

FAITH EXPERIENCES

taking time together

FOR TEENS AND PARENTS

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introduction



background and history

Strong communication between teens and parents helps foster faith formation in young people. After becoming convinced of this reality, a group of parish directors of religious education and catechists in the Diocese of Winona brainstormed and discussed ways to facilitate this communication. *Taking Time Together* emerged as a creative and effective way to enable this communication and enhance faith formation in young people and their families.

The activities in this book have been used successfully in many parishes, both rural and urban, within the Diocese of Winona. The activities are positive, enriching, and fun for both teens and parents. Once parishes have experienced them, they often follow up by creating additional activities of their own based on this model.

audience

Taking Time Together is intended for use with junior high students (grades 7–9) and their parents, guardians, or significant adults. (Hereafter the term *parents* is meant to include parents, guardians, and other significant adults.) But the activities have also been used successfully with tenth graders and their parent(s). The activities work well with groups of five to sixty participants.

purpose

In contemporary U.S. culture, daily life is often lived in the “fast lane.” The time demands on families can be overwhelming. Without a deliberate effort to plan quality family time, communication—including communication about faith and religion—between parents and children can dissolve and relationships can weaken. The purpose of the faith-sharing experiences in this book is to provide the time and the opportunity for teens and parents to get together in a comfortable setting to reflect on and discuss a variety of faith themes and issues.

program design

The program consists of six faith experiences. The first one is an orientation and community-building experience for the whole group. The other five are designed for one-on-one communication between teens and their parents.

suitable situations and settings

These faith-sharing experiences are best used together in a single event that complements current parish faith formation programs for young people, such as parish religious education classes, youth ministry gatherings, retreats, confirmation preparation, and the like. The event can be scheduled during the school year or summer, either on a weekday evening or on a weekend. Before or after the parish Sunday liturgy may be an ideal time for the get-together.

The best physical setting for the experiences is a large room such as a gymnasium, cafeteria, or parish center. A substantial area provides sufficient space for the opening icebreakers, prayers, and the individual tables needed for each activity. A sense of community happens best when all the activities take place in one large space, with the whole group experiencing them at the same time.

However, if a large room is not available, you can adapt the experience to whatever facility you might have. For example, one room can be used for icebreakers and prayer, while another room can be designated for the faith-sharing experiences. The faith-sharing experiences could even be set up in separate rooms if necessary.

the role of the facilitator

Someone needs to assume overall responsibility for the program. That person is called the facilitator. Although volunteers can be recruited to assist with details and specific tasks, it is crucial to have a facilitator who is familiar with the vision and the purpose of the program.

The following is a checklist of tasks that need to be done to facilitate the experiences:

before the experience

- Determine costs and prepare a budget.
- Get permission and support from the pastor or parish administrator.
- Reserve the facility.
- Mark the event on the parish calendar.
- Provide for publicity, for example, posters in the vestibule of the church, notices in the parish bulletin, or fliers.
- Designate a prayer leader.
- Recruit and train any volunteer helpers that you may need.
- Obtain all necessary supplies for each faith experience.
- Prepare all the materials required for each faith experience.
- Have refreshments available.
- Check the meeting space for neatness. Make sure to set up the correct number of tables and chairs.
- Be sure that the temperature in the meeting space is comfortable and that there is proper ventilation.
- Set up a speaker's stand and a microphone, if needed.

during the experience

- Greet the participants individually as they arrive.
- Welcome the participants as a group once all have assembled.
- Assure the participants that all necessary directions are located at the individual activity centers.
- Make closing remarks.

after the experience

- Collect evaluations, tabulate them, and share them with the pastor or parish administrator and the parish director of religious education.
- Return everything in the meeting space to its original order.
- Thank all who assisted and make plans for the next faith-sharing event.

The “materials needed” list and “preparation and setup” section for each experience will be of immense help to the facilitator and others working with the program.

overview

The faith-sharing experiences begin with a whole-group gathering, featuring two icebreakers followed by a prayer. After the whole-group event, the participants separate into family groups. Each experience is set up on a separate table, or tables if more than one setting is needed for each experience. Tables of like experience should be grouped together. The family groups move from table to table, participating in each of the five faith-sharing experiences.

After the families complete all the experiences, they go to a table containing evaluation sheets—one for the parents and one for the teens—and evaluate the experience. Handout A, “Parent Evaluation,” and handout B, “Teen Evaluation,” can be found at the end of this introduction. Depending on time constraints, families may need to depart after the evaluation. However, for those who can stay, it is best to conclude the time together with a prayer service and refreshments. A concluding prayer service is provided on handout C, “Prayer Service: Giving Thanks for Family,” located at the end of this introduction. Invite six volunteers to help with the readings for the prayer service.

As previously noted, each faith experience requires a separate setting. Card tables work well. If long cafeteria tables are used, the ends of the tables can be used to accommodate separate settings. Four of the activities are designed to be experienced by each family alone. Three chairs are needed at these settings. One activity (“highway to heaven”) is experienced by two families together. Six chairs are needed at this setting. Of course, you may need to adjust the number of chairs if some families have more than one child attending.

The time frame for completing all the activities is approximately 90 minutes. However, some of the activities take longer than others. You need to have enough settings available for each activity so that families can experience them without having to wait. (A grid is provided on the next page to help you determine the number of settings you will need to accommodate the number of families present.)

At this point you may feel a bit overwhelmed by the preparation that seems necessary. But remember that once you have prepared the materials initially, you will be able to use them again and again. Believe me, the effort is worthwhile.

The following items will need to be set up before the families arrive:

- a name tag for each person
- a table with markers to sign in and fill out name tags
- a pencil or pen for each person, placed on the evaluation table
- refreshments
- copies of handout A, “Parent Evaluation,” and handout B, “Teen Evaluation,” placed on the evaluation table
- a box for collecting completed evaluations

Upon arrival, all the participants should gather in the meeting space. Waiting to start until most parents and teens have arrived is best, but do try to start on time.

estimating the number of settings needed

experience	number of families				
	10	20	30	40	50
say what?	2 sets	4 sets	6 sets	8 sets	10 sets
thanks for the memories	2 sets	4 sets	6 sets	8 sets	10 sets
highway to heaven	2 sets	4 sets	6 sets	7 sets	8 sets
signed, sealed, delivered: part A	1 set	2 sets	2 sets	3 sets	3 sets
part B	3 sets	6 sets	8 sets	10 sets	12 sets
what’s it to ya?	2 sets	4 sets	5 sets	7 sets	8 sets

Parent Evaluation



Please complete the following sentences:

I liked . . .

I learned . . .

I realized . . .

I wish . . .



Circle one of the words in parentheses and then explain your answer.

I was (happy, surprised, or disappointed) in my teen's participation:



Other comments:

Teen Evaluation



Please complete the following sentences:

I liked . . .

I learned . . .

I realized . . .

I wish . . .



Circle one of the words in parentheses and then explain your answer.

I was (happy, surprised, or disappointed) in my parent's participation:



Other comments:

Prayer Service: Giving Thanks for Family

Leader: As we turn our eyes to the Christ candle, we express gratitude for this holy time together. Let us pause for a moment of silent prayer. [Pause.]

We are grateful, Lord Jesus, for your light that leads us in the way you have taught. You have called us to walk together with trust in you and in one another. Help us always to remember that your Spirit strengthens us to bring the light of hope and peace to others.

Prayers of Thanksgiving for Each Experience

Reader 1: Lord, you have blessed us with your love, which comes through family and community. May we respect and help one another, remembering your example of care.

All: We praise you for the gift of family and community.

Reader 2: Lord, you invite us to walk in friendship with you. Sometimes we fail and choose evil over good. Your forgiveness strengthens us to put sin behind us and go forward in your love.

All: We praise you for the gift of forgiveness.

Reader 3: Lord, wonderful memories of your presence fill our hearts. Help us to cherish the people who have been signs of your love.

All: We praise you for the gift of memory.

Reader 4: Lord, we are on a journey to everlasting life with you. Thank you for giving us faith to live our baptismal commitment to you.

All: We praise you for the gift of faith.

Reader 5: Lord, sometimes our journey is difficult. Your love for us, even unto death, offers us hope and encouragement.

All: We praise you for the gift of your life, death, and Resurrection.

Reader 6: Lord, many values fill our lives. As we make choices each day, may we call forth your Spirit of wisdom.

All: We praise you for the gift of your Spirit.

Leader: Now let us extend a sign of Christ's peace to one another and go forth strengthened by the Spirit of Jesus.

EXPERIENCE 1

getting to know you



focus

Experience 1 is unique because it is the only one of the six experiences in which all the families participate as one group. The experience is intended to create an atmosphere of welcome, openness, and trust among the participants. Faith sharing thrives in such an atmosphere and is deepened through prayer.

materials needed

- a bell, whistle, or other noisemaker
- a paschal candle displayed on a tall stand
- a pillar candle in a candle holder for every four or five families
- matches
- a tape or CD player
- a tape or CD of reflective background music, such as “Reflections,” by the Dameans (Damean Music, Phoenix, AZ), or “Reflections,” by Adam Martin Geiger (LuraMedia, San Diego)
- a copy of handout 1–A, “Special Features of the Experiences,” for each family

facilitating the experience

welcome

Welcome the participants in the following, or similar, words:

It’s great to see all of you! It is especially wonderful to see families together!

Jesus once said something to the effect: “If you want to know my Father, get to know me. And if you want to know me, look within your own heart and into the faces of one another. You will discover my presence there” (John 14:7).

That is what we are here to do: to get to know ourselves, one another, and our God just a little bit better. We will come to know God through our understanding of Jesus and ourselves.

Because families are the first and, it is hoped, best faith builders of young people, our purpose is to provide activities that strengthen the bonds that already unite you as families and that build faith among you.

icebreaker: touch blue

Conduct this icebreaker by giving the following directions in your own words:

As I ask you to touch something, quickly move about to touch it. If possible, move to a different person for each item. Several people may touch the same item at the same time. If you do not know a person you are about to touch, introduce yourself first. Ready? Move quickly.

- Touch something blue.
- Touch a watch.
- Touch jeans.
- Touch glasses.
- Touch . . . [add other appropriate items]

icebreaker: round robin

Direct this icebreaker by giving the following directions in your own words:

Please stand together as families. Now get into groups of eight families each [fewer if you have a small number of participants]. In your group, stand in parallel lines, with the adults in one line and the teens in the other line, facing the adults. Each teen should be standing directly across from an adult. If you have an uneven number, please raise your hand and we will adjust the groups. [Move people from group to group, if necessary.]

You will have 1 minute to answer the questions or respond to the statements I will give you. Persons facing each other must answer or respond to each other. If you are standing across from a person whom you do not know, introduce yourself before answering the questions or statements. I will ring a bell [or make some other noise] to stop discussion of each question. In between each question or statement, I will call a halt and ask the teens to move one person to the right, with the teen on the end moving to the beginning of the line. Then, once each person has a new partner, I will continue with the next question or statement. Ready? Here is the first question:

- What do you most like to do in your spare time?

After 1 minute, call a halt and ask the teens to move one person to the right. Continue this routine until you have covered the following questions:

- Share one thing you like about school or your job.
- If you were given one thousand dollars tomorrow, what would you do with it?
- Name one person you really admire.
- If you were given two hundred dollars but had to give half of it away, which charity would you give the one hundred dollars to?
- If you could change one thing in our world, what would it be and why?
- What do you like best about church?
- [Add other appropriate questions or statements.]

Finally, ring the bell (or make some other noise) to end the icebreaker.

prayer

When you have completed the icebreakers, light the paschal candle that you have placed on a tall stand. Direct the group to divide into circles of four or five families each and stand close to one another. Address the groups in the following or similar words:

Let us remember that we are in the presence of Jesus, the true light of the world. We have just spent time getting to know one another. We will now take time to pray for one another. I will light one candle for each circle from our paschal candle. One person from each group

should come and receive a lighted candle and then stand in her or his group and hold the candle. When the music begins, concentrate on the person who is holding the candle and thank God for the light she or he brings to our world. Pray silently for that person, that she or he may continue to reflect God's light in all that she or he does. Each of you will take turns holding the candle for about ten seconds and then silently passing it to the person on your left. All will pray for the person holding the candle. If your group finishes before the music ends, silently place the candle in the center of your circle and pray for all the members of your circle. If you have not finished when the music ends, continue until you have prayed for each person. Then place your candle on the floor in the center of your circle.

When the music stops and all the candles are in the center, say: Please join hands now within your circles and let us pray together a prayer of praise, the Glory Be:

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

Make sure that someone in each circle blows out the candles.

special features of the experiences

Distribute a copy of handout 1–A, "Special Features of the Experiences," to each family and go over it with the participants, pointing out the special features of each faith experience.

Special Features of the Experiences

This event is full of activities. Each is designed to be experienced by one family at a time, except for "Highway to Heaven," for which two families will join together. The specific directions for each activity are on the table(s) where the activity is set up. This handout lists a few special features about each one. As you move from table to table, take it along as a reminder of these features. Please go through the activities slowly and thoughtfully, allowing everyone to express their viewpoints. After you have completed each experience, place a check mark in the circle next to its description below. Remember, we all have a piece of wisdom to share.

- For the **"Say What"** activity, an easel is located in the center of the table(s). Attach your action statement, what you say, on the easel when you are finished. Be sure that you take a walk by the board later to see what others have said.
- Enjoy the snacks at the table for **"Thanks for the Memories."** You will also find a treasure box in the middle of the table(s). This box is for you to put your thank-you note in, or you may choose to put your thank-you note in an envelope and mail it directly to the person you want to thank.
- **"Highway to Heaven"** is a game two families play together. Be sure that each person gets to answer the questions fully. Listen carefully to one another. Wait for each person to respond before moving on.
- Envelopes with cards in them are on the **"What's It to Ya?"** table(s). After looking at the sample collage, you each should take your own envelope and carefully put the cards in order. First you will put them in two piles: important and not important. Then you will put them in one vertical line, with the least important being on the bottom and the most important on the top. Place the cards carefully because you will have to explain your placement to your family. You can discover much about one another by knowing what you value least and most.
- The **"Signed, Sealed, Delivered"** activity has two parts. In part A, look at the crosses. Pick them up and read their descriptions carefully. Are any of these types of crosses hanging in your home? For part B, read and follow the directions found on the table. This experience invites you to design a personal cross. Choose your colors carefully, noting that each color has a specific and special meaning.

After you have completed all the experiences, please fill out an evaluation sheet, found on the evaluation table. Your comments and ideas will assist us in planning future activities. There are separate evaluation sheets for teens and parents. After everyone has finished the evaluation, we will have a closing prayer. If your schedule permits, please stay for the prayer and refreshments. If not, feel free to depart. Have a wonderful time together. Enjoy the activities. We will be available if you have questions or need help.