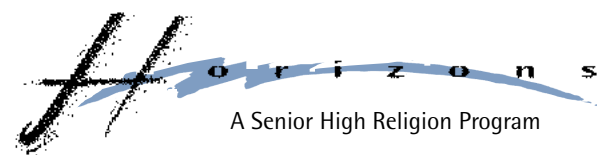


*Jesus:  
His Message and Mission*



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# Contents

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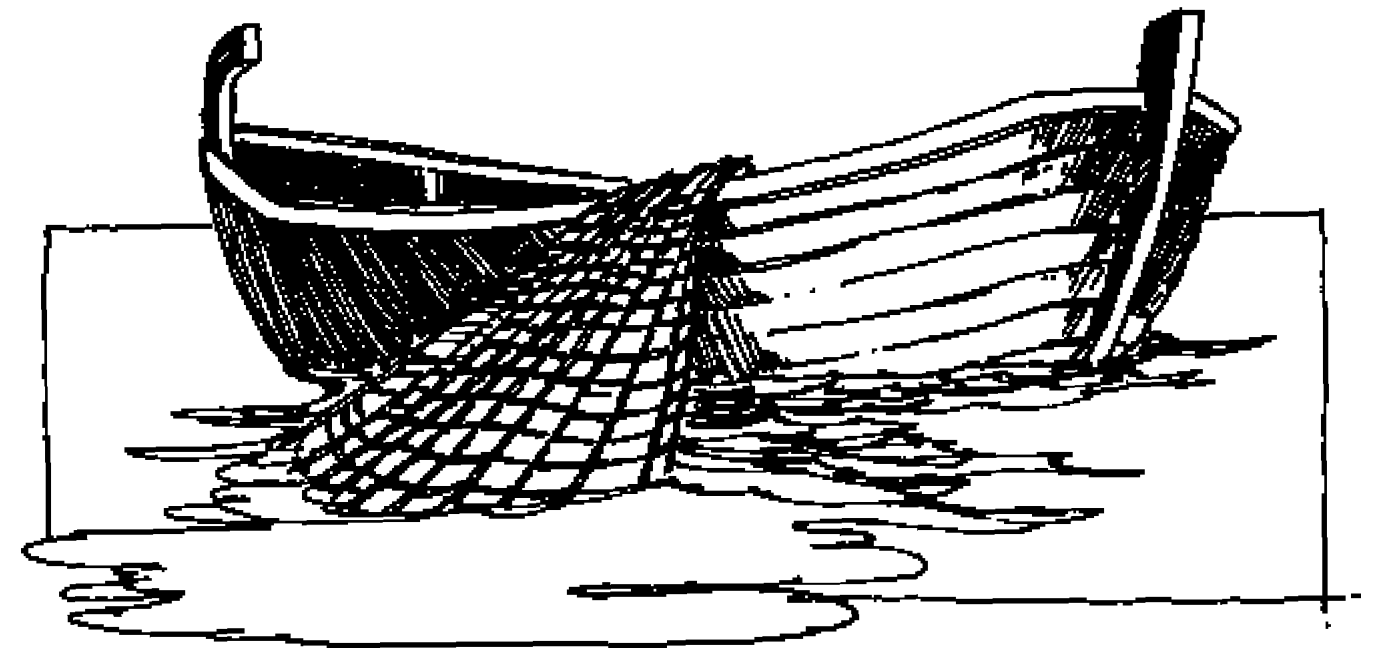
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# Introduction



## An Overview of This Course

The Roman Catholic understanding of Jesus, and the means used to approach and achieve that understanding, is at the center of everything Catholic Christians believe, do, and *are* as persons of faith. All of Christian experience—the church’s doctrinal understanding of the faith, its communal worship, its moral values and convictions, and more—might be viewed as similar to a calm pool in which believers are nurtured, refreshed, cleansed, and renewed. Whenever a new insight into Jesus and his meaning is discovered, it is as if a pebble were dropped into that pool. Regardless of the pebble’s size, it has an

impact and a gradually expanding influence upon the entire pool. The effects of the new insight ripple out, in what are often imperceptible waves, to touch and alter the church’s doctrinal understanding, prayer, values—virtually every facet of Christian life.

The church’s understanding of Jesus, his message, and his meaning for the contemporary world has changed over the years. In recent decades, scholars have given that changed understanding of Jesus greater clarity. Thanks to remarkable advances in the study of the Scriptures, we are perhaps more capable than in the past of getting in touch with the central meaning of Jesus, a meaning free from many of the historical and cultural embellishments

that have often clouded our understanding of him. As a result, the number of books on Christology has increased considerably since Vatican Council II.

The task that confronts us as religious educators and youth ministers is to make all this information accessible to the young people we encounter. Our responsibility is to pass on to them an understanding of Jesus that is grounded in truth, the truth as Jesus offered it to us nearly two thousand years ago. The intention of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is to do exactly that. However, though countless pages have been written about Jesus based on endless hours of study, thought, and prayer, we have only a short time to explore the life and message of Jesus with the participants in this course.

*Jesus: His Message and Mission* begins where the first core unit, *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace*, left off with the issues of faith and religion. After a brief review of those key concepts, the young people are invited to explore their personal beliefs about Jesus as well as their peers' attitudes regarding him. They are also given a chance to think about the risks that every faith-filled person encounters in the process of answering the question Jesus poses to all of us: "Who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20). A brief presentation and demonstration of the Bible is also part of the first session, and though it may be a review for some participants, it gives the whole group a grounding in the basic skills needed to navigate through the Scriptures.

The second session has two primary themes: the beginnings of Jesus' ministry and the core elements of his message. Before these themes are presented, the participants first examine the nature of the Gospels and look at some of the differences between the three synoptic Gospels. An exploration of the stories of Jesus' baptism and the desert temptations follows. The session concludes with a discussion of the Reign of God and our role in making Jesus' dream a reality.

The topic of the third session is the mission of Jesus and, in particular, how he carried it out through teaching and healing. An activity on seeing things from different perspectives establishes the context for viewing the parables and miracles recounted in the Gospels. The participants are consistently challenged to find guidance in the parables and significance in the miracles.

The central reality and mystery of Christianity, belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is presented next. In the fourth session, the participants are led through the incredible events of the last week of

Jesus' life. The focus of the session moves from the Passion and death of Jesus to his triumphant Resurrection and Ascension. The young people are then invited into a deepening relationship with the Risen Lord.

The final session of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* starts with a small, frightened, and confused group of disciples who felt betrayed by their belief in the murdered Jesus of history. It moves toward the establishment of a church founded on the disciples' belief in the Risen Christ of faith. The participants are invited to experience the journey to Emmaus and the day of Pentecost. The course concludes with activities and discussion that focus on the question, What does it mean to be church? The believer's answer to that question has at its roots the answer to the first question posed in *Jesus: His Message and Mission*: "Who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20)

## Background for This Course

### The Adolescent and This Course

In his landmark book *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), John Westerhoff identifies four styles of faith within the broad sweep of lifelong faith development. The second and third styles are most applicable to the young adolescent experience. In the second style, affiliative faith, the young person's need for a sense of peer acceptance and for participation in a caring community finds expression in a desire to feel included in the religious community in which he or she has been raised. Because of this, learning about the traditions of the faith community and participating in various youth group activities can be attractive to the early-adolescent age-group. The third style, searching faith, normally emerges during the mid- to late-adolescent years. This style of faith is characterized by questioning, doubt, and serious reflection upon the faith that the person has inherited from others. The essential question asked at this time is Do I now want to freely accept as my own the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the community with which I have been affiliated? For some people, the answer is an immediate yes; for others, deep and sometimes painful reflection takes place.

Making generalizations about the faith development of any age-group is somewhat risky, but it seems safe to say that the majority of young people with whom you will share *Jesus: His Message and Mission* will be moving from affiliative toward searching faith. This broad movement will itself be characterized by widely diverse levels of depth and intensity.

Some of the participants will be deeply affiliated with the church and its teachings, convinced by their upbringing and experience that the church possesses truth and should not be questioned. Perhaps a larger number will be only culturally affiliated, bound to the church more by socialization than by personal conviction. Some will be facing the emergence of major questions on many levels of their life, perhaps most strongly in the areas of self-esteem and relationships. For them, religion and faith may be virtually nonissues because other concerns dominate their life. (Such young people, it should be noted, often are clearly involved in profound issues of faith, yet they would not likely identify the issues as such.) Finally, a minority of the participants may well be engaged in a conscious searching faith, raising questions about everything from the existence of God to the right of the church to dictate moral guidelines.

Besides the issue of faith development, another thing to consider in your work with *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is the various levels of experience the participants have with evangelization and religious formation. Some young people regrettably will have never heard the Gospel of Jesus proclaimed or explained in a way that has touched both their heart and their head. At the other extreme, some will believe that they have heard so much about faith and religion that they feel they know everything there is to know—the surest indicator, of course, that they know very little. Most of the participants will fall somewhere in between those extremes.

This course responds creatively to such a diversity of starting points. First, the course does not presume that the young people are already committed Catholic Christians. Second, it encourages you to create a safe and nonthreatening learning environment. And finally, it uses active learning processes, allowing the already evangelized and religiously informed young people in effect to evangelize their peers. The teacher is primarily a facilitator of that dynamic process, rather than a source of all wisdom and knowledge.

## The Theology of This Course

It is important to present not only the person of Jesus and the heart of his message but also an understanding of these realities that reflects Catholic belief and teaching. Effectively providing the Catholic perspective on Jesus and the Gospel message requires that we first identify the two ways in which Catholics believe the revelation of God in Jesus is handed on. The Catholic church agrees with all Christian churches that the Bible as a whole and the four Gospels in particular serve as a privileged source of our information about Jesus. However, Catholics also believe that, following the death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Spirit of God has continued to guide the community of faith in its evolving understanding of Jesus and his message. In fact, Catholics view the Scriptures themselves as one of the initial expressions of the Spirit's activity among the community of believers. The church's understanding of both Jesus and the community's own identity and mission eventually became formulated in the Catholic church's doctrines, dogmas, and moral teachings, and is ritually expressed and celebrated in its sacramental life. This constitutes what we know as the Catholic church's Tradition with a capital T.

### The Changing Approach to Christology

The church has experienced a dramatic shift in its understanding of Jesus and, in turn, in its understanding and experience of what it means to be Christian. For hundreds of years, beginning as far back as the second century, the church's understanding of Jesus had been highly doctrinal and theological rather than biblical, gradually developing into what scholars call a *high Christology*, *descending Christology*, or *Christology from above*. This means that Catholic Christians tended to concentrate relatively little on the Jesus of history who walked the dusty roads of Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. Instead, they focused on the meanings of his life and message as interpreted by theologians and scholars and as officially defined by the church through the centuries.

A Christology from above sees God as transcendent and "out there." It emphasizes Jesus' divinity as the second person of the Trinity and presents him as a person who was fully conscious of his identity and role. The focus is on Jesus' incarnation



as a man, leading to an emphasis on Christmas as the central Christian feast. The Eucharist is seen as a re-enactment of Calvary and the sacrificial and salvific death of Jesus on the cross. In an act of perfect sacrifice, Jesus saved us by dying for our sins, thereby satisfying God and reopening the gates of heaven. Salvation is attained through baptism and adherence to the will of God as it is discerned by church authorities.

Catholics who had their formative religious education before the Second Vatican Council were given an understanding of Jesus based on the high Christology described above. Though as a catechist you may be familiar with the theological shifts that have occurred in recent decades, some parents and other adults in the parish may be unfamiliar with the shifts and may still have a Christology from above underlying their theology. This is neither good nor bad, but it is important to recognize this fact as you prepare to teach this course.

The Christology represented by *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is a low Christology, Christology from below, or ascending Christology. It offers a significantly different approach to understanding Jesus, an approach that results in a large shift in emphasis when discussing him and his message. A low Christology is one that moves from the human to the divine rather than the other way around. It recognizes Jesus first as a Jewish teacher and prophet who experienced all the trials and torments of life—much as we do. Jesus' death on the cross is viewed as a direct result of conflicts with Jewish and Roman authorities and as an expression of his total love and commitment to his vision. The focus is on his Resurrection by God, leading to an emphasis on Easter as the central Christian feast. The Eucharist is seen as a communal banquet that celebrates Jesus' ongoing presence and call to life in the Spirit.

We must take care in this brief discussion of the distinctions between high and low Christologies to avoid the impression that one approach is right and the other wrong, or the temptation to discredit one approach and canonize the other. Ideally, we would view the two approaches to understanding Jesus as complementary and compatible, not in conflict. Having said that, we also recognize that any treatment of Jesus—and particularly one that is as limited as the one in this course—must assume a certain starting point and then build reasonably from there. In this course we choose, as do many contemporary scholars, to move from the humanity of Jesus toward a consideration of his divinity, espe-

cially as that is revealed in the Resurrection and Pentecost.

In addition to having a solid scholarly foundation, a low christological approach more closely parallels the common human experience than does a Christology from above. The difference between approaching Jesus from below versus from above is, in a way, the difference between Peter's and Paul's experiences of Jesus. Peter first knew Jesus as the humble and rejected leader of a band of disciples and later came to recognize him as the One exalted by God to sit at God's right hand. Paul, however, first experienced Jesus as the glorious Son of God, who dwelt with the Creator. Later, he came to appreciate the reality that the Son of God had taken on our human condition.

Few of us can identify with Paul's mystical encounter with the Risen Jesus as a starting point for our Christian faith. We are much more like Peter, whose initial encounter with the earthly Jesus only gradually, in fits and starts, evolved into an understanding of and commitment to the Messiah and Lord. *Jesus: His Message and Mission* moves from a portrait of the Jesus of history toward the recognition of him as the Christ of faith.

### 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 [NFCYM], 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.

Young people need to hear the Good News of Jesus. “There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed” (Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 22). Effective evangelization involves an initial proclamation of this Good News. Some young people first hear of Jesus and are touched by him in their family. For others, perhaps the experience of being touched by Jesus happens in religious education classes or a broader youth ministry program. In any case, “the Good News is news that needs to be heard and seen—explicitly through word and implicitly through witness—over and over again” (NFCYM, *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, p. 12).

Above all, the Horizons Program is committed to providing an evangelizing experience of catechesis for young people. In addition to reviewing the basic Gospel story of Jesus, a major aim of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is the development of positive attitudes regarding that story among the group's participants. In other words, the dual purpose of the course is to foster an awareness in the young people that (1) they do not know all that there is to know about Jesus and his message and (2) what remains to be learned about Jesus and his message is incredibly inviting and exciting. The result, it is hoped, will be to spark in them a genuine fascination with the Gospel of Jesus and a sincere desire to grow in their understanding of and response to it.

An important element in kindling that spark in the process of evangelization is your own witness as a committed believer. Even though the methods used in the course do not presume that the participants are committed Catholic Christians, do not hesitate to speak of your own faith convictions. In fact, these may run so deep that you could not hide them if you chose to. Young people need adults who can speak openly and freely about their faith. However, we must share our faith experience in a way that does not alienate them by implicitly or explicitly judging their personal positions. Paradoxically, when we create such a safe and nonthreatening environment for the participants, our own faith convictions become all the more appealing, attractive, and worthy of the young people's serious reflection. When we try to impose our convictions on them, we only create impenetrable walls of resistance.

Ultimately, the main goal of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is to continue the process of evangelization and to help young people get more deeply in touch with Jesus and his Good News. An integrated presentation of his life and his message, combined with opportunities for reflection on the personal experience of both the participants and the teacher, can accomplish that goal.

### On Teaching This Course

#### A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Jesus: His Message and Mission*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses. 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.

Like all courses in the Horizons Program, *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is based on an active learning approach that balances teacher presentations with reflection time, simulations, prayer, and other activities to help the young people grasp the concepts and internalize the messages in each session. In addition, *Jesus: His Message and Mission* is sensitive to the catechetical implications of a Christology from below in that it is heavily biblical and respects the church's historical development of christological doctrine. It also invites the teacher to share a personal faith in Jesus and helps the young people identify and nurture their own unique relationship with Jesus.

Whether or not you are an experienced catechist, working through the session plans in this manual should not be a problem. The processes are outlined in great detail, but to carry them out, you will need to prepare yourself and the learning environment. This course will be successful to the degree that you are prepared and can make it come

alive for the participants. The following information is intended to help you achieve both ends.

### Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Jesus: His Message and Mission* 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 developing 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 arrangement 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. The concept of respect has many implications, and the young people must be clear about the expectations associated with it in this course. 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. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

### 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 will require preparation. This could range from copying a

simple list onto newsprint, to creating game pieces or finding pictures. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions 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 experience 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 faith 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 relationship with Jesus, not yours.
- Talk about your experience 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 developing a relationship with Jesus is indeed a process, as is any relationship. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers, have an unshakable and intimate relationship with Jesus, and fully understand the great mystery that is God.
- 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 the Scriptures

The Horizons Program relies heavily on the Scriptures as a source of wisdom and the starting point for prayer. That is particularly true for this course. In the first session, the participants are given a guided tour through the Bible. Though it may be a review for many participants, such a review can further develop their ability to find their way through the Bible, in the hope that they might eventually reach a point of comfortable familiarity with the text. In addition to this introduction, all sessions include many Scripture-based exercises to help the young people dive into the life, ministry, and message of Jesus.

Each participant in *Jesus: His Message and Mission* will need a Bible. The same will be true for many other courses in the Horizons Program. If it is feasible, each person should have his or her own copy of the Scriptures. This allows for the possibility of marking the pages, highlighting passages, and personalizing the book in a way that is meaningful to each individual.

For the first time in the Horizons Program, the participants will be called upon to compare different Gospel accounts of certain events in the story of Jesus. For the most part, participants will do this by working in small groups, each group examining one Gospel. However, for those who show more interest, for those who are naturally inquisitive, or simply for your own reference, two resources may be valuable:

- *Gospel Parallels* (edited by B. H. Throckmorton) presents the synoptic Gospels side by side, making it easier to see which texts are common and which are unique. It also allows for close examination of the details of each text.
- *The Complete Parallel Bible* presents four different translations of the entire Bible side by side. Though no reference is made in *Jesus: His Message and Mission* to different translations, you may choose to note the differences on certain occasions. At the very least, this resource will help you to easily choose the most appropriate translation of suggested passages for times of prayer and reflection.

### 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, *Jesus: His Message and Mission* 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.

A couple of reasons exist for seriously considering the inclusion of journal-keeping exercises in this course. First, for young people who have not already participated in the level 1 minicourse *Keeping a Journal*, doing such exercises is a good way to introduce them to the concept of journal keeping and to help them develop some basic skills. For those who have already experienced that minicourse, incorporating the journal options in *Jesus: His Message and Mission* will help them further explore the personal benefits of this activity.

Second, 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. Your personal attention might make a big difference to a young person who is struggling, searching, or just growing up.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Jesus: His Message and Mission*, 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, the process of journal keeping is time consuming and energy consuming 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 *Jesus: His Message and Mission* 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. The 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, 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 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 with no words, preferably something that is unfamiliar 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.

### Using This Course as a Retreat

Some of the courses in the Horizons Program can effectively be adapted to a retreat format. Other courses do not lend themselves to reformatting because of the content or intensity of the material.

If you are thinking about providing a retreat experience for the participants based on this course, consult the program coordinator. The first consideration must be the readiness of the young people themselves. Then think about your own or other adults' ability to adapt this material into a retreat format and lead an effective experience for young people. Finally, consider the following advantages and disadvantages:

#### Advantages

Experiencing *Jesus: His Message and Mission* as an overnight retreat gives the participants a chance to submerge themselves in the life and message of Jesus. The added time provides more opportunities for private reflection, discussion, and prayer. In a retreat format, you could also present some of the media suggested elsewhere in this introduction.

The flexibility in a typical retreat plan also allows for more creativity. Some of the alternative suggestions for approaching session activities could be incorporated into the retreat, including group skits and contemporary interpretations of Gospel stories. Depending on the location and climate, on-site presentations can add to the effect of a lesson. For example, the activity on the Emmaus story could be done along a road or a path. The Beatitudes could be incorporated into a lesson on the Sermon on the Mount and presented on a hillside. If the weather conditions are right, the Pentecost story could be presented amid a grove of rustling trees.

Finally, offering this course as a retreat allows for the possibility of celebrating sacraments in a truly meaningful context. In the process of navigating through the material, the celebrations of the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist are likely to be memorable events for the participants. These

events will take on extra meaning for young people and are certainly appropriate faith responses to study and reflection on the message, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

#### Disadvantages

*Jesus: His Message and Mission* is necessarily a content-heavy course. Along with being faithful to the principles of active learning, it includes many teacher presentations and Scripture exercises. Also, it presumes that most of the participants in the course will be ninth graders. Because of these two characteristics, this course may not work well as a retreat. First, it may be too intense to present in an overnight retreat. Second, the participants may not be mature enough to handle the material in such a concentrated format.

For these reasons, offering *Jesus: His Message and Mission* in its entirety as a retreat is not recommended, in spite of the obvious advantages and exciting and creative possibilities. Instead, offering part of the course as a retreat and the rest in a conventional manner is suggested. For example, the last two sessions could be developed into an evening of reflection.

You know your young people and you know your own capabilities. These considerations weigh as heavily on the decision as any named above.

### Special Preparation Needs

#### Optional Video Resources

In the development of the Horizons Program, we at Saint Mary's Press chose not to include the use of video material as a *requirement* for leading any of the sessions. At the same time, people using our materials frequently request recommendations for *supplemental* video resources for their programming. The following two excellent resources deserve consideration. Using a video will require either deleting other material or expanding a session.

***In Remembrance* (Evangelical Films, 1981; 47 minutes).** This video is marvelous, thought provoking, and emotionally engaging. It presents imaginary interviews with five of the disciples who were at the Last Supper. They recount the experience and its meaning for them in light of the death of Jesus.

As each disciple tells his story, flashbacks of the meal provide a sensitive portrayal of what it may have been like. The disciples' comments are instructive and stimulating.

This film could be incorporated as a part of session 4 on the theme of Jesus' Passion, death, and Resurrection. Because of the length of the film, it would be better to schedule an additional session. Another option is to lengthen session 4—perhaps it could take on the character of an evening of reflection. Because of the film's focus on the meal and its meaning, a special session or expanded session could easily be developed by combining the film with a celebration of the Eucharist or a paraliturgy.

See Suggested Resources at the end of this chapter for information on purchasing or renting *In Remembrance*.

***Jesus and His Times* (Reader's Digest Association, 1991; three 1-hour videos).** The first of these three superb tapes is titled *The Story Begins*; it portrays Jesus' birth, childhood, daily life in Nazareth, and experience in the Temple at age twelve. The second title is *Among the People*; it explores Jesus' baptism, his public ministry, and the people's response to him. The third tape, *The Final Days*, includes information on Jerusalem and the Holy City, as it is today and as it was in Jesus' day. It covers the events of the last week of Jesus' life, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Each of the tapes reflects impressive biblical and archaeological scholarship, as well as superior writing, photography, music, acting, and production values.

We at Saint Mary's Press were so impressed with the quality of this series that we negotiated the rights to distribute it. See Suggested Resources at the end of this chapter for information on purchasing these videotapes.

#### Special Prayer Symbols

Each session of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* includes an opening and closing prayer. The session plans include directions for setting up a prayer space for one or both prayers, often including articles that symbolize the themes of the sessions in some way. These symbols are then collected for the closing prayer of the last session. You may want to read through the lists of suggested materials and begin collecting them before the course begins. Do

not limit yourself to the items suggested in the session plans. Use whatever you feel enhances the lesson or the message of the session.

## 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. *Jesus: His Message and Mission* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- If you are offering *Jesus: His Message and Mission* during Lent, have the participants design and conduct the stations of the cross for the whole parish.
- If the stage version of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* or of the play *Godspell* is being offered somewhere in your community, arrange a field trip to a performance. You might be able to arrange to speak to the performers about their experiences of playing different roles. Check out the possibilities before you go. If no performances are scheduled, consider doing a movie night using the video of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. As of this writing, *Godspell* is not available on video.

- Schedule a field trip to a synagogue to experience a Jewish Sabbath service. Arrange to have a rabbi give a tour of the synagogue and speak to your group about Jewish laws, customs, and feasts, especially the feast of Passover. The participants will come away with a better understanding of Jesus' religious heritage.
- Arrange a film series for parish young people and their parents. Perhaps combine the films with a potluck supper or dessert. Show one or more of the videos from the *Jesus and His Times* series (highlighted in the Optional Video Resources section of this introduction). Or create a series using secular feature films that revolve around issues of justice, peace, and the Reign of God.
- Plan a reconciliation service for the class in connection with the session on Jesus' dream of the Reign of God. The focus of the reconciliation service could be on sin as an obstacle to the Reign of God.
- Together with the participants, research, plan, and conduct a seder meal for the families of the participants. Or have the participants plan and conduct the seder meal for the group in the elementary or junior high program that is studying the Hebrew Scriptures.
- As a follow-up to the final session, have the participants brainstorm ways that they can "be church." Work with them to plan service programs in the parish, food and clothing collections, work camps, or outreach programs for elderly people in the community.
- Plan an evening of reflection during Lent on the Passion and death of Jesus. Use elements in the fourth session that focus on these themes and combine them with a seder meal and a viewing of the movie *In Remembrance* (suggested in the Optional Video Resources section).
- Have the young people plan a Spirit Day for younger children, where all the activities are centered on images of Pentecost. Events might include the following: racing sailboats (the children make these out of walnut shells, bubble gum, toothpicks, and paper sails and blow them across a small wading pool); making and flying kites; gathering around a campfire (or something like a hibachi); and showing a popular children's movie in a different language. As the day progresses, the participants can share with the children the story of Pentecost as well as reflections on the workings of the Spirit.

## 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 intended 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 Jesus: His Message and Mission

#### Goals

The three goals for this course are as follows:

- That the young people hear the story of Jesus—his life, work, and message—and begin to develop a personal response appropriate to their age and stage of development

- That they explore their past, current, and preferred images of Jesus and understandings of the church
- That they grow in their understanding of the essential message of Jesus Christ

#### Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which help realize the three course goals. The objectives of *Jesus: His Message and Mission* follow:

##### Session 1

##### "Jesus' Question: Who Do You Say That I Am?"

- To invite the young people to begin serious reflection on their attitudes toward and understanding of Jesus
- To awaken them to the fact that any real act of faith, including faith in Jesus and his message, involves some element of risk and, consequently, a degree of personal courage
- To review the basic structure of the Bible and to help them approach the Scriptures with both comfort and reverence

##### Session 2

##### "Jesus' Mission: Proclaiming the Reign of God"

- To help the young people reflect on Jesus' baptism as a time when he may have discovered new insights into his identity and mission
- To explore Jesus' temptations in the desert as the story of his confrontation with and rejection of destructive forms of power and his ultimate reliance upon faith
- To awaken the young people to the central significance of Jesus' vision of the Reign of God in his life, ministry, and mission
- To help them reflect on the core values of Jesus' message and mission and prayerfully consider the responsibility of his followers to adopt and try to live those values

##### Session 3

##### "Jesus' Ministry: Teaching and Healing"

- To help the young people recognize Jesus as one who not only talked about his vision of the Reign of God but also consistently acted on that vision
- To acquaint them with the uniqueness and significance of Jesus' parables





- To encourage them to move beyond the common perception of Jesus' miracles as magic to a recognition of them as signs of God's always-available healing power

#### Session 4

##### "Jesus' Triumph: Death and Resurrection"

- To review with the young people the series of events surrounding the Passion and death of Jesus
- To provide them with a general understanding of the key events following the death of Jesus—his Resurrection and Ascension
- To invite them to explore in greater depth the story of the Resurrection, and to awaken them to its central significance in both the story of Jesus and the faith journey of all Christians

#### Session 5

##### "Jesus' Challenge: Preserving and Proclaiming the Good News"

- To help the young people increase their knowledge of the events surrounding Pentecost and the birth of the church
- To increase their understanding of the church as a community of people who profess faith in the Risen Jesus and his message and who, through the power of the Spirit, live in loving service to all people

## Suggested Resources

The following materials may be helpful to you as background reading or to expand on the concepts and activities in this course:

### Books

*The Complete Parallel Bible.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers.* Rev. ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1991. Succinct answers to twenty major questions about the scriptural understanding of Jesus.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology.* New York: Crossroad, 1990. A highly readable yet well-grounded presentation of major trends in contemporary Christology.

McBrien, Richard. *Catholicism.* Vol. 1. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980. Of particular interest for teachers of this course is part 3, "Jesus Christ," and more specifically chapter 15, "Special Questions in Christology."

Perkins, Pheme. *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction.* Rev. ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1988. An accessible introduction to the Christian Testament, including helpful background on the world and life of Jesus.

Senior, Donald. *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait.* Dayton, OH: Pflaum Publishing, 1975. A beautifully written summary of scripturally rooted Christology. Though it is no longer in print, it is generally available in libraries that have religious studies resources.

Throckmorton, B. H., ed. *Gospel Parallels.* 5th ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.

Zanzig, Thomas. *Jesus Is Lord!* Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1982. A basic book on Christology that recognizes the past but puts the reader in touch with the most recent trends in the field in the discussion of the historical Jesus and the transforming impact the Risen Jesus had on his followers.

### Films and Videos

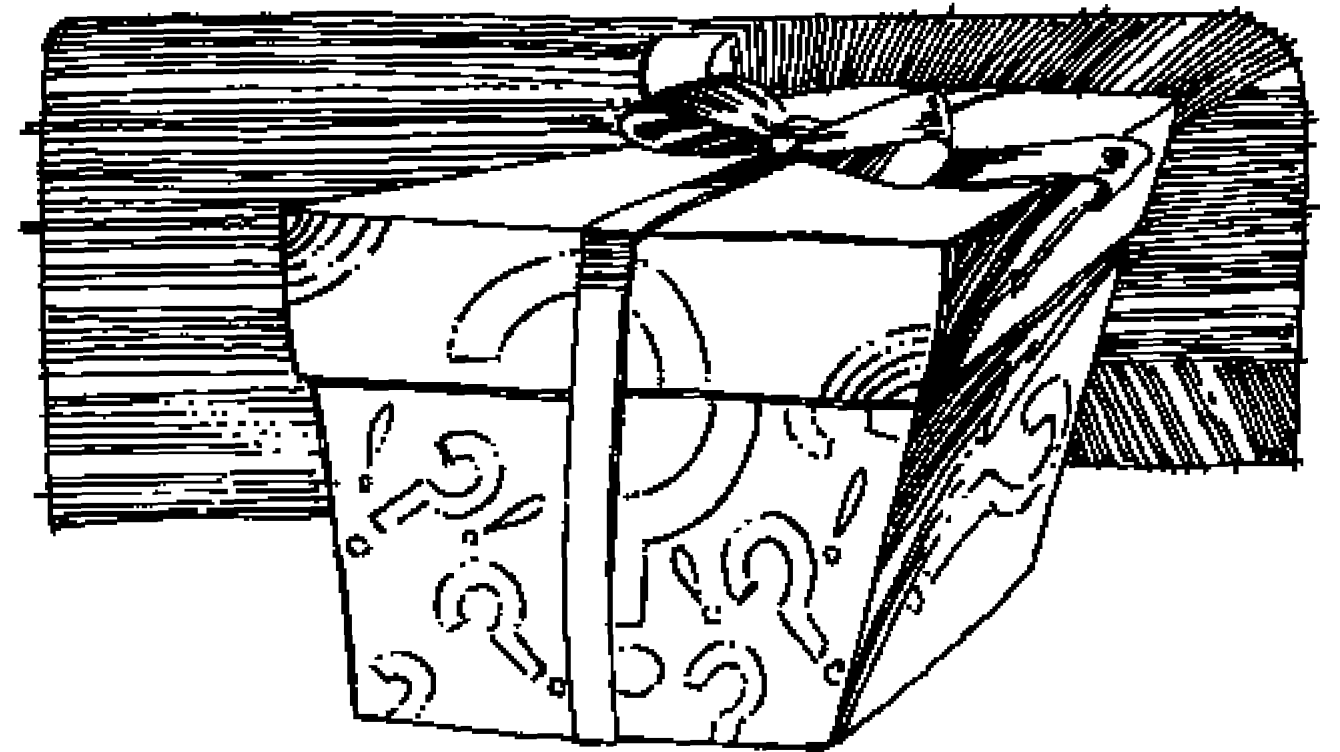
*Blessed Be.* Paulist Productions, 1992. 8 minutes. Available for purchase from Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Boulevard, Mahwah, NJ 07430; phone 201-825-7300.

*In Remembrance.* Ecumenical Films, 1981. 47 minutes. Available for purchase or rent from EcuFilm Distribution Service, 810 Twelfth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37206; phone 800-251-4091 or 615-242-6277. Or check your diocesan library or resource center to see if the film is available there.

*Jesus and His Times.* Reader's Digest Association, 1991. Three 1-hour videos. Available for purchase from Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987; phone 800-533-8095.

## SESSION 1

# Jesus' Question: Who Do You Say That I Am?



### Objectives

- To invite the young people to begin serious reflection on their attitudes toward and understanding of Jesus
- To awaken them to the fact that any real act of faith, including faith in Jesus and his message, involves some element of risk and, consequently, a degree of personal courage
- To review the basic structure of the Bible and to help them approach the Scriptures with both comfort and reverence

### Session Steps

- A. a welcome, an introduction, and an opening prayer (5 minutes)
- B. a discussion exercise on adolescent attitudes toward Jesus (20 minutes)
- C. a forced-choice exercise on personal beliefs about Jesus (25 minutes)
- D. a brainstorming exercise and commentary on revelation (10 minutes)
- E. a break (10 minutes)
- F. a presentation and demonstration on the Bible (15 minutes)
- G. a discussion about the risk of faith (20 minutes)
- H. a closing exercise and prayer on Jesus (15 minutes)

## Background for the Teacher

Even a short summary of the content of this session, like that provided in the list of session steps above, indicates that this is going to be an interesting—and very busy—session. In the last session of *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace*, the young people were led through a general reflection on the adolescent experience of religion and faith in God. In this first session of *Jesus: His Message and Mission*, we move to a specific focus on Jesus and on the particular challenges posed by faith in him. Topics introduced include Jesus' life, his message, and serious reflection on what it means to follow him both as individual Christians and as a community of faith.

In the opening discussion exercise, *Playing the Percentages with Jesus*, the young people try to characterize the common attitudes of their peers toward Jesus and faith in him. This sets the stage for the more challenging forced-choice exercise that follows, *Taking a Stand on Jesus*, in which the young people indicate their current positions, however tentative, on such issues as the divinity of Jesus, his Resurrection from the dead, his miracles, and so on. This is done in a game-like environment, so the participants will not feel pressured or embarrassed about stating their personal religious convictions. The intent of the exercise is to alert you to the starting point of the group as you move into this study of Jesus.

It is important to present not only the person of Jesus and the heart of his message but also a *Catholic* understanding of these realities. Effectively providing the Catholic perspective on Jesus and the Gospel message requires that we first identify the church's understanding of the two reliable ways in which God's revelation is communicated to us: the Scriptures and Tradition. The discussion exercise that concludes the first half of the session presents an opportunity to emphasize the importance of both of these sources.

If your group has had a lot of experience in using the Bible, the presentation and demonstration of the Bible that begins the second half of the session may be redundant. For groups or individuals who have limited skill in finding their way around the Scriptures, this segment will be a valuable review. Some basic information on how the Gospels were written follows the demonstration.

The final activity of the session is *The Mystery Box and the Risk of Faith*. You offer a box to the

young people, the contents of which are guaranteed to bring total fulfillment and peace to their life. The cost of the box is all the money they have with them. For a lucky few (i.e., those who came to the session with little or no money), deciding whether to buy the box is relatively easy; they can buy the box without investing much. The decision is harder for those who have brought along all the money from a newly cashed paycheck from a job at a fast-food restaurant, the cash earned baby-sitting all weekend, or an entire weekly allowance. The point of the activity is clear: the difficulty involved in trusting the word of another person is directly proportional to the amount of personal risk involved.

You will need to keep the session on track and moving if you hope to get through all the activities and discussion. Consciously avoid getting caught up in the involved theological conversations that can be easily provoked by any of the strategies. View this session—and invite the young people to view it—as the beginning of an extended opportunity to prepare to consider Jesus and his message in depth during later sessions.

## Preparation

### Materials Needed

- matches and a large candle (preferably a paschal candle)
- symbolic items for the prayer space (e.g., an image of Jesus, an icon, a cross or crucifix, a special cloth, flowers, and ribbons)
- pens or pencils
- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- butcher paper
- blank paper
- an empty box
- a variety of wrapping materials
- a Bible for each participant plus one extra copy
- a variety of dictionaries and thesauruses (optional)

### Other Necessary Preparations

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

- Read the background information and the plan for session 5 of *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace* to familiarize yourself with the concepts of faith and religion as they were presented to the young people in the first core unit.
- For steps A and H.* Prepare a space for the opening and closing prayers.
- For step A.* Practice reading Luke 9:18–21.
- For step B.* Tape a sheet of butcher paper (or the kind of paper used for covering long tables) at least 10 feet long to a wall in the room.
- For step C.* Prepare three signs as directed in step C.
- For step G.* Put a copy of the Scriptures in a box. Print the questions listed in step G on a sheet of newsprint.
- For step H.* Mark the Bibles and prepare the newsprint chart as directed in step H.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.

### Opening Teacher Prayer

Adolescents deal with many questions in their life. Some of their questions are simple, others have no real answers. Some questions can only be answered by looking deep inside themselves. As a catechist, you will undoubtedly hear some of the questions young people ask. Your task is to lead them to a place within themselves where they can find the answers.

Spend some time before the session focusing on your dual role as listener and guide. If you are part of a team of teachers for this course, you may want to do this prayer together. Begin by centering yourself in a place of inner silence, a place where you can feel God's presence. When you are ready, read the following Scripture passage:

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God." (Luke 9:18–20)

The main question posed to the young people in this session and throughout the course is from Luke's Gospel: "Who do you say that I am?" Spend

a moment in silence thinking about your own answers to that question. Name some of the images or words that come to mind when you think of Jesus. For example, you might think of Jesus as Eternal Friend, God and human, Holy Mystery.

Conclude your prayer with the gesture that precedes the proclamation of the Gospel at liturgy: prayerfully trace three small crosses as you say the words "May the word of God be in my mind, in my heart, and on my lips."

## Procedure

### Welcome, Introduction, and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

*Before the session.* Prepare a space for prayer using a large candle and other symbolic items. Possible additions to the prayer space might include an image of Jesus, an icon, a cross or crucifix, a special cloth, flowers, and ribbons.

Also, practice reading Luke 9:18–21 so that you can proclaim the passage dramatically and prayerfully.

1. If the young people do not know you, introduce yourself and tell them a little bit about yourself. Because of the course sequence in the Horizons Program, it is presumed that the participants know one another from the previous core course, *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace*. However, if they have not been together before, or if new people are in the group, give people the opportunity to get to know one another. To facilitate the get-acquainted process, if it is needed, use the mixer described in the alternative approaches at the end of this session or another get-to-know-you exercise.

2. Briefly recall the focus of the first core course, on identity and relationships. In particular, remind the participants of the last session, on the nature of faith in God and on religion as the expression of that faith. Depending on the amount of time that has passed between core courses, you may need to recap some of the key ideas presented in that session.

Inform the young people that in this first session of *Jesus: His Message and Mission*, the focus will shift to Jesus—what the participants already know,



understand, and believe about him, what his life and message were all about, what it means to follow him, and so on. Explain that they will also get a chance during this course to explore the meaning of church and reflect on what it means for them to be part of a faith community.

3. Invite the young people to be silent for a moment in preparation for prayer. Prayerfully and deliberately, read Luke 9:18–21. Try to capture the drama of the passage as you read it.

In this passage, we learn of an encounter between Jesus and his disciples in which Jesus initially poses a general question: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” After hearing the disciples’ reply, Jesus changes the question to a far more personal one: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter steps forward and replies, “The Messiah of God.” Then Jesus responds in a very curious way: “He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone.”

When you comment on the passage, acknowledge that Jesus’ response to Peter is somewhat confusing—one would think Jesus would have congratulated or praised Peter! An answer to the confusion may well result from a later reflection on the Gospel portrait of Jesus. For the purposes of this session, the key concern is Jesus’ challenge to the disciples to take a personal stand regarding him. He says, in effect, “I know what all the others are saying about me, but I need to know something more: What about *you*? What do *you* believe about me?” Emphasize that in one way or another, every person who wishes to claim the name Christian must confront and answer that question. Together, you will begin to do exactly that in *Jesus: His Message and Mission*.

Close this brief opening prayer with a spontaneous prayer of your own, petitioning that the Spirit of God guide the young people as they begin to wrestle with the central concern of Jesus’ identity and message.

### **B** Discussion Exercise: Playing the Percentages with Jesus (20 minutes)

This exercise helps you identify some of the common attitudes in the participants’ peer group. This process is nonthreatening because individuals within the group are never explicitly asked to state their

own position. You may gain some insights about the role that peer pressure plays in the young people’s willingness to discuss issues of faith and religion.

*Before the session.* On butcher paper, draw a horizontal line about 10 feet long (your room may limit the length). Leave enough space to write above and below the line. Tape the paper to a wall where the participants can have access to it. If you do not have an available wall and if your group is small enough for everyone to see the entire continuum, you can let it run across the floor.

1. Call the group’s attention to the continuum. Above the left end of the line write “Totally Disinterested” and above the right end, “Totally Committed.” Tell the participants that the continuum represents the broad spectrum of responses that people might have to the question, How do you feel about Jesus and his message? If you wish, allow them to suggest other terms for these options, and write those terms at the appropriate end of the continuum. For example, terms might be “Couldn’t Care Less” and “Real Believer.” Use your judgment on the appropriateness of other terms they might suggest!

Next, divide the continuum into four or five sections of approximately equal length by making short vertical marks along the line. Invite the participants to suggest appropriate labels to write above each of the sections. The terms should be consistent with their place along the continuum. Options might be, for example, “Slightly Interested,” “Iffy,” and “Leaning Toward Belief.”

2. Ask the participants to gather into groups of four to six. Tell them that each group must arrive at a consensus on *the percentage of people their age* who fit into each category on the continuum. For example, a group might say that 10 percent of people their age are totally bored or uninterested when it comes to Jesus, 25 percent accept the Christian faith but do not think about it too much, 55 percent take their faith fairly seriously, and 10 percent are totally committed to Jesus. The groups must make sure that their percentages for the entire continuum add up to 100.

Allow approximately 5 minutes for discussion, then have the groups report their results. Record these at the appropriate points on the continuum. If the differences between the groups’ estimates are significant, attempt to achieve a full group consen-

sus through further discussion. If the groups’ estimates on any section are reasonably close, simply average their estimates to determine a final percentage for each category.

3. Identify the section of the continuum that represents the majority attitude. Ask the young people if they can identify four or five reasons why that attitude might prevail among their peers. Mention the common perception among adults that of all the influences on young people, peer group attitudes have the strongest effect on behavior and values. Ask the participants if this might be true regarding their religious and faith convictions. That is, when it comes to religion and faith, do young people believe only what their peers expect them to believe or accept?

It is likely that the young people will have mixed responses to this question, with many claiming that they are not subject to peer pressure in such matters. If so, do not argue; the point will have been made—and will be reinforced later in the session and throughout this course—that a decision either for or against Christian faith will always carry some risk of rejection by others.

### **C** Forced-Choice Exercise: Taking a Stand on Jesus (25 minutes)

This exercise flows naturally from and builds on the opening continuum exercise. Move directly into it following the previous discussion.

*Before the session.* Prepare three signs marked as follows: “Agree Strongly,” “Not Sure,” and “Disagree Strongly.” These signs should be large enough to be read by the entire group. Post the signs in different parts of the room. Make sure that the signs are above eye level and can be seen by the participants as they move around. Place the “Not Sure” sign in an area that can accommodate the largest number of people.

1. Introduce the exercise by noting that it is designed to help the participants identify where they personally stand regarding a number of statements about Jesus. Some of the statements are considered traditional and essential teachings of the Catholic church, whereas others are not. Emphasize that this

is not a test, nor will anyone be judged or criticized for expressing beliefs other than traditional church teaching.

Many of the participants will be either unfamiliar with or simply confused by many of these teachings of the church regarding Jesus. Be careful that this activity does not inadvertently indict the young peoples’ prior religious education. Rather, let it raise their consciousness and affirm their increasing intellectual maturity as they attempt to deal with the highly abstract thoughts and theories associated with theology.

2. Announce that you will be reading, one at a time, particular statements about Jesus. As quickly as possible after hearing each statement, the participants should move toward the sign that best represents what they think about the statement. Note that the participants do not need to gather into one large group before each statement. They can simply move from whatever location in the room they happen to be in to the location that best represents their response to the next statement. At times they may stay right where they are for two or more consecutive statements.

Explain that when each person has made a decision and moved to the appropriate spot, everyone who responded in the same way should discuss their reasons for responding as they did. Tell them that they will have 1 minute for this discussion and that after time is up, you will ask them for a brief report on the results of their discussion.

Given the limits of time, do not expect lengthy reports. Also, do not comment at length on what they say. You may occasionally feel that a point or question requires a response. Just remember that extended discussion on any one point will bog down the entire activity. It will be better to make a mental note (and, perhaps later, a written one) about points of doctrine that you want to make certain to clarify later in the session or in the course. The point of the activity is to gain some sense of how the group as a whole feels about key church teachings about Jesus.

3. When you are assured that the young people understand the directions, begin by reading the following statements one at a time. They do not appear in any significant order. Nor does this list exhaust the many possibilities. Feel free to replace or add statements, but keep your replacements or additions focused on the person and message of Jesus.

Be sure to limit this exercise to the time available for it. The participants are not aware of the number of possible statements, so you can end the activity at any time you wish.

- Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jesus was a fictional character created by someone. He never really existed.
- Jesus was as human as we are.
- Jesus was a good man but was not God.
- Jesus set up the positions of the pope and bishops as we have them today.
- Only people who believe in Jesus will go to heaven.
- Jesus worked many miracles.
- Jesus must have had a great sense of humor.
- Jesus truly was raised from the dead and is alive today.
- If Jesus came among us today, people would reject him just as they did two thousand years ago.

4. Close the exercise by sharing in your own words the following ideas:

- This exercise probably revealed that most of the young people have already learned a great deal about Jesus, or at least hold strong opinions about what they think and believe. However, the need for much more information about him may also have been evident. Some of the participants may feel ignorant of even the most basic information about the person and message of Jesus. Some may have occasionally chosen the “not sure” option because they did not understand what the statement meant or referred to. This is nothing for them to be embarrassed about, but it does point up their need to gain clear information about Jesus.
- Perhaps more commonly, many of the participants probably heard a lot about Jesus when they were younger, but, because of their age, they were unable to understand what was being taught. As a result they hold confusing ideas or half-true understandings. This, too, is not a cause for embarrassment. However, the danger is that as doubts about religion and faith emerge during adolescence, some may choose to reject Jesus and Christianity on the basis of incomplete or confusing information. Again, the need for sound information about Jesus is evident, and a major goal of this course is to provide that information.

- Beyond these two ideas, a third observation may be far more important: Mature believers know from experience that the richness and depth in the story of Jesus and his message can never be exhausted. Some of the greatest thinkers in history have spent their life studying and meditating on the Gospels, only to feel at the end of their life that they have merely scratched the surface of its meaning. That is what makes the study and discussion of Jesus so challenging, enriching, and life-giving.

### **D** Brainstorming Exercise and Comment on Revelation: How Do We Learn of Jesus? (10 minutes)

Most young people will be able to follow the line of logic that is presented in this exercise. Others, because of their developmental stage, may still have difficulty with logical thought processes and may become frustrated. If you suspect that the majority of participants in your group will have difficulty, you may have to be more direct as you lead them through the process.

*Before the session.* Prepare your comments and reflections on the Catholic church’s understanding of the two ways in which God’s revelation is communicated to us: the Scriptures and Tradition.

1. Introduce this exercise by making the following comments in your own words:
  - A vital question must be raised before pursuing any discussion of Jesus: Just how do people find out about Jesus and his message?
  - At first this may seem to be an easy question with an obvious answer. In reality, it is one of the most basic and critical questions one can encounter. If the foundations of one’s understanding of Jesus are shaky, then everything built on them will be uncertain, unsettled, and easily disproved or uprooted. If these foundations are solidly and thoughtfully constructed, however, one will be able to pursue a personal understanding of Jesus with confidence, self-assurance, and growing conviction. So the question remains: How do people gain reliable information about Jesus and his message?

2. Ask the participants to consider how they personally have come to their current knowledge of Jesus. Keep this discussion focused on *their personal experience*. Avoid any discussion of how Christians in general come to know Jesus.

Some young people will likely respond that their parents and others close to them taught them about Jesus. Your follow-up question would then be, How did *those* people learn about Jesus, and what makes their understanding acceptable and reasonable? The participants may respond that their parents and other adults learned from their own parents, of course, and also from their parish communities and the leaders of those communities—that is, from pastors and other priests, from teachers, from educated laypeople, and so on.

Challenge the young people to explain where all those priests from all those parishes and all those teachers and others got *their* information about Jesus. The participants might respond that those people got their information from seminaries and universities. Your obvious follow-up question: Where did all the seminary teachers and college professors get *their* information? The possible response: From the pope and the bishops. The natural follow-up: Where did all of the popes and the bishops over the last two thousand years of Christian history get *their* information about Jesus, and how do we know that all the things they have taught about Jesus are reliable and worthy of our acceptance?

Some of the young people may grow frustrated with the discussion; continue to press the issue, assuring them that this is a critical question for those who want to reflect seriously on Jesus and what the church teaches about him. With a little encouragement and guidance, some of the young people will probably suggest that the popes and the bishops through the years have based their teachings on the word of the Apostles and the early followers of Jesus.

This line of thought leads eventually to *the* central question: How did the information about Jesus get passed on accurately to the members of the early church from those who walked with and listened to him? And how did this information get preserved accurately through the last two thousand years of history? In other words, how can the believer of *today* get in touch with those very early teachings about Jesus? How can one find out *today* if his or her own understanding of Jesus is reliable and worthy of real faith and conviction? The question can

ultimately be summed up like this: *On what solid foundation of information can I build an understanding of Jesus, so that I can eventually make a mature and rational decision about him?*

3. Summarize the key points of this exercise by presenting the Catholic understanding of the two ways in which our understanding about God as revealed in and through Jesus is handed on. This important information can be presented rather simply at this point—it will be affirmed and repeated throughout this program. Make the following points, and combine them with your own thoughts:

- Ultimately, the answer to this fundamental question comes down to this: Catholic believers of today must base their decisions about Jesus on the same foundation that has supported the faith of all the popes, bishops, teachers, parents, and others through the years. That foundation is, first of all, the biblical record of Jesus and his teachings, particularly the four Gospels, and second, the integrity of all those who have preserved and interpreted that biblical record through the years.
- Besides the Scriptures, the Catholic church’s other way of handing on its teachings, practices, and understanding of God’s revelation in and through Jesus is the church’s own Tradition. This Tradition is grounded in the conviction that the Spirit of Jesus has continued to guide the church in the development of its central doctrines and dogmas, its sacramental life, and its basic moral teachings.
- The Catholic belief in the church’s Tradition as a primary way of handing on God’s revelation is unique to Catholicism. Mainline Protestant and, with an even greater intensity, fundamentalist Christian churches claim that the sole source of God’s revelation is the Bible. This is why some of the participants’ non-Catholic friends and peers may challenge some of the Catholic church’s teachings and practices as “nonbiblical.”

Be aware that your experience with this brainstorming exercise may not unfold this neatly. Only two things are required to make this exercise valuable: (1) that the young people identify and grapple with the fundamental questions and (2) that you ultimately identify the central importance of the Gospel portraits of Jesus and the integrity of those who have preserved, interpreted, and applied them throughout the church’s history.



## **E** Break (10 minutes)

## **F** Presentation: The Bible (15 minutes)

This presentation on the Scriptures is intended to involve the participants by “walking them through” the Bible. It is not to be done as a straight lecture. The following information should be presented in a casual way, perhaps while sitting among the young people on the floor.

The content outlined below is very general. Feel free to add more if you have sufficient background to do so and if the participants appear open to it. Avoid simply reading the material to the participants. You may wish to use notes to guide you through this exercise, though some reflection and a little practice will show how relatively simple and logical it is to lead.

Finally, your group may include individuals with a wide diversity of experience with the Scriptures. Perhaps some participants have never opened the Bible, whereas others read it regularly. When you introduce this material, note that you are going to provide a basic introduction to the Bible for the sake of those who have little background or experience with it. For those who are more familiar with the Bible, express your appreciation for their patience and cooperation.

*Before the session.* Ideally, for this activity, each person should have a Bible to use that includes both the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian Testament (New Testament). If the participants do not own Bibles, check to see if the parish has a supply that you can use.

1. As you begin your presentation and demonstration, point out that the Bible is divided into two main sections: the *Old Testament*, or what is known today as the *Hebrew Scriptures*, and the *New Testament*, now commonly referred to as the *Christian Testament*. The word *testament* means “covenant.” The two titles for these sections refer, first of all, to the covenant with God experienced by the people of Israel before the time of Jesus, and then to the “New Covenant,” or “New Testament,” that was brought about by the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Ask the participants to find the end of the

Book of Malachi (the end of the Hebrew Scriptures) or the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel (the beginning of the Christian Testament). Then compare the lengths of the two sections.

Mention that the word *bible* means “book,” but note that the word *book* is a bit deceiving. By taking a quick look at the Bible, we see that it is not a book but rather a *collection* of books. Some people disagree about the number of books accepted as part of the Hebrew Scriptures, but Catholics accept forty-six books in the Hebrew Scriptures and twenty-seven in the Christian Testament, for a total of seventy-three books in the Bible. Ask the participants to turn to the table of contents in their Bible as you lead them through the next step.

2. Caution the young people against confusing the Bible with their conventional understanding of what a book is. A book is commonly viewed as a particular kind of literature—for instance, a novel or biography—written by one person, and usually written in a few years or less. But the Bible cannot be understood that way. The Bible is no ordinary book!

For example, the Bible contains different kinds of writing. Present the following examples. If possible, have page references to help the participants locate certain books as you point out the following styles of writing. This will not be possible—or at least it will not be easy—if the participants are using different translations of the Scriptures.

- A quick review of the Book of Exodus will reveal that it includes a lot of *history*—the birth of Moses, the plagues, various battles, and so on.
- A little book like Ruth (more of a *short story* or *essay*) is a different style of writing.
- The Book of Psalms looks very much like *poetry*. In fact, the psalms were originally the lyrics for songs. Scholars think that the psalms took about eight hundred years to develop and be collected!
- Proverbs is a collection of *short sayings*, much like the kind of statements we might find today on posters or in commercials.
- The Song of Songs looks like the script of a *play* at first glance, with different passages assigned to different characters.

3. Explain that the Hebrew Scriptures grew out of a long oral tradition, in which the great history and stories of the Jewish people were passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Only later were these stories written down by many different authors who collected the results of the long

history of the Israelites. These stories were first recorded in written form beginning about a thousand years before the time of Jesus and continued to be documented throughout the history of ancient Israel.

As a continuing history of the Jewish people, the Hebrew Scriptures reflects a gradually evolving understanding of Yahweh—a Jewish name for God. They also reflect a gradually developing moral sense of the people. Warn the participants that some sections of the Hebrew Scriptures seem almost barbaric; it can be difficult to read these sections because of the cruelty. They need to be approached with proper guidance, some patience, and an open mind. Despite the challenges, the Hebrew Scriptures is one of the most profound and influential works of literature ever developed.

4. It can be surprising for young people to discover how little of the entire Bible speaks directly about Jesus and his life, his mission as a preacher and teacher, and his ultimate death and Resurrection. Have the students locate the division between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament. Then have them find the four Gospels and hold those between two fingers, separate from the remainder of the Scriptures. Note that all the information about Jesus is contained in four small books called the *Gospels*, which are identified as written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Point out that all the information before the Gospels traces the history and religious beliefs of the Jewish people to whom Jesus belonged some two thousand years ago.

The book known as the Acts of the Apostles follows the Gospels. It contains the story of the early days of the Christian church. Twenty-one *epistles*, or letters, follow the Acts of the Apostles, giving us insight into the early Christians’ gradually developing understanding of Jesus and his message. The concluding book of the Christian Testament is Revelation. Using symbolic language and imagery, this book deals with the expectations among Christians that Jesus will return again in glory at the end of time to fulfill God’s work on earth. But note again that it is only the slim collection of writings called the Gospels that gives us anything like a portrait of the person whom Christians claim to believe in and follow.

5. Close this demonstration and presentation by explaining how one locates a passage in the Bible when given a citation for it. Again, this may seem

rudimentary to some of the participants. But by explaining it briefly here you eliminate possible embarrassment for those who do not know how to find their way around the Scriptures.

Write a random citation or two on the board or newsprint by way of example, perhaps Exod. 6:28–30 or Gal. 5:13–15. Suggest that the participants use the table of contents for a page reference. Explain that the number in the citation before the colon refers to the chapter in that book; the numbers after the colon refer to the verses within that chapter. You may want to spend a minute or so practicing this to ensure that all are comfortable with it. Conclude by noting that they will be using the Scriptures throughout the remainder of this course.

## **G** Discussion Exercise: The Mystery Box and the Risk of Faith (20 minutes)

This exercise can be a lot of fun to lead, especially if you direct it with a touch of the theatrical. Feel free to conduct it in a light manner. The critical component is the discussion that flows from the activity.

*Before the session.* Put a copy of the Scriptures in a box. The size of the box does not matter; a large or an oddly shaped box will add to the intrigue. You can alter the feel of this activity just by changing the nature of the box you use. For example, you may wish to wrap and decorate it. Use fancy wrapping paper, newspaper, an old grocery bag, or plain white paper. Decorate the box with ribbons, bows, stickers, or pictures from magazines, or just leave it plain. If you present a beautifully decorated box, the young people might think that you are just hiding the fact that it contains nothing. A plain or mangled box might generate different impressions. Be creative.

Write the following questions on newsprint:

- What do you think is in the box?
- Why did or didn’t you give your money?
- Do you think that a person’s willingness to buy the contents of the box always related to how much money she or he had? Explain your answer.
- Imagine that the money is symbolic of your whole life, your very self. With that image in mind, what connection might you see between this activity and faith?



1. Gather the participants in a semicircle. Ask them to take out all the money they have with them, count it, and put it down in front of them. Tell them to check their wallet, purse, coat or jacket pockets, and so on. The money should remain visible in front of its owner throughout the exercise.

2. Show the group the box that you prepared before the session. Tell the young people that the box contains something that you personally guarantee will give them complete happiness. At the end of the session you will reveal the contents of the box *only* to the persons who are willing to give you all the money they have in front of them. Explain that you will not keep the money for your own use, but that you *cannot* guarantee that you will give it back to them.

3. Give the young people a minute or two to think about the offer and to ask questions. However, *at no time* should you give any hint about what is in the box.

It is likely that some participants will have no money with them but want to buy the box and its contents. Be prepared to loan them one dollar for this, but they must understand that they will be expected to pay it back. This will no doubt aggravate those who will need to pay much more for the box. Just ignore their complaints and hold firm on your offer.

4. Give the participants 2 minutes to make their decision. After everyone has decided, divide the group into small groups of five or six. Do not reveal the contents of the box. Display the newsprint that you prepared before the session. Give the groups about 5 minutes to discuss the questions and come up with their responses.

When time is up, ask for brief reports of the results of the small-group discussions. Comment as you feel is appropriate.

5. Close this activity by offering the following thoughts in your own words:

- What the young people experienced during this activity can provide an insight into the nature of faith and some of the demands it makes of Christians. They were asked to trust you, the leader, when you said that the box contained something that would give them total happiness. All love relationships and friendships involve trusting in the promises of another person—

promises of fidelity, respect, truthfulness, and so on. The same thing holds true in our relationship with God. We are asked to trust in God's promises to us—promises revealed through nature and history and even other religions. As Christians, we believe that God's promises are revealed in a full and complete way only in the life, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.

- Jesus either directly or indirectly promised his followers many things. He promised that it is better to give than to receive, that we can only gain life by being willing to give it up, that love is stronger than hatred, that even death is overcome in God's work in him. These things are not easy to understand and, therefore, not easy to believe. That is where part of the risk of Christian faith comes in. Pose questions like these to the participants: What if Jesus was wrong? What if following his direction only leads to people taking advantage of us? What if reaching out to love others only makes us vulnerable to pain in life? What if our willingness to give up our life for others leads only to death—for ever and ever?
- Whether or not people are willing to take that risk, that "leap of faith," is influenced somewhat by what they have to "lose." Connect this idea to the mystery box exercise by citing examples of how the amount of money someone brought had some bearing on that person's decision to purchase the box. That is why Jesus talked about the dangers of being rich. Accepting his teaching about giving rather than taking is easier if we do not have a lot to give in the first place.

Accepting Jesus' call to identify with and help those who are poor or oppressed is difficult when we are comfortable in our security and freedom. But Jesus calls us to all these things with the promise—the guarantee—that our commitment to the Gospel is worth it. He says that we will find fullness of life and true happiness if we do as he says.

- Just as any relationship has degrees of love, so faith in God can be experienced in degrees. Relationships and faith both grow gradually and at times painfully. And both experience obstacles. For example, we may have been disappointed or let down by someone we trusted; we may not believe ourselves worthy of real love; we may be too selfish or self-centered to take the risk of loving and being loved by another person. The same is true of faith in God. If we do not believe

in God's promises as revealed to us by Jesus, or if we think of God as "the great cop in the sky" who is out to get us, the chances of having a deep faith relationship with God are greatly diminished.

Close these thoughts by noting that this course will be focused almost exclusively on Jesus: the sources for our understanding of him, his ministry, his teachings, and his death and Resurrection. At the end of this course, the focus will shift to the development of the church as a community of faith following the Resurrection. Many of the questions raised in the activities in this first session will be considered in greater depth later in the course.

6. At the conclusion of the session, ask those who decided to purchase the box to remain after you dismiss the group. When everyone else has left the room, reveal the contents of the box to those who bought it. At that time, return to the participants all the money that they paid for it. You may want to tell those who bought the box *never* to reveal what is in it. They will be surprised how often they will be asked to reveal the contents!

As you show the young people the contents of the box, share your own conviction that the message of God revealed in Jesus and in the Scriptures is, as you promised, guaranteed to bring happiness and fullness of life.

## **H** Closing Exercise and Prayer (15 minutes)

*Before the session.* You will need one Bible for each small group of five or six participants. In each Bible, mark or highlight Luke 9:18. Print the following statements on newsprint:

- J — justice bringer
- E — entirely God, entirely human
- S — someone we wonder about
- U — understanding friend
- S — some say a great teacher

1. Ask the participants to gather into the same small groups that they were in for the previous activity. Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker. You may also want to give each group a dictionary, thesaurus, or other list of words, to make the task easier. Ask for a volunteer in each group to be the secretary, another to be the reporter, and another to be the reader. You may want to appoint

these people using some nonthreatening criteria, such as the oldest person in the group or the person with the fewest letters in his or her full name.

2. Tell the secretary in each group to write the name Jesus in large letters down the side of the newsprint. Explain that the task for each group is to answer Jesus' question, "Who do people say that I am?" by writing words or phrases that begin with the letters in Jesus' name. Display the sample that you have created. Tell the participants that they cannot use any statements from your example.

3. While the groups are working, arrange the prayer space in the same way you did for the opening prayer. Give the reader in each group a copy of the Scriptures with the passage from Luke's Gospel marked. After about 8 minutes, call the groups back to attention. It does not matter if they have not completed the task.

4. Explain that in this closing prayer, each group will report on its answer to Jesus' question, "Who do people say that I am?" Remind the participants that their answers are, in reality, the closing prayer. Encourage them to maintain a prayerful attitude throughout the process. Each group should begin with the reader reading the passage from Luke's Gospel. The reporter in each group is to follow the question by reading the group's list of attributes. Choose one group to begin.

5. When all the groups have had a chance to read their statements, close the prayer by reading Luke 9:18–20, stopping with the words, spoken dramatically and emphatically, "But who do you say that I am?"

Thank the young people for their participation and cooperation and tell them that they will have many more chances to explore their own answer to that question in the next four sessions of *Jesus: His Message and Mission*.

## Alternative Approaches

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

**For step A.** Give each person a 3-by-5-inch index card and a marker or pencil. Tell the participants to write in large letters on one side of the card the name of a famous person they admire. This person must be alive today. They should be ready to tell the group why they admire that person. Instruct them to write on the other side of the card the name of someone they admired when they were in elementary school.

Tell the participants that they are to introduce themselves to the rest of the group by stating their name, school, and, if necessary, grade. After this, the participants are to show the group the name of the person they currently admire and explain their reasons for choosing that person. The participants can then show the rest of the group the name of the person they admired when they were in elementary school and their reasons for choosing that person. Start with yourself. Continue with the person whose birthday is nearest your own, and proceed through the group in birthday order.

**For step H.** If you are running short on time, or if there are more than five or six small groups, consider streamlining the closing activity and prayer in this way: Read Luke 9:18 just once yourself. Ask the recorder in each group to read one or two characteristics of Jesus that resulted from the group's brainstorming efforts, trying not to duplicate any phrase already reported by another group. Close the prayer as directed in step H.

**For step H.** Before the next session, compile into one list the participants' ideas about Jesus that resulted from the brainstorming exercise. Use one or two pieces of poster board so that the final result is durable. Write the question, "Who do you say that I am?" at the top of the poster board and the letters of the name Jesus down the side. Consolidate the words and phrases next to each letter. Post this list in the meeting space before each session or include it as part of the prayer space.



### Family Connections

- Send home to parents a summary of the course topics and themes. Ask the parents to spend some time reflecting on their own experience of Jesus and to share stories of how they came to know about Jesus. In other words, who were the people in their life who taught them about Jesus

and his message? Suggest that they also talk about the people in their life or in the life of their children who seem to *live* the message of Jesus.

- Ask the participants to find out who in their family owns a Bible. They should then ask those people to tell them the story of their Bible: how, why, when, and from whom they acquired their Bible; if they have a favorite book, story, or verse from the Bible; and so forth.



### Journal Options

- Tell the participants to spend some time between sessions thinking about their own answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Suggest that they write the question at the top of a journal page and the name Jesus down the side, just as they did in class. Then tell them to write their own characteristics of Jesus for each letter. Encourage them to use more than one characteristic for each letter.
- Suggest that they title one section of their journal "Things I've Wondered About Jesus." Throughout the course, they can keep a list of their questions and thoughts about Jesus.

## Closing Prayer and Evaluation



### Closing Teacher Prayer

"Who do you say that I am?" you ask, Jesus, persistent friend.

Bless us with the courage to keep searching our heart for the answer.

"Hallowed be your name," you pray, Jesus, Son of God.

Give us the eyes to see God in all things and the voice to praise God at all times.

"Come, follow me," you say, Jesus, liberating one.

Walk alongside us as we learn the true and deepest meaning of those words. Amen.



### Evaluation

Take a few moments after the session to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions and write your thoughts in the spaces provided, for future reference. If you are working with other adults, you may want to meet and discuss the results of your individual evaluations.

1. What worked best in this session?

2. What would you change about this session?

3. How well did the session meet the objective of helping the young people begin to reflect seriously on their own and their peers' attitudes toward and understandings of Jesus?

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 participants explore the risks associated with faith?

Did not meet objective                      ↔                      Met objective completely  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Comments:

5. Did anyone in the group seem to be having a hard time? If so, who?

6. What kind of follow-up with the person or persons named in your answer to question 5 is necessary or would be helpful?