

Seeking

Doing Theology with Girls

Voices

Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls

Janet Claussen

with Julia Ann Keller

Voices:
Nurturing the
Spirituality of Girls

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For David, who shares my theology of life.

—Janet Claussen

For my daughter, Michaela, who was born during the writing of this book.

You are the inspiration.

—Julia Ann Keller

Contents

Introduction 9

Thinking About God 17

- Exploring the Mystery of God 17
- Guided Meditation: Theology and Faith 19
- Scientifically Speaking 21
- The Changing Face of Theology 23

Theology in a Different Voice 35

- Theology Through a Different Lens 35
- Discussion: A Story of Two Girls 36
- Introducing Women Theologians 37
- Theologian Tea Party 38
- Trading Cards 38
- Book Report 38
- Compare and Contrast Project 38
- Interview a Theologian 39
- The Color Purple* 39

Examining Our Images of God 61

- The Many Faces of God 61
- Images of God in Music 63
- The Gender Question of God 64
- Why Use Feminine Images of God? 65
- Feminine Images of God in the Scriptures 67
- Language, Gender, and the Spirit 68
- Feminine Images of God in Our Faith Tradition 68
- Visual Images of the Divine Feminine 69
- Literary Images of the Divine Feminine 70
- Praying with Feminine Images of God 70

Doing Moral Theology with Girls 86

- Developing Differently 86
- Introduction to Right Relationships 87
- Right Relationship with Self 88
- Right Relationships with Others 90

A Theology of Sexuality 111

- Right Relationship with Self 112
- Right Relationships with Others 113
- Commitments, Boundaries, and Integrity 115
- Prayer: Temple of the Holy Spirit 118
- Prayer: Guided Meditation 119

A Theology of Life 135

- Voices That Change the World 135
- The Webs of Life 137
- Ecofeminism 139
- Consistent Life Ethic 141
- The Feminist Question: What About Abortion? 143

Epilogue 155



Introduction

“You are made in the image of God.” That simple statement is the heart of spirituality—a profound statement about who we are and who we are becoming. There is no more important mantra for adults to communicate as they parent, teach, minister, and pray with young people.

The journey to adulthood has always been a time of transition. Those who walk with adolescents know that the journey is also unique for each person. In fact, recent studies confirm the age-old intuitive sense that girls and boys experience life in ways that are unique to their gender. If gender differences affect physical, emotional, and psychological development, then certainly, spirituality is shaped as well by feminine or masculine perspectives.

For girls in this country at the turn of the millennium, opportunities for equality are greater than for girls in any previous generation. Still, psychologists, educators, ministers, and parents know that the risks and issues that confront young females seem rooted in a different reality than those that face young males. Brought up in the crucible of a media world, girls continue to receive messages that beauty and body are more important than mind and spirit. Told that they can do anything, they too often engage in behaviors that endanger them more than empower them. In the interest of “being nice,” they abdicate their voice to males, exhibiting a dramatic drop in self-esteem in their adolescent years.

Girls experience life in terms of relationships. While their male counterparts charge headlong into separation and independence, young women, by nature and nurture, seem predisposed to connectedness and intimacy. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) have brought attention to the life of girls, spawning an entire genre of literature aimed at addressing the phenomenon of the female adolescent experience. Addressing young women’s psychosocial world is a good beginning, but few experts in the field of girls’ development have ventured into the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality is about relationship—relationship with the One who created us. It is about loving and living out a call to become the kind of person God created us to be. Girls need to hear this message, embrace it, and live it. They need guidance to challenge a culture that contradicts their sacredness; they need adults who will listen to them, relate with them, and walk with them, reminding them of their destiny, reminding them, “You are made in the image of God.”

“Herstory” of the Voices Series

The Voices series is one step toward the realization of the dream of a national team of female educators, youth ministers, parents, and mentors who have a special concern for the spirituality of girls. They envisioned a multifaceted initiative that would bring together the energy of the girls’ movement and the wisdom of women’s spirituality. Their dream was a convergence of the work of psychologists Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan with the work of Catholic writers like Maria Harris and Elizabeth Johnson. As a result of listening sessions with girls from around the country, the team identified the need for resources for adults who work with girls in Catholic school and parish settings. One response to that need is the Voices series, a result of Saint Mary’s Press’s ongoing commitment to touching the hearts of teens by providing gender-specific resources for them and for those who work with them.

Overview of the Voices Series

The Voices series consists of six manuals that present strategies to use with adolescent girls in schools, parishes, and single-gender settings. The authors and consultants in the series have extensive experience working with girls in both coed and single-gender situations. The manuals they have produced are different from one another in content and focus, yet all share the same purpose: to help girls embrace the true meaning of the phrase “created in the image of God,” a profound statement about who they are and who they are becoming. This manual, *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls*, is one of the results; the other manuals in the series are as follows:

- *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls* offers a variety of activities to help girls critique the culture for both its negative and its positive influences.
- *Retreats: Deepening the Spirituality of Girls* presents seven retreats on themes such as friendship, media, and childhood myths. Also included is a retreat for mothers and daughters.
- *Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls* provides ideas for community prayer services and suggestions for enriching girls’ personal prayer life.
- *Church Women: Probing History with Girls* outlines strategies for discovering the richness of women’s contributions to the life of the church.
- *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls* suggests ways to help girls get to know the women in the Scriptures and examine the roles they played in communities of faith and the beginnings of the church.

Where and When to Use the Voices Series

The Voices resource manuals can be used in a variety of settings, though they are intended for use with girls in single-gender groups. The rationale for meeting in single-gender settings is particularly compelling for young women. Numerous studies indicate that girls are much more likely to speak up, express their opinion, and be genuinely heard in “just girl” groups. Some topics related to growing up and finding one’s way in society are difficult for females to discuss in the presence of males.

Imparting the particular wisdom of women to girls, and of men to boys, is a time-honored practice that can be highly effective when used occasionally in educational, church, and social institutions.

Unless you are on the staff of an all-girls high school, finding opportunities for single-gender gatherings can be a challenge; consider these suggestions:

- Offer gender-specific electives within a school or parish catechetical setting.
- Work with Scout groups, which are already gender specific.
- Form “just girl” groups that meet beyond the typical school day or parish youth night.
- Establish weekly or monthly sessions within the school or parish schedule, at which girls and boys discuss related topics separately. Subsequent discussion with both groups together can lead to greater understanding between the sexes.
- Create mother-daughter or mentor-mentee discussion groups.
- Organize diocesan days for “just girls” or “just boys,” or both.
- Arrange retreats and youth rallies that have gender-specific components or workshops.

Who Might Use the Voices Series

The six resource manuals in the Voices series may be used by coordinators of youth ministry, directors of religious education, teachers in Catholic schools, campus ministers, youth ministers in parish settings, Girl Scout and Camp Fire leaders, parents, mentors, and other adults who work with girls ages ten to nineteen. Flexible enough for single-sex groups in any setting, the manuals’ ideas are designed to engage girls in both headwork and heart work, challenging them to think while nurturing their spirit.

Overview of This Manual

The activities in *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* provide an introduction to theological methods and reflection. Recognizing that our ideas about God begin with our experiences of God, the overriding theme of this manual is that the life experience of women brings richness and balance to the academic discipline of theology.

The chapters in this resource manual are sequential, moving from the generalities of theology to specific theological topics. As the title implies, the emphasis is on “doing” theology, so throughout the manual, girls are actively engaged in making connections between their experience in relation to the wisdom of the ages, particularly in the Scriptures and the Tradition of the church.

Chapter 1 explores the meaning and methods of doing theology, while subsequent chapters introduce girls to the contributions of women theologians, practice in doing theology, and discussions about moral theology, including sexuality and social justice. Some of the highlights in this manual are:

- an introduction to theological methods that incorporate personal reflection in dynamic with the Scriptures and Tradition

- profiles of twelve leading Catholic women theologians, including personal reflections that offer the wisdom of their experience for the benefit of girls and young women
- practice in doing theology by examining images of God and by expanding traditional images to include the feminine face of God
- an overview of moral theology based on relationships as well as sound moral principles
- extensive activities on the topic of sexuality for girls, grounded in a healthy theology of sexuality
- an introduction to ecofeminism that weaves social-justice issues together with the strands of a theology of life for all of life

How to Use This Manual

The topics and methods of *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* are designed for adolescent girls of high school age. College and postgraduate programs have been the main venue for courses in theology from women’s perspective, using resources that are beyond the age-appropriate level of most teen girls. This manual tries to bring women’s theology to an adolescent level, making it more understandable and relevant to the lives of teen girls.

The material in this manual can be used in a separate course, in conjunction with other manuals in the Voices series, or as a supplement to existing religious education programs. Like the chapters themselves, the activities within each chapter are sequential, designed to build on previous themes. They can, however, be easily adapted to stand alone as adult leaders can provide the introduction and foundation as necessary. All the chapters are formatted as follows:

Thematic Activities

Each chapter contains several fully developed activities, most of which are suitable for a time frame of 30 to 60 minutes. Background reading provides the adult leader with an in-depth overview of the themes presented; activities are designed to process this material. Like the chapters themselves, the activities are sequential, beginning with the general and proceeding to more specific topics. All the activities are based on the praxis method of experience, analysis, and reflection in dialectic with the Scriptures and Tradition, leading to synthesis of new insights with the wisdom of the ages. Variations are often suggested, and all activities may be enhanced by the creativity and expertise of the adult leader or teacher.

Options and Actions

Most of the chapters include additional activities to support the learning process. These provide good follow-up for the thematic activities and allow for a variety of learning styles. They might include research topics, interdisciplinary suggestions, projects that incorporate both right- and left-brain skills, multigenerational interaction, service options, and social action.

Reflection and Discussion

Because doing theology requires personal reflection, questions and suggestions for deeper analysis and reflection are provided in each chapter. Although these questions may be used for oral discussion, we strongly recommend that girls engage in some type of written exercises. An ongoing journal, reflection papers, or letters to themselves or God can help participants process the material and activities and help them make connections to their own life.

Prayer

Opportunities and suggestions for prayer are woven within the thematic activities of each chapter. Prayer forms include guided meditations, prayers by girls and women, and suggestions for girls to create their own prayer experiences.

Resource Materials

The chapters provide a list of resources—such as print, video, and Internet—for more exploration. Resources published by Saint Mary’s Press may be ordered from the press’s Web site, www.smp.org, or by calling 800-533-8095. Most recommended books are available in libraries that serve academic institutions. Although some may require ordering from special catalogues, all titles were available through online booksellers at the time this manual went to press.

Background Information

The background essays provided as a resource for each chapter are an essential part of this manual. Reading these and becoming familiar with the content will help leaders to present the activities in the chapter more effectively.

Notes

Space is provided for you to jot down ideas, reminders, and additional resources as you use the chapter materials.

Handouts and Resources

All the necessary handouts and resources for a chapter are found at the end of the chapter.

How to Get Started

Know the Material

Read each chapter or activity before you facilitate it, and use it creatively to meet the needs of your specific group of girls. In particular, look for ways to make the material most accessible for the girls’ ages and for the size and setting of the group. All the suggestions in this manual can be used with girls ages fourteen to nineteen. Most of the activities in this manual are designed for groups of twenty to thirty young people, but can easily be adapted for any size group.

Know the Young People

When you have a wide variety of ages together, keep in mind the following differences between young adolescents and older teens:

- Young adolescents think in concrete terms and may not yet be capable of considering some topics abstractly.
- Young adolescents generally need more physical movement than older teens do. You can address that need through simple activities such as forming small groups for discussion and moving to different halves of the room to indicate the answer to a yes-or-no question.
- When they are working in small groups, young adolescents do better with an adult or older teen leading them. Groups of older teens can often be left alone for discussions.
- Older teens can usually handle open-ended assignments, but younger adolescents respond better to writing exercises and discussions if they are led. For example, an eleventh grader can be expected to write a letter to God about a certain topic on a blank sheet of notebook paper, whereas a ninth grader will be more focused with sentence-starters to guide different parts of the letter.

Create a Welcoming Environment

When possible, adapt the physical space to allow for open discussion and sharing. At times, consider moving chairs into a circle or inviting everyone to sit on the floor. Groups that meet regularly may want to create a sacred space for ritual, using candles, fabric, music, favorite statues, sculptures, and images. Encourage the girls to be involved in creating that space and keeping it special.

Create a Safe Environment

When involving mothers, mentors, and other adults, provide written guidelines and even group leadership training to help them understand the process and dynamics of the group. Consider the following guidelines for any adults who work with the group:

- To hear girls at the level necessary for meaningful interaction, adults need first to listen to themselves and to remember their own adolescence (Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, p. 119).
- Girls need adults who will listen to them and affirm them even when their questions and actions seem uncomfortably challenging, and adults who will allow themselves to be questioned at deep levels (p. 120).
- Girls need confidentiality in any group that engages them in deep thinking, feeling, and sharing. Yet they and the adults who lead them also need to know when to go beyond the resources of the group to seek help.
- Girls need adults who will help them be countercultural in ways that bring animation and love to their life, their community, and their world (p. 121).
- To help girls recognize and nurture their own relationship with God, communities of faith need to listen to and learn from them and take them seriously, with engaged hearts, minds, and souls (p. 121).

General Resources

Print

Chittister, Joan D. *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. This book bridges the gap between theology and spirituality. Referring to spirituality as theology in action, Chittister critiques our culture, calling for a transformation of church and society, for the benefit of all.

Coll, Regina A. *Christianity and Feminism in Conversation*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994. A highly readable text for the lay reader, Coll's work is a primer for themes that are central to feminist theology and spirituality.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992. This book has become a foundational work for anyone who wishes to engage in serious feminist scholarship. Being made in the image of God is a central theme for feminist theology; Elizabeth Johnson explores the foundations of expanding images of God that include the feminine.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry, editor. *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. This collection of ten essays by leading Catholic women theologians is an example of doing theology from a new perspective. It presents thematic topics in Catholic theology that have been transformed by the scholarship of women.

Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition. Translated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. The work of theology examines both the Scriptures and Tradition. The *Catechism* is a reference book that outlines and explains the teachings of the church.

McBrien, Richard P., general editor. *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995. A basic reference book for terms used in this manual and for further exploration of related topics.

Internet

www.saintmarys.edu/~cfsdfm/Madeleva.manifesto.htm. The Madeleva Manifesto, often referred to in the background reading of this manual, can be found on this site, which also includes pictures and short overviews of the women who have been Madeleva lecturers since 1985.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the Voices series. We are also interested in new strategies for use with adolescent girls. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the editor, Laurie Delgatto, at 702 Terrace

Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1318; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at ldelgatto@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these manuals.



Thinking About God

Overview

This chapter introduces girls to the concept of theology as it takes place individually and communally within the church. Doing theology begins with a sense of the Mystery of God, as understood through the Scriptures and Tradition in the light of lived experience, including gender.

Exploring the Mystery of God

This activity will introduce girls to the concept of theology, beginning with the concept of God as Mystery that draws us into relationship.

Preparation

- Read the first section of resource 1, “Background: Doing Theology,” on the topic of theology and faith.
- Place in a box an item that can be worn, such as a cap, scarf, sock, T-shirt, or decorative button. Wrap the box in festive paper. Put it in a prominent place in the meeting room.
- Write each of the following statements on a separate sheet of newsprint or on poster board:
 - All human beings have a sense of transcendence, of something beyond the physical universe.
 - Human beings have an innate ability to recognize and name the existence of an ultimate mystery.
 - Only human beings have the ability to reflect on the possibilities of an ultimate mystery.

1. As the girls gather, invite their questions and comments about the wrapped box. Then ask these questions:

- ⊗ Does anyone want to open the box?
- ⊗ Who is willing to open the box and claim its contents?
- ⊗ Who is not willing to take the risk of discovering and claiming the mysterious contents?

☉ Does it make a difference to you who is offering you the box?
At this point, do not open the box. Just leave it where it is and tell the group you will get back to it.

2. Ask the girls to define the word *mystery*. Summarize their definitions by explaining that a mystery is something we do not fully understand or cannot explain. Invite the participants to make a list of mysteries that puzzle them. These mysteries can range from scientific (What causes cancer?) to entertaining (Who will win the Academy Award for best picture?). Ask them to come up with eight to ten mysteries. You might want to provide paper and pens or pencils for this task.

3. Engage the girls in a discussion about the topic of mystery by asking questions like these:

- ☉ What, if anything, draws you toward something mysterious?
- ☉ How do you feel when you encounter a mystery?
- ☉ Do any mysteries repel you or make you uncomfortable?
- ☉ What kind of mysteries are not worth thinking about?

4. Lead the group into reflection about God as the Ultimate Mystery by asking a series of why questions about a selected topic. As the participants provide an answer, turn the answer into another why question. An example follows here:

- Why are there mosquitoes? Because they provide food for birds.
- Why are there birds? Because they are part of the food chain.
- Why is there a food chain? Because . . .

Keep asking the why questions until no more rational answers are apparent. Explain that such questioning leads to an ultimate mystery, the why that only has an answer beyond human understanding.

5. Reveal one at a time the statements that you put on newsprint or on poster board before the session. Invite discussion about the legitimacy of each statement.

Then make the following points from the first section of resource 1:

- ☉ It is part of human nature to ask questions about and reflect on the mysteries of life.
- ☉ Archaeological evidence indicates that even the most ancient groups of people had a communal sense of transcendence. That is, they sensed the presence of a mystery that is beyond human understanding.
- ☉ The Scriptures tell us that our Judeo-Christian faith is rooted in the belief of a divine being we call God, who is in relationship with each of us.
- ☉ Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the church, says that humans are “built for ecstasy, for movement outward toward God. [We] are ‘wired’ for a spiritual journey toward the divine source” (Robert Barron, *Thomas Aquinas*, p. 142).
- ☉ When we reflect on our belief in God, as individuals or as a community, we are doing theology.

As a conclusion to this activity, invite a willing participant to open the mystery box and claim the article inside. Ask the girl who opens the box whether she likes the article enough to wear it publicly.

Invite the participants to reflect orally or in writing on this question:

- ☉ How does the mystery box activity relate to God and faith?

(Steps 1–3 of this activity are adapted from J. Nocito Alber, M. Gemma Therese Harvey, SSND, and Mary Katherine Roach, *Sacraments*, p. 8.)

Going Deeper

Guided Meditation: Theology and Faith

This meditation makes an experiential connection between theology and faith and the Mystery of God, the topic of the first section of resource 1.

Preparation

- Bring blank sheets of paper, enough for each girl to have one.
- Bring a tape or CD of quiet instrumental music.

1. Have the girls find a spot in the room where they can be comfortable. They should be able to sit independently of one another and still be able to hear your voice. Give each girl a blank sheet of paper.

Establish a reflective mood for a meditation. Consider playing some quiet instrumental music. Tell the girls that this will be a guided meditation and that they will have three opportunities to write their thoughts. The writing they do should be stream-of-consciousness. Grammar, spelling, and sentence structure do not matter. The girls should write from the mind and the heart whatever comes to consciousness.

Begin the meditation by asking the girls to close their eyes and quiet themselves, becoming aware of their breathing. Use this script, speaking slowly and quietly, but distinctly. Pause at the ellipses:

- ☉ Begin breathing slowly, and deeply. Inhale all the positive, warm energy around you. . . . Exhale all the negative and stressful thoughts within you. . . . Slowly breathe in the positive, life-giving elements. . . . Slowly breathe out the negative. Breathe in the positive, breathe out the negative. . . .

In your mind’s eye, recall your first memory of God. . . . If you can’t remember a particular first moment, try to recall the earliest time in your life when you think you were aware of God. Do you remember any particular moment when someone told you about God? . . . Who was that person? . . . How old were you? What kind of thoughts do you remember having about God? . . . What kind of feelings do you experience as you recall this memory? . . . Open your eyes slowly and write what came to your mind during the meditation. When you are finished writing, put down your pen or pencil and close your eyes until we are ready to begin the next meditation.

When all the participants are finished writing, begin the next part of the meditation, adapting the script as necessary:

- ☉ Keep your eyes closed and become aware once again of your breathing as you form mental pictures in your mind's eye. What is your first memory of being in a church? . . . What did the church look like? Can you recall the physical decor of the church? What things drew your attention? candles? crucifixes? a pulpit? windows? . . . Who was with you in the church? Were there lots of people, or were you alone? . . . What was going on in the church while you were there? Was it quiet? Or was it filled with music and ritual, like a Mass or church service, a wedding, a funeral? . . . What kind of feelings do you have about this memory? . . . Are they similar to your feelings about church today? . . . Open your eyes and write thoughts and reflections about your memories of church. When you are finished, quietly wait for everyone to finish writing, being respectful of the silence.

Wait until everyone is finished before moving on with the final segment of the meditation:

- ☉ Again close your eyes. Become aware of your breathing. Try to recall in your mind's eye the first lessons you learned about God and your religion. Were you at home or in a school or parish classroom? Who were your early teachers about God and religion? . . . What did you learn that has stayed with you? . . . How do you feel when you recall those early lessons? . . . Open your eyes and write thoughts and reflections about your memories of learning about God and religion. When you are finished, quietly wait for everyone to complete their writing, being respectful of the silence.

2. Ask if anyone is willing to share some reflections. If time is limited, ask for one or two ideas from each of the three meditation segments.

3. Read or put the following statement on the board or on newsprint:

- ☉ Whenever you become consciously aware of your knowledge and experience of God, the work of theology begins.

Then, instructing the girls to keep in mind the meditation exercise, discuss the ways that an individual becomes consciously aware of God.

4. Ask the girls to think about the meaning of the word *theology*. Elicit definitions or descriptions from them, writing each one on newsprint or on the chalkboard.

Compare their definitions to these:

- ☉ Theology is the study of God and God's relationship to humanity and the universe.
- ☉ A more classically religious description is this: Theology is "faith seeking understanding" (Richard P. McBrien, editor, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 1250).

☉ For Roman Catholics, the definitions are even more specific:

- Theology is "The study of God, based on Divine Revelation" (CCC, p. 901).
- "Any scientific or methodical attempt to understand and interpret divine revelation mediated through the data of Scripture and Tradition" (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 1250).

5. Make the following points about theology:

- ☉ Theology presumes a faith experience. It is not a purely academic exercise because those who do theology approach the study of God from the standpoint of believing in God. The guided meditation exercise is an example of how important faith is in doing theology. Although faith is a gift from God, it is nurtured through religious experience and education.
- ☉ As the girls thought about the questions in the meditation and wrote their thoughts, they were engaging in theological reflection, which begins with experience and knowledge and leads to deeper experiences and knowledge of God.
- ☉ Theology can take place at the individual level, but it is also the work of experts who are people of faith engaging in an academic discipline.
- ☉ "Unlike philosophy of religion or religious studies, theology should be done in and for (not outside or merely alongside) the believing community" (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 1250). *Philosophy of religion* is "the study of religion from a philosophical perspective" (p. 999). *Religious studies* is the study of religious beliefs and practices, including world religions. We would not assume that a person studying any of these fields is a believer.

Conclude this session by emphasizing that doing theology is both individual and communal and is best done in the context of a believing community. Future activities in this chapter will examine the relationship of church to theology.

Scientifically Speaking

This activity introduces girls to the data of doing theology; that is, the Scriptures and Tradition and their place in the science of the study of God.

Preparation

- Read the section under the heading "Catholic Christian Theology" on resource 1.
- Bring to the meeting space items from a science lab or classroom: beaker, thermometer, logbook, jars of chemical solutions, astronomy chart, human anatomy poster or model, and so forth.
- Make back-to-back photocopies of the questions on handout 1, "Scientifically Speaking." You will need two for each small group of three to four girls.
- Bring enough small interlocking blocks (such as Legos) so that each girl will be able to have at least fifteen blocks.

1. Ask the girls to define *science*. Compare their definitions with a formal one in a dictionary or a science textbook or with the following definition from *The World Book Dictionary*, volume 2: “knowledge based on observed facts and tested truths arranged in an orderly system” (p. 1863).

Elicit the names of sciences that are familiar. Include social sciences. Write these on a chalkboard or on newsprint along with simple definitions: biology, study of life; botany, study of plants; psychology, study of the mind. Divide the girls into groups of three or four, assigning each group at least one branch of science from the list.

Give each group a copy of handout 1. Review the instructions and give the participants a chance to complete the handout in small groups.

2. After each group has answered the questions for at least one branch of science, give them a clean copy of the handout and instruct them to apply the questions to theology, the science of the study of God.

When all groups have completed the assignment, gather the girls back into a large group.

3. Call attention to the following definition of *theology* on resource 1: “any scientific or methodical attempt to understand and interpret divine revelation mediated through the data of Scripture and Tradition” (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 1250). Ask the girls how the “science of God” is similar to and different from other sciences.

4. Let each girl take a handful of blocks, or distribute the blocks evenly among the girls. Tell them that as a group they are to construct a building using small blocks. If they run out of blocks, they can get a new supply as long as blocks are available. Allow the girls themselves to work out the details of what the building will look like and how it will be constructed, but every girl should contribute at least some, if not all, of her blocks to the structure.

The logistics of the process may be difficult, especially with a large number of girls participating, but let the girls wrestle with the details for a while. Their struggling is an important part of the exercise.

5. When time is called, or when all the blocks are used, display the structure and lead a discussion using the following questions:

- ☉ As the construction of the building began, what was the most important part of it? [Building the foundation.]
- ☉ What happens if a building does not have a good foundation?
- ☉ What happens if the materials used do not hold up the building?
- ☉ As new features are added to a building, such as windows, doors, or additional stories, how do they depend on the foundation?
- ☉ What other things depend on good foundations? [Things such as any skill, education, families, organizations.]

6. Write the words *Scriptures* and *Tradition* on the chalkboard or on newsprint. Ask the girls to define or describe each term and give an example of each in terms of the church.

Use the material from resource 1 to explain the following points:

- ☉ The Scriptures and Tradition are both the data and the tools that theologians use to do theology.
- ☉ The Scriptures and Tradition are the foundational pieces upon which new ideas about theology must stand.
- ☉ The Scriptures and Tradition work together with human experience in doing the work of theology. They are the interlocking pieces that build a strong foundation and cannot stand alone.
- ☉ The body of writings that make up the Scriptures does not change, although the interpretation of the Scriptures may change.
- ☉ Tradition is the passing on of beliefs, doctrines, rituals, the Scriptures, and the life of the church. “Tradition demands continuity with the past, yet because it is living, it also develops” (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 1262). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines *Tradition* as “the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church” (p. 901).

Give some examples of ideas about God and Jesus that have not stood firmly on the foundation of the Scriptures and Tradition, such as the following:

- ☉ God can be found only in nature.
- ☉ Jesus was only a historical figure.
- ☉ Human beings are basically evil.

The first two of these statements were declared heresies in the early days of the church, and the last statement reflects how the Scriptures and Tradition work together to support one another in the theology of the Catholic church. Many Christian denominations would uphold the belief that humans are basically evil because their belief system is based on the Scriptures alone. They would interpret the second story of Creation in the Book of Genesis, the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, as the basis for this belief. However, the Tradition of the Catholic church focuses on the first story of Creation that reveals that we are made in the image of God and are basically good. The doctrines, rituals, and beliefs of the church uphold this statement.

The Changing Face of Theology

Preparation

- Make a copy of resource 2, “Doctors of the Church,” and cut it apart as scored.
- Bring markers and light-colored pieces of paper, enough for each girl to have one sheet of paper and one marker, and a roll of tape.

1. Explain that in order for someone to be named a doctor of the church, she or he must be a canonized saint “officially recognized by the pope or an ecumenical council as an eminent teacher of the faith” (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p. 423).

2. Distribute to each individual or small group one or more slips from resource 2. Another source for the complete list of the thirty-three men and women doctors of the church is *www.doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com*. This site provides brief sketches of each Doctor. The online index of saints and angels found at *www.catholic.org* also provides specific information about each doctor of the church.

Ask the girls to obtain basic information about their assigned person, including his or her year of birth and death and the year he or she was named a doctor of the church. The girls might also answer questions such as these:

- ☉ Was this person from the Eastern church or Western church?
- ☉ What important contribution did he or she make to the church?

Provide markers and light-colored pieces of paper for the participants to write the names and basic facts about each doctor of the church. It is important to note when each person lived and the year he or she was proclaimed a doctor of the church. Names and dates should be printed large enough to be seen at a distance.

3. Tell the girls to arrange the doctors of the church in chronological order according to when they lived and to tape the papers on a wall in that order. Then invite them to make observations about their posted findings.

Next ask several volunteers to rearrange the papers in chronological order according to the date when each person was proclaimed a doctor of the church. Follow up by asking the girls about possible reasons it took the church so long to recognize the three women as doctors of the church.

4. Make the following points from the section “The Changing Face of Theology” on resource 1:

- ☉ Three factors have led to a profound change in the way people do theology today:
 - the inclusion of women in schools of theology
 - renewed emphasis on the role of the laity in the documents of Vatican II
 - the influence of liberation theology, with its strong emphasis on the lived experience of oppressed people as a starting point for theological reflection

5. Conclude this activity by asking the girls to reflect through discussion or by writing in their journals on issues of the church that might have changed or could change due to the theological work of the laypeople, especially women.

Options and Actions

- Invite a theology professor from a local university as a guest speaker to further deepen the girls’ understanding of the professional work of doing theology.
- Assign the girls to visit a college or community library to locate titles of works that can be found in the general index under the subject theology. Make an estimate of how many books can be found on this subject. List at least three titles to bring back to the large group.

- Bring sample religion books for primary grades in a Catholic elementary school or parish program. Ask the girls to examine these to find examples of how the texts use the Scriptures and Tradition to help children understand their experiences of faith.

Reflection and Discussion

- ☉ Reflect on this statement: Faith informs our study, and study informs our faith.
- ☉ Reflect on a significant experience of God in your life. How does that experience enable you to know more about God?
- ☉ As you think about your own personality, are you more drawn to learning about God through your mind or through your heart? Give personal examples of why this may be true.
- ☉ Think about the following mission statement of a newly formed church. What appeals to you about this church? What is missing from this church that you find in your own faith tradition?

We are a spiritual community consecrated to being a safe, healing place in which you will find love and acceptance just as you are—a creative, alive place in which you will be challenged to become all you can be by realizing all that you are as you travel your spiritual path. (Mary Ann Crawford, “Midtown Spiritual Community”)

Notes

Use this space to jot ideas, reminders, and additional resources.