

*The Challenge
of Discipleship*



The Challenge of Discipleship



Marilyn Kielbasa
Thomas Zanzig, General Editor™

To all the women-disciples in my life who have been a source of great strength, deep love, and continual challenge along the journey—Linell, Joyce, Nympha, Mary Jo, and most of all Mom, my very own model disciple



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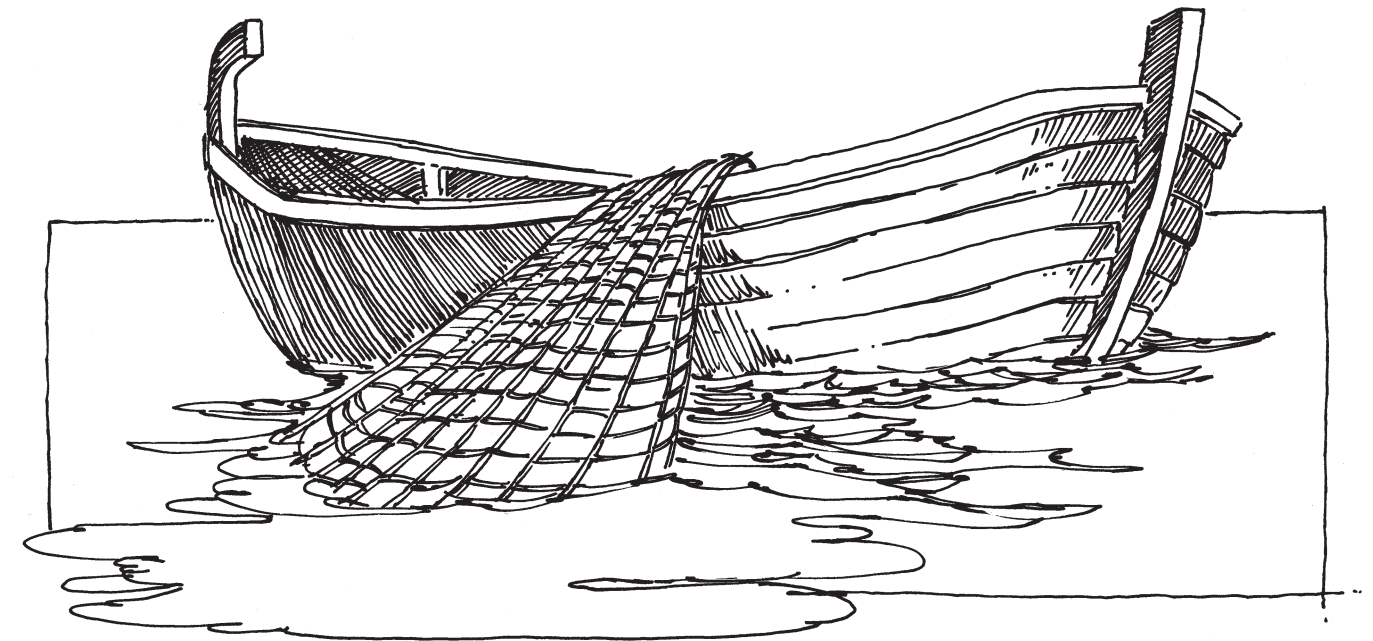
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

The call to Christian discipleship is fundamentally a call to conversion. Faith is the free response of the believer to God's invitation to enter into relationship with God (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 142). Conversion, then, is the process by which that faith response both begins and continues to deepen throughout the believer's life. In that sense we can speak of two kinds of conversion:

Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." . . .

Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. . . .

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church. . . . This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first. (Nos. 1427–1428)

Our focus in *The Challenge of Discipleship* is on what the *Catechism* calls the second conversion, the lifelong process by which the Christian turns more and more away from sin and more and more toward union with God. In this course this lifelong

process is described as a recurring cycle of spiritual growth characterized by four successive movements: hunger, search, awakening, and response. Therefore, discipleship is presented here as a call to embrace the deepest hungers of life and to embark on a meaningful search to satisfy those hungers. It is a call to awaken to the loving presence of God within that hunger and search. And it is, finally, a call to respond to God's presence by accepting God's acceptance of us, and by using our unique gifts to continue the work of ushering in God's Reign. The essence of Christian discipleship, in other words, is to live one's own life fully conscious of and attentive to the spiritual richness and meaning of all life and, with God's grace, to follow in the way of Jesus.

Our responsibility as religious educators and youth ministers is to guide the young people in our care to an awareness of their true hunger for God and a consciousness of their developmental need to genuinely search for answers. These two elements of the conversion process undoubtedly form the core of the adolescent spiritual journey. We are also called to help young people get in touch with the moments of awakening to the presence of God in their life. And, at a time when they are beginning to seriously think about their life's work, we must be about forming young people to respond to God's presence by making life-giving choices, choices that will ultimately contribute to building the Reign of God.

The Challenge of Discipleship is the second core course in level 3 of the Horizons Program. It is intended to follow the core course on the Scriptures, *The Bible: Power and Promise*. Both courses are designed for older adolescents, that is, young people who are at least juniors in high school. Though the two courses are not directly related in their content, a love of and appreciation for the Scriptures is central to the life of a Christian disciple. *The Challenge of Discipleship* presumes a comfortable familiarity with the Christian Testament and engages the young people in frequent use of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. The minicourses that logically follow *The Challenge of Discipleship* are *Becoming a Peacemaker*, *Justice: Building God's Reign*, and *Challenges to Christian Spirituality*. Although any level 3 minicourse will nicely complement the core course.

The Challenge of Discipleship is intended to be taught as five weekly 2-hour sessions presented in consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. The activities are structured with a group of about fifteen

young people in mind. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may have to make minor adjustments in the session plans. Suggestions for making these adjustments are frequently included in the alternative approaches explained at the end of every session plan. However, if you need further assistance with this task, consult your program coordinator.

The first session of the course focuses on the cyclic model of the process of conversion and the central elements of the spiritual life. In the first half of the session, the conversion process is explained. Then the young people reflect on the four movements of the process from an objective point of view. That is, they are asked to name the hungers that people their age experience and brainstorm positive and negative ways that young people search for ways to satisfy those hungers. In the second half, the young people are briefly introduced to the Acts of the Apostles. They explore four elements involved in living out the spiritual life: study, prayer and worship, community life, and service. References to both the conversion process and the elements of the spiritual life recur throughout the rest of the course. (Note that one minicourse in level 4 of *Horizons*, *Young Adult Faith*, deals exclusively with the particular challenges of spiritual growth faced by older adolescents.)

The closing prayer in the first session involves cutting a stem from a mature plant and putting the stem in water so that it may grow roots of its own. The young people then tend to this cutting during all five sessions of the course. The cutting is planted in the last session of the course, as the teacher makes connections between the cutting that has been sprouting roots for five weeks and the need for a disciple to be rooted in Jesus.

The remaining four sessions of *The Challenge of Discipleship* explore various characteristics of the growing Christian disciple. This discussion is organized around three "theological virtues" that the church describes as "the foundation of Christian moral activity": faith, hope, and charity (see the *Catechism*, no. 1813). The second session zeros in on the Christian as a person of faith and, in light of that, the meaning of discipleship and the qualities of a disciple. By searching a variety of Scripture passages, the young people identify the characteristics of a Christian disciple. Their study leads to the conclusion that disciples are normal human beings with regular lives who are committed to a relationship with Jesus. The second half of the session fo-

cuses on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a disciple. The participants engage in a study of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as found in Isaiah and the fruits of the Spirit from the Letter to the Galatians. The session closes with a self-evaluation of one's personal qualifications for and commitment to the life of a disciple.

Compassion and charity are the characteristics of discipleship explored in the third session. To highlight the diversity of gifts that is a frequent theme in the Christian Testament, the participants paraphrase a familiar passage from 1 Corinthians. They learn that when one can truly appreciate and celebrate the gifts of another, prejudice and bigotry are wiped out. The dominant activity of the second half of the session is called the "compassion walk." In this exercise the young people consider the prejudices that affect them and those they love, and reflect on how their own biases may affect other course participants whom they pray with and talk with.

The characteristic of discipleship explored in session 4 is hope. First, young people try to name the risks and rewards of discipleship. Then they apply their insights to challenges that people their age might present to them or attitudes that they themselves may struggle with at times. The session closes with a reflection exercise focusing on four disciples who had to face their own struggles: Peter, Nicodemus, Timothy, and Joseph of Arimathea.

The final session of *The Challenge of Discipleship* presents the disciple as a person of commitment and action. Here the young people learn more about the account of the early church from the Acts of the Apostles. In that context they discuss Peter's qualifications for the role of disciple. They discover that Peter's main qualification was his genuine humanness and his growing capacity to accept God's unconditional acceptance of him.

The course closes with a return to the conversion process first presented in session 1 and a closing prayer service that includes the presentation of newly rooted plants. It is hoped that the symbol of new roots will also apply to the lives of these young disciples. If not now, someday they will discover that being rooted in Jesus Christ is the only way to embrace and ultimately satisfy the profound hungers that are part of being human. If not now, someday they will be so committed in their relationship with Jesus that they will be able to say as Peter did, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

The starting point for *The Challenge of Discipleship* is the process of conversion outlined above, particularly as it applies to the unique character of the adolescent journey. The hungers of adolescents are not unlike the hungers of us all. They, like us, hunger for belonging, acceptance, joy, love, meaning, holiness, challenge, affirmation, and peace. As with each of us, their search for something to satisfy their hunger will take them in all sorts of directions. Some of those searches will leave them empty and only more hungry, still looking for answers to their deepest questions. Other searches will address their immediate needs without long-lasting effects. The hunger will remain. At other times their search will result in a profound experience of awakening to the loving presence of God. The response to that experience may be a deeper hunger for the holy in life and for a more intimate relationship with Jesus. For some, such spiritual awakenings can be confusing, even frightening. Their response may be avoidance or denial. Almost universally, however, those who have experiences of awakening need to share their faith story, hear others' stories, and take action that will contribute in a meaningful way to the sacredness of life as it exists in God's Reign.

The Challenge of Discipleship was written with the presumption that many, though not all, of the young people who take it have had some experience of spiritual awakening that has resulted in a deeper hunger for the holy. By the time a young person reaches their junior year of high school, it generally takes more than a parental mandate to motivate him or her to participate in a religious education program. By that age some young people may truly want to deepen their relationship with Jesus, are beginning to think seriously about how they can make a difference in the world, and simply like being in the company of other believers. Because of these presumptions of free participation and a basic faith stance on the part of the participants, *The Challenge of Discipleship* is one of the most overtly catechetical courses in the entire Horizons Program. It starts with the expectation that the young people want and need to be challenged to aspire to a more mature Christian faith.

No matter how committed a young person may be, however, we cannot expect an adolescent to

respond to the call to discipleship as an adult Christian would. Expecting such commitment from a sixteen-year-old is both unrealistic and dangerous. Failure to live up to the expectations of an adult commitment will result in undeserved guilt in a young person, especially one who is thoughtful and diligent. If pushed too far or too fast to an adult expression of spirituality, a young person who is still searching and not yet totally convinced of the value of a vocation to the Christian life might even reject the whole idea of a Christian commitment to an active spiritual life.

The purpose of this course on Christian discipleship, then, is not to get young people to “sign on the dotted line.” Rather, it is to make the Christian life so appealing and challenging that a young person sees faith more profoundly as the fulfillment of her or his hungers, and the search for God the greatest of all human adventures.

The Theology of This Course

Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?” (Luke 9:23–25)

Over and over again in the Gospels, we hear Jesus utter two simple, stunningly straightforward words to those who would be his disciples: “Follow me.” We are struck by the immediacy with which so many responded to that call, apparently ready to leave family and occupation at the mere sound of his voice. But to where or to what was Jesus leading them? Only over time does the answer begin to dawn on the disciples: He is leading them with him to the cross. “Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38, NAB). It is clear that Jesus was referring to his own death.

According to Jesus this is *the* defining characteristic of disciples, the willingness to “take up their cross” and follow him. But what does that mean? When viewed from a narrow, and largely negative, perspective, it seems to suggest that this life is but a painful burden to be borne with the hope of eventual glory, that is, the attainment of heaven. Older Catholics may recall frequent references to life as “this vale of tears” that we are called to endure,

along with parental promises that “your reward will be in heaven.” No one with significant experience would deny that life does indeed possess its share of pain and turmoil. But is this what Jesus calls us to embrace?

We must understand Jesus’ call to the cross within a larger, more hopeful perspective. After all, this is the same Jesus who proclaimed that he came among us so that we might “‘have life, and have it abundantly’” (John 10:10). What Jesus is calling his disciples to understand and embrace is the reality of the paschal mystery at the center of life, the conviction—verified and made real through his own death and Resurrection—that all death is temporary and the powers of life will always be victorious. “The Paschal mystery of Christ’s cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God’s saving plan was accomplished ‘once for all’ by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ” (*Catechism*, no. 571). The death and Resurrection of Jesus brings justification for humanity, that is, overcomes the bonds of both original and personal sin that shackle humanity. That justification “has been *merited for us by the Passion of Christ* . . . whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all [people]” (*Catechism*, no. 1992). Baptism, then, allows us fully to participate in the primary fruit of the redemptive death of Jesus, a renewed relationship between God and people. And all this is brought about by the sheer gift of God’s grace, “*the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to [God’s] call to become children of God . . . partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life*” (no. 1996).

Freed from the bonds of sin through the grace of God—such language is not merely religious jargon. However, listen to the words of spiritual guide Thomas Keating, who sheds light on how profound and deeply personal this reality is:

Each of us has a significant dose of the human condition. In Catholic theology we call it the consequences of original sin. We come into the world not knowing what true happiness is but needing it; not knowing what true affection is but needing it; not knowing what true freedom is, but needing it. . . . The stronger those needs, the more the frustration when they are not fulfilled.

Into this universal human situation Jesus comes saying, “Repent” which means “change the direction in which you are looking for happiness.” (“Spiritual Direction”)

This is the heart of the conversion process, to “change the direction” in which we look for happiness. In the paschal mystery, Jesus reveals to us that true happiness, the fulfillment of our deepest hungers, can be found only through the denial of our own self-serving interests for the sake of the Reign of God. In other words we must accept God’s agenda as the central concern of our life. Then, paradoxically, we will find all that we have been searching for; we will find the true meaning of life by the very act of “losing” our own limited presumptions about who and whose we are.

The conversion process as described in *The Challenge of Discipleship* is an attempt to name or describe the dynamics of the paschal mystery as followers of Jesus are called to live it each day. The recurring rhythm, if you will, of the spiritual journey is one of movement from hunger, through search, into awakening, and toward response. This is the pattern of “dying and rising with Jesus” that has characterized the followers of Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry.

We are told that early in his public life, Jesus chose twelve men to be his Apostles. These men were undistinguished in their social status, showed no signs of intellectual superiority, and were not politically savvy. They shared a spiritual hunger, perhaps not unlike our own, and eventually came to recognize that their relationship with Jesus provided an answer to that hunger. Their awakening to the presence of God among them was neither immediate, consistent, nor unflinching. The only characteristics they held in common were their openness to “something more” and their profound humanness.

These Apostles, taught by Jesus, were sent forth by him as his emissaries to continue his mission to usher in the Reign of God. Transformed by Jesus’ death and Resurrection, the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world, inviting people of every era to enter into the joy of their communion with him (*Catechism*, no. 425). Besides receiving the mandate for that mission, the Apostles also received the power to carry it out (nos. 858–859).

In the Nicene Creed, we profess the church to be “one, holy, catholic, and *apostolic*.” That is, the church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and continues the work of proclaiming Christ to the world. The church remains “in communion of faith and life with her origin. . . . ‘The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well,’” that is, to “‘every activity of the Mystical

Body’” (*Catechism*, no. 863). As those who carry on the work of the Apostles, the church “must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it” (no. 1816). In other words, we as the church must proclaim Christ to the world by our actions and attitudes—as well as by our words.

Importantly, the entire conversion process is initiated, guided, and draws its energy from the grace of God. It is grace that makes salvation possible (*Catechism*, no. 1996). It is grace that initiates and sustains one’s faith in God (no. 153). It is grace that is the source of our deepest hungers: “[God] has placed in [humans] a longing for truth and goodness that only [God] can satisfy” (no. 2002). It is grace that guides the search of the faithful disciple, and opens the believer to the most profound awakenings of God’s presence (no. 2000). And it is above all grace that allows the believer to freely embrace and respond to the activity of God in her or his life (no. 2002). In other words God’s grace saturates the entire process of conversion, or, as one believer put it, “We swim in it.”

The call to Christian discipleship has its roots on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was then and is now a call to a life-changing relationship with Jesus, offered to all those who share with the original Twelve a profound humanness. If one honestly says yes to that call, the only possible response to that relationship is to continue the work of those who said yes on the shores of Galilee. That is, one must work to build the Reign of God while living as if the Reign of God were already fulfilled among us.

The purpose of *The Challenge of Discipleship* is to convey to young people the significance of the apostolic mission to proclaim Christ to the world in every way possible. It is also an invitation to make that mission their own.

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, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” 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.

The Challenge of Discipleship was described above as one of the most overtly catechetical courses in the entire Horizons curriculum. It is also, perhaps, one of the most overtly evangelizing courses in the series. The central purpose of the course is to lead young people to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and to challenge them to live a life that reflects that relationship. All this is done in a way that is challenging but nonthreatening.

The focus of the course on the process of conversion helps young people get in touch with some of their deepest hungers. The examination of the characteristics of a disciple helps them realize that Jesus called ordinary people who did extraordinary things because of their relationship with him. The exploration of the role of the Holy Spirit assures young people that guidance and support are there for the asking. This is all good news to adolescents who might have considered the role of disciple to be well beyond the reach of their age and abilities. With those barriers addressed, all that remains is the young person’s response to the challenge to build the Reign of God.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *The Challenge of Discipleship*. 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 ado-

lescents, 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 *The Challenge of Discipleship* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and community environment of the group. High school students are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. 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. The issue of rules should be less a problem with a level 3 course than it is in earlier levels. Still, 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 expectations.

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 a sim-

ple list onto newsprint to purchasing potting soil or browsing catalogs. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these 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 of hunger, search, awakening, and response 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 to 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 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, *The Challenge of Discipleship* 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.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *The Challenge of Discipleship*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given 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 it. 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 *The Challenge of Discipleship* suggest using music. 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 your topic. 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. 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 an 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.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Many of the courses in the Horizons Program can be recast as daylong or overnight programs. *The Challenge of Discipleship* may be suitable for adaptation as an overnight or weekend retreat. It depends on the program, the timing, the leaders, the purpose, and above all, the young people themselves. If you want to consider using *The Challenge of Discipleship* as a retreat, consult your program coordinator and together weigh the following advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

- The young people can explore the conversion process and other issues of personal spirituality at a deeper level with more time for reflection.
- You could pair up the young people and have them connect at various points throughout the weekend to share their experiences, support one another, and pray together.
- You can take advantage of more of the options and alternatives suggested in the session plans, as well as some of the parish program connections.
- The participants can view and discuss movies or television shows that portray modern-day disciples, that is, people who are actively and purposefully engaged in living the Christian life.
- You might arrange for guests or team members to speak on their experiences that relate to the course content. For example, invite someone who has spent time as a missionary or peace corp volunteer, someone who is a spiritual director, or someone who is a minister in another Christian denomination.
- The more relaxed format of a retreat allows for more one-on-one time between adults and young people. This can be important in the life of a teenager who is wrestling with some of life's biggest questions and decisions.

Disadvantages

The only disadvantage to doing *The Challenge of Discipleship* in a retreat format is that the plant rooting activity that runs through all five sessions could not be done. You would need to find another image or otherwise adapt the procedure.

Special Preparation Needs

In the first session of the course, the young people start rooting their own plant cuttings that will, if all goes well, produce enough of a root system by the final session to be successfully planted. Before the course begins, you may want to do some research on the best way to produce the desired results. You might consult a friend who knows about houseplants or someone who cares for plants at a nursery. Get that person's opinion on what plant grows best in your area, roots quickly, and is easy to maintain. You could also check the local library for books on the topic. Another resource might be a local garden club.

If you have enough time before the course starts, you may want to try rooting one cutting so that you can judge the time it will take to start showing roots, whether you will need something to stimulate root growth, and so forth.

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. *The Challenge of Discipleship* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Invite a guest speaker on a topic related to the course content. It could be someone who has spent time as a missionary or peace corp volunteer, someone who is a spiritual director, or someone who is a minister in another Christian denomination. Ask that person to discuss the challenges of his or her particular mission as a disciple of Christ. You could also put together a panel that includes members of the parish who engage in various ministries out of an attitude of convicted discipleship.
- Develop a spiritual mentoring program for older adolescents who may want to talk with someone on a regular basis about spiritual issues. Invite adults in the parish who are interested in spending time with young people to participate in the mentoring program and provide training for them so that they feel comfortable in their role.
- Plan an evening or a series of presentations on post-biblical disciples. Use the time to highlight the life and wisdom of some of our spiritual guides in living the Christian life. Some examples would be Dorothy Day, Henri Nouwen, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, Thomas à Kempis, Pope John XXIII, and Thea Bowman. Consider having the young people write a short piece on each spiritual guide. Then insert the stories in the parish bulletin once a month or so.
- Start a regular feature in your parish bulletin called "discipleship in action." Highlight young people in the parish and what they do to serve the parish or the community. You might also consider putting up a bulletin board and posting stories and pictures of young people in action.
- Plan an evening or a series of evenings to view and discuss feature-length movies about people who lived their call to Christian discipleship. Some suggestions might be *Romero*; *The Hiding Place*; *Schindler's List*; *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*; or *The Mission*. Check your local library or video store for the availability of these movies or for other ideas.

- Start a baby-sitting service that is connected to service events in the parish or community. Have young people offer free child care so that parents can get involved with service groups or simply volunteer once in a while to help out on a project.

Family Connections

Parents are interested in knowing what their child is learning. They are entitled to know what is going on in the program and how they can be involved if they choose to be. Each session in this course includes activities for families in the Alternative Approaches section. Also, consider the following options:

- Encourage families to view some of the movies suggested above and discuss the contents. Also suggest that they look for evidence of Christian living or a commitment to Christian values in the television shows they watch.
- Suggest that families start a plant cutting for every person in the family. When the cuttings root, family members can pot their plants together and discuss the symbolism as it connects to their family and the church.
- Invite parents to meet for an hour or so. During that time go through the outline of the course and explain the conversion process to them. You could also put together a flyer to send home to parents before the course begins.
- Suggest that when the family prays together at meals, each person should get a chance to offer an example of something he or she did or a choice he or she made that reflects an attitude of Christian living. This might also be something to do in the car on the way to church.

Goals and Objectives in This Course

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 com-

monsense 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 The Challenge of Discipleship

Goals

The five goals for this course are as follows:

- That the young people understand discipleship as a call to be in relationship with Jesus and as a challenge to live the Christian life to its fullest
- That they recognize the hungers that drive their search for meaning in life
- That they explore the concept of spirituality and what it means for them personally and communally
- That they identify the characteristics of an integrated and balanced Christian and consider the implications of those characteristics for their life
- That they understand the role of the Holy Spirit as sustainer and guide in living the spiritual life

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which help realize the five course goals. The objectives of *The Challenge of Discipleship* follow:

Session 1: “Follow Me: The Call to Conversion”

- To deepen the young people’s understanding of personal spirituality
- To explain the process of conversion as it applies to the deepening spirituality of young adults
- To outline the traits of a healthy and active spiritual life and help the young people reflect on their own spiritual growth

Session 2: “A Disciple Is a Person of Faith”

- To help the young people understand the concept of discipleship as an expression of the Christian’s response in faith to the revelation of God
- To lead the young people in an examination of the role of the Holy Spirit as teacher, empowerer, and guide in the life of a Christian disciple
- To examine the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit as essential tools in living the Christian life
- To search the Scriptures for models of discipleship

Session 3: “A Disciple Is a Person of Charity”

- To remind the young people of the fundamental human predisposition toward relationship with all creation, fully expressed in Jesus as God incarnate
- To lead them through a reflection exercise that challenges them to embrace diversity in the human community and respond compassionately

Session 4: “A Disciple Is a Person of Hope”

- To discuss with the young people the risks and rewards of Christian discipleship
- To present to them the ideal of complete integration of knowledge, belief, and action in living the Christian life in its fullness as modeled by Jesus
- To discuss with them common challenges to the spiritual life and to explore ways of dealing with those struggles
- To foster in them a sense of hopefulness that is grounded in the confident awareness of God’s continued grace in our attempt to live the life of a disciple

Session 5: “A Disciple Is a Person of Commitment and Action”

- To present to the young people the connection between commitment and action as requirements for Christian discipleship
- To help them become more familiar with the events and people of the Acts of the Apostles, with a particular focus on Peter as the model disciple
- To re-examine with the young people the process of conversion and to help them formulate a personal plan for ongoing growth
- To bring the course to a prayerful close

Suggested Resources

- Donnelly, Doris. *Spiritual Fitness: Everyday Exercises for Body and Soul*. NY: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978.
- O’Malley, William J. *Why Not? Daring to Live the Challenge of Christ*. New York: Alba House, 1986.
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990.
- Ralph, Margaret Nutting. *Discovering the First Century Church: The Acts of the Apostles, Letters of Paul and the Book of Revelation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.