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Seasonal Retreats and Prayer Services

for Young Adolescents

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Jenni Vankat

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Contents

Introduction	7
Daylong Retreat for Advent	
Great Expectations	12
Prayer Service for Advent	
Creating and Praying the Advent Wreath	28
Daylong Retreat for Lent	
Desert Times: Jesus's and Our Own	37
Prayer Service for Lent	
Scriptural Stations of the Cross	62
Overnight Retreat for the Easter Season	
Paschal Mystery: Circle of Life, Cycle of Faith.	75
Prayer Service for the Easter Season	
Baptized with Water and the Spirit.	97
Half-Day Retreat for Ordinary Time	
Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together: An Overview of Liturgy	105
Prayer Service for Ordinary Time	
The Body of Christ.	125
Appendix A	
Helpful Hints for Giving Talks	135
Appendix B	
Guidelines for Retreat Team Leaders	136
Appendix C	
Hospitality Crew Guidelines.	138
Acknowledgments	139

Introduction

Seasonal Retreats and Prayer Services for Young Adolescents offers a fully designed retreat and prayer service for the liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. The prayers and retreats explore themes central to these seasons and help young teens reflect on their faith and make meaningful connections between their lives and the liturgical life of the community. Each service and retreat is designed in light of the developmental level of young adolescents. The sessions incorporate various media and utilize interactive and hands-on experiences that are sure to engage the youth and inspire them to participate more fully in the liturgies of the season.

The prayer services and retreats in this book are suitable for youth ministry programs, religious education programs, and school groups. The resource also includes some suggestions for reaching out to parents and guardians and for supporting dialogue between them and the participants. Adapt the material to the needs of your ministry setting and the young people in your community.

The Prayer Services

The four prayer services range in length from 15 to 45 minutes. Each follows a four-part structure: (1) Gather, (2) Listen, (3) Respond, and (4) Send Forth. The services begin and end with song and include the proclamation of Scripture passages. The response portions of the prayer services are designed to actively engage the participants through physical movement, hands-on experiences, and interaction with peers.

The prayer services are fully designed and can be used effectively apart from the retreats; however, each prayer service complements the retreat themes for the corresponding season and can be used in combination with the retreat. For example, the prayer service for Ordinary Time can be used to conclude the Ordinary Time retreat. In some cases, the prayer service offers an alternative approach to something offered in the retreat and can be substituted if it suits your needs better. For instance, both the retreat and prayer service for Lent provide a plan for praying the stations of the cross. The retreat employs an adaptation of the traditional version that requires 70 minutes, and the prayer service uses a Scripture-based version that requires just 35 to 45 minutes.

In preparation for the prayer services, review the outline and gather the necessary supplies. Make decisions about which songs to sing and assign any roles as needed. Be sure to involve the participants in ministry roles when appropriate. The environment for prayer changes with the seasons. Make sure the appropriate visual elements are available and arranged before the service begins.

The Retreats

The four retreats vary in length. The retreats for Advent and Lent are a full day. The one for the Easter season is an overnight retreat. The Ordinary Time retreat lasts for a half day. The retreats encourage community building, individual reflection, integration of the faith story with each participant's life story, and making connections with the liturgical life of the community.

Overview of Retreat Components

Hospitality

Early adolescence can be a socially challenging time of life. Hospitality is key to making the young people feel comfortable and willing to participate in the retreats. For that reason, a hospitality crew is assigned to each retreat, and that crew leads games and conversation starters and encourages community building as the youth arrive and get settled in, and during breaks when the young people are mingling. This is especially important if the participants do not know one another well.

Welcome and Introductions

The welcome and introductions period at the start of each retreat sets the tone for the retreat. It is an opportunity for the leaders and team members to introduce themselves, show enthusiasm for the experience, and review any necessary rules or behavior guidelines. This is a good time to familiarize the group with the retreat site and share ground rules, such as no cell phones, portable music players, hand-held games, and so on. It is also advisable to give the participants an overview of what to expect to ease any nervous feelings.

Icebreakers

All the retreats utilize one or more icebreakers to help build community. These active experiences are designed to get the young people moving and interacting. They are also intended to help the participants learn one another's names and build relationships.

Witness Talks

Witness talks are included in three of the retreats. This form of personal sharing reaches the young people in a way other mediums cannot. The talks may be given by an adult or teenager. Preparation is critical to an effective witness talk. Offer the speaker a chance to practice his or her talk ahead of time at a retreat meeting. A resource to guide the speaker is provided for each talk. Another resource, entitled "Helpful Hints for Giving Talks," also helps the speaker prepare. That resource is found in appendix A of this book.

Creative Activities

Young adolescents enjoy being active. They also enjoy multi-sensory experiences. The retreat sessions are designed with this in mind. They incorporate physical movement, creative activities, and hands-on work to inspire reflection among the participants. These include skits, an obstacle course, the molding of clay, and many more activities.

Small Groups

Each retreat calls for the formation of small groups of young people with one or two adults. Several retreat activities, including discussions, take place in this setting. It is recommended that the small groups be designated at the beginning of the retreat. When forming the groups, work for a balance between males and females and introverts and extroverts, and try to divide any cliques you may be aware of.

Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of every retreat. It enables the youth to build a relationship with God. The prayer experiences in the retreats reflect their focus in an interactive way. Each prayer calls the young adolescents into active participation and provides opportunities for them to carry out ministry roles.

Breaks, Energizers, and Warm-Ups

Young adolescents need structure, but they also need time to unwind. Breaks give the young people down time and help them continue building community. Do not skip a break even if time is running short; adjust the schedule elsewhere. To refocus the group from an unstructured break into a more structured session, energizers are recommended. Community builders and sing-a-long songs with actions are good energizers, because they can build up the group's enthusiasm and help release energy before requiring the youths' focused attention.

Selecting, Forming, and Preparing the Retreat Team

Adult and Youth Leaders

You will want to have a good balance of young people and adults serving on the team. With some good mentoring and training, young people have much to offer. It is important to note that appropriate and healthy relationship boundaries are real concerns when adults interact with young people. We must ensure that safe and healthy relationships are maintained between the

adults and the young people who will spend time together. All dioceses have specific guidelines established for adults who work with young people. Criminal background checks and references for those engaged in ministry are some of the tools that ensure the quality of adults working with young people. Check with the director of religious education, the coordinator of youth ministry, or the pastor to determine diocesan requirements concerning criminal background checks and the use of volunteer covenants.

To help the leaders prepare for their roles, provide each with a copy of appendix B, “Guidelines for Retreat Team Leaders.”

Team Member Roles

Standard roles include the following:

- *Prayer leader(s)*. The prayer leaders are charged with preparing and leading all prayer segments of the retreat. Prayer leaders gather the necessary supplies for the prayer experiences, set up the prayer environment, and make arrangements for music.
- *Small-group leaders*. These team members form and facilitate assigned small groups and gather materials for use before small-group times.
- *Witness presenters*. The people giving witness talks prepare for and offer the witness talks during the retreats. To help them prepare their talks, provide each presenter with a copy of appendix A, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks,” and the witness talk outline for the specific retreat.
- *Hospitality crew*. The hospitality crew is responsible for making the participants feel comfortable as they begin to gather and during breaks. The crew can do such things as preparing get-to-know-you questions or creating easy and flexible activities that engage the youth. Further suggestions and resources can be found in appendix C, “Hospitality Crew Guidelines.”

Note: It is important that the retreat director or another designated team member remain available to prepare for upcoming sessions and spaces to be used, as well as to gather all the necessary materials for the sessions.

Team Meetings

Plan to have at least two team meetings before each retreat to assign roles and tasks, to adequately train the team, and to discuss and prepare for all retreat elements.

During the first meeting, allow time for the team members to get to know one another and pray together. Review the roles and their associated tasks and determine which team members will serve in each capacity. Then review the retreat schedule in detail, allowing time for questions and discussion. You may also want to provide the team members with a brief training segment on the key elements of working with and facilitating small groups.

During the second meeting, pray together and review all final details. Provide other resources or direction as needed. You may also want to

accomplish simple tasks such as making small-group assignments, making copies of handouts, and taking care of any other preparations that can be done before the retreat.

(This section, “Selecting, Forming, and Preparing the Retreat Team,” is adapted from Laurie Delgatto, Maureen P. Provencher, and Thomas Zanzig, *Confirmed in a Faithful Community Coordinator’s Manual*, third edition, pp. 54–55.)

Additional Preparation

Supply Baskets

- Gather frequently used supplies into baskets for small-group use during all the retreats. The following items should be included in each basket:
 - a roll of masking tape
 - a roll of clear tape
 - several markers
 - pens or pencils
 - sticky notes
 - glue sticks
 - a few pairs of scissors
 - several index cards
 - several sheets of blank paper and scrap paper

Evaluations

It is important to engage the participants in a process of evaluation at the end of the retreats. The retreatants and team members can offer valuable insights for the continuous improvement of the retreats. Planning your method of evaluation is an essential preparation step. There are a number of feasible methods, both formal and informal. A common one is to create a form to gather written responses to questions about strengths or highlights of the experience, areas that need improvement, and general comments. A less formal method is to provide a sheet of newsprint at each group’s table and ask for their feedback on the retreat, including strengths and weaknesses. This process can be carried out by the small groups together, or you could invite the retreatants to record their comments individually during a break time. Sometimes the most effective evaluation is an informal person-to-person conversation. At the end of a retreat, consider inviting the retreatants to share their feedback verbally with the leaders. Use cleanup time to gather information from the team members or inquire about the experience of the retreatants if they are waiting around for a ride. Whatever method you decide to use, just be sure to make evaluations a part of every retreat.

Daylong Retreat for Advent

Great Expectations

Overview

Advent is a time of joyful anticipation and great expectations. We wait for that joyous break from school or work. We wait for festive gatherings with family and friends. We wait to share gifts with those we love. Most important, we wait for Christmas, the time for making a special point of remembering Jesus's birth and celebrating that God is with us. Advent is a time to take a look at what God's presence in our lives means and a time to pay special attention to the need to be prepared for the time when Jesus Christ will come again at the end of time.

This retreat explores waiting experiences in our daily lives and the waiting experiences recorded in the Gospels. The participants hear a witness talk on the fruits of waiting and how to invite God into such experiences. They create a garland with the colors of Advent to help them journey through the four weeks. They commit to actions and attitudes that promote healthy waiting and holy living in order to prepare the way for Christ in their lives. The ideal time to hold this retreat is during the first week of Advent.

Schedule

9:00 a.m.	Arrival of retreat team and final preparations
10:00 a.m.	Arrival of retreatants and orientation
10:10 a.m.	Welcome and introductions
10:20 a.m.	Icebreaker
10:40 a.m.	Opening prayer
10:50 a.m.	Small-group formation
11:15 a.m.	Break
11:25 a.m.	Witness talk about waiting
12:20 p.m.	Lunch and recreation break
1:35 p.m.	Faith story about waiting
2:35 p.m.	Break
2:50 p.m.	This Advent
3:50 p.m.	Closing prayer session with families and guests
4:20 p.m.	Closing comments, announcements, and evaluations
4:30 p.m.	Program ends

Note: If the retreat is held on a Saturday, it could end with the retreatants' and their families' attending the parish's evening Mass. Adapt the schedule to allow for this.

General Preparation Steps

- The suggested space needs for this retreat include a large gathering space with an area of tables for small groups and an open space for icebreakers. Space for recreation (indoors or outdoors) is also recommended.
- The recommended personnel for this retreat include a retreat leader, a prayer leader, small-group leaders, and a hospitality crew. These leadership roles are described in the introduction of this book. For additional information about the hospitality crew, see appendix C.
- Provide the witness speaker with a copy of resource 1–A, “Witness Talk Outline: ‘My Story of Waiting’” and a copy of appendix A, “Helpful Hints for Giving Talks.”
- Determine how many small groups you will need. The recommended group size is six to eight youth with one or two adult leaders. Be sure to divide any cliques and make sure there is an even distribution of males and females per group. Develop group assignments and prepare name tags. Assign each group a well-known Christmas carol (i.e., “Silent Night,” “Joy to the World,” “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,” and so on). For each group, write the name of the appropriate song on the back of each retreatant’s name tag and on the group leader’s name tag.
- Designate a table or area where supplies can be accessed throughout the retreat.
- Gather the supply baskets, one for each small group.
- Have a copy of *The Catholic Youth Bible*[®] or another Bible on hand for each participant.
- Set up a prayer area using some or all of these items: an Advent wreath and candles, matches, *THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible, a small table covered with a purple cloth.
- Make arrangements for lunch.

Procedure

9:00 a.m. Arrival of Retreat Team and Final Preparations

10:00 a.m. Arrival of Retreatants and Orientation

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - name tags
- Establish a welcome and gathering area where the retreatants can check in as they arrive.
 1. Welcome the arriving participants and give them their name tags.
 2. Direct the participants to the hospitality crew members who are prepared to engage them in informal conversations or easy, flexible games.

10:10 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

1. Welcome the retreatants and share your enthusiasm for the opportunity to be on retreat. Provide an overview of the facilities. Introduce the members of the retreat team.

2. Present the retreat rules and explain your behavior expectations, stressing the need for mutual trust and respect. Include instructions about off-limits areas, use of media (such as CD players, cell phones, and iPods), snacks, and so on. Ask if there are any questions.

3. Help the participants know what to expect from the retreat experience by providing a brief overview, using these or similar words:

† Retreats are opportunities for us to get away from our daily routines and reflect on our lives and our relationship with God. Our day together consists of sharing, listening, participating in activities, praying, and socializing. It is a full day, and we need your full participation. Let's start by getting to know one another.

10:20 a.m. Icebreaker

“Simon Says”

Note: It is important to get the youth active and energized early in the day. Icebreakers allow the retreatants to interact and help set the tone for the retreat experience.

1. Tell the group that it is time to get up and get moving by playing the childhood game “Simon Says.” Invite a retreat team member to be Simon and give directions to the group.

2. Review the rules of “Simon Says,” using these or similar words:

† Simon is going to give you a series of directions. Follow the directions unless he (or she) doesn't say “Simon says.” Anyone who moves when Simon does not say “Simon says” is out of the game.

3. Answer any questions, and then begin the game. Encourage Simon to be creative in giving directions so the participants have a chance to move around and interact with one another. Some examples include:

† “Simon says introduce yourself to someone you don't know.”

† “Simon says make a chain of five people by holding hands and doing the wave with arms connected.”

† “Simon says lock arms with another person and tell that person one thing on your Christmas wish list.”

† “Get into a group of seven and pretend you're a train.”

† “Simon says make a group of three people doing jumping jacks together.”

† “Simon says make a group of eight and form a human candy cane on the floor.”

- † “Find a group of six and sit on the floor.”
- † “Simon says get into a group of four and tell your favorite Christmas food.”

4. End the game when only one or two people are remaining or when time runs out.

10:40 a.m. Opening Prayer

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - songbooks or songsheets, one for each participant
- Select an opening song such as “The King of Glory” (Willard Jabusch, *Gather Comprehensive*, GIA Publications), “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Richard Proulx, *Gather Comprehensive*, GIA Publications), or another familiar Advent song.
- Select a closing song, such as “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light” (Kathleen Thomerson, *Gather Comprehensive*, GIA Publications), “Find Us Ready” (Tom Booth, *Spirit and Song*, OCP Publications), or another song of praise related to Advent.

1. Invite the participants to join you in the space you have designated for prayer. Allow a few moments for everyone to get settled. Distribute the songbooks or songsheets.

2. The person leading song should then stand, motion for everyone else to stand, and invite the participants to join in singing the opening song.

3. Direct the group’s attention to the wreath. Offer an explanation of the symbolism of the Advent wreath, using these or similar words:

- † The Advent wreath is shaped in a circle to represent God’s never-ending love for us. Evergreen branches are often used to signify that God does not change. The wreath contains three purple candles that represent our hopeful anticipation during the weeks of preparation leading to Christmas. One candle, used in the third week of Advent, is pink. This candle symbolizes joy. The candle flames symbolize that Christ, the Light of the World, is overcoming the darkness of sin.
- † The wreath helps us focus our attention on Christ as we prepare to celebrate his coming.
- † Let us light our wreath in recognition of the dawning of the Advent season.

4. Light one purple candle.

5. Offer a closing prayer in these or similar words:

- † O God of love, we pray for the grace to wait patiently. We know some things cannot be rushed. Your people waited for so long for the coming of a Savior. We, too, are anxious for the celebration of your

coming. We pray to be ready and alert, always trying to live the life you want for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the Christ, who is the light of the world. (Adapted from Janet Claussen and Marilyn Kielbasa, *Ministry Ideas for Celebrating Advent and Christmas*, p. 21)

Invite everyone to respond “Amen” if they don’t do so spontaneously.

6. Have the person leading song conclude the prayer by inviting the participants to join in singing the concluding song you selected.

10:50 a.m. Small-Group Formation

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - tennis balls, two or three for each small group
 - 1. Invite the retreatants to form small groups by singing the Christmas carols noted on the back of their name tags. When they find the other participants who are singing the same carol, they should all sit together at a table.
 - 2. When all the small groups are situated, give each two or three tennis balls and ask everyone to stand up. Instruct the leaders of each group to say the name of another person in the group across from him or her and toss the ball to that person. That person then states the name of a different person across the table and tosses the ball to him or her. The process continues until all members of the group have been named and included. The last person to be named tosses the ball back to the leader. A “tossing” pattern has now been established. Instruct the participants to repeat the established pattern. The leader begins the cycle again, tossing the ball to the person he or she first named while stating that person’s name out loud. The person named catches the ball and tosses it to the group member he or she selected while saying his or her name out loud. After the participants have settled into the pattern, challenge them by adding a second ball. This game helps the young people hear the names of the group members, requires them to work together, and keeps the group on their toes! Continue the game until time runs out or until the group tires of the activity.
 - 3. Invite everyone to sit down and take turns answering the following question:
 - † If you could be a character in the manger scene, which one would you be and why?
- Note:* You may need to clarify that you are referring to the people with Jesus at and around the time of his birth as recounted in the Gospels (Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men, and the shepherds).

11:15 a.m. Break

Give the young people a 10-minute break to use the restroom and move around. Remind them of the boundaries during break—where they can go, where they cannot go, and so on. Instruct everyone to regather at 11:25 a.m.

11:25 a.m. Witness Talk About Waiting

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - sheets of construction or copier paper, six for each small group
 - 3-x-5-inch index cards, one for each participant
- Create a set of six emotion signs for each group by drawing images on the construction or copier paper or by collecting images from magazines, newspapers, or clip-art sources and affixing them to the cards. Suggested emotions for the cards include happy, joyful, hopeful, excited, thrilled, anxious, impatient, frustrated, nervous, and uncertain.
- Remind the witness speaker that he or she will be sharing during this portion of the retreat and that he or she should be sure to limit the talk to 10 minutes or less.

1. Introduce this portion of the retreat on personal experiences of waiting, using these or similar words:

- † Today we gather to reflect on the season of Advent. The word *Advent* means “coming.” Something is coming. We wait with expectation.
- † In the Gospel stories of Advent, we hear John’s prophecies that someone great is coming, and we hear about the journey Mary and Joseph took prior to Jesus’s birth. We also hear that, like the people in the Gospels, we wait too. We wait for Christmas, and we wait for Jesus to fill our lives more and more with his light. We also await the time when Jesus will come again.
- † Ever since Jesus’s death and Resurrection, Christians have been anticipating the return of Christ. We believe Christ will come again in glory and we will see him face to face. The Church sometimes refers to this as the Second Coming of Christ. The promise of Jesus’s return in glory gives us great hope for a future of happiness, beyond what we can imagine. Our challenge now, as we wait, is to prepare ourselves. The Gospels tell us to be ready at all times, because we don’t know when Jesus will come again. Advent reminds us to be prepared for the coming of Jesus by living our lives according to God’s way.
- † The activities of this retreat help us understand why waiting is important and how it prepares us to celebrate Christmas and to recognize Christ’s presence.
- † Let’s start by thinking about all the different things for which we wait. Let’s also think about our emotions and attitudes when we are waiting.

Seasonal Retreats and Prayer Services for Young Adolescents

2. Distribute one set of emotion signs to each group. Instruct the group leaders to spread the signs out in the middle of the group table with the images facing up. Distribute the supply baskets to each group along with a 3-x-5-inch index card for each participant. Ask the young people to write their names on the cards. Then offer these instructions:

† You will be given a “waiting” situation. If you’ve experienced this scenario, stand up. Then decide which of the emotions relate to your experience of waiting. Were you happy or nervous, frustrated or excited? Select the emotion that best describes your feelings and place your name card on the piece of paper that lists that emotion. Then sit down and take turns sharing with your group why you felt the way you did.

3. Present the first situation by saying:

† Stand if you have waited in line to get someone’s autograph.

After a brief discussion time, move on to the next situation. Use the following scenarios to continue the exploration of waiting experiences and add some of your own:

† Stand if you have waited to learn the results of a test that would have a big impact on your future.

† Stand if you have waited to see a close friend after being apart for a long time.

† Stand if you have huddled in a basement waiting for severe weather to pass.

† Stand if you have waited for a sibling to be born.

† Stand if you have waited to get a cast off.

† Stand if you have waited for a ride.

† Stand if you have waited for a family member to return from a trip.

4. After the small groups have discussed a few scenarios, use these or similar questions to have them start drawing some conclusions:

† What makes waiting a positive experience? What makes it a negative experience?

† How does your attitude or openness to the situations affect your overall experiences?

5. After the groups have had time to process, explain that one of the team members is going to share a personal story about waiting. Invite the retreatants to regather into the large group in the area designated for witness talks. Allow a few moments for them to resettle.

6. Introduce the witness talk presenter, using these or similar words:

† Waiting is a part of life. In our world, which promotes immediate gratification, we often struggle with having to wait. But waiting can also be a time of necessary preparation that can help us strengthen our faith. One of our retreat team members is going to share a personal story of an experience of waiting and describe how that experience helped her *[or him]* grow and build a relationship with God.

† It is not easy to share personal stories with a group of people, so please show your gratitude to the speaker by facing her *[or him]*, making eye

contact with her *[or him]*, even smiling and nodding your head. These attentive listening skills will make the speaker more comfortable and will make it easier for you to listen.

† Please give a warm welcome to our witness speaker, *[name]*.

7. At the conclusion of the witness talk, thank the team member who has shared. Then invite the participants to return to their small groups.

8. Ask the small groups to examine how the speaker's story was similar to or different from the situations they discussed earlier. Facilitate the small-group discussions by posing the following questions. Allow 3 to 4 minutes for the discussion of each.

† What in the speaker's talk was similar to your experiences? What was different?

† How did the speaker's experience of waiting lead to a positive result?

† How did the speaker invite God to be part of the waiting?

† What can we do to ask for God's guidance during our waiting experiences?

9. Invite each small group to prepare a skit about people who find themselves in a situation that requires waiting. Explain that the skits should aim to depict significant situations, capture the emotions of the people, and demonstrate the effect of God's presence. Give the groups approximately 10 minutes to develop their skits. Then call the groups forward to perform.

10. When all the groups are done, thank them for their performances. Conclude this segment of the retreat by highlighting central insights depicted in the skits, making sure to incorporate the following points:

† Waiting can be difficult. We often feel frustrated and impatient with waiting, but waiting can be good for us too.

† Waiting challenges us to let go of our immediate wants and to turn to God for help with being patient. God can also help us focus on others' needs instead of our desires.

† Our attitude about waiting helps determine whether we have positive or negative experiences.

† The season of Advent prompts us to anticipate Jesus's Second Coming by remembering the story of Jesus's birth and paying attention to how we are following God's way.

12:20 p.m. Lunch and Recreation Break

Give any instructions for lunch. Then have the prayer leader lead a meal prayer. Give the participants ample time to eat, and then announce a recreation period. Review the options for indoor or outdoor activities.

1:35 p.m. Faith Story About Waiting

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - pieces of poster board, cut in half, one half for each small group
 - magazines, five for each small group
- Ask the retreat team to review the Gospel readings for Advent before the retreat. See step 2 for a listing of the readings.
- Select a variety of magazines that focus on things such as home décor, parenting, education, and news. Avoid magazines that consist of celebrity gossip and suggestive advertising.

1. Gather the youth back into their small groups. Prepare them for this portion of the retreat, using these or similar words:

† In the last part of the retreat, we recognized the many instances in our lives that cause us to wait, and we identified the emotions that accompany waiting. Then we heard a witness talk on a waiting experience that helped the speaker grow. After discussing our own experiences, we developed skits on waiting and recognizing God's presence in the midst of the experience.

† Now we will explore the theme of waiting in the Scriptures, specifically in the Gospels proclaimed at Sunday Mass during Advent. These passages highlight several instances of waiting with great expectations about what is to come.

2. Distribute a Bible to each participant. Then assign each group one of the four Gospels read during Advent. Use the readings designated for the appropriate cycle. See the dates in parentheses.

- Cycle A (2008, 2011, 2014): Matthew 24:37–44; Matthew 3:1–12; Matthew 11:2–11; Matthew 1:18–24
- Cycle B (2009, 2012, 2015): Mark 13:33–37; Mark 1:1–8; John 1:6–8, 19–28; Luke 1:26–38
- Cycle C (2007, 2010, 2013): Luke 21:25–28, 34–36; Luke 3:1–6; Luke 3:10–18; Luke 1:39–45

Note: The themes of the Advent Gospel readings are similar for each liturgical year. The first Sunday of Advent recounts Jesus's foretelling his Second Coming and warning the people to be ready. The second and third Sundays relate to John the Baptist's foretelling of the Messiah's coming, one who is greater than John. The fourth Sunday reveals Jesus's birth being foretold to Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth.

3. Instruct each group to read its assigned passage and to work together to answer the following questions:

- † Who are the people in the passage? Who is sending the message, and who is receiving it?
- † What are the people expecting?

- † What instructions, if any, are given to prepare for what is coming?
- † What is the central message of the Gospel story?

4. When the groups have answered the questions, ask them to try to find similarities between the Gospel story they read and any of the stories about waiting they shared or heard this morning.

Note: The youth may speculate that some of the people from the passages had the same feelings about waiting that they themselves have had, even though the waiting situations are different. They may also find that some of their personal scenarios required preparation and trust in the same way Mary and Joseph had to prepare for Jesus's birth and trust in God.

5. Now direct the groups to adapt the message of their Gospel passage by creating an advertisement or billboard designed to attract the attention of others their own age. Review the central message of the Advent Gospels, using these or similar words:

- † The Gospel passages of Advent call us to prepare for the time when Christ will come again by living lives of holiness. They tell us that Christ will fill us with his spirit and that we are to listen to God's word in order to follow his ways.

Distribute the poster board, the magazines, and the supply baskets. Tell the participants they have 15 minutes to work, and that afterward each small group will have a chance to share its sign with the large group.

6. After all the small groups have given their presentations, thank them for their creativity and efforts.

7. Conclude this portion of the retreat by restating the Gospel messages of Advent, using these or similar words:

- † The Advent season Gospels remind us that just as John, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph waited for Jesus's entrance into the world, we too await Jesus's Second Coming. In preparation, we must live our lives according to God's way. We hear the same message each Advent because we need to. We get distracted from focusing our attention on living as Christ taught us. By putting trust in the presence of God in our midst and by turning to God in prayer, we get ourselves back on track.

2:35 p.m. Break

Give the young people a 15-minute break to use the restroom, have a snack, and move around. Remind them of the boundaries during break—where they can go, where they cannot go, and so on. Instruct everyone to regather at 2:50 p.m.

2:50 p.m. This Advent

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - items suitable for stringing, such as colored beads, cranberries, or popcorn, at least two dozen for each participant
 - upholstery thread (found at your local fabric store), one yard for each participant
 - sewing needles, one for each participant
 - 7/8-inch-wide purple ribbon, three 6-inch pieces for each participant
 - 7/8-inch-wide pink ribbon, one 6-inch piece for each participant
 - 7/8-inch-wide white ribbon, one 6-inch piece for each participant
 - fabric markers (found at your local craft store), one pack for each small group, found at your local craft store
 - sheets of newsprint, one for each small group plus one extra
 - a roll of tape
- Add the items for stringing and all the craft supplies to each group's supply basket.
- Before the session starts, follow the instructions in step 4 for creating an Advent garland so that you have an example to share with the participants.
- Write the following Scripture passages on a sheet of newsprint and post it for all to see:
 - Romans 15:4
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22
 - Philippians 4:6–7

1. Ask the retreatants to return to their small groups. Begin this final segment of the retreat by recalling the stories of waiting and the Advent Gospels. Share the following points, using these or similar words:

- † Our speaker talked about the anticipation and uncertainty he *[or she]* felt during a waiting experience and the positive aspects that came after the waiting. The Gospel stories tell of waiting with expectation for Jesus's coming. Our speaker and Mary and Joseph had to do some sort of preparation while they were waiting.
- † This same process happens for us in Advent. We prepare for a joyful celebration of Christ's birth, but we also refocus our attention on living holy lives in preparation for Jesus's Second Coming. What sort of preparation does this require?

2. Ask how many participants and their families have used an Advent wreath in the past. Explain that the Advent wreath is a tool that reminds us to focus our hearts on Christ as we journey to Christmas. Remind the retreatants of the symbolism of the wreath, using these or similar words:

- † The circle represents God's never-ending love for us. Evergreen signifies that God does not change. The wreath contains three purple candles that represent our hopeful anticipation during the weeks of preparation leading to Christmas. One candle, used in the third week of Advent, is pink and symbolizes joy. The candle flames symbolize that Christ, the Light of the World, is overcoming the darkness of sin.

Explain that today the retreatants will create another tool to help them move through the weeks of Advent and track their own actions and attitudes as they await Christmas.

3. Distribute a supply basket to each small group.

4. Provide the following instructions as you walk through the steps for making a garland:

- † Begin making the garland by stringing the thread through the needle and tying a knot in the thread at the end opposite the needle. You may need to make a double or triple knot at the end so the thread doesn't pull through. Then take one of the purple ribbons and make a large stitch across the top of the ribbon so it hangs vertically. Pull the length of thread through the stitch so the ribbon is at the end of the thread.
- † Now take six beads [*or cranberries or popcorn*] and string them through until they are next to the purple ribbon. You will now have a purple ribbon and six beads [*or cranberries or popcorn*] toward the end of the string. This represents the first week of Advent.

Note: Stringing one item per day makes a short strand of garland. To make the strand longer, double or triple the number to twelve or eighteen.

- † Add another section for the second week of Advent by taking another purple ribbon and making a stitch at the top of the ribbon so it hangs down like the first ribbon. String six [*or twelve or eighteen*] beads [*or cranberries or popcorn*] on the garland to complete the week.
- † Add a section for the third week of Advent, but remember to use the pink ribbon instead of purple. Then add a section for the fourth week, using the final purple ribbon and beads [*or cranberries or popcorn*].
- † Finish the garland by stitching the white ribbon after the section representing the fourth week. The white ribbon represents Christ and our joyful celebration of his coming.

5. Explain to the participants that the Bible contains great advice about how to wait well. Share about the Apostle Paul, using these or similar words:

- † Paul once persecuted the followers of Christ and then became a follower himself. Paul traveled around the Mediterranean world, spreading the message that Jesus is the Messiah. As Paul traveled, he wrote letters to the believers, offering support and guidance on how to be faithful to Jesus. Many of these letters are found in the Bible.
- † During Advent many of the second readings proclaimed at Sunday Mass are from Paul's letters.

Seasonal Retreats and Prayer Services for Young Adolescents

Invite each group to look up the passages you listed on the newsprint and to read Paul's advice.

6. Have the retreatants discuss in their small groups the actions and attitudes needed to wait faithfully during the Advent season. Use Paul's passages to come up with specific things people can do or specific good qualities people need to better prepare for the upcoming Christmas celebration of Jesus Christ's entrance into the world and for the time when he will come again and we will see him face to face.

7. Encourage the participants to think of two actions they will commit to for each week that will help them live faithfully during Advent. Ask them to use the fabric markers to write these actions on the purple and pink ribbons.

8. Now instruct each group to record on newsprint the actions and attitudes each group member wrote on their ribbons. Then have each group write a petition asking for God's guidance throughout Advent. Encourage them to draw on the ideas, actions, and attitudes discussed today. Ask each group to select a reader who will offer the group's petition at the closing prayer session.

9. Invite each group to share the Advent actions and attitudes its members came up with.

10. Bring this portion of the retreat to a close, using these or similar words:

† In our haste to get to Christmas, we often do not give Advent our full attention. To be ready for Christ's Second Coming, we must prepare ourselves. The actions and attitudes we commit to direct our focus back to Christ and his message. May we put our hearts fully into this Advent season.

3:50 p.m. Closing Prayer Session with Families and Guests

Supplies and Preparation

- Gather the following supplies:
 - songbooks or songsheets, one for each participant
 - THE CATHOLIC YOUTH BIBLE* or another Bible, marked at Luke 21:34–36
- Select a reader to proclaim Luke 21:34–36 articulately and clearly. Give the young person the opportunity to read over the passage before the prayer begins.
- Gather the petition readers and explain where and when they should read their group's prayer.
- Invite three or four participants to show and describe their garland creations after the Scripture reading. Inform these young people that they will be called upon after the reading.

- Select a gathering song, such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Richard Proulx, *Gather Comprehensive*, GIA Publications), “In the Day of the Lord” (M. D. Ridge, *Spirit and Song*, OCP Publications), or another familiar Advent song.
- Select a closing song, such as “To You, O God, I Lift Up My Soul” (Bob Hurd, *Spirit and Song*, OCP Publications), “Christ, Be Our Light” (Bernadette Farrell, *Spirit and Song*, OCP Publications), or another Advent song.

1. Welcome the families and other guests and offer some thoughts about what has taken place at the retreat, reviewing the themes explored and what you have observed, using these or similar words:

† During our time today, we looked at various experiences of waiting and what emotions accompany them. We saw that we have the ability to make waiting either a positive and fruitful experience or a negative experience. We explored scriptural instances of waiting for Jesus and created a garland to help us journey through this Advent season. We committed to attitudes and actions that will help us prepare for our upcoming celebration of Christmas and for the time when Jesus will come again in glory.

2. Begin with the sign of the cross.

3. The person leading song should stand, motion for everyone else to stand, and invite all the participants to join in singing the gathering song. When the song is done, the song leader should motion for everyone to sit.

4. Invite the reader to come forward to proclaim the Scripture passage (Luke 21:34–36). Allow a few moments of silence to follow.

5. Offer a reflection on the reading and its importance to the retreat and to the season, using these or similar words:

† In the passages from Luke, Jesus tells us to be on guard so our hearts are not weighed down and to pray for strength until the final judgment. Jesus offered these thoughts shortly before the Last Supper. He was warning the disciples to remain focused on holy living and to watch for signs so that when the end of Jesus’s life came, they would be prepared.

† The Advent season calls us to remember that Christ will come again and to show our belief in this by living faith-filled lives. We use the four weeks of Advent to refocus our attention on Jesus’s message and living as God wants us to live. Christ assured us he will come again. Our task is to be on the alert, to be prepared, because we do not know the hour when he will return.

† In an effort to wait with hearts that are pure and true, the participants discussed actions and attitudes needed to be ready for Christmas and to be ready for Jesus when he comes again. Let us hear those actions and attitudes our young disciples have committed to for this Advent season.

6. Invite those who have volunteered to share their Advent garland to give an overview of their creation. Allow just a couple minutes for each sharing.

7. Now invite the participants to hold up their garlands for a blessing. Continue with these words:

† I ask each family member and guest to extend your right hand in blessing over the garlands and the young people holding them as we pray . . .

Lord God, the Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Savior, / who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. / Pour forth your blessings upon these young people / and on these Advent garlands. / Help them to see in these garlands / a reminder to keep their focus on preparing for your Coming. / May their actions and attitudes reflect the splendor of Christ, who is Lord, forever and ever. (Adapted from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Book of Blessings*, no. 1532)

Invite everyone to respond “Amen” if they don’t do so spontaneously.

8. Call the petition readers to come forward and read their prayers.

9. Conclude the prayer, using these or similar words:

† We wait with great expectation for our celebration of Christmas and for Christ to come again. Each of us will need strength to keep our focus on living faith-filled lives during this Advent season and throughout the year. Let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught us, the Lord’s Prayer.

10. The person leading song should stand, motion for everyone else to stand, and invite all the participants to join in singing the closing song.

4:20 p.m. Closing Comments, Announcements, and Evaluations

1. Thank the retreatants for their participation. Give any closing comments and announcements such as instructions for cleanup and upcoming youth ministry events. Be sure to invite them to any special Advent offerings with the parish community.

2. Conduct an evaluation of the retreat. See the introduction of this book for some suggestions on how to carry out the evaluation.

4:30 p.m. Program Ends

Witness Talk Outline: “My Story of Waiting”

Overview

Advent is a time of joyful anticipation and great expectations. We wait for that joyous break from school or work. We wait for festive gatherings with family and friends. We wait to share gifts with those we love. More important, we wait for Christmas, the time when we make a special point of remembering Jesus’s birth and celebrating that God is with us. Advent is time to take a look at what God’s presence in our lives means and a time to pay special attention to the need to be prepared for Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time.

This witness talk is intended to introduce the theme of waiting as an aspect of ordinary life and as a step in the journey of faith. You are asked to select a significant experience of waiting from your own life. Please be prepared to talk about the emotions that accompanied the experience, how you opened yourself up to the presence of God in the midst of waiting, and what happened when the waiting was over.

Length

Please limit your talk to 10 minutes or less.

Questions for Reflection

- When in your life have you experienced a significant experience of waiting?
- What made this experience different and more life changing than other times of waiting?
- How did having to wait lead to a positive result such as growth in maturity or growth in spirituality?
- How did your faith in God affect your attitude during the experience of waiting?
- How did your experience help strengthen your relationship with God?