

**One-Day Retreats  
for Junior High Youth**

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Gerri Braden-Whartenby and  
Joan Finn Connelly

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To our families, for sharing the gifts of love and spirituality with us, and to the staff of Xavier Retreat and Conference Center, for believing in us, encouraging us, and supporting us.

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# Introduction

## Who We Are

Let us introduce ourselves. We are Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly. Each of us is Roman Catholic with a master's degree in religious education from La Salle University, Philadelphia, and a graduate certificate in youth ministry. Geri has been a parish youth minister, a campus minister, and a parish director of religious education. She is now the director of youth services for Xavier Retreat and Conference Center in Convent Station, New Jersey. Joan has been a parish youth minister and a high school religion teacher. She is now the associate youth retreat director at Xavier Center. We each have fourteen years' experience. Together we direct over one hundred retreats a year, and we also do retreat training, and communication and conflict resolution training for adults and teens.

## Our Kind of Retreat

Our retreat philosophy incorporates active-learning exercises, a sound biblical foundation, and meaningful prayer experiences. Evaluations returned to us by adult moderators of youth groups have affirmed our philosophy.

*Active learning* simply means “learning by doing.” In our retreats we hope to reach our objectives by having teens use their senses in a variety of ways. Active learning keeps young teens moving, knowing that they will remember much more of what they do than what they hear. A study cited in a 1995 issue of *Group* magazine reports that we remember 20 percent of what we read, 30 percent of what we hear, 40 percent of what we see, 50 percent of what we say, 60 percent of what we do, and 90 percent of what we see, hear, say, and do (p. 16).

Active learning is not all fun and games. It takes more preparation than a lecture and requires more faith and trust because the adult is not controlling the learning by feeding information, but instead is allowing the Holy Spirit to work, through the activities, in the teens themselves. With active learning you are never quite sure of the results. But if it is done well, active learning provides valuable lessons more effectively than does a more rote style of learning.

The Bible is filled with stories of active-learning experiences, each requiring trust that learners would “catch on”—for example, the stories of Abraham and Isaac, Jonah, and Noah and the flood. In Jesus we have a great teacher to follow because he used active learning strategies throughout his life. The storm on the lake, the woman caught in adultery, and the washing of the disciples' feet are examples. It was a

pretty risky teaching style, but if God can risk active learning, maybe we can too.

Another part of our retreat philosophy is providing teens with a strong biblical foundation. Each retreat incorporates time for reflection on the Scriptures. Retreatants have the opportunity to read a passage from the Scriptures, reflect on its meaning, and see how the lessons from the passage connect with their personal growth and faith journey. Providing teens with a strong biblical foundation fosters a more mature faith formation.

Each retreat begins and ends with prayer. The opening prayer sets the tone for the day. It creates an environment that encourages teens to be open to God's spirit at work in them. The concluding prayer, a guided meditation, allows teens to listen to God, something that tends to be neglected in their fast-paced lives.

## Retreat Overview

**Theme** The theme provides the retreat director with a concise purpose for the day.

**Bible Basis** The Scripture cite for the message that the combined retreat activities intend to communicate is provided. The Scripture passage both supports the theme of the retreat and serves as the inspiration for creating and selecting the retreat activities. It is also hoped that the teens will come away from the retreat with an appreciation for the richness and guidance the Scriptures provide for their daily life.

**Objectives** The objectives expand on the theme and provide specific learning outcomes for the retreat.

**Retreat at a Glance** This chart is offered at the beginning of each retreat plan. It gives the director an overview of the retreat, including the time frames and materials needed for each activity.

**Retreat in Detail** This section of the retreat plan contains the bulk of the retreat resources. It gives detailed directions for carrying out the activities of the retreat that are listed in the Retreat at a Glance chart. The retreats vary in length but typically run about six hours, and never exceed seven hours. All the retreats include the following elements:

### Welcome and Introduction

A spirit of hospitality is conveyed to the teens in the welcome and introduction. If the retreat director does not know the group, this is a good time to start building a rapport with them. In this introduction the retreat director may do one or more of the following tasks:

- Convey appreciation to the teens for taking the time to participate in the retreat.

- Share a personal story from a retreat experience and explain how it affected him or her.
- Explain the significance of a retreat. For example, we tell teens that a retreat is time away from their normal routine to reflect on their life, experience new things, quiet themselves down to be open to God's spirit, pray, enjoy being with their friends, and learn about others.
- Highlight the philosophy of a retreat.
- Communicate the housekeeping information and rules. For example:
  - Give directions to the bathrooms and other facilities.
  - Explain regulations regarding smoking.
  - Offer an explanation of what rooms in the building are available for their use and what areas outside are designated for recreation at lunchtime.
- Go over the retreat theme and schedule. Retreats are not intended to be mystery games. Informing the teens of the retreat theme and schedule demonstrates respect. Most teens are open to whatever you have planned.

On occasion we have led retreats in which after going over the theme and schedule, the teens said they had already done some of the planned exercises. Sometimes they wanted to do them again, and sometimes they preferred to do something different. Giving the teens some say in the retreat prompts a readiness to participate and a willingness to try new experiences.

- Present the retreat standards. Teens usually come to a retreat with a variety of prior retreat experiences and levels of openness. During the greeting convey that the day will be filled with fun and learning, but along with fun comes some rules. (We call them *standards* rather than rules because teens often have a negative reaction to the word *rules*.) These standards try to anticipate the usual things some teens will do to try to disrupt the retreat (thus heading them off at the pass).

Standards that we recommended include:

- What's said here, stays here.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Put-downs, both verbal and physical, are off-limits.
- Questions are welcomed.
- You may decline when invited to share.
- Be open and try.

Establishing standards right away gives structure and boundaries to the teens. The boundaries allow them to see that "anything does *not* go" on this retreat. Some young people come because they have to and therefore may express some resentment and resistance. Some come expecting not to participate. The standards clarify acceptable and unacceptable behavior during the retreat.

After going over the standards, ask the participants if they would like to add any standards to make the day go smoothly. Then direct them to nod if they find the standards reasonable and are willing to abide by them. Post the standards in a place where they can serve as a reminder during the retreat of what the group has agreed on.

Holding the teens accountable to the standards is important. If a standard is violated, acknowledge the violation and its consequences, and remind the young people that they agreed to follow the standards. If this is not done, the standards will not mean anything to the retreatants.

### Icebreakers

Icebreakers are important. Part A of the appendix offers several to choose from, or you can use your own. Icebreakers conducted at the beginning of the retreat are meant to help relax the young people, show them that the retreat is meant to be fun as well as spiritual, and get them accustomed to working in small groups. Icebreakers conducted immediately following lunch are meant to bridge the transition between the unstructured lunchtime and the structured program. These games help the teens refocus and re-enter the spirit of the retreat.

The following guidelines will help to enhance the effectiveness of icebreakers:

- Practice them ahead of time to ensure you have all the necessary materials and are able to give clear directions.
- Have some large-group icebreakers and then some small-group ones.
- Do not use icebreakers that might embarrass some retreatants.
- Do not continue to play the games over and over. They are meant to be introductory.
- Do not be afraid to try the same icebreaker again with a new group if the first group did not like it or if it did not go well the first time. For example, we often start our retreats with the icebreaker People Upset (see part A of the appendix). It is a great large-group game that gets teens running around and intermingling. The game involves different people winding up as leader in the center of the circle. We played the game with a group we did not know well, and one teen stood in the center of the circle. We waited for him to make the next move, but he did not. A teacher quickly came over and told us that the young man was a new resident of the United States and did not speak English. We respectfully invited him back to the group and assigned another teen to continue the game. If that had been our first experience with People Upset, we may never have used it again. Not all icebreakers work with all groups. If one occasionally does not work, it may not be the icebreaker but the makeup of the group.

### Opening Prayer

Simple opening prayers are provided for each retreat. They may be read aloud by the teens or by the retreat director. You may want to add a song, or you may want to allow time for individual petitions, knowing that “where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, there he is.”

### Retreat Activities

A variety of activities flesh out each retreat. These include personal reflection exercises and small- and large-group activities. You may wish to keep the same small groups throughout the retreat or to form new groups for each small-group activity. That is up to you. All the instructions needed to carry out the activities are included. Each activity builds on the previous one. The retreats usually start with light, simple activities. As the day progresses, the activities become more challenging. Therefore, we encourage you to use the activities in the order presented.

### Affirmation

Going through adolescence is a tough experience. Teens need to know that they are loved for who they are and who they are becoming. Statistics show that from sixth grade to twelfth grade a young person’s self-image typically decreases. There are many reasons for this: media portrayals of the ideal person, biological changes going on inside the teenager, attraction to the other sex, and the added stress of more responsibility.

Unfortunately teens focus on negative images of themselves rather than on positive ones. To compensate for this, affirmation is built in throughout the retreats, and one specific affirmation activity is placed near the end of each retreat so that the teens can leave with positive feelings.

### Closing Guided Meditation

Many teens have told us that they really like guided meditations. They say that these experiences provide some of the few opportunities they have to relax and really pray. After one guided meditation, a young man said that he really liked it. When asked why, he responded, “My father has been dead awhile, and during the meditation I got to speak with him one more time.”

Concluding each retreat with a guided meditation not only gives teens this quiet time to be with God but also shows them that God is truly present in their life.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Starting a guided meditation with progressive muscle relaxation allows the teens to calm themselves down enough to be open to the guided meditation. Several progressive muscle relaxation exercises are given in part C of the appendix.

### Evaluation

Evaluation helps teens reflect on the whole retreat and what it has meant to them. A simple way to do this is to ask these three questions:

- If you had only one word to describe today, what one word would you pick?



- What is one new thing you learned today, or what is one thing that you really liked?
- What do you feel God is challenging you to do as a result of this retreat?

## Helpful Hints

We have found the following strategies to be useful in making the retreat run smoothly:

- When teens are in small groups working on an assignment, alert them to the time remaining with 5-minute, 2-minute, and 1-minute signals. This helps them pace themselves so that they will not be surprised or upset when time is called.
- In some of the retreat activities, we assign teens to be leaders by calling out a certain quality or criterion, such as, “those whose birthday is closest to Christmas,” or “the person with the longest name.” A variety of measures like these increases the likelihood that during the retreat many young people will have the opportunity to be a leader.
- During break time the retreatants may choose to eat a snack. We inform them before they take their break to finish all food or drink before returning to the meeting area. Having teens eating and drinking during the retreat activities is not only distracting for them but for the retreat director as well.
- Be prepared. Gather all needed materials before the retreat. If the retreat director appears unprepared, the teens will know it. Time spent finding things disrupts the flow of the retreat and loses the teens’ attention.
- The material in this book is geared for groups of up to thirty-five participants, with the whole group often being separated into small groups. The ideal small-group size is six to eight participants. Because significant small-group activity is part of the retreat, we encourage you to use trained small-group facilitators. Trained facilitators will enhance the retreat experience for the teens. (See part D of the appendix for a list of tips you can provide to facilitators.) Facilitators can be older high school students, teachers, parents, catechists, or other volunteers. Facilitators are especially helpful for younger teens who may or may not be used to working together.

## Debriefing Activities

Most of the retreat activities end with questions that can be used to discuss the meaning of that particular exercise. As alternatives to posing the questions to the large group and having volunteers answer, you could do the following:

- Have the teens return to their small groups and discuss the questions. Then invite each small-group leader to report back to the large group.
- Assign different questions to each small group and have the small-group leaders report back to the large group.

## Competition Versus Cooperation

The directions for some of our icebreakers and retreat activities suggest telling the group that the first team finished “wins.” We certainly want teens to feel good about themselves throughout the retreat, and not to be put in the position of being “losers.” However, teens in the United States are used to competing, and many are motivated by rewards. The icebreakers and some of the small-group activities that appear to be competitive in nature actually challenge the teens to cooperate as a team within small groups and to engage only in mini-competition with other small groups.

We give prizes to winning teams only when doing so is necessary to the activity. When prizes are not required, we tell winning teams who ask what their reward or prize is, “You win our deepest appreciation and congratulations.” At the end of each game or performance-type activity, we applaud those who participated.

Some groups need to be motivated initially by some form of competition. If you feel that your group does not need the added motivation that competition provides, simply give instructions for the groups to accomplish the activity, and call time when they appear to be finished.

We usually remark at some point in the retreat that we enjoyed many games that did not involve declaring a winner. We try to help the young people realize that participating in an activity and working cooperatively with their team members is more important than winning.

## Our Hope

Retreats have proven to be valuable and effective in the faith formation of teens. We hope that the retreats in this book prove to be an effective tool to help bring your group to a deeper faith.

## Retreat 1

# Christian Community

**Theme** This retreat shows teens why it is important to be a part of a Christian community and how they can create and participate actively in one.

**Bible Basis** *1 Cor. 12:12–27.* Jesus reminds us how important each of us is by comparing our various gifts and talents to the parts of the body.

**Objectives** The retreatants will do the following:

- examine how being a member of a secular community is different from being a member of a Christian community
- reflect on why it's important to be an active member of a Christian community
- recognize cooperation as an asset to a Christian community
- assess and affirm their personal gifts and talents, building on the values recorded by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:12–27

## Retreat at a Glance

The following chart offers a brief overview of the retreat activities, time frames, and materials needed. For more detailed information about any of the activities, refer to the directions given in the Retreat in Detail section.

ACTIVITY	TIME FRAME	SUPPLIES
Welcome and Introduction	10–15 minutes	poster with standards
Icebreakers	15–30 minutes	depends on selection
Opening Prayer	5 minutes	Bible
Human Machine Building	20–30 minutes	
Community	10 minutes	newsprint, markers,
The Giving Cycle	10 minutes	candy or other playing pieces
Christian Community	10–15 minutes	newsprint, markers
Put-Ups and Put-Downs	15 minutes	pencils, paper, newsprint, markers
Don't Stomp on Me	10 minutes	empty soda cans, board or carpet square
Break	10 minutes	
Draw It Together	20 minutes	resource 1–A, pencils, blank paper
Scripture Reflection	10 minutes	
The Body of Christ	20–30 minutes	handout 1-A, pencils
Lunch	45 minutes	
Icebreakers	15 minutes	depends on selection
Yes, No, Maybe	15 minutes	
Community Acrostic	15–20 minutes	newsprint, markers
What Are You Made Of?	15–20 minutes	markers or crayons, paper
Yarn Closing	15–20 minutes	large ball of yarn
Closing Guided Meditation	20–30 minutes	instrumental music, tape or CD player
Evaluation	5 minutes	pencils, paper



## Retreat in Detail

### Welcome and Introduction (10–15 minutes)

### Icebreakers (15–30 minutes)

Choose from among the icebreakers offered in part A of the appendix of this book, or use games of your own.

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin the prayer by reading 1 Cor. 12:12,18–19,25–27, which is Paul’s description of us as the Body of Christ. Then share the following prayer in your own words:

- Dear God, thank you for making each one of us unique and special. Continue to encourage us to use our gifts to help one another. Remind us when we put others down that we all are made in your image and are important. Guide us in building up our world into a community unified in your love. Amen.

### Human Machine Building Small-Group Activity (20–30 minutes)

This activity encourages the teens to reflect on their ability to cooperate and participate in a community.

1. Form the teens into small groups. Each small group will make itself into a machine that others will likely recognize. Begin by demonstrating a “human machine,” for example, a washing machine. You will need three volunteers. Direct two volunteers to form the washing machine tub and the third person to be the agitator. Direct the two volunteers representing the tub to hold hands, with the agitator standing inside the circle. Instruct the agitator to twirl around when the signal to begin is given. When the three volunteers have finished demonstrating the machine, invite the rest of the retreatants to guess what machine was acted out.

2. After someone successfully guesses washing machine, continue by saying something like this:

- Now it is your turn as small groups to create a human machine. As you begin, consider the following questions:
    - What machine do you want to build?
    - Is it possible to create the machine with your small group?
    - What are the parts of this machine?
    - Which part do you want to be? Everyone must play one part of the machine.
    - Is the machine complete?
- Take time to practice. You may use sounds.  
Give the small groups time to practice. If other rooms in the building are available for your use, assign a separate area to each group so that the groups may practice privately. Call them back after 10 minutes.

3. Before the small groups take turns performing their machine, give the following directions:

- After each small group finishes performing its machine, the rest of the groups should try to guess what it is. It is okay if two groups perform the same machine because each small group will likely present the machine in a unique way.

Call for a group to volunteer to go first. Applaud after each small group has performed its machine.

4. To conclude the activity, lead a discussion with the whole group using the following questions (see the introduction for alternative ways of debriefing this and other retreat activities):

- How did your group decide what machine it would be?
- What made this exercise easy or difficult?
- What was your biggest obstacle? Why?
- How did you get over this obstacle? How did your team feel as it overcame obstacles?
- Was it easy or difficult to work with the other members of your small group? Why? What did you learn from working together?
- What does this exercise tell us about community?

### Community Large-Group Brainstorming (10 minutes)

On a sheet of newsprint, write the word *community*. Invite the retreatants to call out words and images that come to mind when they hear this term. This brainstorming helps the retreatants to see the various components of the many communities to which they belong.

After the large group has finished brainstorming, invite a volunteer to compose a definition of the word *community* based on the words and images listed on the newsprint. Make sure the rest of the group agrees to the definition and then write it on the newsprint. Leave the definition up for the duration of the retreat. The teens will compare this definition with the definition of *Christian community*, which they will compose in an upcoming activity.

### The Giving Cycle Large-Group Activity (10 minutes)

The purpose of this exercise is for the young people to experience giving and receiving.

Begin by directing the teens to form a circle with their chairs. Then give each person three pieces of the same item: for example, candy, pennies, or poker chips. (If candy is used, inform the teens not to eat any. Each person will be allowed to eat one piece at the end of the game.)

Explain the rules this way:

- This game has only two simple rules: First, if someone offers you a piece of candy, you must take it. Second, you must give away all your candy, one piece at a time. When I give the signal to begin, you may stand up and move around the inside of the circle. You will have 3 minutes to give away your candy. When I call time, sit down and wait for the next instructions.

Some teens may ask what the goal of the game is or other questions. If that occurs, simply repeat the directions as stated. It is okay if the teens are confused.

At the end of the game, collect the playing pieces. If candy was used, you may want to allow each teen to eat one piece.

Conclude the activity by leading a discussion of the following questions:

- Was it easy or difficult to give away your candy? Why?
- Was it easy or difficult to accept others' candy? Why?
- What feelings did you have? Were you pleased? frustrated? happy? sad?
- Did any of you want to participate less? participate more? Why?
- What would you do differently the next time?
- How does this activity demonstrate belonging or the lack of it?

Supplement the teens' comments by saying that giving and receiving go hand in hand. If all of us concentrate on giving love, each of us will feel overwhelmed with the care we receive, and we will realize that we belong.

### Christian Community Large-Group Brainstorming (10–15 minutes)

This brainstorming enables the group to discern the various components of Christian community.

On newsprint write the phrase *Christian community*. Let the retreatants call out words and images that come to mind when they hear that phrase.

After the group has finished brainstorming, invite a volunteer to compose a definition for the phrase *Christian community* based on the words and images listed on the newsprint. Make sure the rest of the group agrees to the definition and then write it on the newsprint.

Lead a discussion of the following questions:

- What's the main difference between secular communities and Christian communities?
- What are the values that guide each of these types of communities?
- What does a Christian community offer that secular communities do not?
- Does our society live by these Christian qualities and values? Why or why not?
- How can we bring Christian values and qualities into our society?

### Put-Ups and Put-Downs Small-Group Activity (15 minutes)

This activity encourages the retreatants to reflect on the power of language.

Begin by directing the teens to form small groups. Explain the activity in your own words as follows:

- For this exercise your group will need a recorder and a reporter. The recorder writes down the group's answers. And, after all the small groups are finished discussing and writing, the reporter reads the group's findings aloud to everyone. Let's have the recorder be the person in your group with the shortest hair, and the reporter, the person with the longest hair.

Make a vertical line down the center of a piece of paper. On the top left side, write "Put-Downs," and on the top right side, write "Put-Ups." Think of times when people have said things to you that were really "downers"—comments that made you feel bad. Put-

downs can be angry comments, insults, or criticisms. Write these in the "Put-Downs" column. Then think of times when people have said things to you that were "uppers"—that made you feel good. Put these comments in the "Put-Ups" column. As a small group you are to list as many put-downs and put-ups that you can recall others saying.

After a few minutes, call time and express the following in your own words:

- Now I want you to think of times when *you* said a put-down or put-up to someone else. Add these to your list.

Next, direct the reporters to count up the number of put-downs and put-ups and report both numbers to the large group. Record the numerical results on newsprint. Chances are there will be more put-downs than put-ups.

Ask these questions:

- Why is it easier to come up with more put-downs than put-ups?
- What attitudes toward others do we need in order to use more put-ups?

### Don't Stomp on Me Large-Group Activity (10 minutes)

This exercise helps the young people reflect on how crushing put-downs can be.

Have a good supply of clean, empty soda cans available. Place on the floor a board or carpet square on which the cans can be crushed.

Direct the reporters from the previous exercise to come up to the front of the room and take turns sharing with the large group several (three to five) put-ups their group listed and then three put-downs. After sharing his or her group's put-downs, direct each reporter to stomp on and crush a soda can.

Conclude the activity with a discussion of the following questions:

- Who can restore the soda can to its original shape?
- Why can't anyone restore the can to its original shape?
- What does this exercise teach us about put-downs?
- Which is easier to restore—someone's self-esteem after it has been stomped on, or this can after it has been crushed? Why?
- What does it take to restore someone's self-esteem?
- What are the negative results of using put-downs?

### Break (10 minutes)

### Draw It Together Small-Group Activity (20 minutes)

This activity highlights the value of each person in a community.

Form teams of four members. Assign each member of each team a different one of the following body parts: eyes, ears, feet, or hands. Give the teens designated as the hands a piece of blank paper and a pencil. Separate the team members, putting the hands in a different room if possible. Give the teens designated as the eyes a copy of resource 1–A, "Draw It Together Diagrams." The eyes each describe one of the diagrams on the resource to their teammate who is the ears (without the ears seeing the resource). The ears listen attentively to the description and remember it. Then the ears each describe what they heard to their

teammate who is the feet. The feet each go and describe the diagram to their teammate who is the hands. The hands must draw what the feet described. (It's similar to the telephone game.)

Discuss the activity using the following questions:

- How different were the drawings from the original diagrams? Why?
- Who was the most important member of the team?
- How important is clear communication among team members? Why?

Summarize the meaning of the activity in words similar to these:

- This experience is like being part of the church. All of us have different functions, but all of us are so important that the church would be crippled without us.

### Scripture Reflection Large-Group Activity (10 minutes)

In this activity the teens experience the Scriptures in a new way.

Introduce the activity by telling the retreatants they will hear a reading from the Scriptures that has been adapted for group participation.

Then assign equal numbers of people to each of the following parts: hands, ears, eyes, nose, and feet. Give each part an action to perform:

- *Hands.* Clap.
- *Ears.* Say “Eh.”
- *Eyes.* Hold up their index finger and say “I.”
- *Nose.* Take a deep breath in.
- *Feet.* Stomp on the floor.

Give the following directions and then deliver the reading, pausing at the ellipses (. . .):

- Whenever I say the word *one*, everyone should stand up in their place and then sit down immediately. When I name your assigned body part, perform your assigned action. Thus, during the reading you will be moving or making sounds whenever you hear the word *one* or your body part. This is a reading adapted from First Corinthians, chapter 12:

The body is a unity, though it is made up of many members. Though its parts are many, they form *one* . . . body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by *one* . . . Spirit into *one* . . . body. Now the body is not made up of *one* . . . part, but of many.

If the *foot* . . . should say, “Because I am not an *eye*, . . . I don't belong to the body,” that would be downright silly. If the whole body were an *eye*, . . . where would the *ears* . . . and the sense of hearing be? But if the whole body were an *ear*, . . . where would the *nose* . . . and the sense of smell be?

God has arranged the parts of the body just as God wanted them to be. If they were all *one* . . . part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but *one* . . . body. The *eye* . . . can't say to the *hand* . . . “I don't need you.” And the *nose* . . . can't say to the *feet* . . . “I don't need you.” For God doesn't want the body parts to argue, but to care for one another equally. That way if *one* . . . part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Summarize the meaning of the activity in your own words:

- Just as it took everyone's participation to make this Scripture passage come alive, so, too, it takes everyone sharing their abilities and gifts to make a community come alive and stay dynamic.

### The Body of Christ Small-Group Activity (20–30 minutes)

This activity fosters in the teens an understanding of, and appreciation for, the variety of God-given gifts and talents that each teen possesses.

1. Direct the retreatants to form small groups. Give each person a copy of handout 1–A, “The Body of Christ.” Then offer the following instructions:

- First read over the entire handout. Then put your initials on the line in front of the parts you feel describe you best; pick your three strongest talents. Then look at the other people in your small group and decide which part best describes each person. Put each person's initials on the line in front of the part you believe best describes her or him.

2. After everyone has completed the handout, say something like this:

- The person with the birthday closest to today's date will begin by explaining what he or she selected for himself or herself. Then the other small-group members will explain what they wrote down for the person who just spoke. The teen who was spoken about then may comment on the other members' selections. It's okay if everyone comes up with different qualities, because the way we see ourselves is not always the way others see us. Repeat the procedure until each member of your group has been spoken about.

3. After the groups are finished, lead a large-group discussion of the following questions:

- Were the parts you chose for yourself the same as the parts others chose for you? Why or why not?
- Pretend someone in your group behaved like one of the body-part descriptions on the handout. How would that person feel? How would others treat him or her?
- The parts of the body contribute to the whole. In what ways do the individuals in your group contribute to the functioning of the group as a whole? In what ways do you contribute?
- How do you feel when a member refuses to contribute? when a member is not allowed to contribute?

### Lunch (45 minutes)

#### Icebreakers (15 minutes)

Choose from among the icebreakers offered in part A of the appendix of this book, or use games of your own.

#### Yes, No, Maybe Large-Group Activity (15 minutes)

This activity challenges the teens to articulate what they believe about God and the Christian community. The exercise is meant to stimulate discussion, encouraging the teens to think and share their various



opinions. It is not meant to be a test. Unless a teen is extremely wrong, do not correct him or her. This may be difficult to do, but keep in mind that your role is one of facilitator, not teacher. Just keep challenging the teens to defend their position. Use questions like these: How have you come to believe that? What would make you change your mind? What makes it so hard to believe . . . ?

Direct the students to sit in chairs in a circle. Then give the following introduction in your own words:

- I am going to read a statement. If you agree with the statement, stand up in front of your chair. If you disagree, sit on the floor in front of your chair. If you are not sure whether you agree or disagree, remain seated in your chair.

After reading each of the statements below, direct the teens to make their choice. Then call for volunteers to explain why they agree, disagree, or are unsure about the statement.

- Most people in my church say they are Christians, but they really are not Christians.
- Being a member of a Christian community means that I cannot do all the fun things my friends do.
- You can tell whether a person is a Christian by the way he or she acts.
- Christians love everyone.
- If there were fewer hypocrites in church, more people would want to attend.
- The church has little or no impact on today's society.
- Watching a Mass on television is just as good as attending one.
- Smaller churches are better than big ones.
- If your church is boring, you should change churches.
- It's important to choose friends who believe the same things about God as you do.
- A family can be a Christian community.
- There's more to being a member of a Christian community than going to church once a week.
- In a Christian community it's easy to share my gifts and talents.
- The most important community to belong to is the Christian community.
- Service to others is an important value in our society.
- If a person doubts God or doubts what the Bible says, she or he can still be a Christian.
- The main advantage to being a Christian is going to heaven.
- I want the faith of the church to be passed on to the next generation. [Say this one last.]

### Community Acrostic Small-Group Activity (15–20 minutes)

In this activity the retreatants brainstorm tangible strategies and ideas that teens can use to help build community in their school, church, and neighborhood.

Direct the teens to form small groups. Give each small group a sheet of newsprint and a marker. Tell half the groups to make an acrostic using the word *build*, and the other half to make an acrostic with the word *community*. Share these directions:

- Take the word that has been assigned to your group, either *build* or *community*, and write that word vertically down the left-hand side of a piece of newsprint. Then, as a small group, brainstorm ideas for building community in your school, church, or neighborhood that begin with each letter of your assigned word. For example [demonstrate on newsprint]:

Become friends with all kinds of people.

U  
I  
L  
D

Compliment others often.

O  
M  
M  
U  
N  
I  
T  
Y

When the small groups are finished, invite each one to share its acrostic with the large group.

### What Are You Made Of? Small-Group Activity (15–20 minutes)

In this activity the retreatants reflect on the qualities of a Christian.

Invite the young people to show one another the various labels on their clothing. Ask if anyone has a piece of clothing that is 100 percent of anything (for example, silk, cotton, polyester). Say something like this:

- Today we have discussed what it means to be a Christian and how to use those qualities to build up a Christian community. Just as clothing has many contents, so there are many components to being a Christian. In your small group create a label for a Christian. It could be 50 percent loving and 50 percent giving; or 50 percent loving, 25 percent giving, and 25 percent faithful. You decide on the contents.

After the groups are done, have one person from each group report the group's answer. If time allows, distribute paper and markers or crayons, and direct the groups to create a label for a Christian.

### Yarn Closing Affirmation (15–20 minutes)

The purpose of this activity is twofold: (1) to give everyone an opportunity to publicly give thanks to God for one of their gifts or talents and (2) to create a yarn web to illustrate the interdependence of gifts in a community.

1. Direct the teens to sit in a big circle on the floor. With a large ball of yarn in your hands, give the following instruction:

- Think about how you would complete the following statement: “I can contribute to my community because God gave me the gift of . . .”

After giving the teens time to think, describe the following procedure:

- After each person completes the statement, he or she holds on to a piece of the yarn and tosses the ball to someone on the opposite side of the circle. That person then completes the statement, holds on to the piece of yarn, and tosses the ball to someone else. We will continue until everyone has had a turn.

Some teens may complete the statement by saying, “my family” or “life.” These are beautiful statements, but the purpose of the activity is for the teens to share a personal gift or talent. If a teen says “my family” or “life,” ask him or her to share a specific gift or talent. Also, some teens may be embarrassed by this activity and thus say that they cannot think of an answer. If that happens, invite other teens or adults to say aloud the various gifts or talents this person possesses. Then have the person choose one of those gifts to complete the statement.

2. When all have finished completing the statement and have a hold on the yarn, ask the following questions:

- What have we created here?
- What does this image illustrate about being part of a Christian community?
- What might the yarn represent and why?
- What is this yarn doing for us physically?

3. Next, invite two or three teens to let go of the yarn and then ask:

- What happened when some people let go of the yarn? Why?
- What does this say about Christian community?

### Closing Guided Meditation (20–30 minutes)

Begin the meditation with a progressive muscle relaxation exercise (see part C of the appendix for suggestions). If possible, play soft instrumental background music. Then continue with the following guided meditation. Pause for a few seconds at each ellipsis (. . .).

- Sometimes we feel a part of a group, and other times we feel rejected and alone. Jesus understands that and reminds us that he is our best friend and is always with us, especially in difficult times.

Imagine that you wake up on the heaven highway by yourself. . . . The highway stretches as far as you can see. . . . Nothing else is around. . . . It’s a peaceful place, but a little lonely. . . . Suddenly from afar you see a car on this highway headed in your direction. . . . The car pulls up next to you, and a bunch of people start to get out so that you won’t be alone. . . . First Saint Peter comes out. He calls you by name, but he doesn’t look like the saint from the Bible. . . . He’s young like you and dresses a little like you, too. . . . He has a big smile on his face, says hi, and offers you a cool drink. . . . Next, out comes Saint John, and he offers you a piece of your favorite candy. . . . Then out comes the Virgin Mary, and she asks how everything is going. . . . Next, out come two other saints. . . . They are all laughing, patting you on the back, and saying how much they want you to be a part of their group. . . .

One more person is still in the car. He slowly begins to get out. . . . As this person makes his way through the crowd of your new friends, you recognize him as Jesus. . . . He has a big smile on his face that shows how much he loves you. . . . You’re overwhelmed by his love and how great you feel that so many saints are with you and are your friends. . . . You’re overwhelmed by Jesus’ unconditional love. . . . You know from those eyes that he will always love you, does not judge you, and constantly calls you to be your best. . . .

Jesus says, “Why don’t we go for a short walk where we can talk?” . . . You walk a little way on the heaven highway and stop in front of a bench. . . . Jesus invites you to sit on the bench and talk with him. He has some questions for you, and he would like you to ask him some questions as well. . . .

Jesus says: “My disciples are my closest friends. They are my family. Is there anything you would like me to do for your friends and family?” Spend some time sharing with Jesus. [Longer pause.]

Jesus goes on to say: “Being part of a community requires commitment. What’s holding you back from being more committed to your church and to me?” [Longer pause.]

Jesus remarks: “You are very special. God has given you many gifts that our world needs. What are some talents you recently shared that helped another person?” [Longer pause.]

Jesus has one more question for you: “What’s the hardest part of being a Christian, and how can I help you?” [Longer pause.]

Jesus asks if you have any questions for him. Spend a few minutes, if you would like, asking Jesus some questions and listening to his responses. [Longer pause.]

Jesus says: “I have a gift for you—the gift of friendship, my friendship. . . . No matter where you go or who you meet or who you leave, you will always have me. . . . I want to be your best friend and spend time with you. . . . So anytime you want to get together, quiet yourself and call my name, and I will come to you. . . . I love you very much. You do not need to fear.”

Jesus explains that he’s really enjoyed this time together, but he must go now. He stands up from the bench and begins to walk down the heaven highway. . . . As he walks further and further away, he appears smaller and smaller. . . . Now you no longer can see him, but you still feel his presence and friendship. . . . You close your eyes for a moment and say a little prayer of gratitude for your best friend, Jesus, and all the things you talked about with him: “Jesus, thank you for always being there for me. Help me to see my part in the Body of Christ and to always believe in myself and in you. Amen.”

When you open your eyes, you will no longer be sitting on the bench on the heaven highway, but back here in this room. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and come back.

### Evaluation Large Group (5 minutes)

After the guided meditation, direct the teens to reflect in writing on the following questions. Invite them to answer aloud if they feel comfortable doing so.

- If you had only one word to describe today, what word would you pick?
- What is one new thing you learned today, or what is one thing you really liked? (It could be something we did or something someone said.)
- What do you feel God is challenging you to do as a result of this retreat?

## Draw It Together Diagrams

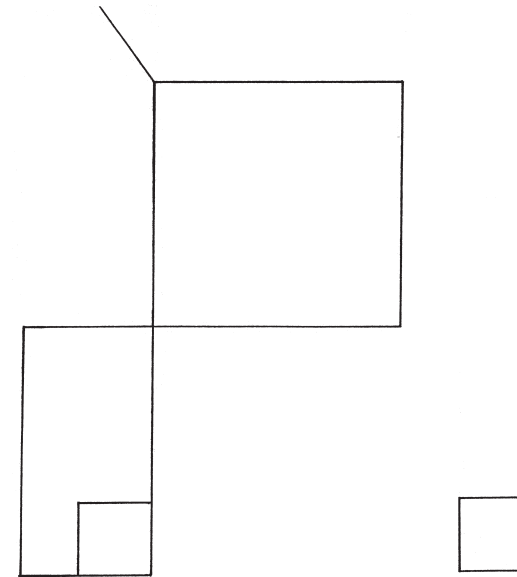


Diagram 1

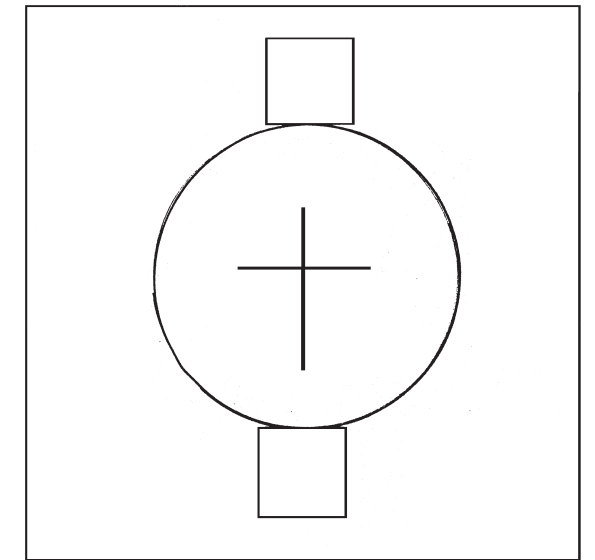


Diagram 2

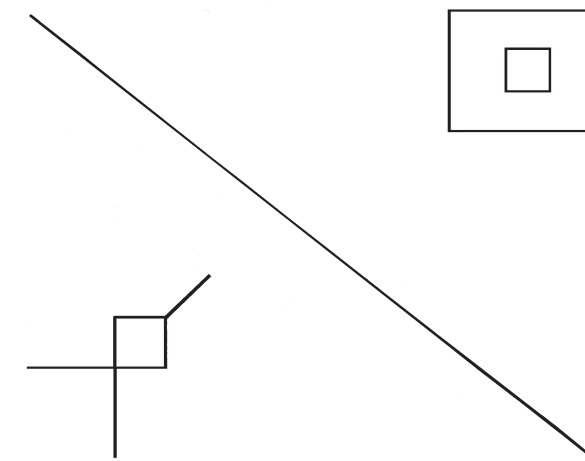


Diagram 3





# The Body of Christ

The drawing below represents our church. Write your initials on the line next to the three parts of the body that best describe you and the unique talents and gifts you share with the church.

Next, write in the initials of each member of your small group next to the body part that you believe best describes her or him.



\_\_\_\_\_ *Head.* Smart, teaches others

\_\_\_\_\_ *Ears.* Listens well

\_\_\_\_\_ *Funny bone.* Makes people laugh,  
has a good sense of humor

\_\_\_\_\_ *Backbone.* Has a lot of courage

\_\_\_\_\_ *Eyes.* Always watches out for others

\_\_\_\_\_ *Mouth.* Has good things to say,  
articulates well

\_\_\_\_\_ *Shoulders.* Supports and helps  
other people

\_\_\_\_\_ *Heart.* Is caring and loving

\_\_\_\_\_ *Fingers.* Is good at building things

\_\_\_\_\_ *Hands.* Is creative and artistic

\_\_\_\_\_ *Legs.* Is athletic and strong

\_\_\_\_\_ *Knees.* Prays and has a deep faith