

Parish Edition

Catechist Guide

saint mary's press



***Catholic
Connections***
for Middle Schoolers

***The Holy Spirit
and the Church***

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Susan B. Stark

HOLY
SPIRIT
CHURCH

***The Holy Spirit and the Church
Catechist's Guide***

Catholic Connections

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Susan B. Stark



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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 *The Holy Spirit and the Church* — *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 to 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.

Course Themes

Core Session: 1. The Holy Spirit

This session explores how the Holy Spirit is present in the world today and gives life to the mission of Jesus Christ.

Core Session: 2. Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

This session examines the gift of God's grace and how it allows us to participate in the life of God and enables us to bring God's love to others.

Core Session: 3. Pentecost and the Early Church

This session looks at the Holy Spirit's activity in the early Church. The session recognizes that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church and empowered Jesus' disciples to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Core Session: 4. The Mission of the Church

This session examines how images of the Church, specifically the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, help us to understand the nature of the Church community.

Core Session: 5. The Structure of the Church

This session explores how all baptized Catholics are called to participate in the mission of Christ to make disciples of all nations by participating in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ.

Core Session: 6. End Things: Heaven and Hell

This session reflects on God's desire for us to be with him and how choosing to follow Jesus' command to love others can lead to perfect union and happiness with God forever.

Core Session: 7. Saints and Mary

This session explores the special connection that we have with Mary and the saints and how they are examples for us of what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

Life Issue Session: 8. Dealing with Peer Pressure

This session examines how peer pressure can be either positive or negative. The session emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in helping young people deal with peer pressure and helps them develop the skills and tools needed to resist negative peer pressure.

Life Issue Session: 9. Role Models: Whom Should I Look Up To?

This session explores how role models help us become the people we want to be and how to identify the qualities and values characteristic of Christian role models.

Concluding Session: 10. The Holy Spirit and the Church Celebration

This session revisits some of the main themes of the previous sessions and allows the young people (and, optionally, their parents) to celebrate what they have learned and the time they have spent together.

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 *Lectionary*.)

Recommended Resources

Dotson Brown, Beth. *Yes! I Am Catholic* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 2007). These are stories by people in the public eye, such as politicians, novelists, and sports stars, who, while admitting they struggle with their faith, can proudly say, "Yes! I am Catholic!" This would be a particularly helpful resource for session nine on role models.

Ellsberg, Robert. *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1997) and *The Saints' Guide to Happiness: Practical Lessons in the Life of the Spirit* (New York: Doubleday, 2005). These reflections give wonderful background information on saints and people of faith.

Turning Points: Transforming Middle Schools is an excellent background resource for information regarding characteristics of young adolescent development and the young adolescent learner, responding to the needs of the young adolescent learner, and project-centered learning. For more information go to their Web site.

Vankat, Jenni. *Exploring Saints and Feast Days with Young Adolescents* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press, 2007). This is a helpful resource for the session on saints and Mary and the concluding session.

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 multi-step 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 a 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 lessons 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!



THE HOLY SPIRIT

Session Overview

In this session the participants will explore the Holy Spirit's presence in the world. The young people will be introduced to the concept of the Holy Spirit as the "breath of life" by reflecting on their need for air. The participants will read about how the Holy Spirit is the creative breath of God in the Book of Genesis and animates the life and mission of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke, then work in small groups to create "Spirit Success Stories" headlines. This activity will challenge the young people to reflect on how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world today. In the optional session extension, the participants will explore what the symbols of water, fire, and cloud and light say about the way the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

Objectives

Enable the participants to do the following:

- explore the meaning of the Holy Spirit as the Breath of God
- understand that the Holy Spirit has always been present with the Father and the Son, and that together they are responsible for creation
- name concrete ways that they see the Holy Spirit present in the world

At a Glance

A. Quick-Start Activity	(5 minutes)
B. Welcome and Opening Prayer	(5 minutes)
C. Every Breath You Take	(5 minutes)
D. The Holy Spirit: The Breath of God!	(15 minutes)
E. Headline News: Spirit Success Stories	(20 minutes)
F. Closing Prayer	(10 minutes)
Optional Session Extension: Images and Symbols of the Holy Spirit	(15 minutes)

Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each pair of participants:

- sheets of newsprint
- copies of resource 1–A, "Spirit News Activity"
- markers

Gather the following additional items:

- ❑ five or more balloons, deflated, plus an additional balloon for each participant if choosing the extended closing prayer
- ❑ a large box or container to hold all the balloons when they are inflated



Preparation Tasks

- ❑ Write on the board the following instructions for the quick-start activity:
 - Pair up with another person and time your partner to see how many normal breaths you each can take in one minute. A full breath includes both an inhale and an exhale. Keep a tally for each other.
- ❑ Option: Save materials you use in this session, such as the props for activities or things the participants create, or take digital photos of the session so that you can display them at the concluding session. (See the “Optional Session Extension” and the caution on digital photography on page 117 in chapter 10.)

Catechist Prayer

Wondrous God, you are holy indeed, and all creation praises you! Your Spirit breathes life into the world and into me. Guide me as I help these young people explore the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in the history of the Church. May they experience you in the time that we are together and embrace the adventure of being disciples of your Son, Jesus. I pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 15
- *CCC*, numbers 279–320 (The Creator); 702–716 (God’s Spirit and Word in the Time of the Promises); 717–725 (The Spirit of Christ in the Fullness of Time); 731–747 (The Spirit and the Church in the Last Days); 852 (Mission)
- Galatians 5:22–25, Genesis 1:1–2, Luke 4:18–19, Isaiah 11:2, John 14:6–17, John 20:22



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:

Pair up with another person and time your partner to see how many normal breaths you each can take in one minute. A full breath includes both an inhale and an exhale. Keep a tally for each other.

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:
 - ▶ Holy God, your first gift to us is your gift of love. You want us to share in your life. You have poured out your love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guides us to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.
4. **Invite** a volunteer to read Galatians 5:22–25.
5. **Pray** the following:
 - ▶ Come Holy Spirit! You are the Breath of God. You have given us God’s life! Fill us with the divine life, so that we can reach out to each other with love. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.
6. **Briefly** explain that the topic for today’s session is the Holy Spirit.

C. Every Breath You Take (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** volunteers to time how many breaths they take in one minute, and to share this information with the group.
2. **Instruct** the group that their next task is to see if they can hold their breath for 30 seconds. **Say**, “Go!” and time the group—no cheating allowed! If 30 seconds seems too easy for the participants, extend the time to 45 seconds.
3. **Ask** the participants to describe what it feels like to keep holding their breath while their brains are screaming, “Breathe! Breathe!”

4. Show everyone the deflated balloons; let some of the participants hold them. **Comment:**
 - ▶ Without air, the balloon has no life, no pizzazz. What's a balloon without air? For those of you holding the balloons, how do they feel?
5. **Take** a deflated balloon and blow it up in front of the group. **Comment:**
 - ▶ Without air, the balloons are basically worthless. But breathing air into them brings them to life.
6. **Say** and **write** the phrase "breath of life" on the board. **Ask** the the participants to raise their hands if they have heard the phrase before. **Invite** volunteers to explain what they think it means.

D. The Holy Spirit: The Breath of God! (15 minutes)

1. **Introduce** the topic of the Holy Spirit by explaining that we can use the image of breath to describe the Holy Spirit, who is the third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Chapter 15: The Holy Spirit

force that makes it all hang together? Who brings us together, energizes us, gives us life, and helps us live fully—not just in a I'm-a-human-who-breathes sort of way—but also in a spiritual, holy way? These questions lead us straight to the **Holy Spirit**, the third Person of the Trinity.

A **The Breath of God**

The Holy Spirit might not be as familiar to you as the Father and the Son, the two other Persons of the Holy Trinity. People don't talk about the Holy Spirit as much as they do the Father and the Son. He's more often behind the scenes rather than on center stage. We might not be aware of his activity, much as we don't notice our own breathing. Yet a truth of our faith is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, and together they are responsible for creation. In fact, together they are responsible for everything. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Breath

D **LIVE IT!**

God's gift of love is his first gift to us. He wants us to share in his life: "This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us" (Romans 5:5). People who are filled with God's Spirit show their love for God through their attitudes and actions. They are loving, joyful, peaceful, and patient. The Holy Spirit helps people be kind and faithful, full of goodness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22). Whom do you know who shows God's love by doing kind things for others? For example, do you know someone who expresses love by his patience with others or her faithfulness to friends and family? Write that person a thank-you note for being a witness of God's gift of love.

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2. **Ask** the young people to take out their copies of *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*. When all are ready, tell them to turn to pages 165, the section titled "The Breath of God." **Have** the participants place their fingers on the title for the section. **Say** and **write** "Breath of God" next to "breath of life" on the board. **Invite** volunteers to explain what they think the connection is between the two phrases.

A

- B**
3. **Ask** the participants to find the “Think About It!” section on page 166 in their handbooks. **Invite** them to read the questions and to reflect individually or to share their responses with a partner. After they have finished reflecting or sharing, invite them to summarize their reflections on the image of the Holy Spirit as the Breath of God for the large group.
 4. **Describe** the Catholic perspective on the Holy Spirit by explaining the following points in your own words:
 - ▶ The Holy Spirit is like our own breathing; we aren’t aware of it most of the time. However, breathing is necessary for life.
 - ▶ The Holy Spirit is like this for us spiritually. God’s Holy Spirit breathes God’s life into us. In fact, the Church refers to the Holy Spirit as the Breath of God.
 - ▶ Because of the Holy Spirit, we are able to experience God’s love. Through the Holy Spirit, we can come to know Jesus.
 - ▶ We believe that the Holy Spirit gives us everything we need to live as Jesus’ disciples.

- C**
5. **Invite** the participants to turn to page 167 in their handbooks. When all are ready, **invite** a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:1–2, which is found there.
 6. **Say** and **write** the word *ruah* on the board. Explain in your own words the paragraph on pages 167–168 in their handbook about the Spirit of God in the Book of Genesis. Emphasize the following points:
 - ▶ The Spirit of God has always been present.
 - ▶ The Holy Spirit’s role was to prepare people to know God.

Part 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church

B

Think About It!

We believe the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. What does this image tell you about the Holy Spirit? What does this image tell you about the Holy Spirit’s role in your life?

of God, are inseparable from each other and from the Father. Whenever the Father sends his Son on a mission, he always sends his Spirit.

One way to understand the Holy Spirit is with the image of breath. Think of it in the following way: God’s Spirit breathes God’s life into us. Much as our own breath, which keeps our bodies alive, the breath of the Spirit gives us God’s life. Through the Spirit we experience God’s gift of love. We might not always be aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence, but through him we come to know who God is. Through him we can know Jesus.

One artist pictures the Holy Spirit’s power to transform us. Take a deep breath and imagine this transforming power within you and around you.




Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, “If we allow Him, the Holy Spirit will transform us and make us holy”, copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

7. **Direct** the young people to open their handbooks to page 169 and follow along as you read aloud Luke 4:18–19 at the bottom of the page and the top of page 170. **Tell** them that this passage describes Jesus' ministry and that the Spirit was with him. **Explain** the following points in your own words:
- ▶ Jesus promised his disciples that he would send a helper, the Holy Spirit, so that they could continue his work.
 - ▶ Since the feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, the Holy Spirit has energized and brought life to the Church and to all baptized believers.
 - ▶ The Holy Spirit is with us today, energizing us and giving us the courage to be disciples of Jesus Christ.
8. **Write** "evidence" on the board, and **ask** the participants to describe situations where they see evidence of the Holy Spirit at work around them. In other words, where do they see the Good News being brought to

people who are poor or oppressed, or those held captive being freed, and so on. You may need to give the young people an example from your own life to get them thinking.

Chapter 15: The Holy Spirit

God's Spirit Prepares the Way

Let's take a minute to look at the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout time. The Spirit of God first appears in the Book of Genesis as the wind that moves over the water: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1–2, NRSV). Here we focus on the word *wind*. In Hebrew, wind is *ruah*, which can also mean "breath" or "spirit." Substitute those words for wind, and we can read the verse the following way: "a Spirit of God, or Breath of God, swept over the face of the waters." We see that the Spirit of God was present in the beginning, bringing life out of nothingness.

Did You Know?
Symbols of the Holy Spirit

The Catholic Church uses visual symbols to help us understand the Holy Spirit. The following are three of them:

- **Water** symbolizes the Holy Spirit's actions in Baptism. Jesus tells us that the Spirit is the "living water" that quenches our thirst for God (see John 7:37–39).
- **Fire** transforms. It is vibrant and full of energy. The Holy Spirit appears to the Apostles as tongues of fire at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1–4). The Holy Spirit energizes and transforms us.
- **A cloud and light** hide and reveal. In the Old Testament, God often appeared as a fire or light within a cloud (see Exodus 40:38, Ezekiel 1:4). The Holy Spirit hides and reveals God's glory. Clouds play a role in Jesus' Baptism (see Matthew 3:13–17), Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1–8), and Ascension (see Acts 1:6–11).

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