

Parish Edition

Catechist Guide

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***Catholic
Connections***
for Middle Schoolers

***God, Revelation,
and Faith***

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Chris Wardwell

REVELATION
GOD OF FAITH

God, Revelation, and Faith
Catechist's Guide
Catholic Connections

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INTRODUCTION

Catholic Connections Program

Welcome to Catholic Connections, a parish religious education program for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders! The program includes six fully developed courses, each with its own catechist guide full of active, hands-on learning sessions:

- God, Revelation, and Faith
- Jesus the Christ
- The Holy Spirit and the Church
- Sacraments and Prayer
- Christian Morality and Justice
- The Eucharist

In each course the participants use a faith handbook called *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009). The handbook is a visually appealing, youth-friendly presentation of the Catholic faith. The six catechist guides and the handbook work together to equip parishes with an excellent resource for fostering the faith of young adolescents.

Fostering the faith of young adolescents involves helping them to make connections between the Catholic faith and everyday life. It also means helping young people to strengthen their connection to the faith community and enter more fully into the life of the community. Catholic Connections aims to strengthen the participants' Catholic identity and inspire them to participate more fully in the Church's mission.

Tips for Leading Sessions

The Catholic Connections program has been designed to make the catechist's preparation for leading sessions as effective as possible, while providing flexible options requested by many catechists. This section will walk you through planning a typical session, providing you with important background information and tips for using the sessions effectively.

Session Time Frame

The sessions in this guide have been created to work in periods of 60 to 75 minutes. The sessions' core activities—listed at the beginning of the sessions, under the “At a Glance” heading—will fill a 60-minute session. If you have more time, consider using the optional 15-minute session extensions. The session outlines include additional discussion questions and media suggestions that can be incorporated to create sessions that go beyond 75 minutes.

Materials and Preparation

Besides becoming familiar with the session steps and activities, you will need to do some minimal advance preparation for most of the sessions. For example, you may need to gather some supplies, make photocopies of handouts, and do some background reading. This preparation is outlined at the beginning of each session under the heading “Materials and Preparation.”

A few standard supplies are necessary for most sessions. They are listed here so that they do not need to be listed for each individual session:

- a Bible
- copies of *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, one for each participant
- pens or pencils, one for each participant
- a large blackboard, chalk, and an eraser; or a large whiteboard and markers
- supplies for creating a prayer space, such as a prayer table, a table covering, a Bible and stand, a cross, a candle and matches (if permitted)

Quick-Start Activities

The first thing you will find as you read the detailed descriptions under the “Session Steps” heading for each session is a quick-start activity. These are simple activities to engage the young people in something fun and intriguing while they wait for the session to start. You may write the instructions on the board or quickly give them verbally as the participants arrive. This frees you to greet the young people as they arrive, recruit volunteers, and so on. In most sessions the quick-start activity is referred to again later in the session.

Prayer Times

Each session begins and ends with a short prayer time. Young people respond well to ritual, so these prayer times have ritual elements built into them. For example, each opening prayer begins with “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” (This is a familiar Lasallian prayer of the Christian Brothers, and Saint Mary’s Press is a Lasallian ministry.) Another ritual element is a special prayer space in your meeting area that the young people gather around for the opening and closing prayers. If at all possible, try to create such a space.

The young people should be involved in the prayer times as much as possible. For the closing prayers in most sessions, the participants read together a prayer from the handbook. If they are willing and able, participant volunteers can read the Scripture passages and prayers, even if the instructions do not indicate the need for a participant to read.

All the sessions have a short prayer for the catechist. You may wish to pray this prayer just before the session begins, to center yourself.

Making the Most of the Activities

The main activities in the sessions use a variety of catechetical techniques to actively engage the young people in their learning. Some young people learn best by reading and answering questions, but many learn more effectively through drama, discussion, physical activity, or even music. Your task in leading these activities is twofold.

First, you must be familiar enough with an activity's details to give clear instructions and to offer needed assistance to the young people as they complete the activity. This is where advance preparation will show its benefit. Consult with your program coordinator or a more experienced catechist if you need help determining how best to lead a particular activity.

Second, you must be able to draw out and clearly summarize the doctrinal points an activity covers. Most activities end with specific "talking points" for you to present. Be sure to cover these! You can enhance your own understanding of the doctrine by reading the handbook chapter or chapters, the paragraphs from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, and the Scripture passages referred to under the "Background Reading" heading.

Options

As mentioned earlier, each session ends with some optional ideas related to the session: the session extension, additional discussion starters (there are also additional discussion starters in the "Think About It!" sidebars in each handbook chapter), and media suggestions. You can use these to extend the length of a session, to enhance an activity or prayer, or even to replace an activity or prayer.

The Catholic Connections program also has an optional card game called *GAME ON! Games for Catholic Connections* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009), which contains cards with questions that can be used to play several kinds of games with the young people. One question on each card is specifically connected to the content of this course. You can use the card game to introduce or review course doctrine. Consider some of these uses:

- Have the cards out on the table as the young people arrive. They can quiz one another while waiting for the session to start.
- After four or five sessions, plan to leave the last 10 minutes or so of the remaining sessions to hold *GAME ON! Games for Catholic Connections* tournaments.
- Invite parents to attend the final session. Have the young people test their own knowledge by playing one of the card games with (or against!) their parents.

Course Project

At the end of this guide is a section with detailed information about an optional course project. The aim of the project is to help the participants synthesize what they are learning in the course and make connections between course material and their own lives. A secondary aim is to provide you with a concrete way to involve parents in their children's faith formation, though the project can be accomplished without parents. Please take a look at the project details before the course begins and consider its fit for your group and how you might use it.

Using *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers Effectively*

A key component of Catholic Connections is *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*. Most of the sessions in this guide are based on one or more chapters of the handbook. At times you will be directed to a particular page in the handbook to have the participants read a short section or look at a particular image. When this happens you will see a snapshot of that handbook page so you know exactly what is being referred to.

But do not limit your use of the handbook to only those instances. The more the participants can use the handbook, the more opportunity they will have to learn content, including content you will not be able to cover completely in the sessions. Consider some of the following possibilities for expanding the young people's use of the handbook:

- Have the handbooks on the tables as the participants arrive, and direct them to look over the appropriate chapter or chapters while waiting for the session to begin.
- Use some of the other images in a particular chapter as a focus point for discussion and to enhance the learning process.
- As part of a session, ask the participants to work in teams to create their own quizzes based on material in the chapter or chapters. Have them use the quizzes they create to challenge one another's understanding.
- Have the young people take the handbook home between sessions and read the chapter or chapters the next session is based on. This creates an opportunity for the parents to see the handbook and be involved with the course.
- Involve parents by sending the handbook home occasionally with a simple assignment the participants are to complete with their parents' help.

Overview of *God, Revelation, and Faith* *Catechist's Guide*

The Holy Spirit energizes and brings life to the Church and to all baptized believers. Throughout these sessions the participants will explore how the Holy Spirit moves in God's people and will discover concrete ways that the Holy Spirit is present in the world today. They will examine how the gift of God's grace is made possible by the Spirit and what it means to be invited to participate in God's life. The participants will reflect on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how these gifts help them to respond to God's love. In exploring the Holy Spirit's activity in the Church, the young people will look at how God's Spirit was present in the lives of the Apostles, examine various models that help us understand the meaning of Church, and look at how all the baptized participate in the mission of Christ to make disciples of all nations. The remaining sessions focus on what is needed to enter God's Kingdom and how Mary, the saints, and those whose lives reflect the qualities, values, and beliefs that characterize Jesus' followers can serve as models of faithful discipleship.

Throughout these sessions the young people will address the basic questions of who God is and how we come to know God. They will be presented with the understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is revealed through Sacred Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures. The participants will also explore the meaning of our human existence and how God is actively involved in the work of our salvation. Though it is God who saves us, the young people will be challenged to do their part: respond to God with faith.

Course Themes

Core Session: 1. Revelation, the Scriptures, and Tradition

This session explores how God reveals himself to us, focusing on the two main modes of God's Revelation: the Scriptures and Tradition.

Core Session: 2. God the Father

This session examines God the Father and how he has revealed himself to us.

Core Session: 3. The Holy Trinity

This session delves into the mystery of the Holy Trinity and how our one God is the union of three unique Persons.

Core Session: 4. Creation

This session looks at God's creativity at work in our world, explores the biblical story of the fall of humanity, and considers how we all must make choices between good and evil.

Core Session: 5. The Human Person

This session investigates what it means to be made in the image of God and examines how Original Sin has affected humanity.

Core Session: 6. God's Plan for Salvation

This session examines the ways God has guided humanity throughout salvation history, recognizing how God continues to lead his people back to be with him, their ultimate home.

Core Session: 7. Faith: Responding to God

This session examines the three elements of faith that are being taught and explores the faith of some of the greatest figures in the Bible.

Life Issue Session: 8. Who Am I?

This session helps to identify the commonalities and differences among young people and also provides the groundwork to get past the superficial ways young people identify themselves. It also explores a number of Scripture passages to help us discover who we are according to God.

Life Issue Session: 9. Winning and Losing

This session offers a different perspective on winning and losing. It examines the Beatitudes and other biblical passages to see how people embody God's Word in their own lives and then challenges the participants to come up with ways they can live out these Gospel values.

Concluding Session: 10. Salvation History

This concluding session focuses on how God has interacted with humanity throughout history, offering the participants an opportunity to reflect on how God continues to interact with them in their own lives through the events and people of their lives.

Essential Resources

The following resources for preparation and delivery of the lessons are used throughout the sessions and should be available for frequent reference:

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009)
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference; also available online at the bishops' Web site)
- a Bible (Be sure it is a Catholic edition. We recommend using either the Good News Translation, which is age-level appropriate, or the New American Bible, which is used for the readings of the *Lectio*.)

Strategies for Helping Young People to Pay Attention

This section is written by John Barone, director of The Monarch Learning Center in Houston, Texas, and author of A Place for All: Ministry for Youth with Special Needs (Saint Mary's Press, 2008).

A Million Miles Away

Think back to when you were in school. Did you ever find yourself daydreaming in the classroom? Most of us at one time or another have become lost in thought and disconnected from the action in the classroom. But did you ever *decide* to daydream? Ever say to yourself, “I’m bored with this lesson; I’m going to daydream instead”? Most of us “wake up” from daydreams not remembering how or when we lost touch with our environment.

Have you ever “put your foot in your mouth” by blurting out something you later regretted? Was it ever preceded by, “I think I’ll say something inappropriate now”?

Consider times when you were energetic and had difficulty sitting still. Remember squirming during a lecture, wanting desperately to move? Did you plan to feel this way?

Most of us do not choose to do these things. Yet when young people lose focus, act impulsively, or are hyperactive, we often think they are doing it on purpose.

Attention Differences

Symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) include distractibility, or difficulty maintaining focus. A participant who is distractible is unable to block out the distractions outside when seated beside a window.

Another symptom is impulsivity. You’ve seen participants who call out answers instead of waiting to be called on. This also includes impulsive actions, like grabbing a pen from another participant or running into the hall without permission.

With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), hyperactivity is an added symptom. Participants who are hyperactive have high energy levels and need to move. They squirm in their seats, kick their legs, tap their pencils, and sometimes just run around the room.

These symptoms can severely impair learning. And many young people with attention differences also have to cope with a lack of acceptance or support from catechists, parents, and peers. This occurs when symptoms are misinterpreted as willful, when hyperactivity is interpreted as “won’t sit still,” and when distractibility is mistakenly understood as “refuses to pay

attention.” Young people who are impulsive are often considered irresponsible or reckless.

This misinterpretation of these symptoms as a matter of choice is unfortunate but not surprising. If a young person in a wheelchair were described as “refuses to walk,” *that* would be surprising, but because the milder symptoms of ADD and ADHD are shared at times by most people, it is easy to label the behaviors as willful. Throughout the sessions we suggest ways you can help the participants who have difficulty maintaining attention. These suggestions are good for all learners, not just those with attention issues.

Around the World with Carlos

While observing a religious education session, I noticed that Carlos frequently ran to a globe in the back of the room and began spinning it. He grinned as he watched the globe whirl.

“Carlos, where should you be?” The catechist’s tone was respectful. Carlos complied but was soon back at the globe. The catechist sighed and raised her voice: “Carlos! What is your job right now?” He sheepishly returned to his seat.

When Carlos got up for the third time, I respectfully interrupted, and asked Carlos what the catechist wanted.

“For me to pay attention and not spin the globe,” replied Carlos.

“Do you want that?” He nodded yes vigorously. Carlos knew what his catechist wanted, and he seemed to want the same, but thus far was unsuccessful. I gave him a stress ball, with instructions to squeeze the ball instead of spinning the globe. The rest of the group was given the job of observing to see if he was successful at keeping up with them and paying attention to the catechist.

The catechist continued the lesson, which was on the Sermon on the Mount. Carlos’s squeezing was intense. He stayed in his chair but seemed to focus all his attention on the stress ball. He never looked up, seemingly unaware of anything but the ball.

After a few minutes, I asked the group, “Did Carlos stay with everyone?”

They all responded, “Yes.”

“Did he pay attention?”

“Nooooo!”

“Let’s check that out.” I asked Carlos if he was successful at staying with the group.

“Yep.” He smiled, never taking his eye off the ball.

“And were you successful at paying attention?”

“Yep.” He was beaming. “We learned about the Sermon on the Mount, how Jesus taught the Beatitudes, how we’re like salt and light, bringing flavor and God’s love to others, and . . .”

Although he hadn't *looked* focused, Carlos had stayed focused and was able to recount the content of the lesson. The others were asked again if Carlos was successful at paying attention. They had a very different answer this time.

This simple modification helped Carlos to maintain his focus, restored peace to the meeting space, and allowed participant and catechist to feel competent. More important, Carlos, his catechist, and the other young people experienced mutual joy because of the successful modification. The exclusive use of traditional methods to enforce compliance often results in embarrassment for a young person, disruption of the group, and a frustrating sense of failure for the catechist.

It would be an oversimplification to say that a stress ball is the cure for attention issues. For some it works wonders; for others it may have no effect, or it may make things worse. Try having a variety of items on hand for participants to try out. You can include squeeze balls, bean bags, putty, pieces of cloth, and other items that can be grasped.

Many other strategies in addition to tactile strategies can help you enhance the attention of the young adolescents you work with. These include strategies for arranging your meeting space, giving instructions, and helping young people who are distracted bring themselves back into focus.

Strategies for Arranging Your Meeting Space

Create Order

All learners benefit from an organized and clutter-free space. A messy, disorganized space can be a nightmare for young people with attention differences.

Be Open to Alternative Seating

The participants' ability to pay attention is impacted by their seating. Traditional wisdom holds that young people focus better when seated in the front of a meeting space. This is sometimes true, but some do better when seated in the back or on the side. Some maintain focus better when standing or sitting on the floor. Be flexible. Do not require everyone to be seated in the same way. Ultimately, what difference does it make if a participant stands? Let the young people choose the posture that works best for them.

Limit Visual Distractions

Ever sit next to a window in class? Was it hard to keep from looking outside? Positioning the participants to limit their field of vision can reduce distractibility. Use shades or partitions to block out distracting stimuli.

Allow Breaks

Adults take coffee breaks, get up to stretch, or chat by the water cooler. Taking a break helps us to reduce stress and maintain focus. Sometimes

breaks are scheduled, but often they are spontaneous responses to stiffness, fatigue, and distraction.

Young people experience these symptoms as well but often do not have the freedom to “disconnect” to refuel, refocus, and refresh themselves. Short, unscheduled breaks can be of benefit to most participants, and are especially important for those with attention issues.

Strategies for Giving Instructions

Use Multiple Modes

Throughout this guide you will read suggestions for expanding the ways you share instructions. You may be asked to write the instructions on the board in addition to speaking them. Sometimes you will be asked to model an activity. These suggestions may seem unnecessary or time consuming, but they will ultimately save you time. By using different styles, you are more likely to reach all the young people the first time, and you will not have to repeat instructions. Some young people focus best by listening, some by watching, and some by doing. Using a variety of communication styles will help you to reach the most learners.

Check for Understanding

Even with these additions, you still may miss some participants the first time. They may not communicate this to you, so it is important that you check for understanding. Use prompts such as, “Who can tell me what we’re going to do next?” Ask several participants until you are satisfied that they all “have it.”

Avoid asking, “Does everyone understand?” Some participants may think they understand when they do not, or they may be embarrassed to share that they don’t understand. Also avoid asking, “Any questions?” Some young people may not realize they “missed it.”

When the participants don’t know what to do, it is important that they are not made to feel embarrassed. When you see hesitation in a young person’s eyes, give him or her an opportunity to ask a peer for help. After the participant chooses another person and that person gives the correct answer, go back to the first young person and ask, “So what are we going to do?” This gives that participant the opportunity to be “correct” and reinforces the instructions.

Communicate One Step at a Time

Young people with attention issues can have difficulty retaining multistep instructions. Communicate steps one at a time, allowing the participants to complete each step before going on to the next, or provide a reference other than memory, such as written instructions on the board or on index cards.

Strategies for Helping Young People Who Are Distracted Bring Themselves Back into Focus

Despite all your efforts and the participants' efforts, some young people may still become distracted from time to time. It is important to gently invite them back into focus. Calling attention to a participant who has become disconnected from the lesson can be embarrassing. Instead use subtle techniques.

Physical Proximity

Sometimes simply walking close to a participant is enough to reestablish attention. This is great tool for refocusing young people who are lost in thought or engaged in private conversations. Try to integrate this into your natural movement throughout the meeting space. If the only time you move from the front of the room is when participants are off-task, the young people will quickly see it as a correction rather than a gentle "bringing back."

Special Delivery

By being aware of items that are helpful for individuals, you can respond to those who have lost focus by gently handing them one of the tactile items described earlier. Your delivering the item can bring the young people back into focus, and their handling the item can help them to maintain focus.

Secret Signals

Another tool to refocus a participant is using a private signal that is agreed upon in advance by the catechist and the participant. Together choose a special word or phrase that can easily be inserted into conversation, such as, "Think about this." Even when a participant is "a million miles away," an agreed-upon phrase can bring her or him back, similar to speaking her or his name, but without drawing unwanted attention to the participant. The signal can also be an action, such as a hand on the shoulder, a clap, or a snap, all of which can easily be integrated into your normal interaction with the group.

Techniques to Avoid

Any intervention that can draw unwanted attention or embarrass a participant should be avoided. This would include techniques such as the following:

- correcting a participant as if he or she deliberately lost focus: "Susie, pay attention!"
- inserting a participant's name loudly into an instruction: "Now, JOSEPH, look at the next paragraph."
- using ill-advised humor by saying things like, "Earth to Johnny!"
- separating friends who get off task together (This may solve the problem of distraction for the rest of the group, but it does nothing to help the participants involved. They need to "practice" staying focused while together, using all the tools at their disposal.)

Working in Groups

When working in groups, young people can lose focus and control of impulsivity. Consider young people in your group who may benefit from doing an activity in a smaller grouping, or even individually. For example, participating in a sharing session in which six participants take turns answering a question may be difficult for young people with attention problems, due to the long listening time. Try forming smaller groups of two or three. Working alone may work well for some young people also. Asking some participants to work alone may seem socially isolating, but repeated failure to focus in a group setting can be even more isolating.

Making a Difference as a Catechist

Imbedded within each of the sessions are more tips and techniques to help you help those who are distractible, hyperactive, and impulsive. Remember that the participants typically are not choosing these behaviors; they want to remain focused and connected to the group. When they aren't successful, it is not your job to force their compliance. You are a guide, a coach, and a mentor, suspending judgment, being curious, running experiments, and providing many opportunities for practice. This empowering approach will result in better attention and more learning!

REVELATION, THE SCRIPTURES, AND TRADITION

Session Overview

In this session the participants will artistically express how God reveals himself to us. After the opening prayer, the young people will learn that the Scriptures and Tradition are two ways in which God's Revelation is handed on to each generation. The participants will explore the Bible with a hands-on approach. Through skits they will examine how they can play a role in helping others come to know God's love. The optional session extension provides an opportunity for the young people to ask questions about parts of their faith that still remain a mystery to them. Also, the participants will do a role-play to help them see things from different perspectives.

Objectives

Enable the participants to do the following:

- understand how God reveals himself to us
- identify the Scriptures and Tradition as ways of encountering God's Revelation
- become familiar with the sections of the Bible
- identify ways to make God known to others

At a Glance

A. Quick-Start Activity	(5 minutes)
B. Welcome and Opening Prayer	(5 minutes)
C. How God Reveals Himself	(20 minutes)
D. Revealed in the Scriptures and Tradition	(15 minutes)
E. God Reveals Himself to and Through Us	(10 minutes)
F. Closing Prayer	(5 minutes)
Optional Session Extension: God of Mystery	(15 minutes)



Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- Bibles

Gather the following items, one for each small group of four:

- sheets of poster board with lines dividing each into four equal quarters
- sets of markers
- several sheets of lined paper

Preparation Tasks

- Write on the board the following instructions for the quick-start activity:

Form small groups of four. Each group member is to do the following:

- Think about how people come to know God. This could be through life experiences in which God provided help or guidance, or revealed himself in some way.
- Choose one quarter section of the sheet of poster board and illustrate one way people come to know God. Be sure to use pictures or symbols only; do not write any words.

You will have 5 minutes to complete the drawing.

- Have the poster board, markers, and lined paper available for the participants to pick up after they form their small groups.

Catechist Prayer

God our Father, throughout history you have called on many people to help make you known: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, Mary, John the Baptist, Saint Paul, and all of the saints. I ask for your guidance so that I may help make you known to others. Please bless these young people and open their hearts to you! Amen.

Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 1
- CCC, numbers 50–73 (Revelation); 74–100 (The Transmission of Divine Revelation); 101–141 (Sacred Scripture)
- Romans 8:38–39

Session Steps

A. Quick-Start Activity (5 minutes)

Greet the participants as they enter the meeting space, and invite them to begin the quick-start activity. Point out the following instructions on the board, but also share them verbally if any participants need help referencing the board:

Form small groups of four. Each group member is to do the following:

- Think about how people come to know God. This could be through life experiences in which God provided help or guidance, or revealed himself in some way.
- Choose one quarter section of the sheet of poster board and illustrate one way people come to know God. Be sure to use pictures or symbols only; do not write any words.

You will have 5 minutes to complete the drawing.

You may play quiet music as the young people draw.

B. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Welcome** everyone and make any announcements.
2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.”
3. **Pray** the following:
 - ▶ God, we thank you for bringing us here today. May this time we spend together bring us closer to one another and closer to you. We ask that you make yourself known to us. We cannot see you or hear you or touch you, but we know you are here. Please speak to our hearts. Make us aware of your presence. Amen.
4. **Invite** the participants to offer any special intentions for which they would like to pray. **Close** with the Lord’s Prayer and the Sign of the Cross.
5. Briefly **explain** that the topic for this session is God’s Revelation. **Ask** if anyone knows what the word *revelation* means. **Ask** if anyone knows a word that sounds similar (*reveal*). **Explain** that this is essentially what revelation is: God’s *revealing* himself, or making himself known, to us.

C. How God Reveals Himself (20 minutes)

1. **Introduce** this activity by making the following point:
 - ▶ Everyone has some notion of who God is. Someone or something has helped shape everyone's idea about who God is.
2. **Acknowledge** that the participants have been hearing about God for many years. **Ask** for volunteers to share some of the things they have learned about God.
3. **Invite** the participants to gather into their small groups from the quick-start activity and sit in a circle around their poster.
4. **Review** the instructions for the quick-start activity. **Explain** that each small group is to now choose a recorder and a reporter who will, respectively, record comments and later report them to the large group.
5. **Ask** the participants to take turns within their small groups and each look at the drawing made by the person to their right. The person analyzing the drawing will attempt to explain how the picture shows people coming to know God. The artist will confirm or deny the guess and explain the picture.
6. When all the group members are done analyzing another member's drawing, **ask** all the groups' recorders to turn their notes over to the reporters. **Invite** each small group to stand up as the reporter explains how the drawings show the different ways people come to know God.
7. **Affirm** the participants' experiences and briefly **share** your own experiences, especially if you have any that are similar to those mentioned in the presentations.
8. **Explain** that the young people are now going to explore how God reveals himself to the entire Church.

D. Revealed in the Scriptures and Tradition (15 minutes)

1. **Describe** the Catholic perspective on Revelation by **sharing** the following points:
 - ▶ God wants us to not only learn about him but to know him and have a relationship with him. God communicates with us in special ways. The term we use for this is *Revelation*.
 - ▶ *Revelation* refers to everything God has made known about himself and his plan for humanity. It is God's self-communication.
 - ▶ God reveals himself to the whole world in two main ways: through the Scriptures and through Tradition.

- ▶ The Scriptures (or the Bible) are made up of seventy-three sacred books and letters. There are forty-six books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. We will talk more about the Scriptures later.

2. **Ask** the participants to take out their *Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* and turn to page 21. When all are ready, **read** aloud the section on Tradition. A
3. **Reiterate** that the preaching of the Apostles is part of Tradition. The New Testament was written later and was added to the Old Testament, which already existed when Jesus was born.
4. **Make** the following points in your own words:
 - ▶ Jesus died, was raised from the dead, and ascended into Heaven around the year AD 30. The first Gospel about Jesus' life was written around the year AD 65.

Chapter 1: Revelation, Scriptures, and Tradition

had an incomplete understanding of the world. This sometimes makes the Scriptures hard to understand. Scholars study the Bible closely to find out exactly what its human authors intended to say. The Pope, our bishops, and our priests help us in understanding the Bible. Above all, we must ask the Spirit to guide us in understanding God's message of salvation.

LIVE IT!

Despite what magazines in the grocery store checkout lines claim, prophets are not psychics who predict the future. Prophets are people who speak God's Word. In the Bible, the prophets reveal God's will to the people. Jesus Christ is the Word who became flesh, the ultimate prophet who was sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit. In Baptism, we are anointed to share in Christ's prophetic ministry. We are all called to be prophets in some way. We are all called to speak God's Word.

That doesn't mean we have to preach on street corners, but it does mean our words and actions should reveal the faith we claim as our own. If someone were to follow you around for a day, would they be able to see God in the way you interact with your classmates?

If it were illegal to be a Catholic, how many of us would be found guilty?

A Tradition


Unlike some other Christians, however, Catholics do not rely only on the Scriptures to discover God's Revelation. We also look to Tradition (with a capital T), which is sometimes called Sacred Tradition. **Tradition** is based on a word meaning "to hand on." So, Tradition means both the central content of the Catholic faith and the way in which that content has been



This handbook is based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a summary of the central teachings of our Tradition. Read the handbook along with your Bible to discover who God is.

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- ▶ How do you think the stories of Jesus survived during those thirty-five years? [*The stories were passed on orally.*]
- ▶ We believe God continued to guide the Church and how its members worshiped, prayed, and lived. This is called Tradition. This includes the teachings that are not explicitly included in the Bible.
- ▶ Tradition includes our belief in the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Seven Sacraments, and many other beliefs revealed through the teachings of the Pope and bishops under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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5. **Distribute** a Bible to each participant. **Direct** everyone to place their Bibles in their laps. As you **review** the sections of the Bible, **instruct** the young people to keep their fingers in the sections. **Demonstrate** how they should do this. They should be able to make some interesting observations at the end of this activity. Have them hold the Old Testament in the fingers of their left hand and the New Testament in the fingers of their right hand. **Ask** for volunteers to share their observations. **Point out** that the Old Testament is more than twice the size of the New Testament.
 6. **Explain** that the word *Gospel* means “good news” and that a Gospel is a special book that tells us about the life, teachings, Passion (suffering), death, and Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. **Point out** that there are four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and have the young people grasp all four with their hands. **Invite** the participants to share any observations they may have.
 7. Now **ask** the young people to hold the Gospel of Mark. **Explain** that this is the shortest Gospel and that they could easily read it in one afternoon. **Encourage** them to do so!
 8. **Ask** the participants to hold the Acts of the Apostles through the end of the Bible. **Explain** that the rest of the Bible covers the struggles, works, and teachings of the early Christian Church. **Ask** the young people if they have any questions.

E. God Reveals Himself to and Through Us (10 minutes)

1. **Explain** the following points in your own words:
 - ▶ If God is still actively guiding us toward salvation today, what does that mean for us? What is our job in all of this? Do we just sit back and watch God do his work? No.
 - ▶ Everyone can do God’s work. God’s job for us is to love. When we love one another, we help make God known in the world.
 - ▶ As Christians, that is our job: to open ourselves up to God so that he can reveal himself to us and others. We are instruments God can use to make himself known. Let’s look at the posters we drew during the quick-start activity. Our drawings show ways we have learned about God and his love for us.
 - ▶ If you have ever borrowed money from someone, you probably heard her or him ask, “When are you going to pay it back?” We are going to look at how we can pay it *forward*. God has been revealed to us in many ways. I want you to think about how you can do God’s work; without using any words, we are going to act out one way we could do God’s work.

2. **Divide** the large group into small groups of three or four. **Invite** the small groups to identify one way young people could do God's work. You might want to **review** the posters they created at the beginning of the session to spark some ideas.
3. **Ask** the participants to each briefly act out, without using any words, one way young people could do God's work. It doesn't have to be long—nothing more than 10 seconds. You might **model** the first one yourself. For example, you could pretend you are helping someone with his or her homework, or teaching someone how to hit a volleyball or baseball. As each participant acts out her or his scenario for the small group, have the other members of the small group guess what she or he is doing. **Make** a game of charades out of it!
4. **Conclude** by emphasizing again that we can all do God's work. God's job for us is to love. When we love one another by *[insert what you saw earlier in the participants' skits]*, we become one of the ways God reveals himself to us.

Chapter 1: Revelation, Scriptures, and Tradition

There are so many different ideas. You begin to wonder about the things you have been taught. Is God really out there? How can you know?

Revelation

One place where you can begin to look for answers to these questions is under your own two feet. The earth itself is a sign of God's existence. In fact, you can find the evidence of God's handiwork everywhere: the trees that give you shade, the sun that warms your back, the dogs that bark in the distance, and of course, all the people around you. Though we do not fully understand God and his ways, we can use our minds to see that God truly exists because of the wonder of creation itself.

In fact, throughout all history, God has made himself known to human beings in a number of ways. He continues to do so today through the signs of creation around us, through the voice of the Church, and through the voices of our consciences speaking from within us. You may already have had an experience where God became known to you. Maybe after going to confession, you have felt the relief of having God remove the burden of your

B

PRAY IT!


Lord God,
I ask,
When I am lost, make yourself known to me.
When I celebrate,
make yourself known to me. When I am
lonely, make yourself known to me. When
I am confused, make yourself known to me.
When I am sick, make yourself known to me.
When I am joyful, make yourself known to me.
When I doubt you, make yourself known to me.
When I am in need, make yourself known to me.
When I pray, make yourself known to me.

Amen

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F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Gather** the participants into a circle. **Ask** the young people to take out their handbooks and turn to the "Pray It!" sidebar on page 17. When all are ready, invite a volunteer to read the prayer aloud. **B**
2. Then **invite** a volunteer to read Romans 8:38–39 aloud.

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3. **Remind** the participants that despite all the ways God is made known to us, he is still a great mystery. Yet there is nothing that can separate us from God's love. Our job is to turn toward him, accept his love, and draw God closer into our lives. You may want to **share** a personal experience of when you felt God close to you, as well as another when God felt distant.
 4. **Ask** the participants to go around the circle and take turns reading a line from the prayer in their handbooks. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

Optional Session Extension

God of Mystery (15 minutes)

This session extension works best after step E, the "God Reveals Himself to and Through Us" activity.

Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- markers
- sheets of newsprint

1. **Remind** the participants that even though God reveals himself to us in many ways, he still remains a great mystery. We often have questions about God and how he reveals himself to us.
2. **Distribute** a marker and a sheet of newsprint to each participant, and then have everyone write questions about things they wish they knew about God. You might want to **offer** a few examples: Did Jesus have any brothers or sisters? How did Jesus pray? What do *fully human* and *fully divine* mean? **Allow** a few minutes for the participants to write their questions.
3. When everyone is done writing, **gather** all the sheets of newsprint and then spread them out in a circle on the floor. **Invite** the young people to walk around the circle and read one another's questions. **Ask** them to sit down by their own list of questions when they are done.