

*Sacraments:
Celebrating the Sacred*



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To Victoria Eden, the first child of a new generation in our life, who was born into a loving family and baptized into a faithful community as this course was taking shape. May life be gentle and the world be kind to this wondrous child of God.



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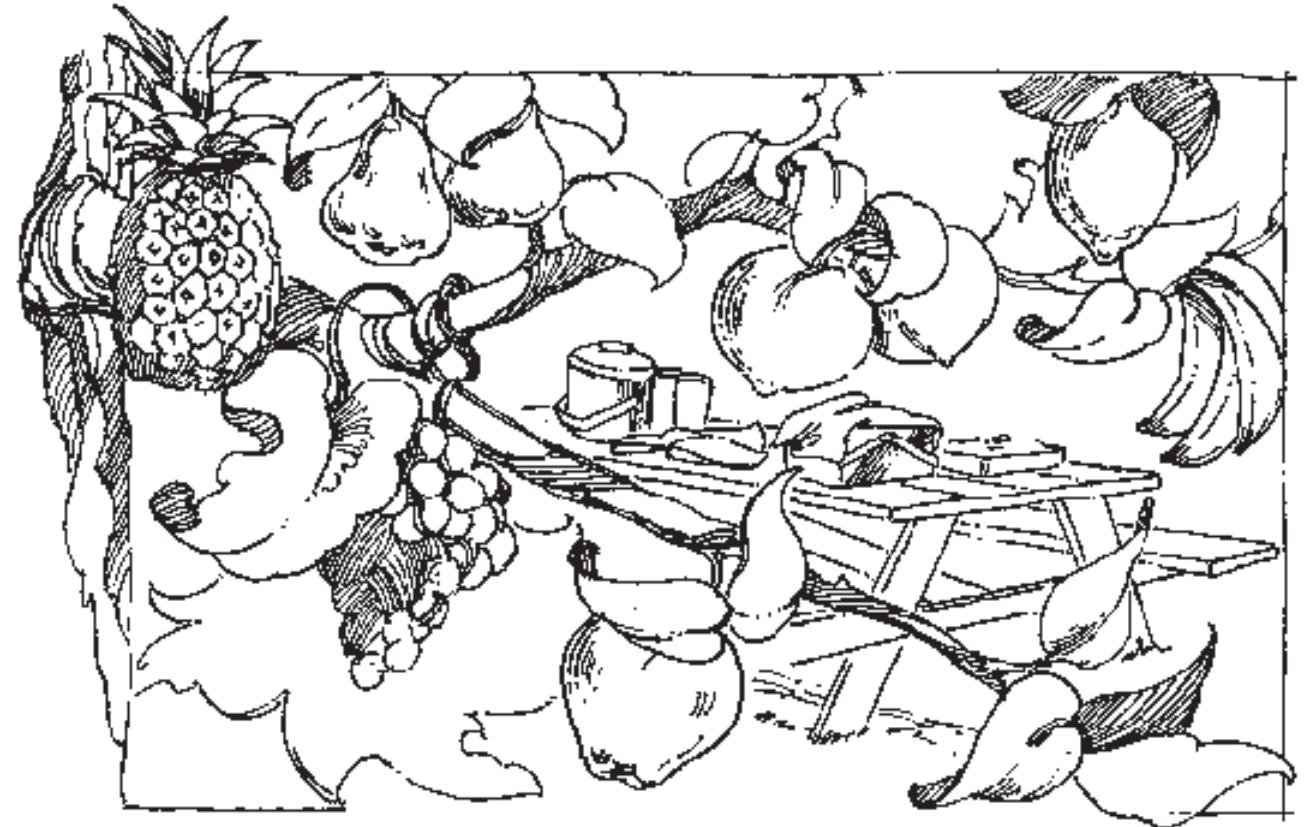
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Sacramental moments are points of contact between us and God—moments of grace that sustain us for the journey. They are moments or life events in which God’s loving presence breaks into our consciousness and becomes very real to us. These moments are common to all human beings. They connect us spiritually to all those who came before us and all those who will come after us.

As universal human experiences, sacramental moments are not uniquely Catholic. And religious rituals that celebrate such moments and life events are common to many religions around the world. As part of their celebration of life’s holy moments,

many religions break bread, anoint with oil, pour wine, lay hands, wash with water, and pronounce forgiveness. However, the place of the sacraments in the life of the Catholic church is unique. The sacraments are “for most of us, the actual point of contact with others who are Christian. They are the moment in which we encounter the church-assembled” (Huebsch, *Rethinking Sacraments*, p. 8).

Young people, too, experience life’s holy moments. They, too, break bread every time they share a meal with family or friends. They have been initiated—sometimes formally, often informally—into countless groups in their short life. Most, we hope, have experienced the comfort of being embraced in a time of struggle. They have forgiven and been forgiven many times over. They have been physically

healed with prescribed balm and experienced emotional healing in the security of a loving relationship. And many have made serious commitments to individuals and to groups. All this experience with life's sacred moments has primed the sacramental pump, so to speak. Because of such experiences, most adolescents can understand the concept of sacrament. They are eager to recognize and celebrate the points of contact between themselves and God.

The focus of *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* is first on sacramental moments of life, and then on those particular moments that are celebrated as part of the Catholic church's sacramental tradition. The readiness of young people to understand sacramentality in a deeper way than they could as children, their experience with the church's sacraments, and their genuine—though probably unarticulated—search for wholeness are the starting points for what can be a rich and enlightening experience for the young people and you.

Because the sacramental life of the church is modeled on the life of Jesus and a way of ritually living out the Gospel message, *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* logically follows from the second core course in level 1, *Jesus: His Message and Mission*. This course presumes, therefore, that the participants will be ninth graders who have experienced the core course on Jesus. The activities and information are written with that age-group in mind.

The course is intended to be taught as three 2-hour sessions presented one a week in consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. However, it is possible to use this course in different formats, such as in a retreat setting. The activities are structured with a group of ten to fifteen young people in mind. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may have to make minor adjustments to the session plans. If you need help with this task, consult your program coordinator.

The first session of *Sacraments* explores the topics of symbol and ritual. Through a series of activities, the participants are encouraged to begin thinking symbolically in a way that is appropriate to their rapidly developing cognitive skills. After establishing the significance of thinking symbolically, the focus shifts to the symbols and rituals that are used in celebrations of cultural holidays and special events. That discussion provides a natural link to the symbols and rituals that are part of religious celebrations. The first session closes with a prayer ritual, one that will then be repeated in every session, with appropriate adaptations.

Session 2 includes an active process in which the young people construct a wall-size grid that includes some of the major facts about each of the seven sacraments. It also uses a Scripture search that engages the young people in finding and connecting passages to specific sacraments. It is not an attempt at proof-texting, that is, trying to prove that the sacraments can be found in the Scriptures. Rather, it is simply a way of highlighting the scriptural basis for the church's sacramental tradition. It is a challenging but fun activity. The session closes with an extended ritual prayer focused on reconciliation, a sacrament that has unique implications for adolescents.

The final session opens with an activity that invites the young people to consider several layers of meaning for each sacrament and to choose the meaning that is closest to their own belief. Then the focus of the session shifts to the Eucharist, which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting Saint Thomas Aquinas, refers to as the "Sacrament of sacraments" (no. 1211). *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* closes with an agape ritual that invites the young people to consider those who have been Eucharist to them, those whom they have served, and those who are in need of care.

Throughout this course, the young people are challenged to grow in their sacramental awareness, being always mindful of God's presence. It is not an easy task for anyone—let alone those who are young—to be perpetually mindful of mystery. To help us achieve the goal of sacramental mindfulness, God gave us the tangible elements of life itself to more clearly understand the mystery that is God.

We cannot see God
but we can see fire;
we can taste bread;
we can hear words;
we can smell incense;
we can touch one another's bodies. . . .
The heart of the sacraments is life itself.
(Huebsch, *Rethinking Sacraments*, p. 4)

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Most young people will come into this course with some knowledge about the sacraments. If they have any experience of religious education, it probably includes at least some personal sacramental preparation—likely first reconciliation and communion, and perhaps confirmation. So the good news is that you probably are not starting from scratch! But the understanding of the sacramental life of the church that they come with will be restricted to what they were capable of hearing and knowing as children.

As noted, one of the presumptions about this course is that it is being taught to a group that consists primarily of ninth graders, probably in the second half of their first year of high school. For the most part, young people at this age have moved into the style of thinking known as formal operations. This means that in their study of sacraments, they can move beyond the concrete thinking of children and think about concepts like sacramental awareness and the meaning of the Eucharist. They can also begin to understand and appreciate the connections between their everyday life and the sacramental life of the church.

Following are some characteristics of adolescents that connect directly with sacramental life. Even though a particular young person may not manifest all these characteristics, you are likely to encounter teenagers who reflect each of the following traits:

- **Adolescents are regularly involved in and appreciate tradition and ritual.** Whether it be a ritual before a game or performance, an initiation into a club or a performing organization, the way they choose to celebrate birthdays among their friends, or even the way the family celebrates Christmas, adolescents are coming to rely on the familiarity and meaning that ritual brings to life. And if a tradition is broken, they are often the first to call attention to it. Because of this adolescent affinity for ritual, *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* relies heavily on experiencing ritual rather than simply talking about it.

- **Adolescents have experienced the meaning of symbol.** Young people are likely to attach great significance to things that may not hold much value for adults. A quick glance at a teenager's bedroom will confirm this peculiar trait of adolescence, one that results in almost a sacramental attachment to certain things. Because young people appreciate the power of symbol in a new way at this time in their life, many symbolic items are included in the prayer services. In fact if you are familiar with other Horizons courses, you may notice an unusually high number of required and optional items in the materials checklists for this course. Rely on your experience and judgment in using these materials.
- **Adolescents can and often do plan celebrations for others.** Through the elementary grades, birthday and holiday celebrations are planned by parents. Those celebrations may or may not include the presence of friends. But adolescents are likely to think of planning a celebration on their own for a friend's birthday, even if it is only getting together with two or three others and sharing a pizza. They may observe anniversaries, particularly if they are dating. And they often try to think of creative celebrations and gifts for family members to commemorate birthdays and holidays. Many of the parish and family connections in this course suggest engaging the young people in planning celebrations.
- **Adolescents are developing an awareness of how all of life is connected.** Because of this, they may be able to see the sacred in places and events where it was not obvious to them. If they do not yet see these connections, a course like this one may open their eyes.

The Theology of This Course

In one sense, all major religions have "sacraments." That is, all religions have some way of recognizing and expressing the connections between God, the world, and humanity. Other Christian religions even celebrate some of the same sacramental moments as Catholicism does. But Catholicism is *essentially* and *particularly* a sacramental faith tradition.

Contemporary Catholic theology teaches that Jesus is the sacrament of God. That is, the humanity of Jesus is a sacrament of his divinity. It also teaches that the Catholic church, as the Body of Christ, is the sacrament of Jesus. If the church itself

is a sacrament, then it must act sacramentally. It does so primarily through the seven sacraments.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Catholicism is its unique way of viewing all of reality as manifesting God's presence, which broadens the meaning of sacramentality. The created world itself can be understood as a sacrament in that it is a manifestation of Godself as well as a means to encounter God.

In a talk entitled "Teaching Sacraments," theologian Doris Donnelly cites seven principles of Catholic sacramental theology that we must operate from and convey as we teach about the sacraments to the contemporary church:

- Contemporary theology respects human experience as the starting point for understanding sacraments. God's story can only be heard if it is a response to the human story.
- To understand sacraments requires that a person be able to think symbolically. Once the shift to symbolic thinking is made, however, it becomes permanent. It becomes a special way of seeing reality.
- Catholic sacramental theology involves more than just the seven official sacraments. As noted above, in its broadest sense, the world itself is a sacrament.
- All sacraments are not equal in terms of their importance or centrality in the life of the church. Baptism and the Eucharist are at a level above the others, primarily because their institution by Jesus is more direct, more formal, and more explicit. The Eucharist, the real presence of Jesus, is considered the "Sacrament of sacraments," the source and summit of Catholic life.
- Contemporary sacramental theology honors the revealed word of God as sacrament. Like sacraments, the word of God effects what it signifies. God's most important word was the person—the sacrament—of Jesus. ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" [John 1:1, NRSV].)
- Contemporary sacramental theology supports a social justice agenda. The emphasis is on the *we* rather than on the *I*. The foundation for the task of bringing justice to the world begins at baptism.

- Sacramental training must deal with the *why* questions rather than the *how* questions. The *how* questions (How many . . . ? How much . . . ? How do I . . . ?) reflect a causal orientation that quantifies the experience of grace. Grace is not collectible or quantifiable. It is a gift freely given. However, it is important to note that, pastorally speaking, the *how* questions are often the gate to the *why* questions. (Why do you want . . . ? Why do we do this . . . ? Why is it important to . . . ?)

Donnelly cites the Emmaus story from the Gospel of Luke as one that embodies the fundamental principles of sacramental theology. First, the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus in *community* ("Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road . . . ?" [Luke 24:32, NRSV]). Second, they recognized him in the *word* ("while he was opening the scriptures to us?" [24:32, NRSV]). Finally, they recognized him in the breaking of the bread ("Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" [24:31, NRSV]).

The intention of *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* is to help the young people recognize the presence of God in their life in the same three ways: by seeing God in the word, in other people, and in the sacramental life of the Catholic church.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as "the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers" (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons

Program tries to *be* "good news" not just proclaim the Good News.

Depending on their experience with liturgy and religious education, some young people eagerly enter into the sacramental life of the community and find it enriching and life-giving. Others view it as meaningless drudgery that is tangential to real life. This course is evangelizing in that it takes into consideration both positions while leading young people to the eventual recognition that the church is vitally aware of the holiness of *all* of life. Young people need to know that the Catholic church teaches that *all* of life is real, holy, and, by virtue of that fact, sacramental. They also need to know that certain moments in life are so significant that they require us to acknowledge the presence of God in a special way and to celebrate that presence in community. What young people will hear in *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* is an evangelizing challenge to recognize the sacramentality of life and to live in accordance with that awareness.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and community environment among the members of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to introspection and to sharing. In addition, the many ritual prayers in this course will be most effective in a space that is warm and inviting. Here are two suggestions for developing that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. Because sacraments involve experiences as well as words, this course, *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred*, is necessarily experiential. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Such movement is a basic requirement for active learning. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules and any others that you establish.

It is also important, especially to the success of the prayer experiences in *Sacraments*, that the participants treat the rituals seriously. State this expectation clearly at the beginning of the course. Most young people will respond positively to an expectation of serious behavior that is grounded in respect. However, if you observe that some of the students are not able to maintain an attitude of solemnity, you may need to make adjustments in the prayer experiences. Talk with your program coordinator about the best way to do this.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This could range from copying phrases onto sheets of paper to procuring items for the prayer space. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences with the sacraments will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.

- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

Journal activities present an opportunity for one-to-one ministry to young people. A young person might write something in a journal that she or he would not feel comfortable sharing in a group or even talking about at all. If you do assign journal activities, take the time to read the young people's responses—with their permission—and then write in comments or words of encouragement or affirmation.

Though we encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Sacraments*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, there are some practical reasons for not including the journal component. First, if every teacher of every course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of the activity. Second, journal keeping is a time- and energy-consuming process for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into

your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Sacraments* suggest using music. This is particularly true of the prayer experiences. However, no activities in this course *require* music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. Circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of class participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to the topic of sacramentality. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. This is particularly true of younger adolescents. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by the ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for. You may not be able to find specific songs on the sacraments, but you will find many options that deal with the holiness of life, baptism, and the Eucharist.

Ritual Prayer

Because of the nature of the church's sacramental celebrations, all the prayer experiences in *Sacraments* consist of ritual. This form of prayer may be uncomfortable initially for some teachers and young people. If we realize, however, just how many rituals are part of our daily life, ritual prayer seems like a natural part of our prayer life. Some suggestions for leading effective ritual prayer with young people follow:

- Be comfortable with the process of the ritual. Practice leading the prayer with a real or imaginary group before the session. It will lose some of its solemnity and effectiveness if you must constantly refer to this teaching guide. If you like, jot some notes about the process on an index card and refer to the card as you need to. Doing so will be less conspicuous than reading from the book.
- Maintain a proper sense of pacing, reverence, and solemnity. Do not rush through the rituals. Our culture calls both young people and adults to live most of life at a fast pace. A well-paced solemn ritual can be a calming factor in the scattered life of an adolescent. Their attitude will reflect your mood and your manner.
- The young people's discomfort with ritual prayer may lead to their behaving inappropriately. Be clear in your expectations that they treat prayer time reverently. Also let them know that you know they can do it. If you expect the best from them, you will probably get it.
- Many of the experiences in this course are active. It may take some time for active adolescents to quiet down. Be sure that everyone is settled before beginning any ritual. It may take more than a few seconds for your group members to calm down, but when they do, they will be able to enter into the prayer more fully. Be silent while you wait for silence. Telling the young people to be quiet is not nearly as effective—or as conducive to prayer—as being quiet yourself. They will eventually catch on.

- Young people are likely to be uncomfortable if they do not know what is expected of them. Before beginning a ritual, briefly explain it to the group. If any words or gestures are involved, you may want to practice with the participants if you think that they will not be able to follow your lead. If the ritual uses words, you could write the words on a piece of poster board so that everyone can see them. It is better to prepare the group before the ritual begins than to stop in the middle of it to explain what comes next.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Sacraments is one of the minicourses in the Horizons Program that can be effectively recast as a daylong retreat. It can also be used as an overnight retreat, with the inclusion of some additional material and activities. If you are thinking about providing a retreat experience for the participants, consult the program coordinator. The first consideration must be the readiness of the young people. Then think about your own or other adults' ability to adapt this material into a retreat and lead an effective experience. Finally, consider the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- The focus of the prayer in sessions 2 and 3 is on reconciliation and the Eucharist, respectively. In a retreat format, you can have the participants help plan full celebrations of each sacrament. These celebrations will be most effective if you have a priest who relates well with young people.
- You may be able to invite guest speakers, such as those named in the parish program suggestions that follow. The young people can connect with other adults in the parish besides you and the religious education team.
- Some retreat settings are suitable for nature walks. Such a hike could easily lead to a discussion of the need for sacramental awareness.
- Most retreat centers, campsites, and lodges are conducive to effective prayer and ritual experiences. Sometimes simply getting away from the usual location helps people look at things in a new way.

Disadvantages

Though doing *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* as a retreat has many advantages, it also has one major disadvantage that deserves serious consideration before proceeding. The topic of sacraments is a heavy one for ninth graders. The course includes many fact-based activities that are fine in a 2-hour format but could get overwhelming in a retreat setting. To make the retreat effective for the age-group, you may have to include a lot of icebreakers, games, and community builders. On the plus side, such activities can teach a great deal about sacraments and sacramentality.

Special Preparation Needs

Read through the entire course to get a sense of its plan and progression. Become so familiar with the ritual experiences that you can conduct them skillfully. If you would like some help with this part of the course, consult your program coordinator.

Consider your own experiences of the sacraments, particularly those you had as an adolescent. Think about the following questions:

- How did you feel about going to Mass?
- Were you confirmed as an adolescent? If so, what do you remember of your confirmation?
- Can you name some significant sacramental moments?
- How did you define *sacrament*?
- Did the word *sacrament* have meaning for you beyond the seven sacraments of the church?

At the end of session 3, consider giving each young person a small token to remember the course. It should be an appropriate symbol of the sacramental life of the church, for example, a small cross, a bookmark with a butterfly and a Scripture verse on it, a candle, or a pencil with an appropriate saying. You can be as creative as you like. If your group is small, you could give each person something different. For example, for each person find something small that symbolizes him or her and present it during the closing prayer.

And finally, before you begin teaching this course, read the section on the sacraments in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 1210 to 1666.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Connect the participants with members of the parish liturgy committee, people involved with baptismal preparation for new parents, married couples who prepare engaged couples for marriage, people who minister to the sick of the parish, and so forth. Ask these adults to speak to the young people about the sacraments with which they are involved. They might even be willing to include a few young people in their next meeting, class, or visit.
- As part of a retreat or day of reflection, ask the participants what other moments in life they think could be officially recognized by the church as sacraments. For example, these might include graduation from high school or college, the birth of a baby, or certain milestone birthdays. Direct them to design rituals for celebrating their new "sacraments."

- Help the participants plan and conduct a day for those preparing for first Eucharist or first reconciliation. Put the young people in touch with the DRE or coordinator of the elementary program for resources that are suitable for children.
- Because the sacramental life of the Catholic church is one of its unique features, ask new Catholics who recently experienced the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults to share with the young people some of their thoughts on the sacraments.
- After the course is over, help the young people plan a eucharistic celebration for themselves, their families, or younger students in the religious education program.

Family Connections

In addition to broadening parish connections, *Sacraments* lends itself to forging links with the family life of the participants. Here are some options to consider:

- Gather a group of parents and course participants to plan a liturgy or an agape service for all the families in the group. The theme might be “Seeing the sacred in each other.” Or instruct the participants to plan such an event for their families or for families in the parish.
- As part of a retreat or evening of reflection, let the young people invite a parent, grandparent, or other older relative or friend to talk to the group. Suggest that the speaker talk about how and what he or she learned about sacraments as a youngster and how the sacramental celebrations have changed over the years.
- Suggest that families create some of their own rituals for significant events. Or if you have the time and interest, you may want to develop a few yourself, write them down, and send them to the families of the participants. Two good resources include *Prayers for the Domestic Church: A Handbook for Worship in the Home*, by Edward Hays (Easton, KS: Forest of Peace Books, 1979) and *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC: USCC, 1988).

- After the course is finished, write notes telling each family what you see as the sacramental gift of their young person. That is, express where you see God’s presence alive in this person. Mail the notes to the families.

Suggestions specific to each session are offered in the Alternative Approaches section at the end of each session plan.

Goals and Objectives

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred

Goals

The three goals for this course are as follows:

- That the young people develop an understanding of the sacramentality of life and the need for sacramental awareness
- That they grow in their knowledge about the sacraments and their understanding of the place of sacraments in their life and in the life of the church
- That they explore the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist with particular implications for their life as adolescents

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the three course goals:

Session 1: “Signs, Symbols, and Celebrations”

- To introduce the young people to the concept of sacramental awareness
- To foster in them an awareness of the significance, richness, and power of symbol and ritual
- To help them understand the sacraments as a way of celebrating life events within the Catholic community
- To let them experience ritual prayer that engages them in symbolic gestures and the use of symbolic objects

Session 2:

“Sacrament of God, Sacraments of the Church”

- To facilitate a process that will outline for the young people basic facts and beliefs about the sacramental life of the church
- To define and describe for them the Catholic understanding of the seven sacraments
- To engage them in an experience of reconciliation

Session 3: “Breaking Bread, Being Sacrament”

- To facilitate a process that will give the young people a summary understanding of the Catholic church’s seven sacraments
- To help them understand the Eucharist as the source and summit of the sacramental life of the Catholic church
- To engage them in an agape ritual to bring the course to a prayerful close

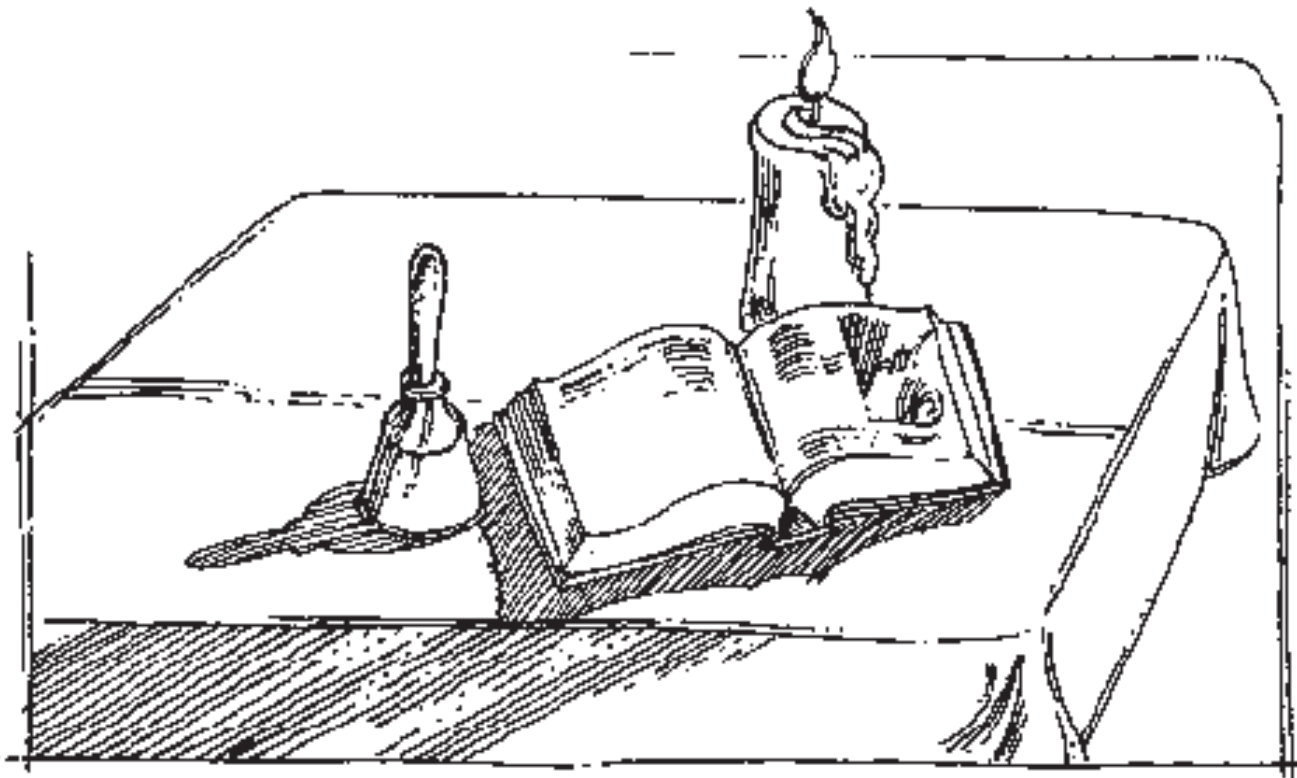
Suggested Resources

The following resources may provide helpful background and teaching materials.

- Bausch, William J. *A New Look at the Sacraments*. Rev. ed. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983.
- Cooke, Bernard. *Sacraments and Sacramentality*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983.
- Donnelly, Doris. *Teaching Sacraments*. A taped presentation delivered at the 1996 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress.
- Guzie, Tad. *The Book of Sacramental Basics*. Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981.
- Huebsch, Bill. *Rethinking Sacraments: Holy Moments in Daily Living*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989.
- Stoutzenberger, Joseph. *Celebrating Sacraments*. Rev. ed. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1993.
- . *Teaching Manual for Celebrating Sacraments*. Rev. ed. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1993.

SESSION 1

Signs, Symbols, and Celebrations



Objectives

- To introduce the young people to the concept of sacramental awareness
- To foster in them an awareness of the significance, richness, and power of symbol and ritual
- To help them understand the sacraments as a way of celebrating life events within the Catholic community
- To let them experience ritual prayer that engages them in symbolic gestures and the use of symbolic objects

Session Steps

- a welcome and an introductory activity (10 minutes)
- a prayer experience using common items (15 minutes)
- an exercise on nonverbal communication (15 minutes)
- an exercise to focus on life events (25 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a demonstration and a discussion on ritual actions (20 minutes)
- a presentation on human experience and sacramental life (10 minutes)
- a closing prayer ritual (15 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

The first session of *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* focuses on the richness of symbol and ritual and how common these things are in our life. As the young people arrive, they are asked to decipher word puzzles. The activity breaks the ice, focuses the participants, and provides a starting point for an exploration of various means of communication.

After a brief discussion of the puzzles, the concept of sacramental awareness is presented briefly along with an introduction to the course. Then the participants engage in three activities designed to help them investigate the nature of symbol; the use of objects, gestures, and other nonverbal means of communication; and, finally, ritual.

After the break the focus shifts to the religious symbolism of objects, actions, and rituals. Six volunteers each experience a different ritual action. This is followed by a small-group discussion of the religious significance of the rituals. After the discussion your task as the leader is to synthesize the experiences of the session and to begin to connect them to the sacramental life of the Catholic church. Because of the limited attention span of young adolescents, the presentation time is restricted to 10 minutes. Be sure to prepare your comments adequately to make the best use of the time you have to integrate all the elements of the session.

The closing prayer for session 1 is—as you might expect—replete with symbols and rituals. It will be most effective if you are so familiar with the process that you can orchestrate it without relying on the printed page. It begins with a call to recognize the ubiquitous presence of God. A well-conducted prayer service will foster an attitude of sacramental awareness in the young people that might never be accomplished with words alone.

Note: See the introduction for other tips on how to conduct ritual prayer.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- a copy of resource 1–A, “Word Puzzles”
- blank paper
- markers
- masking tape
- name tags (optional)
- pens or pencils
- a box of household and office objects
- one blindfold for each person
- several large sheets of newsprint
- blank strips of paper, approximately 8 1/2-by-3 inches
- a Bible
- items for the demonstration: a pitcher of lukewarm water; a large bowl or a bucket; a hand towel; a small roll or a slice of bread, on a plate; a small amount of lightly scented oil or lotion; a pillar candle and matches; and a tape or CD player and a recording of reflective music (optional)
- items for the prayer space: a small bell or chime; a small table (optional); a colored cloth; a small, white cloth; a small, clear glass bowl of lightly scented oil; a Bible; and the lit candle used during the demonstration

Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Copy onto sheets of paper the word puzzles from resource 1–A and post them around the room.
- For step B.* Gather a variety of household and office items and put them in a box. Consider formulating one or two sample prayers as directed in step B.
- For step C.* If you do not have material for blindfolds, make some out of dark-colored construction paper as directed in step C.
- For step D.* Write the discussion questions on newsprint as directed in step D.
- For step G.* Prepare a presentation as directed in step G.
- For step H.* Place a bookmark at Matt. 18:19–20 in the Bible.

- ❑ *For step H.* Read through the prayer service carefully and become familiar with the process.
- ❑ Think about your experiences with sacraments, both those you have personally received and those you have witnessed. Which were particularly meaningful to you? What factors contributed to the positive experience? Which seemed empty? Why?
- ❑ Determine if you want to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches described at the end of this session plan.

Opening Teacher Prayer

The teacher prayers in *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred* are based on the Exsultet, the hymn sung during the Easter Vigil service, one of the most significant times of the year in the sacramental life of the Catholic church. In addition to reflecting on the prayers as they are presented in the course, you may also want to get a recording of the Exsultet. It would most likely be available at a religious goods store or a media store that carries eclectic recorded music.

You may also want to create a ritual for yourself to accompany your prayer. The ritual may be as simple as lighting a candle or laying out a special piece of cloth. Use the same ritual for every teacher prayer.

Blessing. Begin this time of prayer by invoking the Triune God.

Scripture reading. “In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you. . . . For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:19–20, NJB).

Exsultet reading. “Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God’s throne! Jesus Christ is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation!” (adapted from *The Sacramentary*, p. 182).

Reflection. As a Christian and a Catholic, what do you want to “trumpet” to the young people in this course?

Prayer. Eternal God, I pray that the light of Christ may shine on me, helping me to honor our God and proclaim fitting praise. Through Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.

Procedure

A Welcome and Opening Activity (10 minutes)

1. As the young people arrive, greet them warmly. Distribute name tags if you do not know the participants or if you think they may not know one another. Provide each person with a sheet of blank paper and a pen or pencil and tell them that while they are waiting for the session to begin, they should try to figure out the meaning of the word puzzles posted on the wall. You may have to solve one for them as an example.

2. When everyone has gathered, formally welcome them and introduce yourself if necessary. You might want to tell them a little about your family, your work, and why you chose to be involved in the ministry of catechesis and formation.

3. Call attention to the word puzzles posted around the room. Ask for answers to the puzzles. If the participants are stumped by a puzzle, reveal the answer listed on the bottom of resource 1–A, “Word Puzzles.” When all the word puzzles have been solved, make the following comments in your own words:

- Explain that the word puzzles convey ordinary messages in different ways. Finding the solution to each puzzle requires that we look beyond the obvious and ordinary meaning of letters, words, numbers, and pictures and recognize the symbolic ways in which these elements are used.
- Note that the course *Sacraments* is about symbolic actions that recall profound events, celebrate their significance, and provide hope and direction. They are celebrations in which ordinary events in life take on extraordinary meaning in the presence of God and the worshiping community of the Catholic church. In the sacraments, God communicates through the people, places, actions, events, and experiences that shape a person’s life.

- Note that the young people may already know a good deal about the seven sacraments of the Catholic church from other religious education classes. Acknowledge that they have probably celebrated some of the sacraments. Ask the participants to name the sacraments that they have celebrated or witnessed.
- Clarify that the word *sacrament* has a broader meaning than most people learn about as children. The church teaches that all life is sacramental and that we are called to sacramental awareness. That is, we are called to acknowledge that God is everywhere and that all creation is sacred and communicates God’s love to us. Sacramental awareness is necessary to truly appreciate the special meaning of the church’s sacraments. Cultivating sacramental awareness allows human beings to grow in love of both creation and the gift of life, as well as in faith in God.
- Conclude by saying that the first session of *Sacraments* focuses on signs, symbols, rituals, and other ways that human beings communicate nonverbally with one another and with God. Along with words each of these elements of non-verbal communication plays a special role in sacramental celebrations. Invite the young people to practice sacramental awareness throughout the course, that is, to grow in their awareness of God’s presence in a special way.

B Exercise: Prayer in a Box (15 minutes)

Before the session. Gather a variety of common household and office items and put them in a box. You might include, for example, a roll of tape, a tissue, a scissors, a cup, an eraser, a picture frame, a bottle of aspirin, a stamp. Try to have at least three objects for each person in the group.

You may want to create a prayer or two to use as examples instead of the one described in part 1.

1. Display the items in the box. Tell each person to choose three items and create a prayer that refers to each of the three items. Give the following example, or one of your own creation:
 - If a person chooses a roll of tape, an eraser, and a bottle of aspirin, her or his prayer might be something like “God, help me to erase my mistakes (eraser), heal the hurts I may have caused (aspirin), and patch up a broken friendship (tape).”

Let the participants know that they will be sharing their prayers with the entire group.

Note: If some of the participants seem particularly shy, you may want to have everyone work in pairs or triads to lower the discomfort level in the group.

Allow no more than 5 minutes for the young people to create their prayer. You may want to provide blank paper and pens or pencils for those who want to write their prayer. Make sure to create one yourself if you did not do so before the session.

2. When everyone has finished, ask each participant to share his or her prayer with the rest of the group, beginning with yourself. Be prepared for some creative responses and even laughter!

3. After all the prayers have been shared, explain that the items in the box were used to get everyone thinking *symbolically*, that is, they were used to illustrate that objects can take on special meanings apart from the objects themselves. As human beings we often use things in a symbolic way to communicate with one another. Ask the participants to think of items that are regularly used in a symbolic manner. Some examples might be flowers for someone who is ill, a Christmas present, a varsity letter earned through school activities, a ring, and a birthday cake.

Announce that you will make connections between these symbols and the sacramental life in the church later in the session. Then move right into the next activity without stopping for discussion.

C Exercise: Blind Lineup (15 minutes)

Before the session. You will need one blindfold for every person. If you do not have access to strips of cloth, use strips of dark-colored construction paper with a triangle cut out for the nose. Give each participant a large rubber band to secure the paper around her or his face.

1. Tell the participants to stand in a straight line. Give everyone a blindfold and ask them to put it on. When they have done so, explain that the task of the group is to rearrange the line according to height, from the tallest to the shortest. Allow no more than 3 minutes for this task. When they have finished, comment on the success or failure of their attempt. Have them keep their blindfold on.

2. Once again make sure that the young people form a straight line. Explain that they are to rearrange the line in order of birthdays. Emphasize that they are to do this without speaking or whispering to one another. They can use gestures or some other form of communication that does not involve words. Give no other instructions and do not offer suggestions for accomplishing the task. When they have finished or when 5 minutes has passed, tell them to remove their blindfold. Check on the accuracy of the results by having each participant state his or her birthday, beginning with the first person in line.

3. Gather the young people in a circle and discuss the following questions:

- How did you accomplish the task in the first lineup? What methods of communication did you use?
- How did you accomplish the task in the second lineup? What methods of communication did you use?

4. Summarize the activity with comments like the following:

- Before moving into the next activity, briefly tell the group that human beings need nonverbal ways to communicate certain things. Words can convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas, but as we noted earlier, we also make use of symbolic objects to express these things. Sometimes symbolic actions also get at something deeper. Symbolic actions are called rituals. A hug, a handshake, or even applause are nonverbal actions that convey a deeper meaning.

Move directly into the next step without stopping for discussion. However, mention that you will be coming back to nonverbal communication and sacraments in the second half of the session.

D Discussion Exercise: Life Events (25 minutes)

Before the session. Write the following questions on newsprint, using one sheet of newsprint for every one or two questions. Leave space for writing below each question. If you have a large group, use one sheet for each question, because the answers will require more space than if you have a smaller group. Post these questions on a wall or someplace where they will be easily visible to the participants.

- What objects are used in this event?
- In what ways and by what means are persons gathered for this event?
- Who is usually included?
- What actions or gestures are associated with the event?
- What senses are used to communicate?
- What happens after the event or as a result of it?
- What past event does the celebration recall? what present reality? what future meaning?

1. Divide the participants into pairs or triads. Assign each group one of the following events. Choose the events that you think would be most appropriate for your group or your setting. For a more random result, you may want to write each event on a small slip of paper, fold it up, put it in some sort of container, and allow one person from each group to choose a slip of paper.

- a birthday
- a graduation
- a sports championship
- a wedding
- homecoming at the high school
- the Fourth of July
- an anniversary
- Christmas
- Easter

2. Give each pair or triad seven strips of paper, approximately 8½-by-3 inches, and a marker. Call the participants' attention to the questions posted on newsprint that you prepared before the session. Explain that they are to answer the questions with their partner or partners as they pertain to the event that was assigned to or chosen by them. For example, if their event is graduation, they should consider each question from the perspective of that event. Each answer should be written on a strip of paper. Allow 10 minutes for this part of the process.

3. When all the groups have completed the task, tell them to tape their answers to the sheets of newsprint under the appropriate questions. After the answers have been posted, compare them and comment on the similarities or differences. Find common elements, objects, gestures, symbols, and so forth. In some cases the common denominator may simply be the existence of a certain element, for example, that all celebrations examined include some sort of symbolic object or action. Pay special attention to the last questions regarding the past, present, and future meanings of each event.

4. In your own words, present the following information to connect the three previous activities.

- Begin with the comment that in all cultures people commemorate and celebrate significant events and markers in their life and in the life of the community. These celebrations have many things in common, such as the inclusion of symbolic items, gestures, and actions. These are repeated every time the event takes place. Refer to the common elements found in the discussion of life events.
- Explain that when repeated gestures and actions take on symbolic meaning, they are known as rituals. For example, the usual festivities surrounding a birthday cake make up a ritual—singing the birthday song and blowing out the candles are actions that convey a certain message. The academic procession and the presentation of diplomas at graduation are parts of a ritual. The awarding of a trophy after a team wins a conference championship in a sport is a ritual.
- Caution the young people that not all repeated actions and gestures are rituals. Repeated actions without symbolic meaning are simply routine. For example, the annual decoration of the family Christmas tree may be full of meaningful rituals. Or it may simply be a task that must be done during the holiday season.

E Break (10 minutes)

During the break recruit six volunteers for the demonstration that follows. Simply tell them that they are to remain silent throughout the activity and follow your lead. For example, if you give them something, they should take it, or if you ask them to move in a certain direction, they should do so.

Also recruit a volunteer to read aloud Matt. 18:19–20 during the closing prayer. Ask the person to practice reading the passage until he or she can proclaim its meaning rather than simply read the words.

F Demonstration and Discussion: Ritual Actions (20 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to gather in the pairs or small groups that they worked in before the break. Tell them that you will demonstrate in silence certain gestures and the particular use of certain objects. They are to observe each action and think about the symbolism that each could hold. Some of the actions could have religious meanings that are traditional or obvious, or meanings that may not be so obvious or common. Emphasize that the participants should be silent while the process is going on. They are to simply observe and think about their responses. You may want to provide the young people with blank paper and pens or pencils for note taking. You might also want to play reflective music during this time to add to the sense of sacredness.

2. Ask the first of the six volunteers you recruited during the break to come forward. Tell the rest of the volunteers that you will use each person in order and that when they are finished, they should go back to their place and remain silent.

One by one, demonstrate the ritual actions listed below. Make sure that the actions are visible to the entire group.

- Gently pull the first person's hands, palms upward, over a large bowl or bucket. Pour a pitcher of lukewarm water over the volunteer's hands. After the pitcher is empty, carefully dry the person's hands with a towel.
- Join your right hand to the right hand of the next volunteer. Slowly, but firmly, shake the person's hand while looking into his or her eyes. Then put your other hand over the joined hands and invite the other person to do the same. Hold that position for a few seconds.
- Cup the hands of the next person, palms facing upward. Take a roll or slice of bread in your hands. Break off a small portion of it and give it to the young person. Break off another portion and keep it yourself. Eat the bread and indicate that the other person should do the same.
- While facing the next person, stretch your hands over her or his head. Hold that position for about 5 seconds. Then lay your hands on the person's head for the same amount of time. Again, remain in that position for a few seconds.

- Bring the hands of the next person toward you, palms upward. Pour a small amount of lightly scented oil or lotion on each of the person's hands. Slowly and gently massage the oil or lotion into the person's hands until it disappears.
- Give the last volunteer a pillar candle and light it. Bow before the person and hold the position for 5 seconds. Gesture to the person that he or she should put the lit candle with the other items you gathered before the session for the prayer space. Or simply direct the person to put the candle off to the side or someplace where it will not be disturbed.

3. Assign one ritual action to each pair or small group. If you have more than six pairs or groups, assign two or more groups the same ritual action. If you have more actions than groups, either assign some groups more than one ritual action or do the following discussion process with the whole group, using one or two actions.

Explain to the participants that their task is to answer the following questions regarding their assigned ritual action. Allow 7 or 8 minutes for the discussion.

- What might the ritual action express?
- What religious significance might it have?

4. If the discussions were done in small groups, ask the young people to share the results with the rest of the participants. Invite additions and comments from the rest of the group members based on their own observations of the ritual actions. Lead directly into the presentation that follows.

G Presentation: Sacraments (10 minutes)

Before the session. Using the points outlined here, prepare a presentation connecting the activities of the session to the sacramental life of the church. You may want to make an outline of the following points on newsprint to make it easier for you to remember and for the participants to follow:

Begin by reminding the participants of the various experiences they had in the first part of the session:

- the experiences of nonverbal communication
- the use of ordinary objects in symbolic ways
- the survey of common celebration activities, ritual actions, and meaningful gestures

Then present the following information in your own words.

- State that all human beings have an individual and communal need to celebrate, commemorate, and ritualize certain events and moments. All religions have different ritualistic expressions. For example, Muslims make or dream of making a pilgrimage to Mecca. Many religious traditions use ritual prayer postures. Jews honor young people of a certain age with ritual ceremonies called Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah. The Catholic church, as a community of faith, also ritualizes significant events.
- Explain that the sacraments are a uniquely Catholic way of celebrating the life of Jesus and his call to build the Reign of God. Through the use of symbolic items, gestures, and actions, the church communicates the holiness of life in a way that gives extraordinary meaning to ordinary things. Each of the sacraments recalls a past event, celebrates a present reality, and speaks to a hope for the future. They are sacred celebrations of God's gift of grace and an invitation to fullness of life in Jesus Christ.
- Ask the participants if they can name ordinary items that are used in symbolic ways when the church celebrates sacraments. If their answers do not include bread, wine, water, and oil, add them yourself.
- Note that in addition to the symbolic items used in the church's sacramental celebrations, Catholics also rely on symbolic gestures—or rituals—to convey a deeper reality about a life of faith. Ask if anyone can name some of the rituals that are part of sacramental celebrations. These actions might include a gesture of blessing or honor, the pouring of water, the laying on of hands, or the anointing with oil. Be clear about the uniquely Catholic understanding of sacrament, however. Catholics believe that sacramental celebrations do not simply recall or symbolize events. A sacrament makes the event truly present.
- Conclude by recalling your earlier comments about sacramental awareness, that is, the appreciation for the sacred in the world. Affirm for the young people that God communicates through the people, places, actions, events, and experiences that shape a person's life. Mindfulness of this reality is the first step toward a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the sacramental life of the church.

Move directly from the presentation into the closing prayer.

H Closing Prayer Ritual (15 minutes)

Pay special attention to the ritual nature of this and all formal prayer experiences in this course. If the young people can truly experience the power of sacred ritual through these prayers, they will come away from the course with a deeper understanding of the meaning of ritual prayer and the importance of its role in liturgy and other sacramental celebrations.

Before the session. Mark the scriptural passage Matt. 18:19–20 in the Bible to make it easier for the volunteer reader to find it later.

You might also want to set up a tape or a CD player to play reflective music during the prayer.

If you have a small, portable table, include it as part of the ritual of assembling the prayer space. If the table you use is not portable, simply start the ritual with the table already in place.

Read through the prayer service carefully and become familiar with the process so that you can proceed through it without having to rely on the book. Make a note card for yourself if you feel you need something to refer to.

1. Tell the young people that the prayer time will contain few words but will be rich with symbol and ritual. They should look beyond the obvious meanings of the objects, gestures, and actions and think about their deeper symbolic meaning. Some of the symbols were discussed during the session. Others are new. Ask the group to maintain a prayerful silence throughout unless directed to do otherwise by your words or example. Note, however, that at certain points you will indicate that they should imitate your gestures or respond with the phrase "And also with you."

Recruit volunteers. You will need one person for each symbolic item that you collected for the prayer space. Give each volunteer an item. Tell the volunteers that they are to bring their symbol to the prayer space at your signal. Instruct the volunteers that when it is time to come forward, they should walk slowly and place their symbol reverently in its place, thinking about the meaning of the symbol as they are doing it.

2. Use a bell or chime to gather the young people for prayer or lead them to the area where you hold the prayer. Have them stand in a circle. When everyone has gathered and the room is quiet, begin playing reflective music, if you decided to use it.

3. Begin the prayer by gesturing and pronouncing the words that are included in many Catholic rituals: Gesture to the group by stretching out your arms, palms raised upward, as you say the words, "The Lord be with you." Invite the participants to imitate your gesture as they respond, "And also with you." Call the young people to sacramental awareness, that is, to be conscious of the presence of God in all things and in all people. Allow a few seconds of silence.

4. Signal the volunteers to come forward, one at a time, with their symbolic item, in this order: a small table (if you chose to use one); a colored cloth; a small, white cloth; a small, clear glass bowl of lightly scented oil; a Bible; the lit candle from the demonstration. In order to preserve a sense of sacredness, make sure to wait until each volunteer has returned to his or her place before signaling the next person.

When the prayer table items are assembled, proclaim the following words of invitation:

- Come, let us worship the Lord. For Yahweh is our God, and we are God's people.

Then bow deeply toward the prayer table, urging the young people to follow your lead.

5. Ask the person who volunteered to read Matt. 18:19–20 to retrieve the Bible and proclaim the passage. Then tell her or him to hold the Bible up, as if offering it to the group. Allow about 30 seconds for silent reflection on the reading. Then tell the reader to put the Bible back in its place on the table.

6. When the reader returns to his or her place, go to the table and pick up the bowl of oil. Ask the participants to join you in blessing the oil by stretching out their right hand, palm facing down, as in a gesture of blessing. Have them remain in this position for about 10 seconds. Then make the sign of the cross over the bowl together.

Starting with someone standing near you, dip your thumb in the oil and make a cross on the person's forehead, saying as you do it, "[Name], be a sign of God's presence in the world. Amen." Give that person the bowl and ask that she or he do the

same for the next person in the circle. The last person should anoint you and then return the bowl to the table.

Note: If you think the young people do not know one another's names, eliminate the personal address in the anointing.

7. Conclude the ritual by once again extending your arms out to the group, palms facing upward, while saying, "The Lord be with you." Invite the participants to copy your gesture while responding, "And also with you." Then say something like this in your own words:

- Our prayer time together has ended, but as individuals our prayer continues. Go now and be aware of God's presence in all things and people. Before the next session, try to find God in at least one new person or place. And above all, be a sign of that presence to others.

Then ring the bell, blow out the candle, and dismiss the participants.

Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step A. If the participants do not know one another, use this activity to facilitate introductions. Give each person a small ball of modeling clay or a few chenille pipe cleaners. Instruct the participants to spend 3 minutes creating an object that symbolizes themselves. Gather their creations in the middle of the group. Pick up one object at a time and have the person who created it tell the other participants his or her name and school if appropriate. Then ask the rest of the group members to try to explain the person's symbol. When the creator of the object verifies or corrects the explanation, move on to the next object.

For step A. If your group enjoys word puzzles, you might consider purchasing a book of them and putting a few up before every session. This helps to break the ice among the people who come early. It may even get some people to the session early just to have a chance to do extra puzzles! Most larger bookstores have collections of such puzzles. These puzzles go under names such as *rebus* and *wuzzles*, so you may have to ask someone for help.

For step D. Go to the public library and find some books on ritual celebrations in other cultures. You might focus on one type of event, such as the birth of a baby, marriage, or entering young adulthood. Share some of these rituals with the participants.

For step H. If the participants seem to have grasped the concept of symbol, you might want to consider the following option. As each volunteer brings a symbolic item to the prayer space, ask the participants what they think that particular item symbolizes. This, too, should be done prayerfully rather than conducted as a discussion or a brainstorming exercise. Asking the young people to simply state a word or phrase will help maintain the solemnity.

For step H. You may also want to include burning incense as part of the prayer space. If you do so, consider using the incense to make the sign of the cross over the Bible and the reader before he or she reads the scriptural passage.

For step H. If you have time, you might want to do a ritual disassembling of the prayer space. This should be done step-by-step in reverse order of the way it was constructed at the beginning of the prayer service.



Family Connections

- Ask the young people to think about symbols and rituals that are important to their family as a whole and to individuals within their family. Symbols could include things such as the family Bible or a family heirloom. An important ritual might be the way a family prays together before meals or the blessing of Easter baskets in eastern European cultures.
- Send home to parents a description or an outline of *Sacraments: Celebrating the Sacred*. Include a note that asks them to talk with their sons or daughters about the session and together identify something that symbolizes their family.



Journal Options

- Suggest to the young people that they make a list of things that call them to sacramental awareness, that is, a keen sense of God's presence in the world. Or suggest that they focus on just a few things or people and write about why these objects or people remind them of God.
- Tell the young people to purchase a roll of film or a disposable camera and take photographs of things that bring them to an awareness of God's presence in the world. Direct them to develop the film and then write on the back of each photo or in a journal why this person or object called the writer to a sense of sacramental awareness.
- Instruct the young people to make a mental note of symbols and rituals in their school and among their friends. Suggest that they write about the meaning of these objects or events after school. You may need to remind them of the meaning of symbol and ritual and how these differ from a sign and a habit.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



Closing Teacher Prayer

Blessing. Once again, begin this time of prayer by invoking the Triune God.

Exsultet reading. "Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus Christ is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation!" (adapted from *The Sacramentary*, p. 182).

Reflection. What objects would you choose to symbolize your group of young people? What is something that would symbolize you?

Exsultet refrain. "Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God's throne!" (adapted from *The Sacramentary*, p. 182).



Evaluation

Take a few moments after the session to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions and, for future reference, write your answers in the spaces provided.

1. What really worked well in this session?
2. What would make this session better next time?
3. How well did the session meet the objective of introducing the young people to the concept of sacramental awareness?
 Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:
4. How well did the session meet the objective of helping the young people become more aware of the significance of symbol and ritual?
 Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:
5. How well did the session meet the objective of presenting the sacraments as a uniquely Catholic way of celebrating life events within the community of faith?
 Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:
6. What changes, if any, would you make to the prayer service at the end of the session to make it more effective?

Word Puzzles

1 SSSSSSSSSS C	2 WORLD	3 GEAR
4 GNICNUOB BOUNCING	5 AEIO	6 ni a etunim
7 I F E E L	8 PAIN PAIN	9 e e e e e ə
10 he he 	11 GOOD BETTER	12 repair way
13 J A C K E T J A C K E T	14 READY	15 TO UGH

Answers: 1. Tennessee 2. Small world 3. High gear 4. Bouncing back and forth 5. Missing you
 6. Back in a minute 7. I feel left out 8. Growing pains 9. Finally over 10. He's up to no good
 11. The best is yet to come 12. Highway under repair 13. Down jackets 14. Not quite ready 15. Tough break.