well as with God.

The desire to belong is very strong in us. We want to know we are loved and we want to love others. When the Spirit is with us, we truly belong. In this Spirit, we are able to build communities of respect, patience and courage.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. Why was it so hard for Kateri to be baptized?
3. Have you ever wanted something as much as Kateri wanted to belong to the Christian family? What happened?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page (the answers are on page 8). Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: Belonging to a faith community gives us support and strength.

If, as we've already discussed, it is risky to talk about God, then it is even more scary to do what God wants us to do. But the Spirit makes sure we are never alone. Belonging to God and to the Church means we *have* a home and *are* a home for others, just like Kateri. There is challenge in following Jesus' Spirit, but there is safety and assurance as well.

A Short but Rich Life

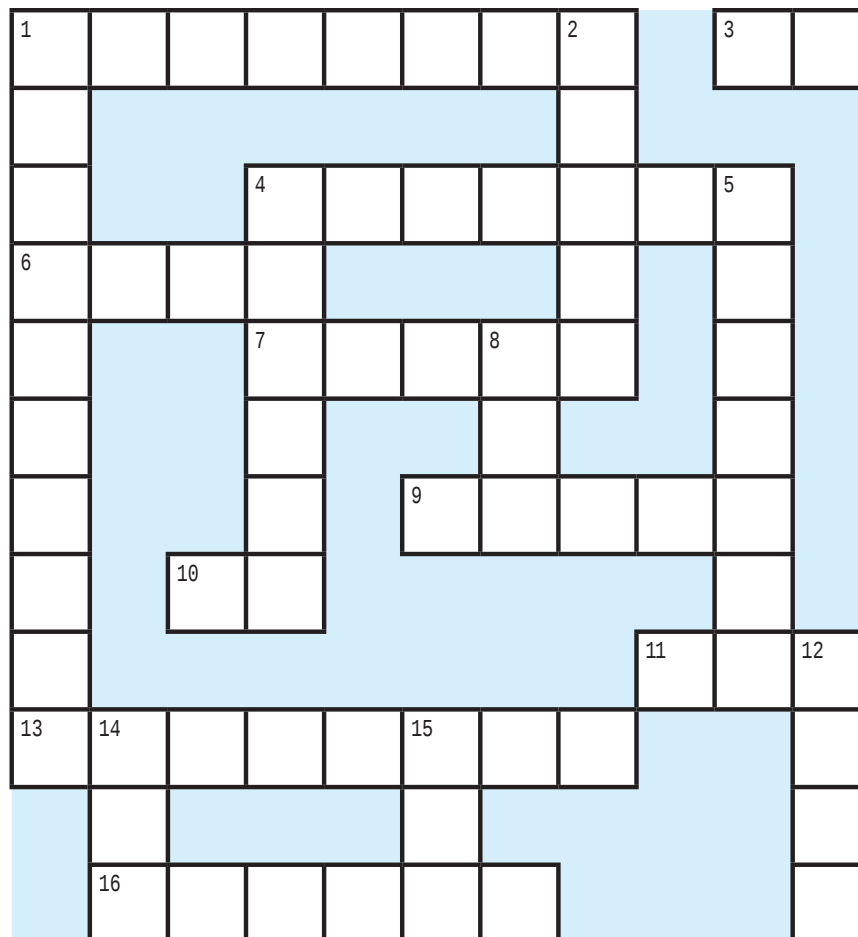
Kateri did not live long, but we still remember her today. She lived a life of great love for the Spirit. The crossword puzzle below has many words from her life. See how many you remember from your reading!

ACROSS

1. Kateri Tekakwitha wanted very much to be ____
3. Short for New York
4. Father ____ baptized Kateri.
6. The missionaries ____ and left too quickly to baptize Kateri at first.
7. Kateri was left with many ____ after her illness.
9. Her ____ was the chief.
10. Kateri wanted to feel ____ home somewhere.
11. What we use to see
13. The disease that killed Kateri's family
16. Kateri's tribe

DOWN

1. What the Mohawks called the missionaries
2. Musical instruments
4. A member of the Society of Jesus
5. An organized body of people
(Hint: look at #4 down.)
8. To move quickly
12. A popular breakfast food
14. The member of Kateri's family who was Catholic
15. Seat in a church



Welcome Home!

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

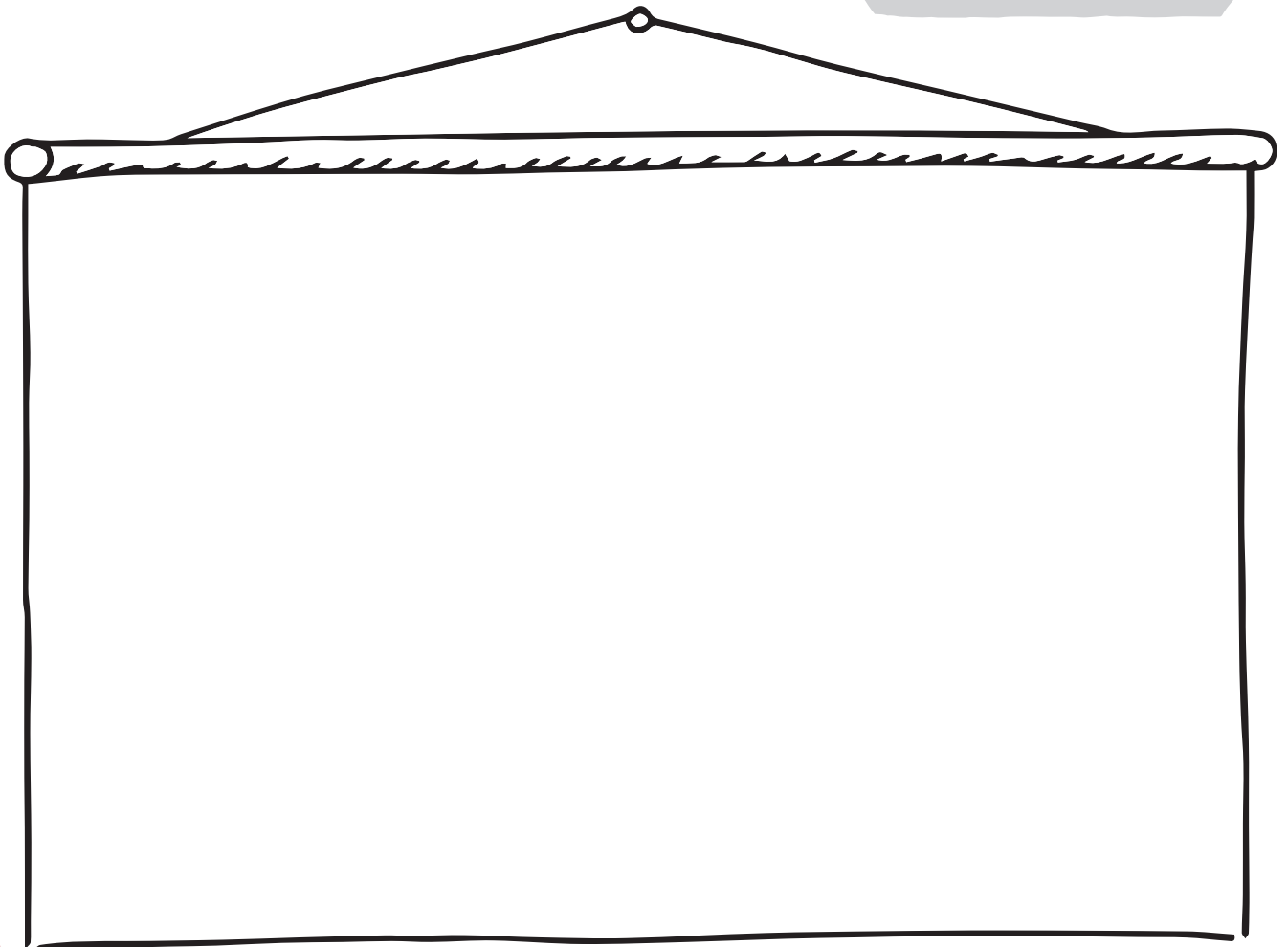
Just for you: Some churches have a “Homecoming” or “Welcome” Sunday. This is a time when parishioners who have moved away, left the church for a time, and those still seeking a Church family are warmly invited to attend.

Pretend your church is having a “Welcome” Sunday and you are in charge of designing a banner for the front door. Consider how you would answer the questions below.

3

- What is especially good (unique, valuable) about your church?
- How do the people in your church make others feel welcome?
- Why is it important for us as Christians to be a welcoming community?

Once your child has completed the activity, design your banner together. Remember, a banner has only a few words on it and uses color and design to catch the eye.



Finally Finding a Home

Kateri Tekakwitha struggled with wanting to belong and to feel at home. Eventually she found a place where she was welcomed.

Think about some words and actions that make people feel welcome. Then place these words or actions in the puzzle below, using one of the letters in the word WELCOME in each phrase. The letters may be used at the beginning, middle or end of the phrase. (For example, “ho**W** are you?” or “s**M**ile.”)

_____	ho W	are you?	_____
_____	E		_____
_____	L		_____
_____	C		_____
_____	O		_____
_____	s M ile		_____
_____	E		_____

_____	W	_____
_____	E	_____
_____	L	_____
_____	C	_____
_____	O	_____
_____	M	_____
_____	E	_____

Keeping Others Safe



1

Our society tries in many ways to keep us safe. Visit a fire station, a police department or a hospital. Talk to someone who works there about how they help others and support their colleagues at the same time.

Closing Ritual

2

Native Americans teach us much about belonging. Tribal ties are unbreakable and constant, a family of unconditional love. All creation is united in importance, all life is respected. In prayer now, ask St. Kateri Tekakwitha to help you take care of our world and all life upon it.

Answer to activity on page 5



Spirit of Prayer

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

Prayer is a very important dimension of living as a Christian. Prayer is both private and communal. Within these two broad categories are a great variety of options. Prayer is our response to God's love in our lives. The communal prayer central to our Catholic beliefs is the sacrament we call the Eucharist.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: There's no right or wrong place to pray. In fact, you can pray anytime, anywhere! Is there someplace where it's easier for you to pray? Why? Is there somewhere where it's harder for you to pray? Why?



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

How do you know someone is your friend? There are lots of ways to know, aren't there? A friend will smile at you when you meet, and a friend says good things about you to others. But one of the most important ways we know when we have a friend is also the most obvious: A friend wants to spend time with you.

The love God has for us is very special because God is always “spending time” with us. There is never a moment when we are not in God’s life. This sharing of God’s life, which we often call “grace,” is a gift to us. It’s a gift without any strings; that is, God gives grace freely.

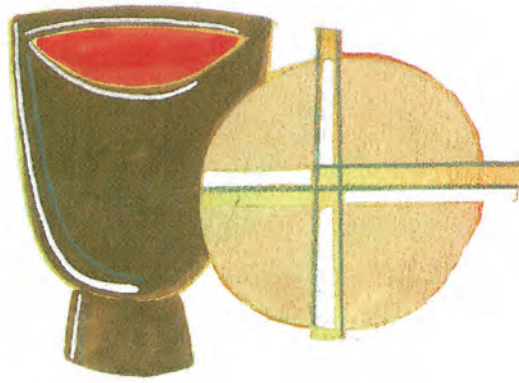
How then do we show we are grateful for this gift? How does God know that we, too, want to spend time together, that we want to be true friends?

We spend time with God when we pray.

Praying is our response to God’s love. Sometimes we thank God for all we have received. Other times we have problems or concerns, so we ask God for help. Prayer can grow so strong in us that we can’t help but talk to God and praise God for all that is. And sometimes we know we are lost, that we have gone wrong or done evil, and then our prayer rises from an aching heart that whispers, “I’m so sorry.”

Praying can be lots of different things. We can pray alone in our room or outside on a walk. We can use formal prayers that someone else has written or we can use our own words. We can even say nothing at all; we can just listen.

We can pray together with others. There are lots of times when we pray with our family, our classmates, our Church. The most special of these



community prayers is Eucharist. Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments. We celebrate the Eucharist in memory of Jesus. During the Eucharist, at the hands of the priest, Jesus forever offers his sacrifice to God the Father for us. The priest takes bread and wine, just as Jesus did with his disciples, and asks God's Spirit to come and make them into the Body and Blood of Jesus. By coming forward to receive Communion, we can become part of the Body of Jesus.

This prayer is so important that we gather every week to celebrate it together. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is a pleasing sacrifice to God and our food for life in Jesus.

Prayer is important and there are many ways to pray. Do you have a favorite way to spend time with God? Ask the Holy Spirit to be your helper each time you pray. You may be surprised at how happy God is to be your true friend.



2

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. Out of all the different ways of praying described here, which do you like the best? Why?
2. Do you ever pray on your own? When?

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page. They should start by reading the description in the palm of the hand, then have them read each numbered step in order. Then read your next step below.

2

Just for you: The Sacrament of the Eucharist nourishes our relationship with God. There are many different ways to spend time with God in prayer.

There are many ways to pray, but all of them require intention and awareness. We choose to spend time with God. Learning formal prayers helps us pray with others and to pray when our own words fail us.

Spontaneous prayer, aloud or silent, can open our deepest needs to God's care. Praying in community, especially at the Sunday Eucharist, helps us remember that we are part of a family and can help carry us through times of doubt or confusion. Whatever the type, prayer places us firmly in God's presence.

Five-Finger Prayer

4

Our ring finger is our weakest finger. Pray for **those who need the most help**, such as those who are sick, poor, or vulnerable. Write down some people you want to pray for.

5

On your smallest finger, pray for **your own needs**, especially for growth of your mind, body, and spirit. Write down something you want to ask God for below.

3

Our tall finger reminds us to pray for **leaders and people in authority**, such as political leaders, government workers, and police. Write down some leaders below.

2

Using your pointer finger, pray for **people who point the way**, such as teachers, church leaders, and other role models. Thank God that these people can guide us. Write the names of one or more people on the pointer finger.

1

Your thumb is closest to you. Pray for **people who are close to you**, like your friends and family. Also thank God that they are in your life. Write names of one or more people close to you on the thumb above.

*One way to pray is to ask God for help. This form of prayer is called **petition**.*

The Five-Finger prayer is an easy way to make this kind of prayer. Touch each finger as you pray, using them to remind you of who to pray for.

Jesus as Our Model of Prayer

1

In Scripture we see that Jesus prayed in many different ways. Look up the Scripture readings on the next page to see some examples.

2

On the next page, list the ways you notice Jesus praying in the left column. In the right column list the ways you can use Jesus as a model for your own prayer.

Jesus prayed by

We can do this by

Matthew 3:13-17

Matthew 6:5-15

Matthew 14:22-24

Mark 1:35-37

Mark 6:41-44

Luke 4:14-21

Luke 22:39-46

Luke 22:34

Your Prayer Notebook

1

Many prayer books and spiritual resources are available in libraries and bookstores. Start a small notebook with your favorite prayers in it. Ask for a tour of your church so you can see up close the building where the community gathers.



Closing Ritual

2

Eucharist uses the important symbols of bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Christ. Place some snack to share between you. Then say whatever form of grace before meals you wish. As you eat, talk about how Jesus ate with his friends, too. Close with the doxology, on the right.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, forever and ever.
Amen.



The Church at Home



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

Nympha and the Church in her house are mentioned in Colossians 4:15. There is evidence that the early gatherings of the followers of Christ were held in what we call “house churches.” Those who had homes large enough would host these celebrations.

This story is a fictionalized account of what one of these early Eucharists might have been like.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: What was the best party you ever attended? What made it so?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

A long time ago, people began to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed that God had kept the promise of the covenant with the Hebrews, the chosen people of God. Christian Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) would gather together to pray and to break bread as Jesus had told them.

They would meet in someone's house to share the stories and the food. The head of this house would lead the prayers. Everyone would bring something to eat and to share with others. A traveling preacher would tell them about Jesus. Then they would break the bread and pass the wine as Jesus had done.

This is a story about Nympha. Nympha is one of the women mentioned by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Colossians. We don't know much about these early churches in homes (or "house churches"), but we do know that this is where our Church today began.

Nympha busied herself looking over the room they would use. There were couches against each wall, but surely not enough for all who might be coming.

"Come here," she called to her servant. "Take out these two tables, then people may sit on the floor if they wish."

"Yes, ma'am," the boy answered. He worked happily because he, too, was coming to the celebration this evening. Nympha took Paul's words very seriously, that in Christ there was no difference between being a slave or being free. The boy looked forward to being with the other Christians.

Even though hers was one of the largest houses in Laodicea, the crowd seemed to be growing too large to be comfortable. "Well," she thought to herself, "they may always spread out into some of the smaller rooms if they wish."

Nympha reached into her pocket and removed the latest letter from Paul. She read it again to be sure to catch every word. Paul had come and spent time with this community when they first began meeting together. They owed much to his teaching and preaching. She was grateful for his prayers and encouragement.

As she was thinking, Archippus arrived. He also had a celebration planned for this evening in his home. Nympha was glad to see her brother in the Lord, and greeted him. "Peace of our Lord be with you."



He embraced her as warmly as she did him. “Grace to you, and peace from our Lord.” He looked around her room with admiration. “Again you help to build our community with your kindness, Nympha. How lovely you have made this room.” She had to accept his compliments with quiet pride. Her room was indeed striking. She was always concerned about creating a feeling of welcome. Nympha knew that Archippus would be no different. “I’m sure you, too, have had a busy day.”

He laughed and lowered his head. “Yes, but a good one. I hear you have a new letter from Paul.”

“Oh yes, I am reading it now. I will send it over to you as soon as we have finished.”

“Good, good, my thanks. Our preacher for this evening is resting. He has traveled far, but I think the Lord has sent him to the right place. We need to hear his message of God’s love and generosity.”

Nympha frowned slightly as she remembered the last gathering. Some of those who had brought the most food were unwilling to share with those who had brought less. Some of those baptized by Paul were claiming to be “better” than those baptized by other disciples. “You are very right, Archippus. We are in need of reminders that rich or poor, Greek or Hebrew, we are all followers of the Way of Christ.”

Shortly after Archippus left, Nympha returned to her preparations. She checked on the bread baking in her ovens. She polished the great cup they would use in tonight’s prayer. Then she retired to pray alone for a while.

As people began to arrive, they shouted each other’s names. They caught up on the week’s events and watched to make sure that everyone had enough to eat. Nympha and her family walked through the crowds. They were especially aware of any who seemed to be quarreling and tried to make peace before the meal began.

Eventually the time came for reading Paul’s letter. Nympha read aloud, “As people God has chosen and loved, you should put on certain good habits, like being kind and caring about others. If you are hurt, forgive the one who hurts you. The Lord has forgiven you, remember, so you, too, must be forgiving. Above all else, put on love, because this is what makes all the other virtues possible.”

The preacher waited patiently for his turn to address the community. When he stood, he spoke with words so moving that some cried. He reminded them how Jesus loved them all and sent the Spirit to be with them. “This bread and wine we share tonight is sign of what Jesus



asked of us,” he reminded them. “We remember our Lord each time we gather together to break this bread ”

“Yes, Lord,” Nympha thought quietly to herself as they passed the bread among them, “this is noisy and crowded and not perfect. But it is yours, and we are yours, and we thank you for your Body and Blood.” She smiled at the people around her.

Whether we meet in church buildings or homes now, we are still one family. This is one of the gifts the Spirit gives us. Another important gift is our prayer together. Our most special prayer is the Eucharist. Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” When Jesus left us with his Spirit, he also left us with bread and wine to become his Body and Blood. Receiving the Body of Christ at Communion, we remember that we are the Body of Christ in this world. For such a wonderful gift, we need to always give thanks.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. If you were Nympha, what would you want to do to get ready?
3. Can you think of ways to make your meals with family or friends into times when you also remember the Body of Christ? How?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. (The answers are D, E, B, H, I, C, F, A, G.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: The most special time we gather with others to pray is the Sunday Eucharist.

In the Gospels, Jesus commissioned Christians to “do this in remembrance of me.” The Sunday Eucharist can be traced back to these gospel times.

Eucharist is still the greatest source of grace and nourishment for our community. At every Mass Christ offers his sacrifice to the Father for our salvation. He gave his life in self-giving love for us, and we pray that we might also live lives of sacrifice. We receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and we reclaim our title as “the Body of Christ.”

What Do You Mean Mass Is a Celebration?

Think about it for a moment: What do you see happening at Mass?

There are two main parts of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And there are things that happen within these two that closely resemble other celebrations in our lives. While we approach Mass in a different way from other celebrations—prayerfully and reverently—this comparison can help us better understand what happens at the Eucharistic celebration.

See if you can match up the activities on the left with parts of the Mass most like them by putting the appropriate letters in the blanks:

- A. Eating the food
- B. Hearing all the family news
- C. Bringing food to share
- D. Being welcomed by the host
- E. Apologizing to anyone there whom you have hurt
- F. Preparing the food to eat
- G. Relaxing afterward
(and thanking the hosts)
- H. Getting some good advice from a friend
- I. Worrying about those who are not there, or remembering them with affection

Introductory Rites

- ___ Greeting by priest/presider
- ___ Penitential Rite
(e.g. “Lord, Have Mercy”)

Liturgy of the Word

- ___ Readings and Gospel
- ___ Homily
- ___ Prayer of the Faithful
(General Intercessions)

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- ___ Preparation of Gifts (Offertory)
- ___ Eucharistic Prayer
- ___ Communion
- ___ Prayer After Communion



The Pleasure of Your Company is Requested

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

Read the text below to yourself to learn about the Mass.

3

Explain to your child that one way to think about the Mass is as a special celebration that Jesus gives for his friends. Work together to fill out the invitation below. Decorate the invitation in any way you like. When you finish, hang your invitation somewhere to remind you that the Mass is an ongoing celebration and all are welcome!

Just for you: Have you ever heard Mass called a celebration? While we approach Mass in a different way from other celebrations—prayerfully and reverently—the similarities can help us better understand what happens at the Eucharistic celebration.

Sunday Eucharist is divided into two main parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word, when we hear the readings and the homily, is not unlike that time period at any gathering when people catch up with each other. We hear the stories of our tradition, the Good News of Jesus, and applications to our lives.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is an even more obvious parallel. At some celebrations we bring gifts, while at Mass we prayerfully bring forward our offering of bread and wine, plus gifts for those in need. At Mass, the altar (“Eucharistic table”) is prepared. Bread and wine are consecrated by the priest during the Eucharistic Prayer to become the Body and Blood of Christ which are offered to God as a pleasing sacrifice. Finally, the Body and Blood of Christ are shared as Communion.

An Invitation

You are cordially invited to a special gathering of friends!

Who is invited:

When:

Where:

Why:

What you will bring:

RSVP

See you soon!
Love,
Jesus

Your Invitation to Jesus

With your adult partner, you will fill out an invitation from Jesus to Sunday Eucharist. Good manners, however, means we often invite to our celebration those who have invited us to theirs. So let's say you "owe" Jesus an invitation. The phrases below are to help you decide where and when and to what you would like to invite Jesus.

The place I'd most like to have a party is _____

The food I would serve is _____

The music I would play is _____

The decorations would be _____

The people I would invite (besides Jesus) are _____

The time of year I would have the celebration is _____

The time of day I would have it is _____

The reason I want Jesus to come is _____

Food for Thought

1

Discuss the upcoming or recent Sunday readings. Look for whatever “food for thought” you may find.

Make a plan to volunteer some time or somehow support a program in your community that feeds the poor.



Closing Ritual

2

Answer your invitation from Jesus to come and remember him at Mass by finishing this prayer:

“Thanks for inviting me, Jesus. I look forward to your celebration because....”



The Woman Who Laughed With God

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: What makes you laugh? Has there ever been a time when you “laughed with God” because you were so happy? What happened?

**1**

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Not so very long ago, there lived a little girl who was the joy of many peoples' lives. Her name was Bertha Bowman. Her father, Theo, was the only African American doctor in their town in Mississippi. He was a tireless worker and gave much to his community. Her mother, Mary Esther, was a teacher. Both of Bertha's parents were generous, loving people. Bertha must have been proud indeed to be the daughter of two such wonderful persons.

In Bertha's community, the "old folks" (as she called them) were respected and listened to. No one listened any better than Bertha. They taught her songs with words that would burn into her soul and music that lifted her heart. They told her their stories. Some were happy ones about families and friends and good times. Some were sad tales of their experiences with slavery and prejudice. The happy stories would send Bertha skipping or dancing home. The sad ones made her think long and hard about how sometimes people use skin color as a reason to hate those they don't know. Slavery was especially hard for Bertha to understand. How could one person "own" another? "Only God made us and only God owns us," she reasoned wisely.

It would have been easy for Bertha to learn to dislike and fear the white people who had done stupid and cruel things to her people. After all, some still continued to do such things. But that's not the message her parents and her elderly friends gave her. Later in her life, Bertha would tell others, "The old folks taught me how to face life and pain and even death."

When Bertha was ten years old, she went to a Catholic school. A group of women religious (sisters) taught there. They were called the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Here again she listened and learned. These sisters told her more stories about God and Jesus. Her spirit continued to sing and dance with the songs of her people and the words of these lessons. Bertha became a Catholic and, when she finished high school, she joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. She took a new name, Sister Thea, in honor of her father.

Sister Thea left the South and went to Wisconsin to study. The harsh winters were certainly different from what she was used to in Mississippi, but there was nothing cold about Sister Thea. She could warm up a room just by walking into it. Her sisters in the religious community knew that Sister Thea was a very talented woman. They

encouraged her to study even more. She went to Washington, D.C., and earned her Ph.D. in English literature. After this time, she returned to her home in Mississippi, where she taught elementary school. As usual, Sister Thea was as generous as her parents and grandparents had been.

Sister Thea was called by the Spirit to serve in a very special way. Often, we think there is only one way to be, one way to pray, one way to act. We want people to be just like us, and if they aren't, we ignore or reject them. Sister Thea didn't believe that God wanted us to be all the same. If so, why would God have made so much variety? She knew that no one person's way was better than another's. She used to say, "No matter who you are or what your background, always remember to be proud because you can say, 'I am a child of God. I am somebody.'" Sister Thea began to work with the Office of Intercultural Affairs and the Institute of Black Catholic Studies.

Some people teach with blackboards. Some teach with books. Sister Thea taught with these, yes, but she also wrote on peoples' hearts. She wrote a message of love and respect.

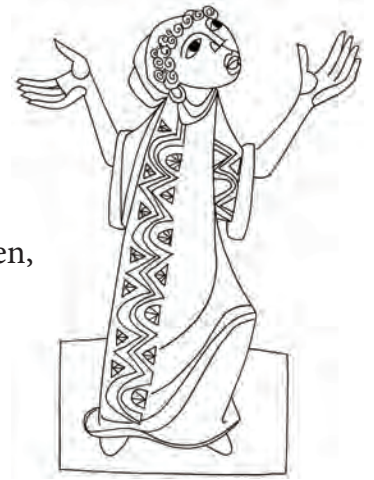
Sister Thea never forgot the stories and songs of the old folks or the traditions of African Americans. She wore the beautiful, colorful robes and turbans of various African nations. Whenever she got the chance, she would preach to people, all kinds of people. Even if they began quiet, they didn't stay quiet for long. Sister Thea would raise her head and sing out, and soon everyone would be singing and clapping with her. Joy is contagious. We "catch" it from each other!

People wondered where she got all her energy. Students were amazed at how happy she was. Everyone she met left her presence a little closer to Jesus. How was she able to do all this? Sister Thea laughed when people asked her. "Just go ahead and do it, whatever it is," she would say, "and leave it up to the Lord to decide. The old folks taught me a simple prayer, 'Use me, Lord, use me.' You can't go wrong if you're letting the Lord use you."

All of Sister Thea's life was this prayer. She was being used by the Lord when she taught or sang or spoke. The Lord used her to bring joy into fear, and love into prejudice.

In 1984 Sister Thea faced another great challenge. She found out she had cancer and that she would soon die from it. She certainly had her moments of sorrow and tears, but her laughter stayed as well. "Even when you are scared," Sister Thea told others, "you got to keep on steppin'." She had great pain with her illness, and eventually had to use a wheelchair to get around. Still, even if her legs weren't cooperating, her spirit danced forward.

Sister Thea continued to preach and teach all around the world. Thousands of



people got a chance to hear her in the last years of her life. She would be lifted up, wheelchair and all, onto a stage. “She looks so weak,” the members of her audience would think. Then she would start singing, talking, and laughing, and everyone would feel her power and strength. This was the power of the Spirit that was in Sister Thea and was Sister Thea.

She died on March 30, 1990, but her songs stayed with us. She has provided us with video and audiotapes of her presentations and music. She left behind smarter and kinder people, more likely to understand that there are many ways to pray and live as Catholics. Now she is in heaven singing and talking with the God she loves, the God she has laughed with since she was a young girl in Mississippi.

Differences in race or culture divide us if we shut our eyes to the gifts we have to offer each other. Sister Thea opened our eyes and our hearts. She enjoyed life and music, and that celebration became her unending prayer. The holy and unifying Spirit will do this for us as well. We, too, can make our whole lives into prayer.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you about the story? Why?
2. What does the story about Sister Thea teach YOU about how to live as a Catholic?
3. When do you do your best praying? Where? Alone or with others?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. (The words hidden in the picture are “I am God’s child.”) Then continue to read below.

3

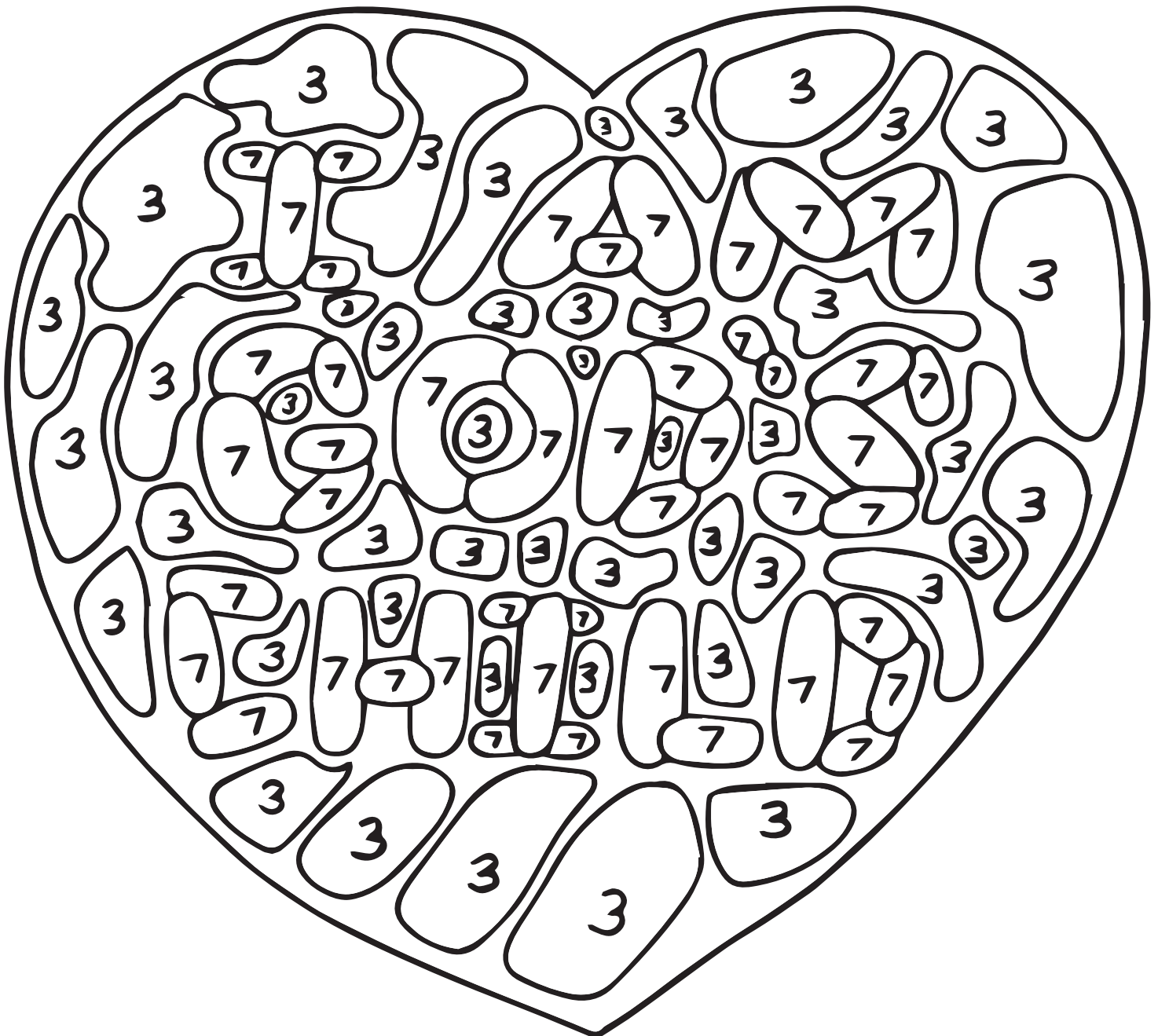
Just for you: When we pray individually, we bring back to God the rich diversity of creation.

If we limit ourselves to one way to pray, the way most common to our culture, we will lose opportunities to grow in our awareness at God. We are created as individuals who bring our own experiences, background, and stories to our prayers. The beauty of the Spirit of Jesus lies in our recognition of the diversity of humanity. There are many ways to pray!

Who We Are, Whose We Are

Sister Thea used to say “Always remember who you are and whose you are.” Using the color code below, fill in the spaces in the heart. Inside the heart is Sister Thea’s reminder of who and whose we are.

3 = red 7 = yellow



How Do You Pray?

1

Help your child get started on their activity on the next page, and then continue to the next step.

2

Just for you: There are many ways to pray, and we use them at different times. Sister Thea was very clear in her message to us: It is not important *how* we pray. It is important *that* we pray.

3

Please look at the list below (your young person has a similar list). How many of these “ways of prayer” have you tried?

1. Place a check mark by any of these you have tried.
2. Place a star by the ones you like best.
3. Place a question mark by the ones you would like to try.



- ___ Journaling (writing down your thoughts, prayers, or observations about how God is working in your life)
- ___ Experiencing God outside in nature
- ___ Sunday Mass
- ___ Weekday Mass
- ___ Talking with God
- ___ Saying the rosary
- ___ Sitting alone at home aware of God's presence
- ___ Singing a song about God
- ___ Reading the Bible
- ___ Listening to music that brings you closer to God
- ___ Offering up our actions as we help others or listen to them when they need a friend.
- ___ Other (please describe)

Many Ways to Pray

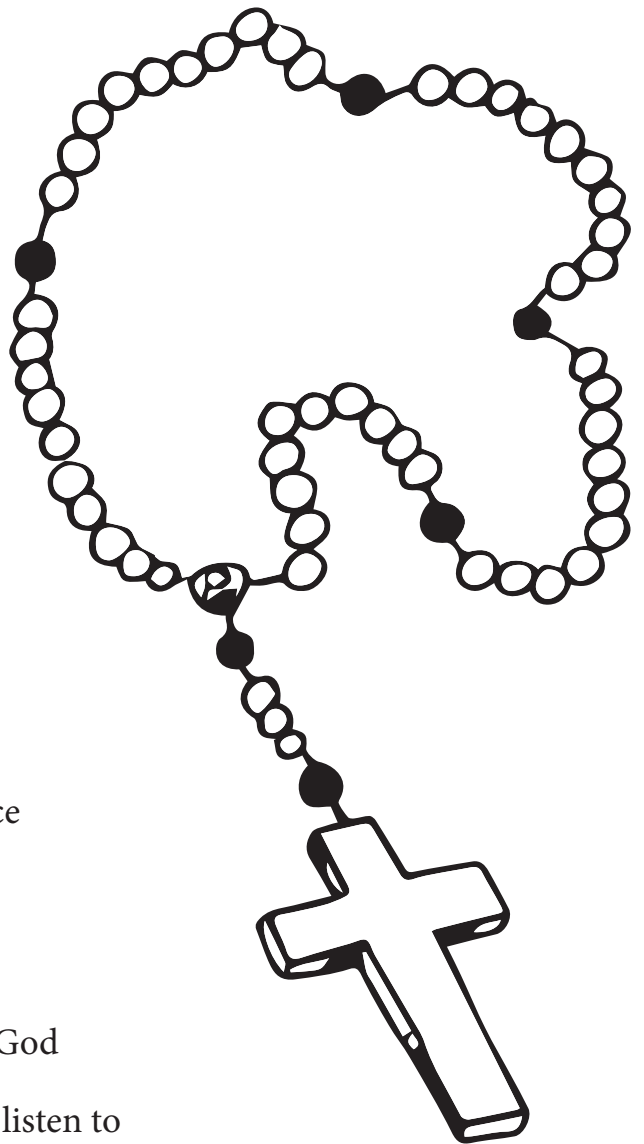
There are many ways to pray. Some may not even seem like praying, but they are. Read the list below.
(Your adult partner has the same list.)

X Put an X next to the ways you have prayed.

***** Place a star by the one you like best.

? Place a question mark by the ones you might like to try.

- ___ Journaling (writing down your thoughts, prayers, or observations about how God is working in your life)
- ___ Experiencing God outside in nature
- ___ Sunday Mass
- ___ Weekday Mass
- ___ Talking with God
- ___ Saying the rosary
- ___ Sitting alone at home aware of God's presence
- ___ Singing a song about God
- ___ Reading the Bible
- ___ Listening to music that brings you closer to God
- ___ Offering up our actions as we help others or listen to them when they need a friend.
- ___ Other (please describe)



Exploring Prayer

1

Talk with a variety of people about when they most like to pray and how they pray. This group could include your pastor, a pastor from another tradition, members of your family, your Church, or other faiths.

Go to the library and see if you can rent a DVD or borrow a prayer book from another faith tradition. How are we different? How are we alike?



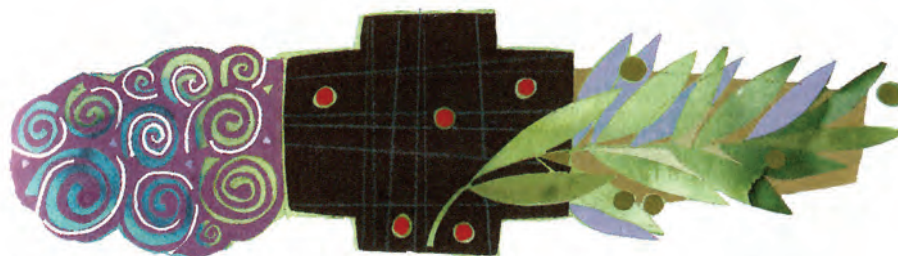
Closing Ritual

2

Think of a song you could both listen to and reflect upon together. Where is God in the lyrics of this music? Thank God for all our differences and for the rich diversity in our world!



Spirit of Forgiveness

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you had to say "I'm sorry"? When was the last time you were asked to forgive someone?

Along with "please" and "thank you," "I'm sorry" is one of the first things we learn to say as children. The ability to be forgiven and to forgive others is important to relationships and families. It is important to our relationship with God as well. We believe that God is always ready to forgive us when we ask.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an opportunity for us to recognize when we have hurt others, to confess our failings to a priest, and to receive God's forgiveness. Our sins result in broken relationships, especially between us and God and our neighbors. This sacrament helps us to receive God's grace and mend these gaps, lifting a weight from us in the process. We encourage you to take advantage of this gift, both for your own benefit and to serve as an example to your child.



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Mom! Sam just hit me” “She hit me first!”

Does this sound at all familiar? Whether this is an argument between brother and sister or between two friends, it certainly happens often enough that you must have heard it. Maybe you have even said such things.

When someone does something mean to us, we get angry. Then we usually do two things: We blame the person who hurt us and then we try to get even, to take revenge.

It’s normal to get hurt and angry. We need to tell people when they have done something wrong so they can learn not to do it again. But when we start trying to blame others or to get revenge, we are just making a bad thing even worse.

How can we, as people of the Spirit of Jesus, make a “bad thing” good? Jesus showed us how to be healers rather than hurters. We can forgive others and we can forgive ourselves. Why? Because God forgives us.

If that sounds too simple to you, it’s not. Forgiveness can be very hard. First we have to admit we have done something we shouldn’t. Whenever we go against what Jesus teaches us, we are wrong. If we know something is wrong but we do it anyway, then we have committed a sin. A sin is when we choose to do bad instead of good. (Jesus told us that there were two Great Commandments to remember. One is to love God with our whole heart, and the second is to love other people as much as we love ourselves.)

Then, after we know we did wrong, we have to say “I’m sorry.” We need to say that to anyone we hurt.

And finally, we need to make up with a person we have injured. We may need to replace a broken item or promise to never say that mean name again. We need to prove we have changed and that we won’t do the wrong thing again.

All this is worth it when we finally hear, “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.”

There is a sacrament in the Catholic Church that helps us when we sin by showing us that God is always ready to say “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.” It is called *Reconciliation*, which means “bringing together again.” There is a sacrament in the Catholic Church that helps us when we sin by showing us that God is always ready to say “That’s OK. You’re forgiven.” It is called Reconciliation, which means “bringing together again. As Catholics, we go to the sacrament of Reconciliation throughout our lives. During the celebration of this sacrament, we tell the priest our sins (confession) and that we are sorry for having sinned (contrition). He will tell us what we must do to show God we are sorry (penance). Then he gives us God’s forgiveness (absolution).

Sometimes we are the ones who need to do the forgiving. Jesus taught us about that, too. We are told to forgive those around us. Since love is the greatest commandment, how could we do anything less?

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive? Is there someone you should say “I’m sorry” to? Ask the Spirit of Jesus to give you the courage and love you need both to be forgiving and to be forgiven.



2

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. How do you feel when you have made a mistake that hurt someone? What if you have hurt someone on purpose? How do you make up to the person you have hurt?
2. Are there any people you have a hard time forgiving? Why? What would make it possible for you to forgive them?

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page.
Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: When we hurt others, we have to take active steps to make things right.

First we have to admit we have done something wrong. Then we have to apologize to those we hurt. Finally, we have to change our ways to avoid doing the same wrong again. If we are the ones receiving the apology, we need to risk forgiving that person. The two stories in this section both talk about how we ask for forgiveness and how we give forgiveness to others.

3

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the Church's celebration of God's mercy and forgiveness which helps us when we have done wrong:

- We prepare for the sacrament with an **examination of conscience**, to help us realize how we have failed.
- We **confess** our sins to a priest, and then **apologize** to God (and the rest of the Church).
- We commit to changing our ways, often with an **Act of Contrition**.
- The priest gives us a **penance** as a way to make amends for our sin.
- The priest gives us God's forgiveness through **absolution**.

If your child has received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, make sure they remember these steps and encourage them to receive the sacrament again soon.

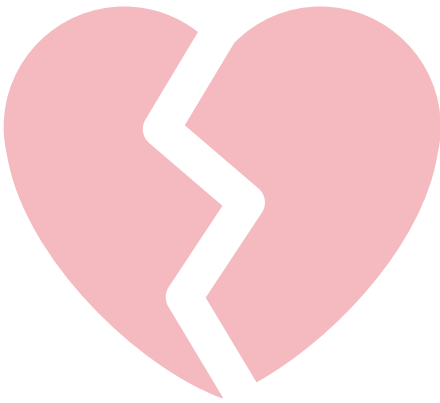
Broken Hearts

When we hurt others or others hurt us, it breaks our relationship with them. The person who was hurt may feel angry, scared, upset, or all three. Forgiveness and reconciliation are about healing our relationships to bring us back closer together.

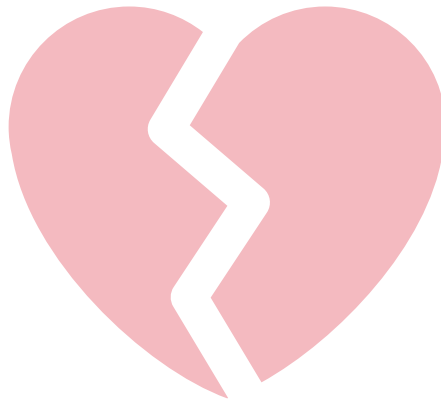
Briefly answer the questions below by writing on the hearts.



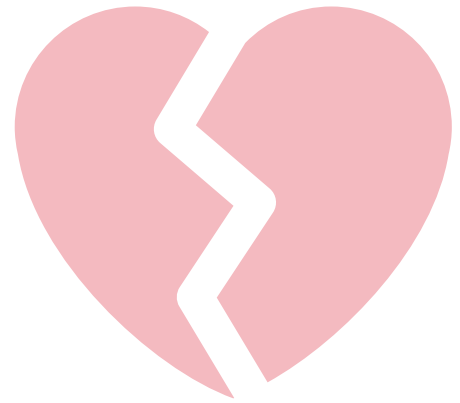
**Describe a time when
you hurt a family member
(accidentally or on purpose):**



**...when you hurt a friend
or an acquaintance
(accidentally or on purpose):**



**...when you hurt a stranger
or someone you barely knew
(accidentally or on purpose):**



**Now describe a time when you
were hurt by a family member:**



**...when you were hurt by a friend
or acquaintance:**



**...when you were hurt by
a stranger or someone
you barely knew.**



Thinking back to all these examples, which is easier for you: to apologize for hurting someone else, or to forgive someone who has hurt you?

Circles of Hurt, Ripples of Sin

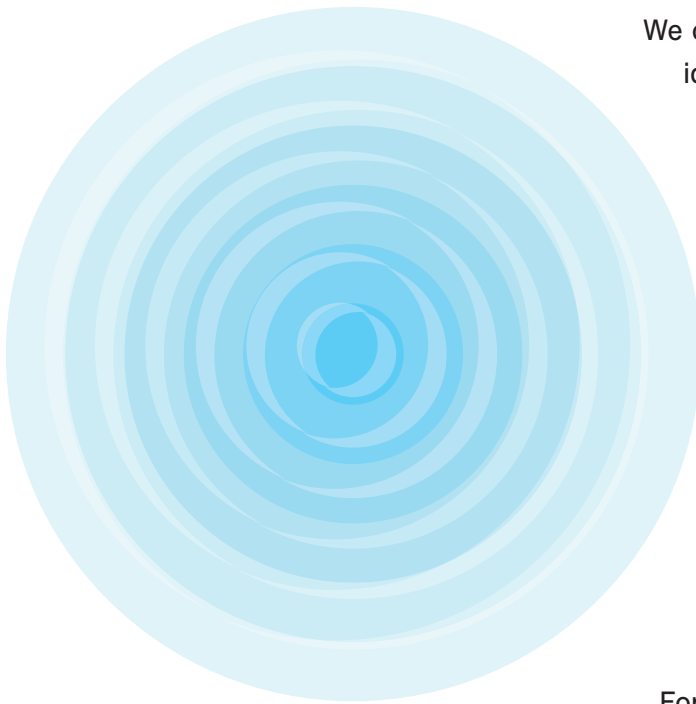
1

Work on this activity together with your child. Begin by reading the text below together.

2

On the next page are three circles, one for family and friends, one for our community and one for our world. List in each circle the hurts that happen, on purpose or unintentionally. (You'll notice at the end how each one can "ripple" into the other!)

Before we can talk about forgiveness, we have to recognize the reality of sin. We all make mistakes, and when we deliberately are selfish or hurt others, these mistakes become sin.

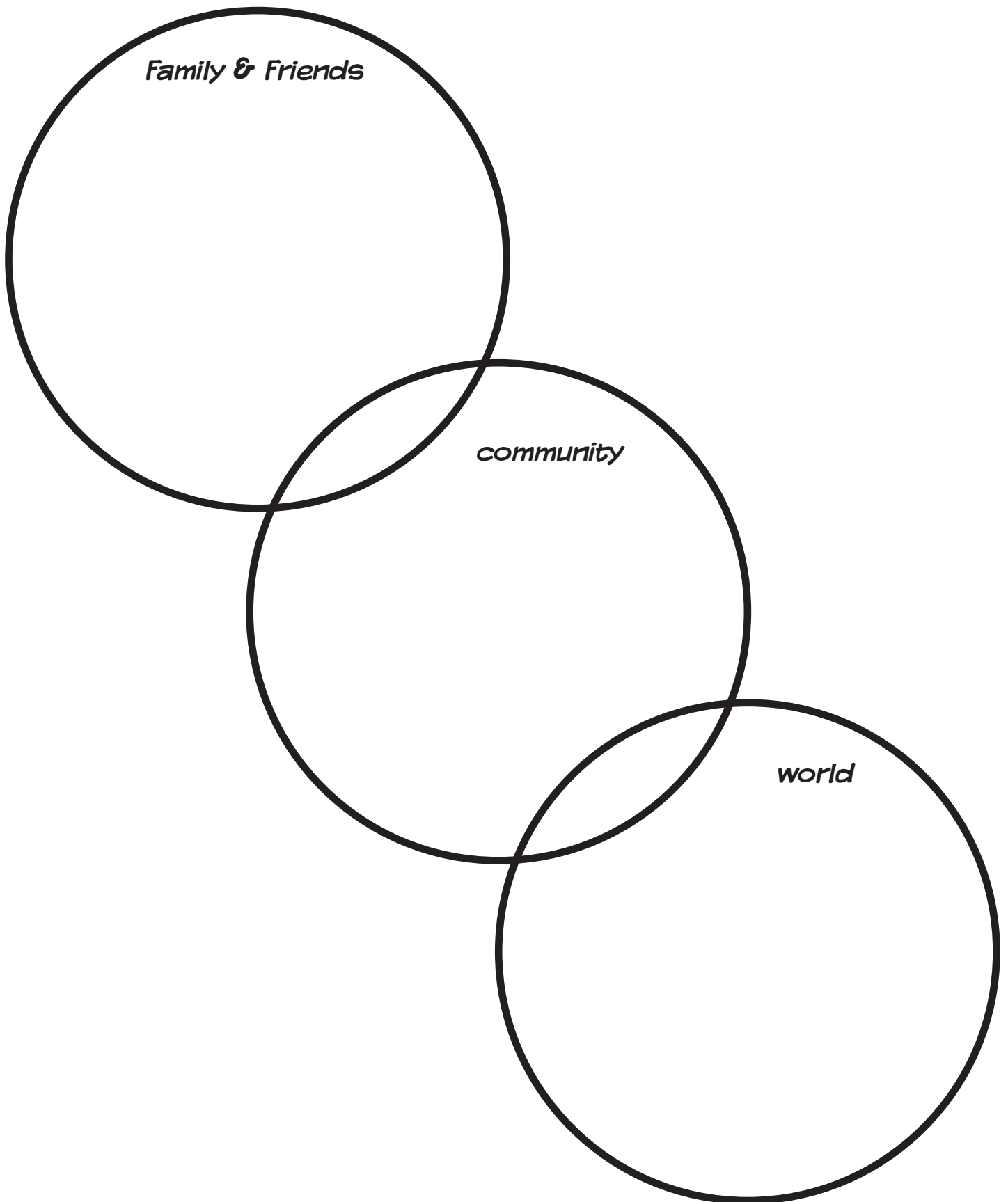


We call the time when we look at our lives to identify sinful actions an "examination of conscience." That means we examine, or look at closely, the inner voice and thoughts that tell us when we have done something wrong.

Hurtful things have a way of "rippling out" to others. We hurt someone in our family circle, and they may take their anger to work or school. Then they hurt someone there! So, just like a pebble dropped in a lake, one sin can spread out to hurt many, many other people.

It happens in the other direction as well!

For example, a government may cut funding for school breakfasts, so a particular school has to stop offering help to its children. Then a child in that school may go hungry all day because there is no food at home



Forgiveness

1

Many family-appropriate videos and movies deal with forgiveness. Find one you would like to see with your young person. (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Mighty Ducks*, *Field of Dreams*, and *Clara's Heart* are just a few.)

Also notice what your friends and family members do when they want to be forgiven. Do you have any personal rituals of reconciliation like a hug or a special phrase you say?



Closing Ritual

2

Say the closing prayer on the right together.

God of mercy,
we ask for your forgiveness.

Teach us how to forgive others.

We ask this through Jesus, in Jesus, and with Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever. Amen.



The Man Who Made Trouble



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

The story of Paul's conversion is in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The Saul we read about early in Acts is certainly different from the Paul of the later chapters or the Paul we know through his letters in the New Testament! The difference is Paul's acceptance of Jesus' loving forgiveness, even after he had imprisoned Jesus' followers.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When was the last time you knew you had a second chance, a chance to change and improve? What happened?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long, long time ago, a man named Saul hated the people who followed the new Way of Jesus, the Christians. He felt they were not following the Law of the Hebrews and he wanted them punished.

One day, a Christian named Stephen was arrested. He was taken before the council and the high priest. Though Stephen spoke the truth about Jesus, he was condemned to death. They stoned him, and Saul was there watching and approving of this killing.

After that event, Saul went from house to house in Jerusalem. Whenever he found Christians, he would drag them off to prison. No one was more feared than Saul.

Saul decided to go into other lands to arrest more Christians. He went to the high priest in Jerusalem with his plan. "I want you to write some letters for me. In these letters, you can explain to the Jewish leaders in Damascus who I am and what I am doing. Then I will have their support when I find any followers of the Way of Jesus. I will go find these traitors in Damascus and bring them back, bound and gagged, to Jerusalem. Here we can imprison and punish them."

With these letters in his pocket, Saul set off for Damascus. As he approached the city, Saul was surrounded by a bright, blinding light. He fell to the ground and tried to cover his eyes, but the light was too powerful. Then he heard a voice, "Saul, Saul, why do you hate me? Why do you punish me?"

Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (Saul called the voice "Lord" because he knew this light had to be from God, even if he did not yet understand what was happening to him.)

The voice answered, "I am Jesus, the one you so hate and fear. Get up now, Saul, and go into the city. You will be told what to do."

The people who had been traveling with Saul had heard the voice, too, but they saw nothing. They were speechless. "You must help me, I am blind," Saul said to them. Indeed, even though his eyes were wide open Saul could not see anything so the others took Saul by the hand and led him into Damascus.

Three days passed, and Saul remained blind. It was a very difficult time for Saul and he felt lonely and unsure.

Saul prayed and prayed for forgiveness. In his prayers one night he had a vision. A man would come to him and touch him and restore his sight. Saul hoped this would happen soon.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city, a disciple named Ananias was also having a difficult time. Jesus appeared to Ananias in a vision also and gave him very clear

instructions. “Get up, Ananias. You will go to Straight Street and find where Judas lives. [This was not the betrayer of Jesus, but a different man with the same name.] In Judas’ house is Saul of Tarsus. I’ve already told Saul you are coming and that you will place your hands on him and he will regain his eyesight.”

Ananias was not thrilled with this message. “Lord, you can’t be serious. Saul of Tarsus! I have heard about him and how cruel he is to us. He has done much evil in Jerusalem. And he is here in Damascus with letters giving him permission to catch and imprison us. All this he does because we are trying to be your followers. Now you tell me I am to go and cure him?”

The Lord answered Ananias, “Yes, I am telling you to go to Saul. He is to speak for me to the Gentiles and to kings and queens and even to his own people of Israel. I can use anyone for good. Now get going.”

Ananias got up and found the house of Judas. There, just as Jesus had told him, sat the now blind and humble Saul. Ananias spoke to him. “My brother Saul, I know Jesus appeared to you on your way here to Damascus. Jesus has appeared to me as well, and it was he who sent me here to you. I am here to lay my hands on you and then you will be able to see again. More than that, I will lay my hands on you and you will receive the Holy Spirit.” Then Ananias placed his hands on Saul’s head and shoulders.

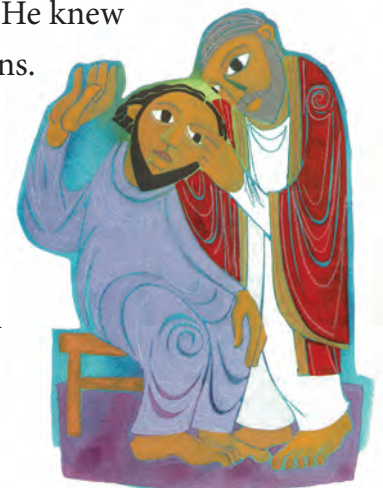
Saul’s eyes cleared as if something like the scales on a fish had been covering them and now fell away. More importantly, the heaviness of all the fury and violence he had held in his soul left him, too. He rose to his feet and asked to be baptized right then and there.

When he was well again, Saul went out to the people in Damascus and began to preach, “Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. I know and I believe.”

The people of Damascus could not believe their ears. “Isn’t this Saul who came to our city to arrest Christians?” one man asked.

But Saul (or Paul, as people began to call him) was patient and wise. He knew Jesus had forgiven him and he knew he must be forgiven by the Christians. He continued to teach in the synagogues (Jewish places of worship) and on the streets. He proved he was very sorry.

Paul went on to visit many lands and speak to many people, Jews and Gentiles both. He wrote letters to the communities of Christians he helped to start, and we have some of his letters today in our Christian Scriptures. Paul faced many sufferings, just as Jesus had warned, but he never stopped following the Way. The forgiven Paul became one of the best teachers and missionaries of the risen Christ.



The power of the Holy Spirit never leaves us. We can make mistakes or sin terribly, but Jesus is always ready to pardon us and heal us. Sin can make us blind, just like Paul, but forgiveness makes us see again. The Spirit with us can take any anger or hatred in our hearts and turn it into freedom and love.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. If you had been Ananias, what would you have thought about Paul? What would you have done? Why?
3. How do you think Paul felt when he knew he had been wrong to imprison the Christians? Pretend you are Paul. What would you say to the Christians? What would you say to the people in Jerusalem who sent you to capture the Christians?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. (The answers are 8, 1, 4, 7, 2, 3, 6, 5.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: Each of us sometimes does wrong and must ask for forgiveness.

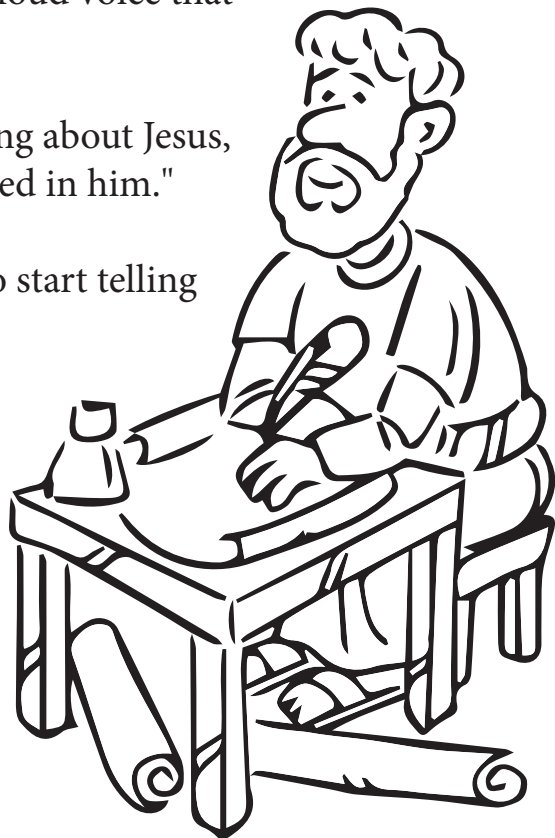
If Paul can change from an angry persecutor to a powerful preacher, think how much can happen through the power of the Spirit! We all get second chances; we all get to begin again. This is a wonderful and liberating truth of our faith. God will always forgive us our sins because God is always ready to love us. Sin blinds us, just as Paul was blind, but forgiveness makes us well. It is not without good reason that we recognize Reconciliation as a Sacrament of Healing.

A Message From Paul

Paul wrote many letters to the Christian communities he helped start. But what has happened here? It looks like Paul's pages became separated and are out of order.

Can you number the sentences to put them in the order in which they happened?

- ___ "Being blinded actually let me see what I couldn't see before, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah and Savior!"
- ___ "I stood and watched them stone Stephen, and I knew then that I wanted to see all the followers of Christ be punished."
- ___ "So I asked the voice in the brightness, who are you? And it answered 'Jesus.'"
- ___ "They actually had to lower me down the wall in a basket, that's how angry some in Damascus had become! But I got away."
- ___ "I went to Damascus determined to imprison as many followers of Jesus as I could before returning to Jerusalem."
- ___ "There was this incredibly bright light and loud voice that knocked me to the ground!"
- ___ "At first, they wondered why I was preaching about Jesus, I who had so persecuted those who believed in him."
- ___ "When I regained my sight, I knew I had to start telling everyone that Jesus is Lord."



Saying 'I'm Sorry' and Being Forgiveness

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to the next step.

2

If we never have the experience of being forgiven, how will we be able to forgive others? Answer the reflection questions below.

Reflection Questions

To prepare for the closing prayer service, look back at the circles of hurt from the last session. Using these "sins" as your guide, finish these sentences:

"I'm sorry _____."

"We need you God, to _____."

"I will never again _____."



Asking for Forgiveness

We learn how to forgive others by being forgiven ourselves. If we think we are too good to need forgiveness, we can begin to think too highly of ourselves and think that others are beneath us. If we think we are so bad we can never be forgiven, then we are denying our own goodness, which comes directly from God. None of us is perfect, but all of us belong to our forgiving God.

Reflection Questions

To prepare for the prayer service, look back at the circles of hurt from the last session. Using these "sins" as your guide, finish these sentences:

"I'm sorry; God, that I _____."

"I need your help, God, because _____."

"Something I will never again do is _____."

You may not know it, but you have just written a prayer. This kind of prayer is called an "Act of Sorrow" or an "Act of Contrition."

Here is an Act of Sorrow you can learn by heart and use if you wish:

O my God,
I am sorry for all my sins,
because they displease you,
who are worthy of all my love.
With your help, I will sin no more.
Amen.

Forgiveness and Second Chances

1

Visit whatever space is used for Reconciliation at your church, if it is accessible. Explain to your child how the process works and share your own experience of what it is like to be forgiven.

2

Talk about some of the programs in your community that offer people a second chance (such as halfway houses, hospitals, Twelve Step programs, soup kitchens). Visit one if possible, and talk to a volunteer there about forgiveness and second chances.

Closing Ritual

3

Be open to the reality that we can *all* experience forgiveness because our loving God is waiting for us to come home. Come together with your young person to share this prayer service.

Prayer of Reconciliation

Opening Prayer:

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Reading:

Mark 2:5-12

Response:

There are many stories of Jesus forgiving people when others don't think he should. But Jesus never hesitates to forgive people. Take a minute of silence to ask Jesus in your heart for forgiveness for something you did (or didn't do) that hurt someone.”

Prayer of Sorrow:

(*Adult leads; young person responds “Amen.”*)

“God of loving mercy,
we are not perfect people,
but we are trying to be your followers.

Help us to admit when we do wrong.
Lead us to reconcile with others.
Guide us to healing the world
with your justice and peace.

We ask all this through, with,
and in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.”

Sign of Peace:

Close by exchanging a sign of Christ's peace.



The Soldier Who Had No Enemies



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Did you ever have a very hard time forgiving someone else? How did it turn out? How do you feel about it now?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



When the twentieth century was new, a young boy named Rajmund (“Raymond” in English) Kolbe played with his four brothers in Poland. They were not wealthy, but they were happy. Their parents dyed beautiful colored cloth for clothes. This work did not earn them much money, but it kept everyone fed and warm.

When World War I ended, their village came under the rule of the Russians because Poland was divided among three other countries: Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Times were hard for the Polish people, but they kept their own traditions and faith.

Raymond was a very bright boy and did well in his studies. He shared his mother’s love for Mary, the mother of Jesus. Raymond knew that Mary also had to live simply under another nation’s control of her land. He admired how Mary stood by her son, Jesus, even until his death.

As Raymond grew, he knew he wanted to become a priest. He and his older brother Francis went to Austria to study with the Franciscan priests and brothers. Perhaps because he had seen so much of war and its effects on people, Raymond wanted to fight for freedom and justice. He even considered becoming a soldier. Instead he decided to be a “soldier of Mary,” fighting evil and teaching good. Raymond decided that having enemies was not the way to support the Plan or Reign of God.

As an ordained Franciscan priest, he took the name Maksymilian (Maximilian) Maria Kolbe. He continued to impress people with his intelligence and effort. When he returned to Poland, he and some of his Franciscan brothers began a writing and publishing company that grew and grew. A Polish prince even donated land to them. Soon they had formed a city called Niepokalanow (City of Mary). This center had over seven hundred brothers and workers.

Father Kolbe went to Japan and started another such program there. His health was not good, since he had caught tuberculosis when he was younger, but his spirit was strong and able. He learned much of the Japanese culture and loved the people he met there. In fact, Maximilian loved everyone and believed that there was good in all. “God’s Spirit is in all things and all people,” he often stated in many different ways.

When Maximilian returned to Poland he became the superior of his community. He continued living at Niepokalanow and writing his magazine, *The Knight of Mary Immaculate*. But the Nazis were now in charge of nearby Germany, and they soon invaded Poland. The Nazis took people away from their homes and families just because they were seen as different,

“undesirables.” Father Kolbe wrote against the Nazi ideas. He believed that just because some people were Jewish or Gypsy (traveling families) or somehow “different,” they were not less human.

Maximilian’s magazine angered the German leaders, and they arrested him. While he was in prison, he would often take care of other prisoners. He also was kind and loving to the German guards. He forgave them, for he believed they were children of the same God. When he was released from prison the first time, Father Kolbe even wrote to the mother of one of the guards to thank her for her son’s fair treatment of the prisoners.



Even though Maximilian did not hate those who were doing such evil, he did hate the sins they were committing. He knew that many of the Jews and others whom the Nazis had taken away were being killed. He heard stories of the concentration camps, awful prisons where people were killed in terrible ways. Father Kolbe did what he could to help fight against this, and he was arrested again for helping the Jews and the Polish people who were against the Nazis.

This time Maximilian was taken to one of the dreadful concentration camps, a place called Auschwitz. Now he had a new way to be a soldier of Mary. He secretly celebrated Mass with other Catholic prisoners. He heard their confessions, encouraging them to accept God’s forgiveness and to forgive the cruelty of others. He shared whatever he had with any of the other prisoners, no matter who they were.

In the end, he even shared his life. After one man had escaped from Auschwitz, the commander came to the cells where Father Kolbe and 600 other men were held. “Because of this one man, ten of you shall die. I will pick ten of you to be placed in a separate room and starved to death.” Then this commander walked heartlessly among the prisoners and pointed his finger at nine men. “Take him, and him, and him.” When he pointed at a tenth man, the man began to plead for his life.

“Please, commander, I have a wife. I have children. I do not want to leave them alone.”

At this, Maximilian left the line of men and approached the commander. “I want to ask you something, sir,” he said in German.

The cold guard turned and looked at the 57-year-old priest. He could have had him shot right then, but instead he answered, “What do you want?”

“I have no wife or children, and I am older than this man. I want to take his place in this punishment.”

“You? Who are you?” the commander snapped back.

“I am a Catholic priest,” Maximilian responded.

Many Polish priests and nuns, as well as Catholics in other work, had spoken and fought against the Nazis. The commander felt no problem with this substitution. “Request granted,” he grunted before turning quickly and walking away.

So it was that this soldier of Mary did die in battle, saving the life of another man, Franciszek Gajowniczek. This man told the tale of Father Kolbe after the war was over

and the Nazis had lost. Others also came forward to share their stories of Maximilian Kolbe, a man who forgave all his enemies and who loved all as brothers and sisters.

If forgiveness is possible in these drastic events, how much more are we asked to forgive the people who hurt us? Remember that in the Our Father we promise to forgive “those who trespass against us.” The Holy Spirit reminds us that God has forgiven us first, so we, too, must forgive others. If we have love in our hearts rather than hate, respect rather than revenge, we are building the Reign of God right now.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. Even though you probably haven't had the chance to offer your life for someone else's, when have you had a chance to show bravery?
3. When is it hard for you to forgive? How do you feel after you have forgiven someone?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: We are called by the Spirit of God to forgive others.

It is not easy to forgive. We are much more likely to try to strike back or hold grudges. Forgiveness requires that we let go of our hurt. Such Christian forgiveness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This type of love is heroic indeed.

Changing to Happy Endings

Can you suggest a new ending to either of these stories? How could forgiveness help these people?

Susie is very angry. She texted Judi to ask her to a movie, and Judi said she was sick.

However, when Susie showed up at the theater, there sat Judi with another girl, Rita! "I'm never going to ask her again," Susie thought angrily. But really, Susie was sad enough to cry. Just then, Judi turned around and saw Susie. Judi was too embarrassed to say anything. "I bet she'll never speak to me again," Judi worried.

For the last two weeks at school, neither of them has spoken to the other, and Susie is always making fun of Rita.

Levon and Darrell have known each other since kindergarten. Levon is the better athlete, but both of them have always enjoyed playing basketball. When they had try-outs for the team this year, Darrell was afraid he wouldn't make the team. He asked Levon to ask the coach to let Darrell play. "He needs your talent," Darrell told Levon, "Just tell him you'll quit if I don't make the team. Then he'll have to let me on!"

Levon felt that really wasn't the right thing to do, but he didn't know how to tell Darrell what he really thought. When the team list was posted without Darrell's name on it, he came to Levon shouting, "I thought you weren't going to play without me!" Levon just walked away quietly. "And I thought you were my real friend," Levon murmured to himself. Now both avoid each other.

The Freedom and Courage to Forgive

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

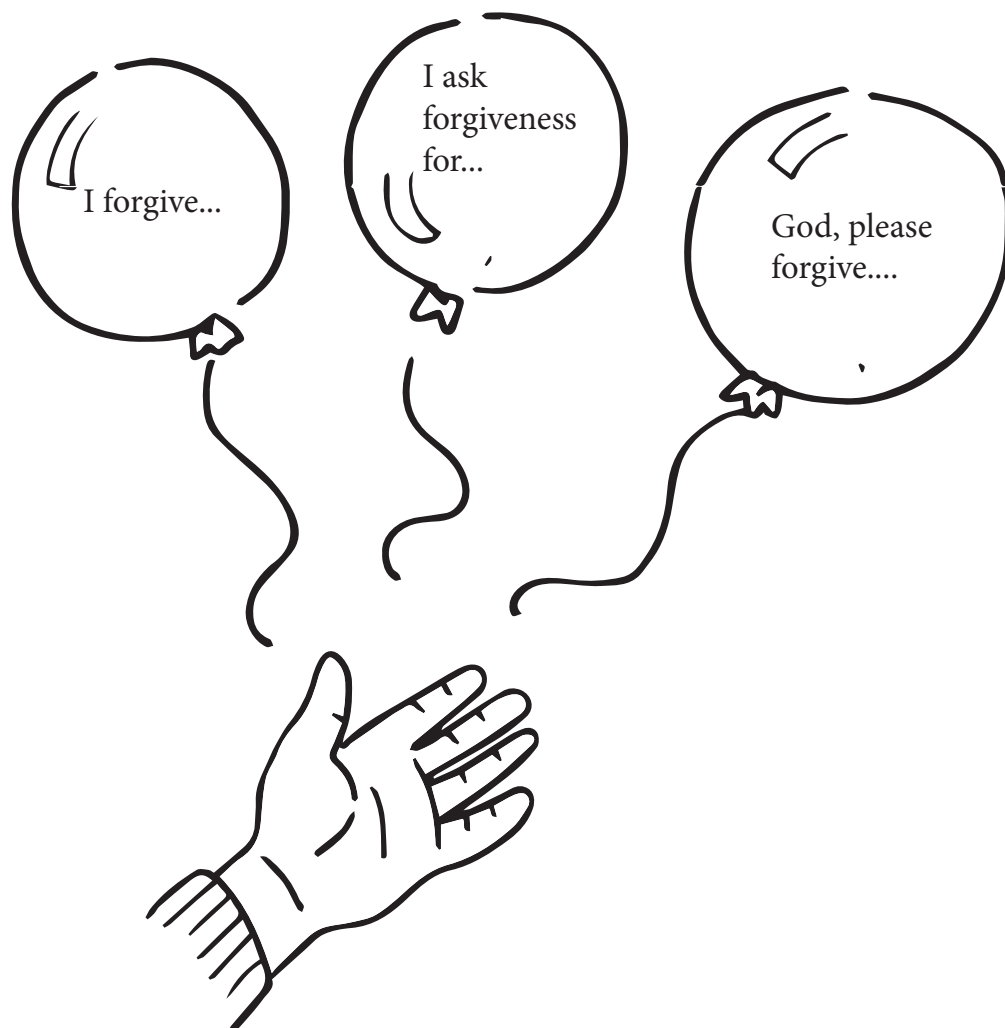
Go back to your circles of hurt one last time. Are there hurts or sins in one of those circles that are especially hard for you to forgive in yourself? In others? What are they? Why are these hard for you to forgive? Is it harder for you to forgive sin in yourself or in others? Why?

3

Follow the instructions below.

Just as the balloons in the drawing below are being released into the sky, so we, too, can ask God to help us release our anger, hurt or disappointment so we may truly forgive ourselves and others.

Take a separate piece of paper (you'll be ripping it up during the closing ritual) and write a letter to God. Ask God for the strength or gifts you need to be forgiving. It may also be helpful to tell God exactly what hurts you about this sin and how you feel about the one who hurt you. (God can take hearing our anger and pain. Remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane!) This letter will not be read by anyone else.

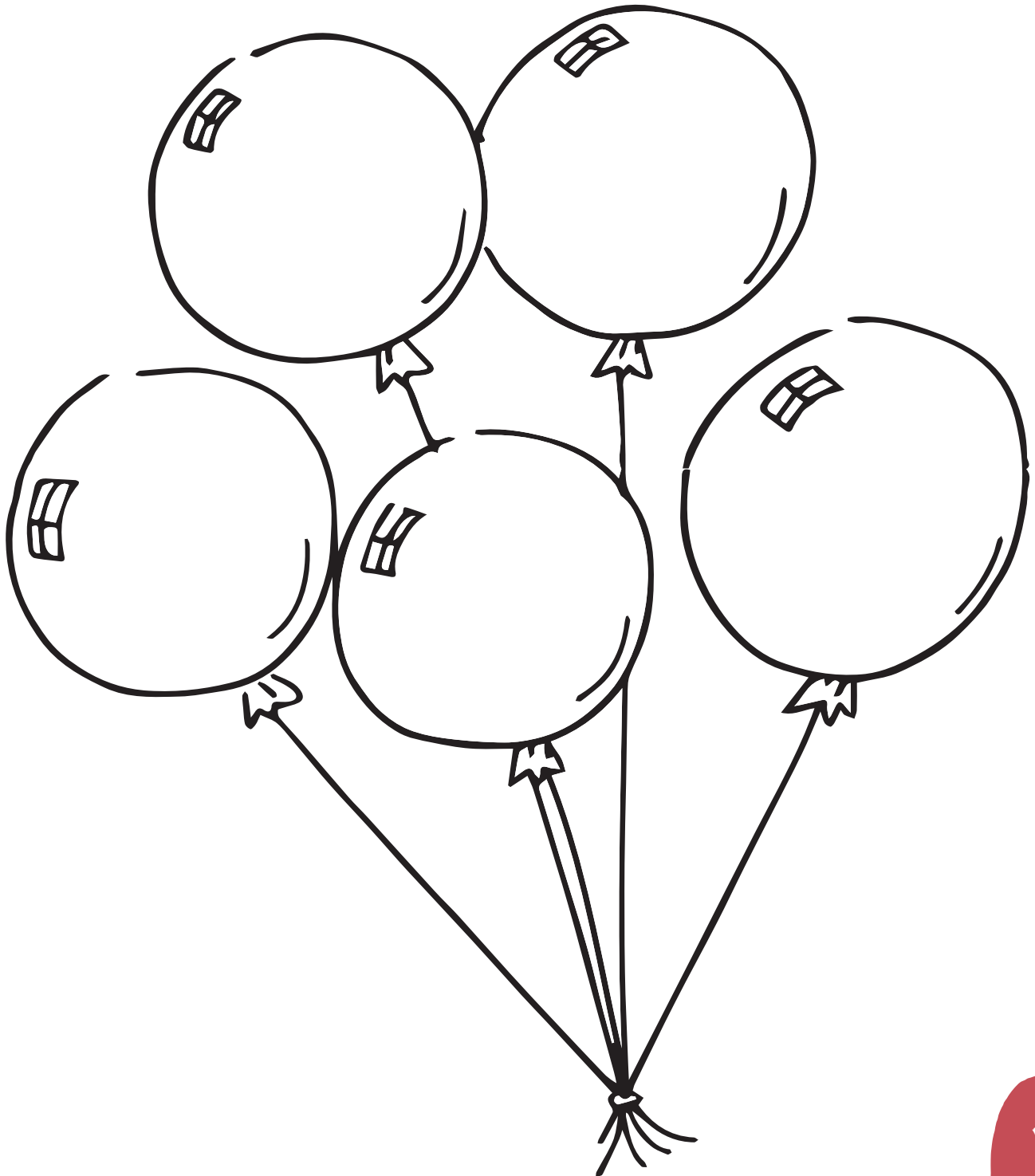


Forgiving Means Letting it Go

We have already talked about asking for forgiveness. Saint Maximilian Kolbe teaches us that we must also be ready to forgive others.

Just as we can let go of helium balloons and watch them float upward through the sky, so we need to let go of our anger and hurt. When we do that, we are then ready to forgive others. To whom do we let them go? To God, of course!

In each of the balloons below, write a word or initials to represent some event or person you are ready to forgive. If you need more balloons, draw them on this page.



Forgiveness in Conflict



1

Look up the history of some troubled spot in today's world (any country at war within itself or with another country).

What brought the two sides to this conflict? What could genuine forgiveness do?

Closing Ritual

2

Forgiveness means letting go. Take the initials, names, and events you wrote down during your activity time and rip them up into little pieces. Ask God to help you let them go.



Spirit of Action

**1**

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

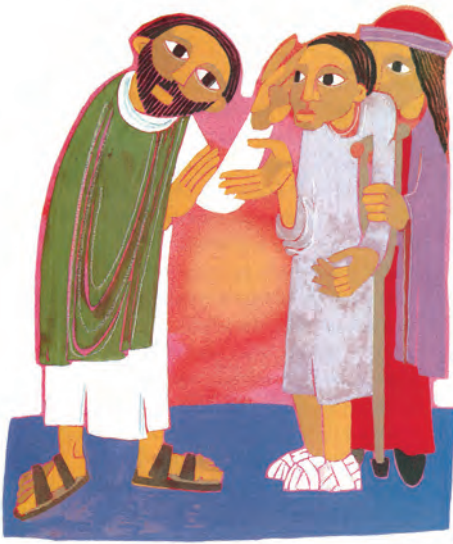
With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

Confirmation is a sacrament in which we are “sealed” with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was poured out upon us at baptism, and at confirmation that Spirit is further strengthened within us. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with his followers after he ascended into heaven. Several places in Scripture list gifts that come to us through the Spirit. This session will focus on some of those gifts.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When have you surprised yourself by acting with unexpected patience, courage, kindness, or self-control? That was probably the Holy Spirit at work in you!



1

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

The Holy Spirit was promised to us and, on Pentecost, came to us. Jesus had taught us all he could. Now, with the Spirit's help, we are to live out the plan Jesus spoke about so often.

Words are important, of course. We express our thoughts, our feelings and our beliefs. Language is what connects us to one another.

We belong to a community that supports us. We pray to a God who loves us. We are forgiven by both our community and our God when we say we are sorry. These are signs of the Spirit with us, and we are called to share this Good News in all we say.

But what do you think about people who say one thing and do something different? If I say I love dogs, but kick a puppy when it runs up to me, what have I really told you about me? Would you believe my words or my actions?

When you are baptized, you receive a vocation or a calling to a certain life. Your vocation is to be a Christian. Christians do more than “talk the walk”; they “walk the talk.” That is, they act as they say they believe. Confirmation, another of the seven sacraments, reminds us of this baptismal call. In Confirmation (whether we receive this sacrament as a baby, a child, a young adult or an adult), we remember that Catholic Christianity is an *active* religion. Being a Catholic is *not* a spectator sport.

You are learning a lot about the Holy Spirit in these stories. That's important. There is an even more important lesson: After you know about God's Spirit, what do you intend to do? Where is the Spirit speaking in your life?



2

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. Do you try to say what you mean and do what you say? Give an example.
2. Are there times when you think people are telling you one thing but doing another? How does this make you feel?

1

Get your child started on the activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. The answers are 1. peace, 2. self-control, 3. kindness, 4. joy, 5. goodness, 6. faithfulness, 7. patience, 8. gentleness, 9. love. Then continue to read below.

2

Just for you: The Sacrament of Confirmation reaffirms our baptismal call to *act* to help establish the Reign of God.

Being a Christian is work—sometimes hard work indeed. But the Spirit’s message of hope is two fold: we are never alone in our efforts and we are never without God. Confirmation is yet another chance for the Spirit to enter our lives, bringing God’s grace. And once we have received the Spirit, we can no longer sit quietly and still. We must speak and we must act.

Fruit of the Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul lists nine fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. When we let the Holy Spirit work in our lives, these are the results that other people can see (just like a good tree gives us fruit!). Draw a line between the fruit on the left and its description on the right. We've drawn in a couple to get you started.

 	1 Having a sense of calm. The opposite of being nervous, worried, or anxious.
 	2 Behaving or choosing what is best for yourself and others, even when you want to act differently.
 	3 The opposite of meanness.
	4 A feeling deeper than happiness.
	5 The ability and strength to do the right thing. Having strong character.
	6 Being loyal to Jesus's teachings.
	7 Trusting something will happen when the timing is right, even if it's not when we want it to happen.
	8 Not rough or violent. Balanced and considerate.
	9 Always wanting the very best for others. Giving freely without asking for anything in return.

Acting Out the Plan of God

1

Work on this activity together with your child. Begin by reading the paragraph below together.

2

List some ways you have been the Body of Christ to others (even if you didn't think about it at the time). Write your answers below, and have your child write theirs on the next page.

3

When you are done, share what you wrote with each other and discuss. Talk about which ones were more difficult to answer.

We are all gifted, just gifted differently. And that is good, because that means we all have something to contribute to the Reign of God. Jesus counts on us! Together, we are the Body of Christ!

How have I been the eyes of Jesus (how I see the world):

How have I been the lips of Jesus (what I say to others):

How have I been the hands of Jesus (what I give or do):

How have I been the feet of Jesus (how far and where am I willing to go):

How have I been the heart of Jesus (how I show love):





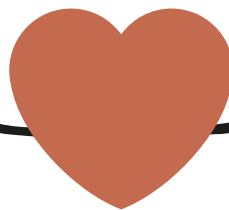
How have I
been the eyes
of Jesus (how I see the world):



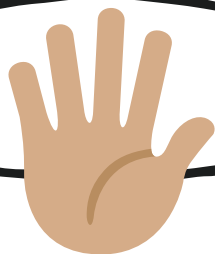
How I have
been the feet
of Jesus (how far and where am I willing to go):



How have I
been the lips of
Jesus (what I say to others):



How I have
been the heart
of Jesus (how do I show love):



How I have
been the hands
of Jesus (what I give or do):

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1

Go over the list of the Holy Spirit's gifts on the right. Decide which of these gifts are important to you for their ability to give you the strength to act. Which gifts do you still need to work on more?

2

Make a mobile of the words to hang in your meeting space. As the wind moves the mobile, notice how strong something you can't see (like an air current) can be. What does this mobile say to you about the Spirit?

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- **Wisdom** helps us make the best decisions, for ourselves and others.
- **Understanding** gives us insight into people or situations.
- **Counsel** allows us to help others see and understand the best choices.
- **Fortitude** gives us courage to follow through when we are confident how to proceed.
- **Knowledge** is an awareness of facts and information that will help us make good decisions.
- **Piety and fear of the Lord** means honoring and respecting God and feeling wonder and awe at God's works (fear of the Lord is not the same as being "afraid" of the Lord).

Closing Ritual

3

Make the Sign of the Cross on each other's hands, eyes, and lips. As you make these three signs of blessing, say the closing prayer on the right.

Through Jesus [hands],
with Jesus [eyes]
and in Jesus [lips],
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father,
forever and ever. Amen.



A Letter of Good News



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: When has someone done a small act of kindness or said a comforting word that made a big difference to you? Share your story.

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.



A long, long time ago, Jesus' friends, the disciples and Apostles, were telling everyone about the Good News. The Good News was (and is) that Jesus died and rose and lived again. The Reign of God had begun because the Messiah had come. Peter and Paul and others of the disciples were traveling to many nations, teaching and preaching this news. There were already many baptized believers in Jerusalem. A man named James was the leader of the community there.

James had many responsibilities. He wanted the Christians to remember that the Reign of God was all about love and harmony. He knew they had to tell and retell the stories of Jesus' life so that they would never forget how to live as God wanted them. Usually he felt very honored to serve the others in Jerusalem in this way. But on one particular day, his heart was heavy with worry.

James had been watching how the Christians in Jerusalem were treating each other. Well-dressed people with fine gold rings on their fingers would enter the Christian gatherings very proudly. "Here, my brother, take this chair," someone would say. Then James saw the poor members of the community enter, with dirty clothes and lowered heads. "Stand over there," they would be told. Or, "Sit here on the ground at my feet."

"We are not to treat each other any differently just because one of us has gold and one does not," James thought. "That is certainly not how Jesus acted when he walked here with us." James noticed a needy man approach one of his fellow Christians. This man was in shabby clothes and looked as if he had not eaten in weeks. As the men crossed each other's path, the richer Christian smiled heartily. "Hello, my friend. Peace to you, and go in peace. Keep warm and be sure to eat regularly."

James shook his head and muttered to himself, “What good did that do the cold and hungry man? Something more was called for—some kind of aid.”

He also remembered how he had overheard two women in a Christian family fighting last week. What harsh words and awful names they had called each other! The women were no longer speaking.

All this made James very sad. “We are making judgments about each other, about the way we look or act or speak. But mercy is far more important than judgment.”

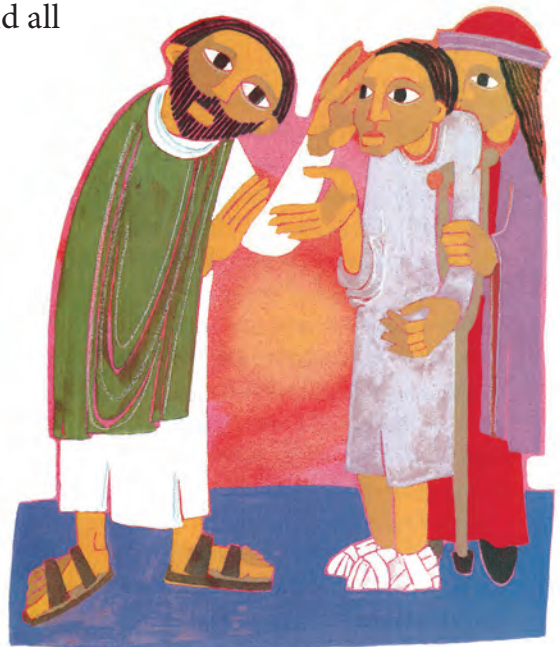
James continued to be troubled about all he was seeing. “Don’t they understand that the Reign of God needs us to make it happen? Jesus left us the Spirit so that we, too, can help with God’s Plan for peace, justice and love. It is good to pray and very good to speak of Jesus, but we need to do even more. We need to act.”

He decided he would write a letter to the whole community in Jerusalem. (Another name for this type of letter is *epistle*.) In it, James told the complete story of the Good News, that is, what Jesus did for us and what we must do for one another.

“My sisters and brothers, we can give to others because God first gave to us. Think of that and be patient and grateful. Think of that and take care of the widows and orphans and all among us who are in need.”

James listed other actions for the Jerusalem community. “Be slow to get angry with each other, for the least word can do much to hurt another. Remember that others are watching you. And let your actions, even more than your words, show them what you are really like.”

The Good News needed hearers that were willing to become doers. James knew this, and he encouraged both. “Share with each other. If you are suffering, pray and we will pray with you. If you are cheerful, sing songs, sing songs of praise and we will sing, too. If you’re sick, a priest will lay hands on you and anoint you



with oil. If you've committed sins, we'll forgive you and remind you that God will heal you."

James was very strong in his warning: "Just as a body without any spirit is dead, so faith without action is dead."

The people took James's warning very seriously. And, although James wrote a long time ago, his words have much to say to us today. The Spirit of God calls us to action, just as James said. The Reign of God includes us and all we do. Each one of us individually is called to live this Good News.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. Can you name some of the evils or sins that James was observing? Why did these make him so sad?
3. Have you ever felt like James? That is, do you ever wonder why people do mean or evil things to each other? What would you like to say to them if you had the chance?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. (The code substitutes the letter "a" for "z," "b" for "y," etc. The answer is "Faith without works is dead.") Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: Each of us can work individually toward justice and compassion in many ways.

The evils of the world can seem overwhelming, but James reminds us that we can and must start right where we are! The people closest to us, our family and our friends, are where we first need to live the Gospel message of love, forgiveness, and peace. No one is too young, too weak, or too slow to answer this call of the Spirit.

Figuring Out the Good News

Can you crack this simple substitution code? When you do, you will find a message from James about the importance of the Spirit of Action!

UZRGS DRGSLFG DLIPH RH WVZW!

A = Z

B = Y

C = X



Responding to James's Letter of Good News

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

In the last session, you and your young person listed some ways you were the eyes, lips, hands, feet, and heart of Jesus. As James writes, it is only when we put these commitments into action that we are truly living as Christians!

Now commit yourself to a course of action in the activity below for this coming week.

3

Share your responses with your child and listen to theirs. Then, draw a star next to the part of the Body of Christ you will most try to be and have your child do the same.

Remember that just as evil can start small and ripple out to many, so can peace and compassion start in our own hearts and families and extend to all we meet!

I will be the **eyes** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

I will be the **heart** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

I will be the **lips** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

I will be the **hands** of Jesus because

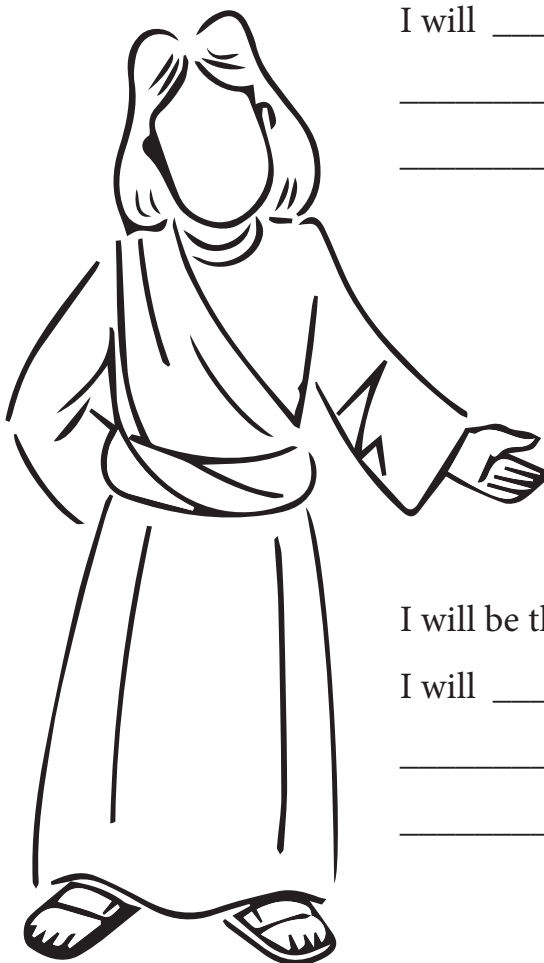
I will _____

_____.

I will be the **feet** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.



And we will do all this through the gifts of the Spirit with us.

Responding to James's Letter of Good News

In last session's activity, you listed some ways you have been the eyes, lips, hands, feet and heart of Jesus in the past. As James writes, it is only when we put these commitments into action that we are truly living as Christians!

Look back over your ideas from the previous activity and commit yourself to one course of action for this coming week. (Your adult is doing the same thing.) Remember that just as evil can start small and ripple out to many, so can peace and compassion start in our own hearts and families and extend to all we meet!

I will be the **eyes** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

I will be the **heart** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

I will be the **lips** of Jesus because

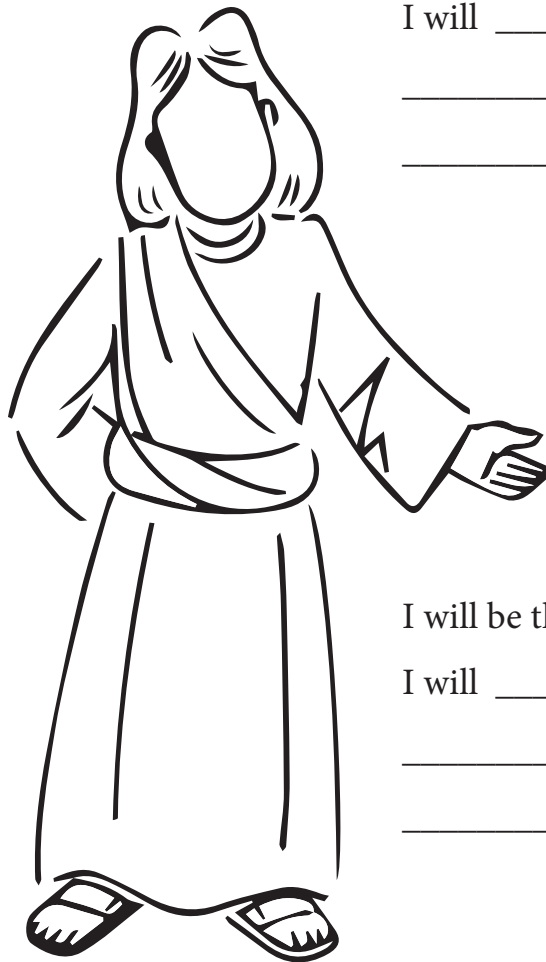
I will _____

_____.

I will be the **hands** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.



I will be the **feet** of Jesus because

I will _____

_____.

And we will do all this through the gifts of the Spirit with us.

Simple Acts of Holiness

1

Many saints of our tradition felt that the day-to-day events of our lives were the ground of holiness. The lives of Saint Therese (the Little Flower), Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope John XXIII, Mother Teresa, and others were filled with appreciation for the details of our lives.

Find a simple activity you and your young person can do together: pick up litter, take cans to a recycling center, drop off clothes at a thrift shop, and so on.



Closing Ritual



2

Read James 2:14-17 together. Then read the commitments from your activity pages.

Close by thanking the Spirit for the gifts that enable you to keep these commitments.



The Bishop for the Poor



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

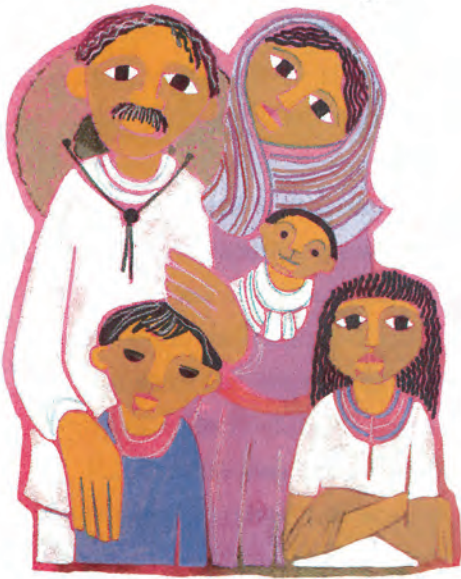
Then begin with a prayer.

The Catholic churches of Central and South America have given much to their northern neighbors. Small faith-sharing communities, liberation theology, and many examples of courageous martyrdom have profoundly affected the universal Church.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, his life and his example, certainly fit into this list of shared graces. His real-life story has more drama than many fictional works and more to teach us than this short treatment can reveal.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Who do you know who works or volunteers to help poor or marginalized people in our society?

**1**

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

Not so very long ago, a man sat praying by the body of his friend. His friend was Father Rutilio Grande, a priest of the country of El Salvador. El Salvador is a country in Central America, a beautiful land, but it has many troubles. For years and years a handful of wealthy families owned almost all the land, and they made all the decisions. They didn't care about the poor and needy all around them.

Father Grande cared very much for these struggling people. He would ride in his jeep to reach even those who lived far away from the village church. Father Grande spoke openly against the greedy leaders of the country and against the military police, who would torture and kill anyone who tried to stand up for justice. It was this that made Father Grande a martyr, one who dies for his or her faith. As he was traveling with an old man and a young boy in his jeep, Father Grande and his passengers were shot and killed.

Now his body lay in the grand cathedral of San Salvador, and his friend was sitting and trying to decide what to do. "Rutilio, my brother priest, my friend, it was only seven years ago we celebrated my ordination as bishop. You planned everything; you made it so lovely. Now you are dead, and I cannot truly understand why." The friend placed his head in his hands and prayed some more.

The friend was Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador. He had to make some very tough decisions, indeed. He knew that many citizens would be waiting for his leadership, waiting to hear what he had to say about these tragic deaths.

Archbishop Romero was not always concerned with such difficult matters. He was born in 1917 in a quiet mountain village. When young Oscar was only thirteen years old, he left this village to follow his dream of becoming a priest. He attended a seminary in his own country and then studied in Rome. He was ordained in Rome in 1942. He then returned to El Salvador, where he served as pastor, then auxiliary bishop (an "assistant bishop"), bishop, and finally as archbishop (the bishop who leads and serves other local bishops). It was a great honor to be named the Archbishop of San Salvador.

Archbishop Romero remembered his first years as a bishop. As the Bishop of Santiago de Maria, he often rode a horse or a mule to visit people who lived where cars could not go. In those days, he had to preside at a funeral for five people murdered by the government police. He knew that such things were not right, but he felt it was not his role to get involved.

In his prayer, the archbishop again addressed his dead friend. "Rutilio, was I wrong? Do the people need me to speak out against the government?" (Most of his fellow bishops in El Salvador felt that silence was the safest and smartest route. They often warned Archbishop Romero to stay out of political fights.) "Are they right, Rutilio? Should I continue my quiet resistance? Or do I now

need to be more open?”

Even in his sadness, the archbishop could remember that only three weeks before this death this same cathedral had been filled with joy and celebration. It had been the day of his installation as archbishop.

When Oscar Romero was named the new archbishop, the wealthy families and the government officials were relieved. “At least we will have an archbishop who knows his place,” they told each other. “Oscar Romero is more interested in his books and learning than in political battles.”

They would soon find out how wrong they had been about Archbishop Romero. He was indeed well educated, but his heart was with his country and his people. He did “know his place”—to serve God.

When the Archbishop rose from his prayers beside Father Grande’s body, he knew what he had to do. The Spirit of Jesus, who always calls us to compassion and justice, filled his heart.

This death was a turning point for Archbishop Romero. He closed all the Catholic schools for three days of mourning. He ordered that only one Mass be said on the next Sunday at the cathedral. All other churches were to remain closed for the day.

Others around the archbishop expressed their dismay and concern.

“This will be seen as a slap at the government.”

“Won’t this cause only more violence?”

Many disagreed with his decisions, but he went forward with his work. Oscar Romero was not going to ignore the violence and injustice any longer. He had come to this decision in prayer and he knew it was what God wanted. He felt the strength and passion of the Spirit, just as the disciples had on Pentecost.

Oscar Romero dedicated the rest of his life to serving the oppressed and the hungry. He became a famous speaker throughout the world. He preached on radio programs in his own country. He encouraged the people, “Don’t give up. Jesus, too, lived a simple, ordinary life. Power and wealth are not the way of the Spirit.” He pleaded with the corrupt members of the military, “These are your own brothers and sisters you are killing. In the name of God, stop this repression.”

The archbishop became the best friend the poor and worn people of San Salvador ever had. He continued to pray to follow God’s will, and he formed programs to help cure the problems of his country. Meanwhile, pain and evil multiplied. More and more people were threatened or even killed. It became clear that Archbishop Romero himself was in danger of being killed for his beliefs.

The wealthy families who once had considered him a friend would no longer speak to him. The powerful and frightening government officials warned that they could no longer promise his safety. Other bishops in his country argued with him. “You can’t take sides in this fighting. You will only make it worse.”

“I am on the side of the needy and the hurting people of our Church and our country. I am on the side of the priests and workers who are trying to improve the living conditions. I am on the side of Jesus and his Spirit.” Archbishop Romero knew that the Gospel message of the Reign of God made him say these things.

The whole world knew of Archbishop Oscar Romero and his fight to improve his country. He taught us that Jesus’ message was one of liberation, that is, that Jesus wants each of us to live



as free, healthy, loved individuals. This can happen only when the entire community supports and cares for one another.

This teaching was very scary to the cruel and powerful leaders. Like the leaders at the time of Jesus, they knew that this message would destroy their power over others.

On Monday, March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot and killed while standing at the altar celebrating Mass. This was a sad and awful time for the people of San Salvador and for the world. But even in his death, Oscar Romero is a sign of hope for us. The last time he preached in the cathedral he said, "If I die, I will live in all of you. My life will be a seed, a beginning, for you to continue the work."

Archbishop Romero used his role in the Church to help those who needed him. He built a community of hope and courage among the Catholics of San Salvador. He became one of the most famous martyrs of Central America. Sadly, he was not the only martyr, but in 1992 the government of El Salvador and the people fighting against them came to an agreement for peace. It was the sacrifices of these brave Salvadorans that led to this peace.

Most of us will never face a life or death choice in following Jesus. But all of us will face times when we are forced to choose: either we will live as Catholic Christians or we will hide our true beliefs in order to "get along." Such times are difficult, but the Spirit has promised us strength, wisdom and patience. All we need to do is be open to these gifts and let them grow in us. The Spirit will give us the power to act in our communities.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
2. Do you agree with what Archbishop Romero decided? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything you would be willing to die for? What?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: As a community, as a Church, we are involved in bringing about the Reign of God in our world.

Not only as individuals but also as members of an institution, we are called to act for the Reign of God. In fact, there is a power in "us" that "I" alone cannot capture. Archbishop Romero never stopped loving his community and its tradition. It was on this firm foundation that he accomplished his ministry. This is how the Spirit works for us as well, within the structure of our community and our Church.

The Reign of God

Archbishop Romero felt that there are two goals for Christians. One is to live with our eyes on heaven and the other is to live here on earth. God, for Oscar Romero, is best served right here and now.

Jesus tells us in Scripture what the Reign of God is like. It is like a mustard seed, a wedding banquet, a lost coin, a pearl of great value, and many other images. This means that our imagination is important for helping the Reign of God happen. We have to be able to imagine a better world.

Using your imagination, what do you think the Reign of God is like? What images would you use to talk to modern people your age? (For example, "The Reign of God is like a music video where everyone is dancing to the same beat.")

The Reign of God is like:

The Reign of God is like:

The Reign of God is like:

The Reign of God is like:

The Reign of God is like:

Bad News, Good News

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

Just for you: Look through a news app, website, newspaper, or magazine. First you will probably notice the bad news—and most of it on the front page. But if you look deeper, you may find good news as well.

3

Use these pieces of good news (heroic people, happy events, moments of compassion, and so on) to fill in the newspaper below.

Children will also be looking for something for the *Daily Good News* in their activity. When you are both finished, share what you each wrote.



Local Good News

You have read the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero, so you know how powerful it can be when people of faith join together.

You and your adult helper will be putting together a newspaper, *The Daily Good News*. You've just been hired as a stringer for this paper. (A "stringer" is an independent writer who goes after special stories.) Your assignment is to write in the space below some answers for these questions:

- When were you involved in some good news?
- What project have you worked on that succeeded?
- Whom have you helped lately?

You may write this story as an interview with yourself or someone else, as a straight report, or even as an editorial (an opinion piece).



The Daily Good News!

Social Action

1

Investigate what your parish offers in the way of social action. Many parishes have food pantries, outreach programs, or cooperative events with social agencies.



Closing Ritual

2

Share your “Daily Good News” papers. Ask God to bless and bring peace to people who are at war in the world, in their families and in themselves.



The Not-the-End



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

The title of this series is *Spirit With Us*. If the stories you have shared with your young person do anything, they should show you that the Spirit is still active, still needed, still loving. Nothing is finished; all is still in process. We are continuing on our journey to God and to the Reign of God no matter what our age.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: Who is the best storyteller in your family or among friends? Why?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

What stories you have read in this book! You have read stories of belonging—about a treasurer who found great wealth and a young girl who found a way to live in two communities.

You have read stories of prayer—about how our earliest Christians celebrated together and how a modern woman wove her tradition into today's world.

You have read stories of forgiveness—about a man whose hate changed to love when he was forgiven and another who used his love to overcome the evil of hating.

You have read stories of action—about service that started when individuals lived like Jesus and service that continues as the Spirit speaks to us today.

There is one story left. It does not begin with “A long time ago.” Nor does it begin with “Not so long ago.” It begins with, “Today...”

This is really the best story of all! The main character is a young person, about your age. This person is learning and growing in faith. This person is willing to ask questions.

You'd like this person. This is someone on a journey, someone God chose at birth to be special and important.

Through Baptism, God says, “You belong to me,” Through Confirmation, the Spirit says, “You will do great things.” Through Eucharist, Jesus says, “I am always with you.” God says wonderful things to this person!



As a young person's tale, this story is being written daily. There are incredible adventures yet to come. There may be some heartache as well. But this is someone who has a special promise, a covenant, from God.

Surely you know by now whose story this is. It's yours, of course, and it is the most important of all! Live your story, tell it to others and they will share theirs with you.

So, begin (not end) this book with, "Today..."



A Prayer for Your Story

Today

*the wind will rush in at me
and I will be on fire with God's love.*

Today

*the need to love will enable me
to belong in God's family.*

Today

*my heart will give out mercy and forgiveness,
and I will be the better for it.*

Today

*I will act with a spirit of wisdom,
of strength, of compassion,
and today I will not be too young.*

For today, today

is my time.

Today belongs to me,

(the Spirit sings this to me)

and I will give it to the world!

Amen.

This session will give you a chance to tell some of your story. Write, draw, doodle, whatever—but get some of your story down so you will remember!

You are the only one who can write these pages. May the grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit be with you!

1

Now discuss the reading with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. Do you believe that your story is as important as anyone's who we have read about? Why or why not?
2. What was your favorite story in "Spirit With Us"? Why?

2

Get your child started on the activity on the next page, making sure they understand the instructions. Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: We are sacraments, individually and in community, because we continue to show the Spirit of God in our actions and our lives.

While we learn much from our study of Scripture and our examination of the lives of other committed Christians, we must also reflect on our own lives, our own stories. Help your young person finish the blank pages in this book. Help your children see the value of their own stories of faith. Help them see the action of the Spirit, who is indeed with us, in their lives.

My Story

On the following pages, you will have the chance to write and draw a story of a way/some ways the Spirit has been at work in your life. You may choose to focus on people who have loved and supported you, helping you to know that you are cherished. It might be a story of a stranger or an acquaintance doing something unexpected to help you. It could be a story of some of the amazing gifts you've been given (material gifts like enough to eat, a home to live in, etc) or other gifts like a special talent you have or a gift in your personality or temperament that God uses to help others. On this page, design a cover for your story and give it a title as if it were bound as a book.



Your Story of the Spirit

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

A story—or many stories—makes up the fabric of our lives. Remember the weaving activity at the beginning of this series? That was to remind you that your story is just as important as any other story in this book.

3

Take a few minutes now to think of your story and jot down answers to the questions below. You may wish to share your thoughts with your young person.

I see the Spirit of belonging in my life in...



I see the Spirit of prayer in my life in...

I see the Spirit of forgiveness in my life in...

I see the Spirit of action in my life in...

Use this space to write and draw a specific story of the Spirit at work in your life.

Seeing God in Your Life



1

The best way to help your young persons value their own stories is for you to share your story of faith with them.

Take time to reflect on where you have seen God and the Spirit act in your life.

Closing Ritual

2

Since this is your last session, close by sharing a meal or a special snack. As you eat, tell each other your “Not-the-End” stories. At the end of your time together, pray the doxology one more time.

Remember to pray for each other whenever you hear those words at Sunday Mass.

The Doxology

“Through Jesus, in Jesus, and with Jesus,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father,
forever and ever. Amen.”

