

Teaching Guide for
Gathering to Celebrate

Yvette Nelson

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Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-consumer waste.
Printed with soy-based ink.

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD
Censor Librorum
5 May 1998

Imprimatur: Rev. Michael J. Hoepfner, JCL
Administrator, Diocese of Winona
5 May 1998

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The publishing team included Cheryl Drivdahl, copy editor; Barbara Bartelson, production editor; Hollace Storkel, typesetter; Proof Positive/Farrowlyne Associates, Inc., cover designer; Maurine R. Twait, art director; pre-press, printing, and binding by the graphics division of Saint Mary's Press.

Special thanks to the following teachers for their gracious and generous assistance during the development of this course: Mary Lou Evanoff of Holy Family Middle School in White Bear Lake, Minnesota; Mary Elizabeth Jambor of Our Lady of the Lake Church in White Bear Lake, Minnesota; and Karen Needham of Saint Mark's School in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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The extract about the affiliative style of faith on page 9 is from *Will Our Children Have Faith?* by John Westerhoff (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), page 94.

The words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel on page 20, the Vietnamese folktale on page 40, and the words of Mishkat al-Masabaih on page 46 are from *Peacemaking: Day by Day*, by Pax Christi USA (Erie, PA: Pax Christi USA, n.d.), pages 74, 97, and 25, respectively.

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Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Year: 2011 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

ISBN 0-88489-468-1



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Introduction



THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

The Catholic church is a celebrating church. Through symbolic actions the faith community celebrates the presence of Christ in its midst. With the successful completion of *Gathering to Celebrate*, the young people in your group should possess a growing confidence in their ability to celebrate the sacraments with understanding and should identify the connection between the sacraments and their daily life.

This course is primarily developed for six 1-hour sessions that can be conducted once a week for six weeks or once every two weeks for twelve weeks. If your group is scheduled to be together for more than an hour, the sessions can be extended with the optional approaches suggested at the end of each session plan. Also consult these approaches as alternative strategies if your teaching style or the students' learning style calls for changes. *Gathering to Celebrate* will not readily lend itself to a weekend or daylong session.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or

fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs. Also, leading a larger group increases the risk that some participants will feel lost or ignored.

This course can be successfully taught with seventh and eighth graders. Although sixth graders can also profit from this study of the sacraments, they are just beginning to understand the nature of symbols and symbolic actions or gestures. For this reason they may experience some difficulty recognizing the relationship between the symbolic actions of the rites and the reality that these actions disclose.

Discovering Program courses that help students to be at ease with one another—such as *Understanding Myself* and *Becoming Friends*—would help prepare them for the content and strategies of this course. Discovering courses that give the students background on specifically religious topics, such as *Being Catholic*, *Meeting Jesus*, *Exploring the Bible*, and *Praying*, would also help prepare them for *Gathering to Celebrate*.

Note that only one other Discovering course, *Celebrating the Eucharist*, deals explicitly with the sacraments. If you plan to use both of these courses, consider offering *Gathering to Celebrate* as a survey course in seventh grade and *Celebrating the Eucharist* in eighth grade. See the coordinator's manual for a further discussion of curriculum options.

BACKGROUND

The Young Adolescent and This Course

This course assumes that the young people are involved in the local church, if only erratically—and it is hoped that their involvement is long-standing and positive. Typically, young people experience the life of the church most frequently by attending the sacrament of the Eucharist—and some truly celebrate that sacrament, though many are less than enthusiastic about participating. For most young adolescents, baptism was before memory, and confirmation either lies ahead—in eighth grade or in high school—or was celebrated with their first Communion. The sacrament of reconciliation, which is readily available to them, may be welcomed, dreaded, or ignored altogether, depending on their experience. With few exceptions the remaining three sacraments—anointing, marriage, and holy orders—lie well beyond the immediate concern of most junior high and middle school students.

In light of these rather daunting realities, the question arises, What can *Gathering to Celebrate* offer young adolescents? The course can provide a context that helps the students by doing the following things.

Deepening Their Understanding of Symbolic Action

Young adolescents are constantly, though not always consciously, engaged in symbolic actions. They can “read” signs of belonging that are as subtle as the roll of the eyes that symbolizes rejection and as telling as the

hairstyle that signals interest in belonging to a particular peer group. The sessions in this course introduce the young people to the church's symbolic actions (sacramental rites) that aim to put them in touch with one another and with Christ.

Encouraging an Appreciation of Themselves as Active Participants in Sacramental Celebrations

The sacraments are frequently viewed as performances by the priest before a passive audience, or as “things” given to those who simply “receive” them. This course is designed to begin to modify these notions by helping young people understand that each sacrament is celebrated by the community as a whole.

A feature that is unique to this course can be found at the end of each session plan. It is a section called Young People and the Parish. This section suggests activities that can involve young people in the parish's sacramental celebrations, and offers ways that the parish can include the contributions of young people.

In his book *Will Our Children Have Faith?* John Westerhoff describes the level of belonging appropriate to junior high people. He identifies young adolescents' mode of belonging as the affiliative style of faith:

During this period persons seek to act with others in an accepting community with a clear sense of identity. All of us need to feel that we *belong* to a self-conscious community and that through our active participation [we] can make a contribution to its life. . . . Of crucial importance is the sense that we are wanted, needed, accepted, and important to the community. (P. 94)

The feature Young People and the Parish is an attempt to respond to this need for participation and belonging.

Encouraging an Appreciation of Themselves as Sharers in the Church's Ministries

Sacraments gather the church. They also provide the church with a mission: The sacraments of initiation command us to be a welcoming people. The sacraments of healing call us to be healers. The sacraments that celebrate the vocations of marriage and holy orders invite members to make and abide by commitments.

Sacraments are not exclusive and closed rites that float above or beyond human life. They are gifts of God that transform our life. They are also ministries in which young adolescents can participate. Sacraments call us powerfully to become welcoming, healing, and committed people in our daily life.

Each session of this course invites the students to assess their ministry to be welcomers, healers, and committed and faithful people. The session activities call the young people into the circle of those who celebrate and pray what they believe and act from the depths of that prayer and belief.

The Theology of This Course

All of Christian life can be summarized as a dialog—God’s call in Christ, and our response in Christ. We are summoned not because we are wonderful, but because God is. Christianity is not simply a good philosophy or a neat idea; it is a way of life, a response to God, who has first called us. Our response to God’s saving work is *liturgy*, “the work of the people.” We do not create liturgical or sacramental celebrations so much as they create us. When we gather together to remember, to celebrate, and to hear the call to serve, we become a people who know who and whose we are. We are an assembly that responds to God’s salvation, effected through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The sacraments are our privileged means of encountering God through Christ in the Spirit. The pattern of divine initiative and human response, which is realized most clearly in the crucified and Risen Christ, is the pattern of the church’s life, and indeed is the pattern of our life as baptized Catholic Christians.

People need reminders of this reality that all of life can be holy. The sacraments not only jog and enliven memory, they also bring about what they celebrate. Further, they cast a clear, sharp light on the rest of our life. For example, we spontaneously celebrate or find ways to observe the events that we value in our private and shared lives. We mark times and days and set aside daily routines and schedules; we take time out to remember. We do this on happy occasions such as wedding anniversaries, and we do this on somber occasions such as those that mark a death.

The church takes this very human behavior further. It gathers to remember and celebrate the presence of the Risen Lord in the important events of birth and nurturance, growth and healing, and commitment and ministry. Its solemn and high celebrations in these events constitute liturgy, the public and holy work of the church. Without liturgy there would be no church.

The heart of the church’s liturgical celebration is the Eucharist, and the other six sacraments are best celebrated in that context: baptism and confirmation lead to Communion (the breaking of the bread), and reconciliation draws the church’s members back to Communion. The sacrament of anointing brings the care of the church to those who cannot be present at the church’s celebration of the Eucharist. Marriage and holy orders celebrate the beginning of lifelong ministry to the world and to and within the church.

In exploring the seven sacraments in this course, the sessions employ the following steps: First, they present the sacraments as grounded in the actions and attitude of Jesus and in the practice of the apostolic church. Though every sacrament cannot be directly matched to a specific word or action of Jesus, all the sacraments are congruent with the spirit of Jesus and the consistent practice of the church from the beginning. For example, baptism and the Eucharist come to us through direct commands given by Jesus, but the church’s understanding of marriage as a sacrament evolved from an understanding of Jesus’ words about the indissolubility of a union made by

God. Jesus' actions and words honored fidelity and the integrity of relationships. Marriage is surely one of these vital commitments.

Second, the sessions show how today's church celebrates the unique presence of Jesus. For example, the actions of Jesus as a healer of soul and body are celebrated in the Rites of Reconciliation and Anointing. The sacrament of reconciliation can be a private confession (referred to as form 1); or a communal celebration with a private confession of sins (form 2); or, less frequently, a communal celebration with a general confession of sins (form 3). Session 3 studies forms 1 and 2.

Third, the sessions examine the broader ministry that each sacrament celebrates. For example, the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist) invite us to be welcoming people. The sacraments of reconciliation and anointing call us, in union with Christ, to become reconciling and healing persons in our everyday life. The sacraments of commitment (marriage and holy orders) challenge us to recognize and honor our commitments.

This course divides the study of the seven sacraments into six sessions by devoting session 1 to the initiation sacraments of baptism and confirmation. Because these two sacraments are theologically closely related, they can be successfully studied as two movements of a single celebration of welcome. Indeed, baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist were initially celebrated as parts of the early church's single initiation rite. However, by the fourth century, the Rites of Baptism and Confirmation were separated. Infant baptism became the rule of the day, followed by a delayed celebration of confirmation. The age at which Catholics are confirmed has fluctuated over the intervening centuries and continues to fluctuate to this day. Generally, though, young people can be expected to receive the sacrament of confirmation before they graduate from high school, and a thorough study of this sacrament is most appropriate at the time of their preparation for the sacrament, rather than in this course.

Definitions of Terms

Although the Second Vatican Council took place more than thirty years ago (1962–65), the results of that council are still being integrated into the church's life. The renewal stemming from the council has caused a change in language, especially regarding the church's sacramental life. As a result of the deliberations and pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council and the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist, though they still each carry their own name, are considered a unified whole and are frequently called the sacraments of initiation. In this course the simpler synonym *welcome* is often used, as well as the term *initiation*.

Eucharist, *eucharistic celebration*, and *Mass* all refer to the same celebration. The word *Mass* has a long history in the church. It comes from the Latin word *missa*, from the parting words of the priest: "*Ite, missa est*" (in Latin), or "Go, you are dismissed." The term *Eucharist*, based on a word meaning "thanksgiving," is also deeply rooted in the church. In this course the terms *Eucharist* and *eucharistic celebration* are used to mean the whole

Mass. *Liturgy of the Eucharist* refers to the part of the Mass that includes the consecration and sharing of the bread and wine.

Reconciliation is used rather than the terms *penance* and *confession*, which today refer to specific parts of the rite.

The term *presider* is often used in this course when referring to the ministry of the priest. By virtue of his ordination, he (or a deacon or a bishop) assumes the role of presider over the liturgy. The older term *celebrant* more accurately applies to all participants in liturgy, because all who are present celebrate. However, this term is often used solely to describe the priest, deacon, or bishop who presides over the celebration.

The term *anointing* replaces the older and somewhat misleading term *extreme unction*, which once referred to anointing when death is imminent. The new term more clearly identifies the sacrament's meaning and celebration.

This Course and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

All Discovering courses rely on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a primary resource and a guide to theological accuracy. The *Catechism* can also serve as a valuable source of both information and inspiration for the teacher. We encourage you to review and reflect on part 2 of the *Catechism* as you prepare to teach this particular course. Part 2, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery,” begins by defining and describing the primacy of the liturgy in the life of the church. A thorough discussion of each of the seven sacraments makes up the balance of part 2. The sessions of this course relate to the *Catechism* as follows:

- Sessions 1 and 2 discuss the sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist (nos. 1212–1419).
- Sessions 3 and 4, about the sacraments of reconciliation and of the anointing of the sick, are based on the concept of the sacraments of healing as set forth in numbers 1420 to 1532.
- Sessions 5 and 6 discuss the sacraments of holy orders and marriage as celebrating service to others that builds up the people of God (nos. 1533–1666). The course closes with an exploration of the students' baptismal commitment to serve others in the church and in the world (nos. 1084–1088, 1113–1134).

Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in

the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives the students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet’s attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

Student Booklet Sidebars

The student booklet includes a number of quotes, scriptural passages, prayers, and bits of interesting information that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students’ interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Gathering to Celebrate* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

Prayer Experiences

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during each session. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a

candle and a plant or other object from nature are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Prayer opportunities usually end each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

The Bible

The Bible is another key tool in the Discovering curriculum. The students in this course frequently use Bibles and must be able to look up scriptural citations.

If possible, provide a Bible for each of your students. Ideally, everyone would get the same translation. If this is not possible, try to divide your group into smaller groups of people with the same translation. Comparing the various translations can add a further dimension to your discussions throughout the course, though it may slightly complicate some activities and discussions.

The following translations are among the best available for Catholic young people:

- The New American Bible (1991). This version is a modern translation of the Scriptures that is faithful to ancient sources. It is approved for use during the liturgy of the word and therefore will be somewhat familiar to the students.
- The New Jerusalem Bible (1990). This translation uses contemporary language, comes closest to using inclusive language, and provides theological insights through extensive notations that accompany the text. It is also an approved translation for use in the liturgy of the word.
- The New Revised Standard Version (1989). This translation uses gender-inclusive language when such use is consistent with rigorous biblical scholarship.
- The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version (1993). This translation attempts to capture and convey the meaning set forth in the original texts, in language that is accessible to a broad readership. It is truer to the original meanings than paraphrased versions, and it is presented in language that young people can more readily understand. Most students respond enthusiastically to this translation. It can be obtained from the Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson.

Some of the scriptural excerpts in this course are cited as adapted. Such passages generally have been adapted to make the language more accessible and to avoid exclusive language.

The Learning Environment

In offering this study of the sacraments, try to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for the group by making the room in which you meet less formal than the typical classroom with its rows of desks. For example, you might want to arrange desks or chairs in circles rather than in

rows. At the same time, keep the environment conducive to learning. Young people blossom in an atmosphere that is accepting and open, but they also want clear structures and limits within which to learn. Unclear limits can contribute to an atmosphere of confusion, lack of respect, and chaotic behavior. Also keep in mind that the site and your budget will influence how much you can do with your environment.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Gathering to Celebrate*

Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students assume greater individual responsibility to celebrate the sacraments consciously and intentionally
- that they recognize the relation between the spirit and actions of Jesus and the rites of the church
- that they recognize the relation between the celebration of the sacraments and the ministry to which the sacraments call them

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Gathering to Celebrate* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

Session 1: "We Are Welcomed"

The students will do the following:

- define the sacraments
- name the seven sacraments
- recognize that baptism and confirmation initiate them into the life of Christ

Session 2: "We Are Welcomed to the Table"

The students will do the following:

- realize that the life of the church is centered in the celebration of the Eucharist
- identify the basic structure of the eucharistic celebration
- recognize that the Eucharist calls them to be people of service

Session 3: "We Are Reconciled"

The students will do the following:

- identify themselves as participants in the reconciling ministry of Jesus
- understand that the sacrament of reconciliation celebrates God's forgiveness
- participate in a prayer service of reconciliation

Session 4: "We Are Healed"

The students will do the following:

- identify the ways in which the healing work of Jesus continues in the church
- recognize that the sacrament of the anointing of the sick celebrates God's healing and strength
- choose ways they can be ministers of healing

Session 5: "We Make and Keep Commitments"

The students will do the following:

- understand the Rite of Marriage as the beginning of a lifelong commitment between husband and wife
- recognize Jesus' life as a model of a life of commitment
- assume responsibility for honoring their commitments to others

Session 6: "We Minister to One Another"

The students will do the following:

- recognize that the sacrament of holy orders continues the servant leadership of Jesus
- recognize that through their baptism they are participants in the servant leadership of the church

RESOURCES

The following books can be helpful in preparing to teach this course:

- Bausch, William J. *A New Look at the Sacraments*. Rev. ed. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983.
- Guzie, Tad. *The Book of Sacramental Basics*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.
- Hellwig, Monika. *The Meaning of the Sacraments*. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1981.
- Kavanagh, Aidan. *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style*. New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1982.
- Martos, Joseph. *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. Expanded ed. Tarrytown, NY: Triumph Books, 1991.



SESSION
1

We Are Welcomed



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

Objectives

The students will do the following:

- define the sacraments
- name the seven sacraments
- recognize that baptism and confirmation initiate them into the life of Christ

Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 4 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. an introduction (10 minutes)
- B. the student booklet activity “A People Gathered” (5 minutes)
- C. a free-association exercise (15 minutes)
- D. the student booklet activity “God’s Beloved Sons and Daughters” (15 minutes)
- E. a closing prayer service and the student booklet activity “A Welcoming People” (15 minutes)

BACKGROUND

This session introduces the sacraments as celebrations of an assembly—the church. The students learn that *in* and *through* the church’s celebration of the sacraments, God’s grace is signified and communicated. The church has always understood human beings as related, interdependent, and social. The liturgy reminds us that from age to age, Jesus has gathered a people unto himself. The church is that people, whose members are gathered to remember and renew their participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ.

After the students introduce themselves, they recall that they are members of a gathered people. They also learn that the greatest work of the church is found in its celebration of the sacraments. A free-association exercise that follows the introduction provides a nonthreatening experience that allows you and the students to assess their familiarity with the sacraments.

The students then go on to study the first two sacraments of initiation, or welcome—baptism and confirmation. (The Eucharist, the third sacrament of initiation, is studied in session 2.) The students explore Jesus’ identity as the one chosen and blessed by the Father. They discover that the Father’s words to Jesus at the river Jordan—“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11)—are meant for us, too. Jesus’ intimate relationship with the Father is not for him alone. Through our baptism we also become sons and daughters of God. (Note: Jesus’ acceptance of baptism by John reflected his willingness to fully identify with humanity. His identification with God was made clear by the theophany, or unique experience of God’s revelation to him, that followed his baptism of repentance.)

The session thus moves from the reality of Jesus as God’s beloved Son to a consideration of the students themselves as God’s beloved sons and daughters. The young people study the actions of the early church and learn how it understood and carried out Jesus’ commission to the Apostles to baptize all nations—offering everyone the status of beloved sons and daughters of the Father. They are led to understand that from the beginning of its life, the church has baptized its members and has conferred on them the Holy Spirit. They learn that these two actions, which were once intimately linked, eventually became the separate sacraments of baptism and confirmation, each with its own distinctive rite.

The closing prayer for this session takes the form of a ritual that incorporates signs of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. This prayer recalls the grace of these two sacraments. It also renews the students’ challenge to live as baptized members of the Body of Christ.

PREPARATION

Materials Needed

- blank name tags, one for each student
- markers
- student booklets, one for each student
- pens or pencils
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- newsprint

- masking tape
- a Bible, a pillow or a Bible stand, a table and a cloth, a cross or a statue, a live plant or other object from nature, and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)
- a tape or CD player, and music appropriate for reflection (optional)
- a glass bowl of water
- taper candles and holders, one for each student
- a glass bowl of oil, preferably lightly scented

Other Necessary Preparations

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

- For step C.* Post three or four sheets of newsprint side-by-side in the front of the room at a level that is easy for you to write on and for the students to see.
- For step E.* Set up the prayer area as described in step E.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

Teacher Prayer

Let these words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel sink quietly into your mind and heart: “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy” (as quoted in Pax Christi USA, *Peacemaking*, p. 74).

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your life. Name at least five blessings for which you are grateful.

Move on in your prayer to reflect on the students, who just are, and are a blessing. Say each of their names out loud. Ask God to help you draw out from them the unique blessings they possess.

PROCEDURE

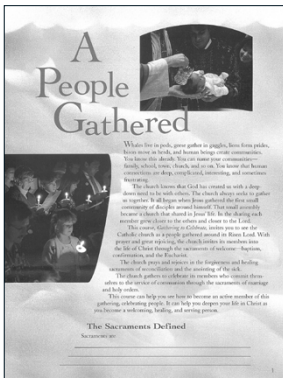
A. Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Have everything ready and at hand so that you are free to welcome the students individually. As they arrive greet them and give them blank name tags and markers. Ask them to write on their tag the name by which they want to be known, and to put on their tag when they are done.

2. When everyone is ready, ask the students to introduce themselves by saying their name and telling one bit of good news they want to share. Explain that the news does not have to be spectacular; rather it can be a small fact about themselves or others that they are glad about. Begin by saying

your own name and adding “some good news of your own, such as, “I finally visited the Grand Canyon this summer.”

Ask a volunteer to be next. Continue in this manner until all the students have introduced themselves.



Booklet page 1

B. Booklet Activity: “A People Gathered” (5 minutes)

1. Distribute the student booklets, pens or pencils, and blank self-adhesive labels. Tell the students to write their name on the label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Give them a few moments to leaf through their booklet. Explain that they will use it as part of each session and that you will collect everyone’s booklets for safekeeping after each meeting. Add that the students may take their booklet home at the close of the course.

2. Direct the students’ attention to “A People Gathered” on page 1 of their booklet. Read this course introduction aloud, stopping before the section “The Sacraments Defined.” Help the students recognize that this course can help them to see that the church is a gathering of people and that the sacraments are celebrations of the people.

The students may be unfamiliar with relating the term *celebrating* to the sacraments. At this point they may equate celebrating with entertaining or partying, and they may think of sacramental celebration as merely going to church. Help them begin to understand that as used in this course, the term *celebrating* connotes a conscious, engaged participation in an event that unites us with God.

3. Point out that in this course the students have an opportunity to explore each of the sacraments in more detail and to consider their participation in all of them. Also tell the students that later in this session, they will be asked to complete the sentence at the bottom of page 1 in their booklet.

C. Free-Association Exercise (15 minutes)

1. Invite the students to consider their experience of the sacraments. Write the word, “Sacraments,” centered at the top of your posted sheets of newsprint, and ask the students to call out the names of the sacraments from “A People Gathered” on page 1 of their booklet. Write the names of the sacraments they identify horizontally across the top of the newsprint sheets, under the heading “Sacraments.” Be sure to leave plenty of space under each name.

2. Invite the students to suggest words or phrases that come to mind when they think of each sacrament. Explain that this process of free association is somewhat like brainstorming. Offer the following guidelines in your own words:

- ▶ You are to call out any term or phrase you associate with the word *sacraments*.
- ▶ The object of this activity is to identify your views about the sacraments.
- ▶ The associations you make will not be judged correct or incorrect; they will simply be records of your experiences with and knowledge about the sacraments.
- ▶ The single, ironclad rule is that no one can make any positive or negative judgments during the free-association exercise.

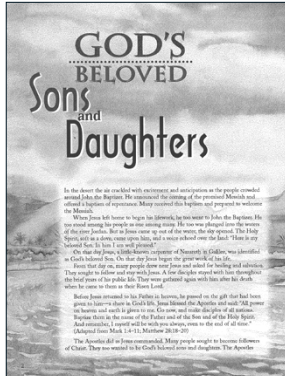
After it is clear that everyone understands this procedure, begin. Record the students' free associations under the appropriate headings on the newsprint sheets. The following list defines the sacraments and suggests typical views of young people. This list is for your information only; it is not necessary to guide the students' responses to match the ones included here.

- *Baptism* celebrates our initiation into new life in Christ. The students' views of this sacrament might include membership in the Catholic community, freedom from sin, and receiving a name.
- *Confirmation* celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit. The students' views might also focus on the sacrament as a personal decision to participate in the life of the Catholic community and on a recognition of their maturity as a responsible Christian witness.
- *The Eucharist* celebrates the unity of believers with the Risen Jesus and with one another. The students might suggest a true but limited understanding of the Eucharist as taking personal spiritual nourishment and receiving the body and blood of Christ. The young people might also use the term *holy Communion* to describe this sacrament.
- *Reconciliation* celebrates God's mercy and forgiveness. The students' views might focus on the *asking* or *granting* of forgiveness, rather than on the *celebration* of the forgiveness God always extends.
- *The anointing of the sick* celebrates God's healing and strength.
- *Marriage* celebrates a lifelong commitment of love and service between spouses. The students may prefer the more familiar term *marriage* rather than *matrimony*. Also, their focus on this sacrament will likely reflect their experience of the wedding *day* rather than the vocation of a wedded *life*. Again, for young people this is an understandable and age-appropriate, though limited, understanding of the sacrament.
- *Holy orders* celebrates Jesus' call to lead and serve. Because this sacrament speaks to a way of life rather than the day of ordination, the students may focus on what the parish priest does daily for and in the local parish.

3. After the students have offered their ideas, thank them for their contributions. Direct them back to the section "The Sacraments Defined" on page 1 of their booklet. Invite them to suggest a definition of the sacraments. Incorporate as many of their intuitions and recommendations as possible in a final definition. Ensure that their final definition closely follows this one:

- Sacraments are celebrations through which the church's faith is manifest [or expressed] and the living reality of God's life [or grace] is communicated.

Write their final definition on a clean sheet of newsprint, and ask the students to copy it in their booklet on page 1.



Booklet page 2

D. Booklet Activity: “God’s Beloved Sons and Daughters” (15 minutes)

1. To focus the students’ attention on baptism and confirmation—two of the three sacraments of welcome—make the following observations using your own words:

- ▶ Everyone has had experiences of being welcomed.
- ▶ People depend on and respond to signs that express welcome and acceptance.
- ▶ Three sacraments welcome members into the church—baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist.
- ▶ In this session we consider the sacraments of baptism and confirmation; in session 2 we explore the Eucharist.
- ▶ All the sacraments are rooted in the Gospels and in the Tradition of the church.

2. Read aloud the opening section of “God’s Beloved Sons and Daughters” on pages 2 to 3 of the student booklet, up to the subhead “The Sacraments Today.” Help the students connect the signs of welcome found in the scriptural reading—baptism with water and the laying on of hands. Observe that when Jesus went to the river Jordan, he might have appeared simply as another person from a small town in Palestine. Then ask questions like these:

- ▶ How do you know that Jesus wanted everyone to share in the relationship he had with God? [He commissioned his followers to baptize people so that they, like Jesus, would be the beloved sons and daughters of God.]
- ▶ How did the Apostles carry out Jesus’ command? [They baptized the people.]
- ▶ What action of the first followers of Jesus was a sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit? [the laying on of hands]

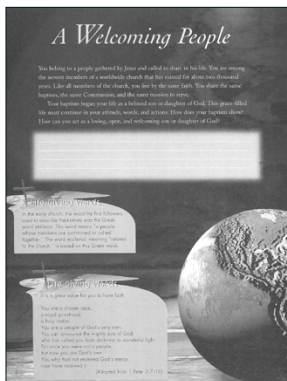
Note that the laying on of hands eventually evolved into the separate sacrament of confirmation. Also mention that other symbols are part of baptism today. Read the section “The Sacraments Today” from the student booklet. Then ask the students questions such as the following:

- ▶ What does being clothed in a white garment symbolize? [entering into a new life]
- ▶ Why is a candle part of the baptismal rite? [It reminds us of our sharing in Christ as our Light.]

Point out that today in both baptism and confirmation, the candidate is anointed with oil. Note that anointing with oil is an ancient sign of passing on a role or a task. Challenge the students to propose what role or task is passed on to the baptized or confirmed Christian.

3. Recall the definition of the sacraments that the students wrote on page 1 of their booklet. Then summarize the key understandings of this session by making the following points in your own words:

- ▶ Sacraments not only signify aspects of our faith and of God’s grace at work among us, but also make present what they signify.
- ▶ The Rite of Baptism signifies and brings about death to sin and new life in Christ.
- ▶ Baptism initiates, or welcomes, us into the church, the Body of Christ.
- ▶ The laying on of hands and anointing with oil signify and make present the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us to live our faith.



Booklet page 4

E. Closing Prayer Service, and Booklet Activity: “A Welcoming People” (15 minutes)

Before the session. Set up the enthroned Bible with the items suggested in the materials needed list. Then add to the prayer table a glass bowl of water, taper candles and holders for the students, and a glass bowl of oil, placing them in this order from left to right, with the pillar candle and matches between the bowl of water and the candles and holders.

1. Invite the students to participate in a rite that recalls the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. Ask them to bring their booklet and form a circle near the enthroned Bible.

2. Play music conducive to quiet reflection if you so desire, light the pillar candle on the prayer table, and dim the lights if possible.

When everyone is quiet and attentive, begin the prayer service with the following prayer:

- ▶ O God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, you have created water to be abundant and clean and refreshing. In water your Son was baptized and we were baptized. In water the earth is renewed and our thirst is satisfied. Bless this water. May we remember our baptism. May we who are your sons and daughters continue to become joyous members of your church.

Indicate that the group should join you in saying, “Amen.”

Invite the students to come forward and take turns making the sign of the cross on themselves with the water from the bowl on the prayer table, taking a candle, lighting it from the pillar candle, placing it in a holder, and returning to their place in the circle. When all have completed this process, continue with the prayer that follows:

- ▶ Receive this candle. May you always be light for one another. May you always walk as sons and daughters who have been enlightened by Christ. May faith and love always burn brightly in your heart and shine in your eyes and in the work of your hands.

Invite the young people to say, “Amen,” together.

Extend your hands over the heads of the students and pray as follows:

- ▶ May the Holy Spirit be your helper and guide as God’s beloved daughters and sons. May you be confirmed in your faith and filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. May you be filled with the spirit of wonder and awe in God’s holy presence. May you be strong and swift in service. May you be kind in your care for one another.

Invite the students to come forward and anoint their own forehead with oil. Or, if they know one another and are comfortable with ritual, have them come forward in pairs and anoint each other.

3. When everyone has been anointed, comment that baptism and confirmation mark the *beginning* of new life in Christ. Direct the students to “A Welcoming People” on page 4 of their booklet. Calmly and slowly read the exercise, which invites the students to write their decision to act in a way that shows their baptismal commitment. Tell the students that you will pause until all of them have written their decision. Assure the students that their decision is for their eyes only.

4. As soon as everyone is done writing, continue the prayer service as follows:

- ▶ I invite you all to exchange a greeting of peace by shaking hands and saying, “May the peace of Christ be yours.” [*Pause while everyone does this.*]

Now let us say the prayer Jesus taught us. [*Lead the group in the Lord’s Prayer.*]

5. After the Lord’s Prayer, make sure all the candles are extinguished. Then pass out masking tape and ask the students each to put a piece on the bottom of their candleholder and mark it with their initials. When they are done, collect the student booklets, name tags, and candles, and dismiss the students.

Note: Keep the students’ booklets and name tags for use in subsequent sessions. Also, if possible, keep their candles in the prayer area for the duration of this course. The students use the candles as part of their shared prayer in sessions 3 and 6, after which they are invited to take them home.

OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

For step A. Establish discussion guidelines for the group. Invite the students' ideas as you list them on newsprint. Consider posting the following guidelines and asking the students to add to them:

- All opinions are respected.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Each person deserves to be listened to.
- Each person has a right to speak or to pass.

Post the guidelines in the meeting room for this and subsequent sessions.

For step A. Suggest that the students compete to create a logo that best symbolizes their membership in the class. Direct them to gather and work in pairs or small teams. Tell them that their logos will be judged on the following criteria: The logos must symbolize that they are students, that they belong to a parish, and that they are gathered to understand and grow in their faith.

Pick three outside judges who are likely to be fair and impartial. You might need to delay the announcement of the winning logo until the next session in order to complete the judging process. After the winning logo is identified, post it and give its designers an award, such as a blue ribbon.

For step B. Clear a large space on the floor or on a table. Then set out a variety of items that show gathered people and objects, such as the following: a collection of unrelated objects such as an eraser, a cup, and a comb; a carton of eggs; a pile of stones; a picture of a nest of birds; a picture of a family; a picture of a circle of friends, a class, a sports team, or a music group; and a picture of people on a bus or in an airplane.

Ask the students to consider which groupings are most closely related. Invite them to line up the items and pictures from left to right, beginning with the grouping of items that have the least in common and moving to the grouping of items that are most closely related. For the above example, the order should be the collection of an eraser, a cup, and a comb; the pile of stones; the carton of eggs; the picture of people on a bus or in an airplane; the picture of a circle of friends, a class, a sports team, or a music group, which can be equal in closeness; the picture of birds in a nest; and finally, the picture of a family.

Refer to each of the human groups pictured and ask these questions:

- How does someone know when they belong to this group? [Answers will depend on the group; they should range from outward signs, such as uniforms, to inner realities, such as family ties.]
- How do group members stay together?

After the students have identified the actions that solidify groups, make the following point in your own words:

- People express their belonging by gathering, celebrating, and strengthening the ties that make them one.

For step B. Expand your discussion of the church as a gathering of interdependent people by exploring the idea of sponsors at baptism and confirmation. Also help the students understand the parishioners as a sponsoring community for those who are newly initiated.

If your parish has the Rite (or Order) of Christian Initiation of Adults (commonly called RCIA [or OCIA]), check the bulletins for the rites of welcome that invite the participation of the parish as a sponsoring community. Review the rites that are scheduled throughout the process. Focus on the words and actions of the assembly as welcomers and sponsors. Also suggest that the students attend the liturgies at which those rites are celebrated.

For step C. To prepare the students to focus on actions and words and things that express welcome and belonging, use handout 1–A, “Signs of Belonging.” Pass out copies of the handout, and then read the directions aloud and check to see that the students understand them. Announce a 5-minute time limit on this exercise. Afterward discuss the importance of concretely marking one’s membership in a group.

Note: Two of the squares on handout 1–A are blank. Before making copies of the handout, fill in each square with a description that seems appropriate for your group.

For step D. In part 2 of this step, do the following things to expand the discussion on the meaning of the primary signs of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation:

For baptism invite the students to focus on ways that water washes or carries away dirt, grit, and the like. Repeat this process in discussing how water brings and sustains life. To bring this part of the discussion to a close, emphasize that the waters of baptism effect, or make real, all that water signifies—death and life. Through baptism we die to sin and are born to new life in Christ, or in the church.

Continue by discussing the meaning of two gestures associated with confirmation, signing with oil and the laying on of hands. Because these two symbolic actions are not as familiar today, help the students to compare them to contemporary actions that confer some role. For example, giving a stole or an oath of office are today’s ways of conferring a task or honor. Be sure that the young people understand that in taking an oath of office, for example, a person assumes a work for a time. Make clear that the sacramental actions of anointing with oil and laying on of hands signify, and make permanent and present, the power of the Holy Spirit.

For step D. To help the students understand the symbols that are part of baptism and confirmation, have at hand a baptismal garment, a baptismal candle, and a container of the oil used at baptism. Some or all of these items can probably be obtained from your pastor.

For session 3. The prayer service “Walking Together Again” at the end of session 3 can be readily adapted to a class celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. If you choose to incorporate such a celebration, begin making plans at this time. You will need to coordinate schedules with your pastor

and set a time for the celebration, preferably arranging to use the reconciliation room at the church.

Young People and the Parish

If your parish is involved in the RCIA or OCIA, invite someone to speak about it to your group. See if you can invite a sponsor, a catechumen, or someone who has helped plan the process in the parish.

To further deepen the students' understanding of the celebration of the sacrament of baptism, arrange for a conducted tour of the baptistery.

If high school students are confirmed in your parish, arrange for a candidate or a panel of candidates to meet with the students and try to answer any questions they have about the process of preparing for confirmation.

If the sacrament of confirmation is scheduled to be celebrated in the near future in your parish, see if your students can be involved in some meaningful and useful way. Perhaps they can help usher or help with an after-confirmation celebration at the parish center.

If the sacrament of confirmation is celebrated in the diocesan or archdiocesan cathedral, consider organizing a car pool to take your students to it. Include in this trip a stop at a favorite restaurant or another experience the students might enjoy.