

Holiday and Seasonal Ideas

for ministry with young teens

H E L P

Heads-up | Easy | Low-Cost | Purposeful

Carole Goodwin and Marilyn Kielbasa

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The acknowledgments continue on page 135.

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Printed in the United States of America

3401

ISBN 978-0-88489-605-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Goodwin, Carole

Holiday and seasonal ideas for ministry with young teens / Carole Goodwin and Marilyn Kielbasa.

p. cm. — (HELP)

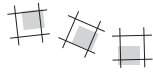
ISBN 0-88489-605-6

1. Church work with teenagers—Catholic Church. 2. Church year—Study and teaching. I. Kielbasa, Marilyn. II. Title. III. HELP (Series : Winona, Minn.)

BX2347.8.Y7 G66 2000

259'.23—dc21

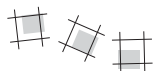
99-050825



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Introduction

Holiday and Seasonal Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens is one of seven books in the HELP series—a collection of **H**eads-up, **E**asy, **L**ow-Cost, and **P**urposeful activities for young adolescents. These strategies are designed to be used as part of a comprehensive youth ministry program for grades six to eight. The strategies can stand alone or complement a religious education curriculum.

The other books in the HELP series are as follows:

- ☉ *Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Hands-on Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)
- ☉ *Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Retreat Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* (available in 2001)

These books are helpful resources for anyone who works with young adolescents in a church or school setting. They can provide a strong foundation for a year-round, total youth ministry program whose goal is to evangelize young adolescents and support them in their faith journey.

Overview of This Book

Holiday and Seasonal Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens may be used by a coordinator of youth ministry, a director of religious education, catechists, teachers, a parish youth ministry team, or any adult who works with young teens. Ownership of the book includes permission to duplicate any part of it for use with program participants.

The book's strategies are organized according to the calendar year. Secular holidays are represented, as well as holy days and seasons of the liturgical year.

Included are ways to foster learning, engage young teens in service, build community, and attend to the spiritual needs of young adolescents.

Format of the Strategies

Each strategy begins with a brief description of its purpose. The next element is a suggested time for the activity. This is flexible and takes into account several variables, such as the size of the group, the comfort level of the participants, and whether you want to include a break. Use the suggested time as a starting point and modify it according to your circumstances. It is a good idea to include time for a break within the longer strategies.

Next is a description of the size of the group that the strategy was written for. Most of the strategies work with a range of group sizes. If your group is large, be sure to recruit enough adults to help with logistics and supervision. A good rule to follow is that for every six to eight young teens, one adult should be present.

In some strategies a section on special considerations follows the one on group size. It includes things such as notices about remote preparation requirements and cautions to pay special attention to a particular developmental issue of early adolescence.

A complete checklist of materials needed is the next part of the presentation of every strategy. A detailed description of the strategy's procedure is then provided, followed by alternative approaches. Those alternatives may be helpful in adapting the strategy to the needs of your group. In some cases they include a suggestion for reworking the strategy so that it can be used at any time of the year.

Frequently included is a list of scriptural passages that may be used with the strategy for reflection or prayer. The list is not exhaustive; a Bible concordance will provide additional citations if you want to add a more substantial scriptural component to a strategy.

The final element in each strategy offers space for keeping notes about how you might want to use the strategy in the future or change it to fit the needs of your group.

Programming Ideas

The strategies in this book can be used in a variety of ways. Consider the following suggestions:

- © The program coordinator, catechists, teachers, and coordinator of youth ministry may collaborate to plan youth meetings and special activities that use strategies from this and other books in the HELP series.

- ⊙ Some of the strategies in this book may be used anytime during the year, either as they are presented or with suggested adaptations. Those activities may be presented in the summer months, when most young adolescents are less busy and may be open to a variety of activities. Youth ministers may use those strategies as part of a strong summer program for young teens.
- ⊙ Schoolteachers may use ideas from this and other books in the HELP series to supplement their day-to-day curriculum.
- ⊙ Many of the strategies in the HELP series can be adapted for use with multi-generational groups.

Standard Materials

Many of the items in the materials checklists are common to several strategies in the series. To save time consider gathering frequently used materials in convenient bins and storing those bins in a place that is accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Some recommendations for how to organize such bins follow.

Supply Bin

The following items frequently appear in materials checklists:

- ⊙ Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- ⊙ masking tape
- ⊙ cellophane tape
- ⊙ washable and permanent markers (thick and thin)
- ⊙ pens or pencils
- ⊙ self-stick notes
- ⊙ scissors
- ⊙ newsprint
- ⊙ blank paper, scrap paper, and notebook paper
- ⊙ postcards
- ⊙ notepaper
- ⊙ envelopes
- ⊙ baskets
- ⊙ candles and matches
- ⊙ items to create a prayer space (e.g., a colored cloth, a cross, a bowl of water, and a vase for flowers)

Craft Bin

Many of the strategies use craft activities to involve the young people.

Consider collecting the following supplies in a separate bin:

- ⊙ construction paper
- ⊙ yarn and string, in assorted colors
- ⊙ poster board
- ⊙ glue and glue sticks

- ☉ fabric paints
- ☉ glitter and confetti
- ☉ used greeting cards
- ☉ beads
- ☉ modeling clay
- ☉ paintbrushes and paints
- ☉ crayons
- ☉ used magazines and newspapers
- ☉ hole punches
- ☉ scissors
- ☉ stickers of various kinds
- ☉ index cards
- ☉ gift wrap and ribbon

Music Bin

Young people often find deep and profound meaning in the music and lyrics of songs, both past and present. Also, the right music can set an appropriate mood for a prayer or activity. Begin with a small collection of tapes or CDs in a music bin and add to it over time. You might ask the young people to put some of their favorite music in the bin. The bin might include the following styles of music:

- ☉ *Fun gathering music that is neither current nor popular with young teens.* Ideas are well-known classics (e.g., *Overture to William Tell*, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, and *1812 Overture*), songs from musical theater productions, children's songs, and Christmas songs for use any time of the year.
- ☉ *Prayerful, reflective instrumental music, such as the kind that is available in the adult alternative, or New Age, section of music stores.* Labels that specialize in this type of music include Windham Hill and Narada.
- ☉ *Popular songs with powerful messages.* If you are not well versed in popular music, ask the young people to offer suggestions.
- ☉ *The music of contemporary Christian artists.* Most young teens are familiar with Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, and Steven Curtis Chapman. Also include the work of Catholic musicians, such as David W. Kauffman, Steve Angrisano, Bruce Deaton, Sarah Hart, Jesse Manibusan, and Jessica Alles.

Other Helpful Resources

In addition to the seven books in the HELP series, the following resources can be useful in your ministry with young adolescents. All the books in the following list are published by Saint Mary's Press and can be obtained by calling or writing us at the phone number and address listed in the "Your Comments or Suggestions" section at the end of this introduction.

The Catholic Youth Bible, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (2000). The most youth-friendly Bible for Catholic teens available. The scriptural text is accompanied by hundreds of articles to help young people pray, study, and live the Scriptures.

Faith Works for Junior High: Scripture- and Tradition-Based Sessions for Faith Formation, by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart (1993). A series of twelve active meeting plans on various topics related to the Scriptures and church life.

Guided Meditations for Junior High: Good Judgment, Gifts, Obedience, Inner Blindness, by Jane E. Ayer (1997). Four guided meditations for young teens, available on audiocassette or compact disc. A leader's guide includes the script and programmatic options. Other volumes in this series, called *A Quiet Place Apart*, will also work with young teens.

Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (1999). A collection of 274 prayers by and for young adolescents in grades six to eight.

One-Day Retreats for Junior High Youth, by Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly (1997). Six retreats that each fit into a school day or an afternoon or evening program. Each retreat contains a variety of icebreakers, prayers, group exercises, affirmations, and guided meditations.

Prayers with Pizzazz for Junior High Teens, by Judi Lanciotti (1996). A variety of creative prayer experiences that grab young teens' attention. The prayers are useful in many different settings, such as classes, meetings, prayer services, and retreats.

ScriptureWalk Junior High: Bible Themes, by Maryann Hakowski (1999). Eight 90-minute sessions to help bring youth and the Bible together. Each session applies biblical themes to the life issues that concern young teens.

Catechism Connection for Teens collection, by Lisa Calderone-Stewart and Ed Kunzman (1999).

That First Kiss and Other Stories

My Wish List and Other Stories

Better Than Natural and Other Stories

Straight from the Heart and Other Stories

Meeting Frankenstein and Other Stories

The five books in this collection contain short, engaging stories for teens on the joys and struggles of adolescent life, each story with a reflection connecting it to a Catholic Christian belief. Each book's faith connections reflect teachings from a different part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Connections to the Discovering Program

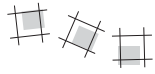
The Discovering Program, published by Saint Mary's Press, is a religious education program for young people in grades six to eight. It consists of fourteen six-

session minicourses. Each session is 1 hour long and based on the principles of active learning.

The strategies in the HELP series cover themes that are loosely connected to those explored by the Discovering Program, and can be used as part of a total youth ministry program in which the Discovering curriculum is the central catechetical component. However, no strategy in the series presumes that the participants have taken a particular course in the Discovering Program, or requires that they do so. The appendices at the end of this book list the connections between the HELP strategies and the Discovering courses.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the HELP series. We are also interested in new youth ministry strategies for use with young teens. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the series editor, Marilyn Kielbasa, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at mkielbasa@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these books.



Getting a Fresh Start

A Reflection Activity on New Year's Resolutions

OVERVIEW

This reflection activity gives the young people a chance to make a concrete resolution for the New Year and to create a symbol that represents that resolution.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes

Group Size

This strategy can be done with any size group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ 3-by-5-inch index cards, one for each person
- ☀ pens or pencils
- ☀ envelopes, one for each person
- ☀ colored pencils or thin-line markers

PROCEDURE

1. Invite the young people to consider an area of their life that needs improvement. For example, some may need to work harder in school or use more loving behavior in a family relationship. Others might want to improve their relationship with God, such as by praying more often or paying better attention to the liturgy.

2. Give each person one 3-by-5-inch index card, a pen or pencil, and an envelope. Make colored pencils or thin-line markers available to everyone. Tell the young people that they are to write on their card a resolution for improving the area of their life that they have just considered. Then on the other side of the card, they are to draw a symbol that illustrates the resolution. For example, they might sketch a math book or a simple addition problem if their area needing improvement is academics, or a heart to symbolize the need for more loving behavior in a family relationship.

3. When the young people finish drawing, have them place their card in their envelope and write their name on the front of the envelope. Comment briefly that change is difficult and takes patience and persistence, but is always possible. Note that the support of other people is crucial in our efforts to become better people.

4. Close with the following prayer or with one you create spontaneously on the same theme:



O God, send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we face the challenges of making a fresh start. Bless our efforts and help us to remember that we are not alone. We have the support of one another and the guidance of your Spirit. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

5. Collect the participants' envelopes and save them for at least one month. After that time distribute the envelopes to the young people to remind them of their resolutions and give them an opportunity to assess their progress.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ In step 3 instruct the young people to write their complete address on their envelope. A month later, instead of distributing the envelopes personally, mail them to the young people.
- ⊙ Use this activity as part of a New Year reconciliation service, giving the young people a chance to reflect on their actions of the past year and to resolve to improve in the coming year.
- ⊙ Resolutions can be made at any time of the year. Consider doing this activity as part of a kickoff for a new school year instead of a new calendar year, or for any time you want to talk about new beginnings.

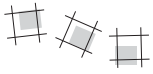
**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

- ☉ Ezek. 14:6 (Turn yourselves to God.)
- ☉ Acts 3:19–20 (Reform your lives and turn to God.)
- ☉ 2 Cor. 5:17–21 (We are made new in Christ Jesus.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





“I Have a Dream”

A Reflection Exercise on the Speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

OVERVIEW

In this reflection exercise, the young people hear the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and each name a dream they have for the future. Then they offer their dreams as part of a prayer litany.

Suggested Time

15 to 20 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

No more than eight people for each dream catcher

Materials Needed

- ☀ a Bible
- ☀ copies of handout 1, “I Have a Dream,” one for each person
- ☀ strips of ribbon, 24 inches long, one for each person
- ☀ thin-line permanent markers, one for each person

PROCEDURE

- ☀ 8- to 10-inch embroidery hoops, or wire hangers bent into 8- to 10-inch circles, one for every eight people
- ☀ a stapler
- ☀ pieces of string, 24 inches long, one for each hoop

Preparation. For each group of eight, attach a piece of string to an embroidery hoop or a wire hanger bent into a circle, so that it can be hung from the ceiling or outside in a tree.

1. Read Rev. 21:1–5 to the group. Explain that the writer of the Book of Revelation reflects the same ideas that Jesus expressed when he challenged people to work for a new way of living in community based on the understanding that equality for all is the will of God.

2. Distribute copies of handout 1, with the excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Read the excerpt with your group or invite individuals to take turns reading it. Make the following comments about Dr. King in your own words:



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived when black people were denied basic rights. He challenged them to work for their rights and brought this issue to the forefront of U.S. society.

Dr. King's most famous speech was delivered in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on 28 August 1963. He addressed 250,000 people who had demonstrated for the civil rights of black people in the United States. The demonstration was a peaceful one.

Many people consider Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech to be his finest speech and one of the best speeches ever delivered by anyone in our country's history.

3. Give each person a strip of ribbon and a thin-line permanent marker. Invite the young people to think about a situation that needs changing in their school, in their community, or in the world. Go around the group and invite each person to state the change he or she thinks needs to happen.

Ask the young people to state their idea in the form of a dream. Have them write their idea on their piece of ribbon, starting with the following words: "I have a dream that one day."

4. When everyone is done writing, read the following prayer:



I have a dream today that we will enjoy a new heaven and a new earth.
I have a dream that all God's people will live together in harmony. Let us

now pray that all our personal dreams will soon come true. For what other dreams should we now pray?

Invite the young people each to read their dream from their ribbon. After each person reads, instruct her or him to put one end of the ribbon over a hoop and staple it to the rest of the ribbon close to the hoop, creating a streamer. Follow the same process until every person's ribbon is attached to a hoop, putting eight ribbons on each hoop.

5. Hold up the hoops, noting that each young person's dream is now part of a dream catcher filled with prayers. Hang the dream catchers in a prominent place, where everyone in the parish can read the dreams of their young teens.

6. Gather everyone in a circle under the dream catchers. Read Acts 2:17–21, then close with the following prayer:



O God, pour out your Spirit upon us so that we can dream dreams and see visions. We call on your name to help us build a new heaven and a new earth. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to follow our dreams by following you. And so we say amen.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ Instead of having the young people read the excerpt from Dr. King's speech, get an audiotape or videotape of the actual event and play it for them.
- ⊙ Rather than making group dream catchers, ask the young people each to attach their ribbon to their clothing with a safety pin. Invite them to wear their ribbon on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, as a dream maker for a new way of living.
- ⊙ Provide a large hula hoop and make ribbons and markers available to other members of the parish. Invite everyone in the parish to attach their own dream for a better world.

SCRIPTURAL CONNECTIONS

- ⊙ Ps. 126:1–3 (The Lord has done great things for dreamers.)
- ⊙ Joel 2:28 (They shall dream dreams.)
- ⊙ Rev. 21:1–5 (We shall have a new city.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



“I Have a Dream”

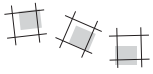
I HAVE A DREAM that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. . . .

I have a dream that one day . . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. . . .

I have a dream that one day “every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all shall see it together.” (As quoted in Alex Ayres, editor, *The Wisdom of Martin Luther King, Jr.* [Meridian, 1993], pages 63–64. Copyright © 1993 by Alex Ayres.)



Soup or Bowl

A Game and Service Project for Super Bowl Sunday

OVERVIEW

This combination game and service project is played in relay style by teams of young people with cans of soup that they bring as donations for the local food pantry.

Suggested Time

A minimum of 10 minutes, or as long as the group wants to play

Group Size

Six to eight people in small groups, with each small group forming a relay team

Materials Needed

- ☀️ masking tape
- ☀️ basketballs, one for each team
- ☀️ donated cans of soup
- ☀️ newsprint and markers

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Before the gathering send a message to the participants telling them to bring cans of soup to donate to people who are poor. Mention that the more cans they bring, the more fun they will have at this event.

Create a bowling lane for each group of six to eight people as follows: With masking tape mark a ball line and a pyramid line at opposite ends of the meeting space. Place a basketball on the ball line.

1. Divide the young people into small groups of six to eight people and assign each group a bowling lane. Direct the members of each team to stack the cans of soup they brought into a pyramid on the line you marked earlier. Tell half the members of each team to line up in back of their pyramid. Those people are the stackers. The other half of each team should line up in back of their basketball. Those are the bowlers.

Explain the following rules in your own words:



The person who is first in the bowling line will roll the ball toward the stack of cans. The team gets a point for every can that falls off its pyramid when the ball hits it. Throwing is not allowed. If a bowler throws the ball, the team gets no points.

When the ball hits the stack, the bowler runs to the end of the stacking line. Meanwhile the stackers reset the pyramid as quickly as they can. The pyramid must be stacked the same way every time.

When the pyramid has been restacked, the first person in the stacking line runs to the end of the bowling line. When he or she reaches the line, the next bowler rolls the ball, and the team follows the same process for bowling, stacking, and rotating places. The game continues until you call time.

Keep score on newsprint. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

2. After the game donate the cans of soup to a local food pantry.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ Follow the game with a soup supper.
- ☉ Challenge other groups in the parish or other youth groups to a soup-or-bowl tournament and award prizes to the winners. For the young person who brings the most cans of soup, provide gift certificates to a fast-food restaurant or a bag of snack food. Give the tournament winners plastic soup bowls—blue bowls for the first-place team, red bowls for second place, and yellow bowls for third. End the tournament with a soup supper.
- ☉ Instead of knocking down cans, use an actual bowling game with pins and balls, and award cans of soup for the top score after each round. Also give prizes to the team with the most cans at the end of the game.

**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

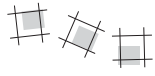
- ☉ Help the young teens run a soup-or-bowl tournament for young children. You may want to use empty soup cans and soft foam balls for the game itself.
- ☉ Ask the entire parish to bring cans of soup to Mass on Super Bowl Sunday.

- ☉ Isa. 58:7 (Share your bread with the hungry.)
- ☉ Matt. 25:35–40 (I was hungry, and you gave me food.)
- ☉ James 2:14–17 (Put faith into action.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





Valentine Visit

An Outreach Event for Valentine's Day

OVERVIEW

This strategy brings a holiday slant to a standard outreach project—a visit to a nursing home for older people. Such a visit allows the young people to connect with elderly people and also gives them an opportunity to discuss how older people are cared for in the community. You will need one session to prepare for the visit, in addition to the actual visit.

Suggested Time

About 60 minutes for the planning meeting, depending on the number of young people and how elaborate and creative they are with the cards

Group Size

This strategy works best with up to twenty young teens, depending on the number of residents you are visiting.

Special Considerations

Most young people are uncomfortable around nursing home residents. During the planning session, be sure to discuss with the participants things they might encounter in their visit. For example, some of the elderly people will be senile

and may not respond in ways the young people expect, some of the residents may be sick, many may look sad and depressed, and many will be unresponsive. Remind the young people that each of the residents is a human person, created by God, cared for by God, and loved by God. Emphasize that all the residents deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Materials Needed

- ☀️ paper in a variety of colors and types
- ☀️ scissors
- ☀️ glue
- ☀️ markers
- ☀️ heart stickers
- ☀️ other items that can be used for creating valentine cards, such as doilies, ribbon, yarn, Mylar confetti, and hole punches
- ☀️ copies of the lyrics to sing-along songs for the young people and the residents

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Make arrangements to visit a nursing home on or around Valentine's Day. Check with the administration about the guidelines for such visits and the best way to connect with the residents. Get a list of the names of the residents if you can, or at least some idea of the number of residents you will be visiting.

Recruit other adults to transport the young people, and secure the necessary permission forms.

Find the lyrics to songs that the young people know, such as "This Little Light of Mine," "When the Saints Go Marching In," and "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Many sing-along books include lyrics that can be duplicated. Check a music store or your local library.

Planning Meeting

1. When the young people gather, tell them about the nursing home visit and the circumstances they might encounter. Allow them to discuss any anxieties or discomforts they have. Share the following instructions:



Imagine that you are about to meet someone who has lived a long time and has done amazing things. This person may not be able to talk any longer, but she or he probably knows when someone is visiting. Your role is to smile and be friendly and share your presence.

2. Explain the details and logistics of the visit. Assign partners, and tell them that they will travel together and visit the same people and share the experience with each other.

3. Provide paper, scissors, glue, markers, heart stickers, and a wide variety of other art supplies for the young people to use in making valentine cards for the nursing home residents. The cards should be as colorful and festive as possible. Be sure that every resident will get at least one card.

4. Distribute lyrics for sing-along songs the group will lead, and practice the songs. Explain that the young people should invite the residents to join in the singing, but warn them not to be surprised if few do. Note that the older people's lack of active participation should not dampen their own enthusiasm.

5. Help the participants create a group cheer or chant, such as the one that follows. Tell them that they will use this cheer when they arrive at the nursing home or to announce their arrival at each room there. Caution them not to get too boisterous.

We are here
to bring you cheer.
Join our singing,
our voices bringing
joy-filled sounds that sing and say
it is love we share this Valentine's Day!

Valentine Visit

1. On the day of the visit, with the adults you have recruited, help the young people present their cheer or chant, distribute their cards, pass out sing-along lyrics, lead a sing-along, and visit with the residents for as long as time allows.

2. After the visit lead the young people in a discussion of the following questions:



What was the best thing about the visit?

What can you tell the group about someone you met? Share their name and anything you learned about them or from them.

Did anything bother you about the visit?

What could be done to improve the life of the residents?

3. Close with the following prayer or one that you create spontaneously:



God of all that is good, stay by the side of the special people we met today. Help them to feel your strength as they face each day. Keep them safe. And may we always remember them in our prayers. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ Instead of planning a sing-along, help the young people prepare an appropriate skit to present to the residents.
- ⊙ Encourage the young teens to dress in costumes or as valentine clowns.
- ⊙ In place of gathering sing-along songs, encourage the young people to create “valentine carols” by changing the words of popular Christmas carols to reflect the valentine themes of love, friendship, and care.
- ⊙ Provide the young teens with Bibles and help them look up scriptural verses on the theme of love. Encourage them to add their favorite verse to the cards they make.
- ⊙ Instead of helping the young people create a cheer or chant to use at the nursing home, invite them to write a short prayer asking God’s blessings on the residents and on the visit.

NOTES



Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.