

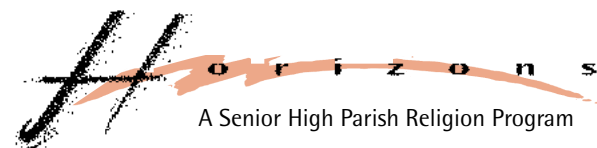
Moving On: Embracing the Future



Michael Theisen

Thomas Zanzig, General Editor

Marilyn Kielbasa, Consultant



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For Rachel Ying Theisen

From another's shores whose birth was yours
on the breath of God you came,
to a distant land, into the waiting hands
of those who longed to call you by name.

Rachel,
you are a Spirit of joy
a loving presence
and a gift to behold.



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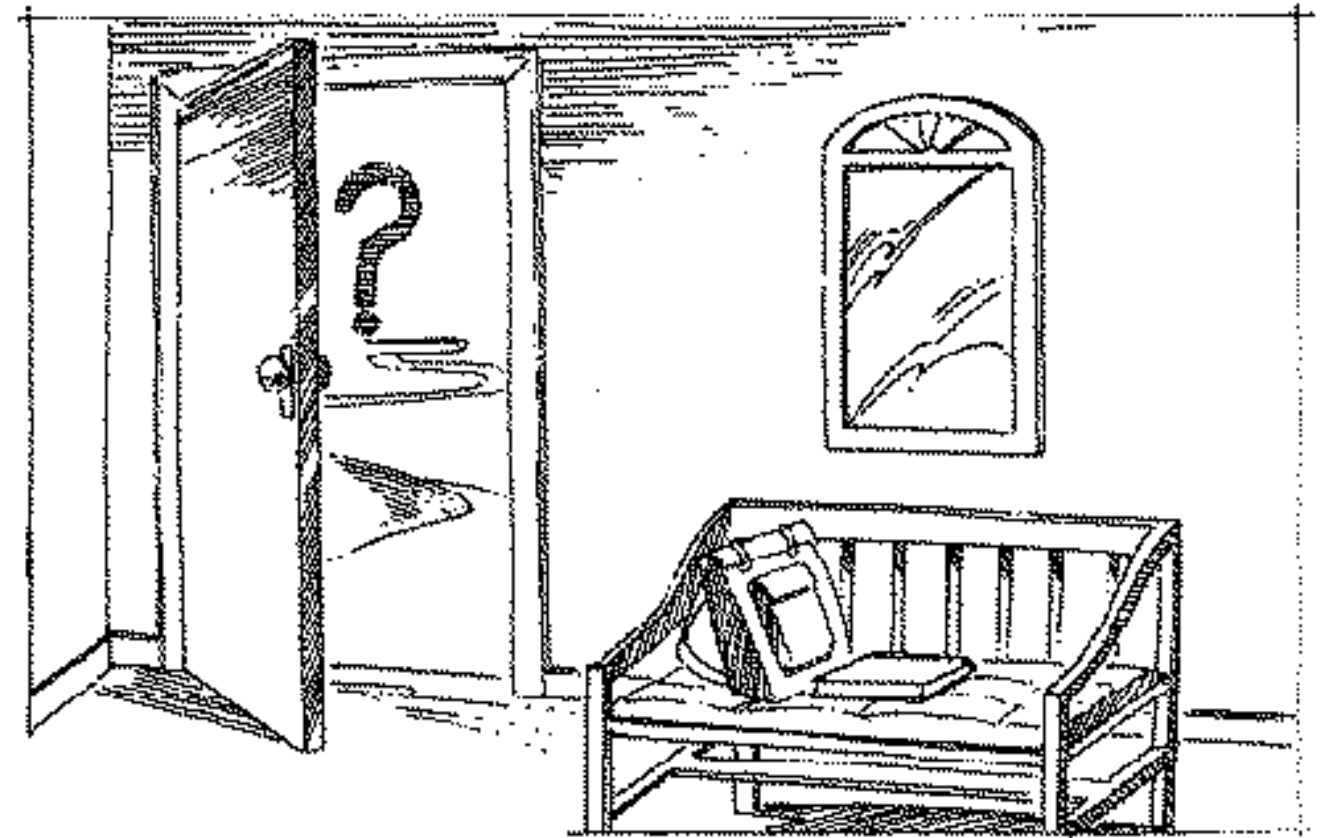
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Moving On: Embracing the Future focuses on a major transition in the life of the adolescents participating in the Horizons Program. This course invites the young people to take all that they have come to be and know about themselves and their faith and to confidently bring this into the unique future that awaits each of them.

Traditionally, high school religion programs directed toward seniors include topics aimed primarily at the future—marriage and the family, future lifestyle issues, vocations, and so on. Although these topics and themes have much to offer seniors, they tend to give short shrift to the concern that most dominates young people during their final year in

high school—that of being in the midst of a profound life transition.

Most adults will remember that as graduating seniors they were caught up with the tasks and feelings associated with leaving behind one time of life and moving on toward an oftentimes unknown and anxiety-provoking future. It is this specific time, and the feelings and issues associated with it, that *Moving On: Embracing the Future* focuses on.

Unlike other courses in the Horizons Program, which can, at least theoretically, be used with different age-groups, this course was written specifically with high school seniors in mind. It addresses the unique tasks, issues, events, and feelings that they are experiencing. It helps them make the transition from older adolescence to young adulthood. This major life transition involves five essential tasks:

1. Bringing Closure to Present Situations and Relationships

Seniors need to say good-bye to the many people, involvements, and roles they have developed over the years. Even if they are not leaving home, the relationships and places that are part of their current lifestyle will change, because their life will change. It is important for seniors to begin naming those significant people, places, and roles and then letting go of them in healthy and life-giving ways.

2. Creating a Dream and a Mission

Although young people are well known for their idealistic hopes and dreams, those ideals begin to take on a serious and powerful force as they prepare to leave the familiarity of high school for the “real” world. The task of developing a dream or a mission to guide their life is foundational to successfully navigating the many choices and obstacles that they will face in the coming years. If they have a clear sense of direction (even if that direction may change in the future), chances are greatly enhanced that they will achieve healthy and positive growth.

3. Accepting One’s Self-identity

The lifelong process of identity formation comes to a significant moment during the last year of high school. The young people are challenged to embrace their emerging sense of identity—of who they are becoming—apart from how they have been seen and identified in the past by others. Claiming and accepting their own identity is a critical challenge for seniors. They need to grow in a healthy sense of who they are and who they are becoming, before moving away from the familiar roles and sources of support that they enjoyed during the teenage years. If young people do not name and embrace a clear sense of self, they will continue to be confused by the various roles expected of them by family, peers, and other groups they encounter along their journey.

4. Seeking Autonomy

One of the key tasks of young people is the gradual but persistent development of their own independence throughout the teenage years. This type of independence is not the recklessness or rebellious-

ness that is often associated with teenagers (although those traits can mark the beginning of adolescence) but rather the increased self-awareness and the assumption of responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Autonomy refers to the capacity to self-govern. A growing sense of autonomy is essential for young people who are entering young adulthood, a time when they will be confronted with tough choices. In order to become autonomous, one must separate from being dependent on (or “governed by”) family and friends so that personal independence and responsible decision making can be achieved.

5. Seeking a Mentor and a Community

Another task awaiting young adults upon graduation is the search for a community that accepts them and their values, ideals, and goals. The need to belong—to be supported and challenged by a group that accepts people as individuals—is a primary need for young adults in transition. Some groups and organizations—not all of them healthy—seek out or recruit emerging young adults. Therefore, young adults need to discern in advance the types of groups they truly wish to belong to, as well as be alert to the specific goals and values of the groups that approach them.

Closely related to the search for a community is the desire for a mentor, someone who might serve as a professional, moral, or spiritual guide. Mentors can have a powerful and profound effect on young adults. The connection with a mentor can happen by chance or it can be intentionally pursued—by either the young adult or the mentor. In either case, mentor relationships need to be carefully nurtured.

These five transitional tasks are addressed in *Moving On*. Participants reflect on and begin to integrate their past and present selves in order to truly embrace their future with confidence. And they are invited to do so as people of faith committed to a God who walks the journey with them. The more prepared the young people are to acknowledge and respond to their current transitional status, the better able they will be to withstand the pressures and forces that can push them off track, away from the path they want to journey.

Unfortunately, we know all too well what can happen when young people in transition are pushed forward without any grounding, preparation, or support for the new life that awaits them. Consider

this reflection by Judith Viorst, the author of *Necessary Losses*:

Going away to college is a time when many shaky selves will falter. Unbuttressed by family and friends, there are boys and girls who will turn to themselves and find . . . nothing there. The college counseling services are filled with students whose separation anxieties are being masked by desperate escapes from pain. And while most of these students are hardy enough to survive their struggles with separation anxiety, some of them may sink beneath their damaging and sometimes deadly solutions.

Drugs can blunt the mourning—why not get high instead of cry? Cults can replace the familial security. Dependent attachments or flights into marriage where mates are made into mommies can keep boys and girls adolescents all their life. And if these tactics fail—and separation pain cannot be held at bay—there may be crippling depression, breakdowns, suicide. (P. 168)

This separation anxiety is readily understood when one considers the huge shift that a high school senior makes upon graduation. The senior goes from the top of the high school hierarchy to the bottom of whatever social setting she or he enters (e.g., as a new employee, a college freshman, or a military private). The senior also moves from being known and having an established network of relationships and a communal identity to having few, if any, support systems or groups. The possible absence of family and friends also contributes to this separation anxiety. No wonder many seniors enter a type of “senior slump,” especially during the final semester of high school as they confront these and other realities that are part of the change that awaits them.

To prepare the young people for this change and the many feelings that accompany it, *Moving On: Embracing the Future* invites seniors to enter fully and embrace their present situation so that they can prepare adequately for the future. In the first session, “A Time of Change,” the participants are invited both to reflect on the amount of growth they have accomplished over the last few years and to look ahead at their transitional tasks. Placing the past, the present, and the future together in this manner introduces the young people to the fact that life is a constant journey. Each step taken today is made possible by the thousands taken before, and all the steps of the past lead the young people to the future.

Underlying *Moving On: Embracing the Future* is the truth that seniors have a lot of “unfinished business” that when taken care of can help them more fully move into and embrace their future. Session 2, “Saying Good-bye,” addresses the themes of fear, forgiveness, and letting go. The nature of this unfinished business is unique for each person. This session invites the young people to name, claim, and tame the feelings and the fears that can accompany the process of moving on from high school.

Sessions 3 and 4, “Creating a Mission” and “Living the Mission,” form the heart of the course. In session 3 the young people develop a mission statement to help guide their decisions, choices, and life direction. A personal mission statement can be immeasurably helpful, especially during times of change and chaos, like that which seniors experience. A mission statement serves as a guiding light, a North Star, that is continuous and changeless because it is grounded in basic values and principles. In session 4 the young people test out their mission statement by applying it, and the values and principles it represents, to current and anticipated problems and issues in their life.

The final session, “Embracing Change,” focuses on the transitional task of seeking a mentor and a supportive community. The young people then reflect on the nature of change and its implicit invitation, for people of faith, to let go and embrace the future with a God-centered hope. The session concludes with a prayer ritual designed to celebrate all that has been, is, and will be for each of the young people.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Young people in transition from older adolescence to early young adulthood are in a unique time of life. They are simultaneously moving from a position of letting go to one of reaching out, from one of death to new life. In the middle of this time lies entombment—the unknown. This is therefore a paradoxical period of life—exhilarating and anxiety-producing, joyful and fearful, adventuresome and panic-stricken. No wonder many an older adolescent seeks to prolong the safety and security of their present stage of development. As analyst Peter Blos notes:

“Adolescent individuation . . . is accompanied by feelings of isolation, loneliness and confusion. . . . The realization of the finality of the end of childhood, of the binding nature of commitments, of the definite limitation to individual existence itself—this realization creates a sense of urgency, fear and panic. Consequently, many an adolescent tries to remain indefinitely in a transitional phase of development; this condition is called *prolonged adolescence*.” (As quoted in Viorst, *Necessary Losses*, p. 169)

The concept of prolonged adolescence is understandable when we consider where the young people are coming from and where they are going. When these two dimensions are properly understood and appreciated, ministry to young people at this unique juncture in their life can be done in a more sensitive and supportive manner.

Where They Are Coming From

Seniors in high school have accomplished most of the major physical, cognitive, and social developmental tasks of adolescence. Many are at or near their maximum level of physical development. Many have mastered some physical skills and have moved beyond the impediments of constant changes in growth typical of children. They have become more coordinated and capable and this, in turn, has a positive effect on their self-concept and identity.

Socially, the majority of seniors have a well-established friendship group, and many have ritualized patterns of relating and celebrating with their friends—favorite places to meet, eat, or hang out. They also have an increased ability to make independent choices about what they will do, where they will go, and who they will be with. This reflects older adolescents’ increased capacity and need for autonomy and individuation. They are striving in big and small ways to separate themselves from others as well as from prior definitions and assumptions about who they are or how they are to act.

Seniors often possess a great sense of idealism and responsibility. Many enjoy getting involved in, even taking leadership positions in, various causes that are deemed worthy of their tireless energy and sense of commitment. Such older adolescents enjoy experimenting with a newfound sense of purpose, which frequently blossoms during their senior year as they are looked to by both younger people and adults as the expected leaders of their generation.

Regarding the faith development of older adolescents, many have begun to own their faith, along with the expression of that faith, and to realize the powerful call to discipleship that Jesus is extending to them. One indicator of this is that many want to develop their own unique prayer life. Different forms of prayer can be attractive to them as they seek out new ways of communicating and spending time with God. Some high school seniors begin to consider how they might live out this faith in the years ahead, with some attracted to a call toward a lay or ordained vocation.

Some, particularly younger students, might say that many seniors “have it made.” Older adolescents have normally achieved a sense of position among their high school peers. Seniors, by their stature and accomplishment, are afforded many special privileges and often public approval and celebration, particularly in school.

Where They Are Headed

The stage of development awaiting older adolescents is that of young adulthood, which is commonly identified as ranging from ages eighteen to thirty-five. This age span is comprised of several actual ministages, beginning with early young adulthood, the stage into which the older adolescent—the high school senior—is transitioning. Early young adults are marked by a critical consciousness that allows them to reflect not only on *what* they think and know but also on *why* they think and know it. This level of thinking allows young adults to select their morals, values, principles, and ideals and to articulate why they hold them. This cognitive ability is a critical factor in their effort to develop a personal mission and moral value system.

A central, even dominant, task of young adults is the search for intimacy—the desire to share with another on a deep and profound level who they are and who they are becoming. People who do not possess an accurate and developed sense of personal identity cannot totally participate in this search for intimacy. Therefore, early young adults are challenged to bring some sense of closure to their own sense of self (self-identity) while at the same time beginning to seek out others with whom they can establish a sense of intimacy. If a young adult attempts to enter into an intimate relationship with another before having a secure sense of who he or she is, the relationship can become a codependent

one; one person (or both) becomes dependent on the other for his or her sense of personal identity or worth. The danger in such a relationship is that when the relationship ends (which is usually the case), the person’s “identity,” which was grounded in the relationship rather than in the self, also collapses. The end of the relationship leaves the individual with a sense of worthlessness.

This is a major reason why early young adults need to possess a positive sense of their own identity, autonomy, and purpose in life. With this in hand, they are able to forge ahead in their personal development and growth. They will become known by their moral character and vocational choices. Their personal growth is then reflected more through the individual’s actions, choices, and behaviors than through their words and statements.

In the moral realm, early young adults become more aware of larger, universal principles that determine right and wrong. They move beyond the often self-centered and self-serving conventional morality of adolescence and into one that demonstrates their sense of ethical responsibility toward the larger world. One might describe this morality as a “grounded idealism,” to differentiate it from the “free-floating idealism” of older adolescence.

Early young adults devote increasing energy to finding a career or vocation that complements the person they have become. This is more than a search for “the right job.” It is a journey toward oneness, wherein the individual’s principles, mission, and moral code are in direct alignment with their gifts, strengths, and interests.

In light of all this information, it becomes apparent why many high school seniors are tempted to prolong their adolescence, along with the safety and security it seems to hold for them. After all, who wants to go from being “king or queen of the hill” to being at the bottom of that hill? Who looks forward to leaving behind a firmly established set of friends and family support in order to seek out, sometimes in a strange environment, a new set of friends and support systems? Who wants to give up the known for the unknown? Who wishes to have their life turned upside down? Clearly, the resistance many young people have toward this change in their life is natural and to be expected. In fact, the resistance itself is simply another step in the senior’s transition toward early young adulthood and, like each of the other tasks associated with this stage, should be named and embraced.

The young people in your group will be at different stages of the developmental spectrum, from late adolescence to early young adulthood. Accepting where each person is coming from and working with everyone at their own starting point is more fruitful than forcing or expecting them to be at the same place at the same time developmentally. We cannot control all the variables that go into shaping an individual’s personality and development. We can control the expectations we hold for each of the young people we work with. We must ensure that each is given the time and space needed to prepare for the journey ahead.

The Theology of This Course

Moving On: Embracing the Future focuses on the process young people must undergo to let go of a known and often comfortable lifestyle in order to reach for something that is not fully known. For Christians, the event that helps us to comprehend this process in the context of faith is the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The movements of the paschal mystery parallel the movements in the life of young people outlined in this course—the realization of what is about to happen (passion), the letting go (death), the entering into the unknown (entombment), and the embracing of a new life (resurrection).

Our faith tradition is born in and based upon the story of Easter, when the God of mystery reigned over death, and life was made anew for all people. The Easter story gives us the hope and trust necessary to let go of what has been in order to enter into the unknown of what can be. This risk-taking paradigm can provide a powerful model for young people who find themselves in the midst of their own letting-go process.

Another pertinent Gospel image for this course occurred just before the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus entered the desert. There he endured various temptations and pressures and discerned the values upon which he would base his public ministry (Luke 4:1–14). Only after defining those values for himself was he able to return to his hometown of Nazareth. It was there that he shattered the expectations the people of his childhood held for him by announcing what he and his ministry would be about (Luke 4:16–22).

These early events from Jesus' life reflect a central theme in this book's title, *Moving On: Embracing the Future*. In the course the young people first name for themselves and then claim in public through actions and words the specific mission they want to be about in their life. Jesus is their model, demonstrating how people must first enter their own internal deserts in order to confront the temptations and pressures that threaten to rule their life. Only after this internal battle can believers claim a self-identity that will stand up to the pressures and temptations that are waiting for them as they try to live out their mission.

This course devotes much time to helping the participants clarify and state the mission that will guide them into their future, much like Jesus' mission first proclaimed at Nazareth guided the rest of his life. By holding up Jesus as the model for this process, we demonstrate to the young people that this is the way for people of faith to pursue their calling in life.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as "the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers" (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly "religious," explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be "good news," not just proclaim the Good News.

One of the central messages of *Moving On: Embracing the Future* is that God has been, is now, and will be forever present to the young people in their life journeys, no matter where the road takes them.

This can be both a comforting and challenging message to the young people who are in the midst of this major life transition. The course can also serve as an opportunity for the parish to reach out to the young people who are searching for meaning during this time of change. The knowledge of God's constant and unchanging love and presence is indeed "Good News" for those whose life is filled with not-so-good news along with the challenge of major change and the turmoil that can accompany it.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Moving On: Embracing the Future*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Moving On* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings and community environment of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to introspection and to sharing. Here are two suggestions for developing that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will

help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom arrangement is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint to gathering several items for a prayer service.

All the sessions include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants.

Preparing Yourself

When teaching a course with older adolescents, it is important to let them help direct the flow of the sessions. Because they are at an age when leadership is expected of them, it is necessary to make sure that each session is conducted in a way that gives them as much input and involvement as possible. This may require that you assess how comfortable you are with such a cooperative and somewhat fluid learning style. Some teachers accustomed to teaching in a school may find the active learning strategies used in this course a bit demanding or discomfiting. It is good to name such realities at the outset. If you feel uncomfortable about this, consider involving a co-teacher or getting some input from other young adults who may be able to help with some of the sessions.

Another preparatory step for this course is to get in touch with how you react to loss, grief, and letting go. These are major issues that high school seniors will be bringing to this course, so you need to reflect on how you have dealt with your own experiences of transition and loss. If you don't reflect on

these experiences, you risk bringing your own negative memories and perhaps unresolved issues to the learning setting. If, on the other hand, you have reflected on and brought resolution to past instances of loss and letting go, the wisdom gained from that process can be shared in a positive and healthy manner with the young people. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines will help you to share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This lets the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program,

Moving On offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. These journal activities are intended for use by the participants between sessions and following the last session.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Moving On*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given for not including the journal component. First, if every teacher of every course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of it. Second, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Moving On* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. Circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of class participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starters or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

Using This Course as a Retreat

When choosing whether to use the material in *Moving On: Embracing the Future* in a retreat format, consult your program coordinator and together weigh the following strengths and limitations:

Advantages

The common components of a retreat—community building, prayer, faith sharing, open and honest discussions, sacramental celebrations, and individual reflection and journaling—are well suited for the issues and insights offered in *Moving On: Em-*

bracing the Future. A retreat that includes one or two overnights lets participants get away from the pressures and stresses of everyday life and, therefore, give more focused attention to the topic. The retreat format will likely provide more time for addressing the specific concerns and interests of the young people regarding the topic of letting go, discovering one's mission, and dealing with change. The retreat process also offers young people an opportunity to develop community and share faith with others their own age.

If you choose to adapt this course for a retreat, design the flow of the retreat so that it covers the five sessions in their designated order. An exception might be the content of session 2, "Saying Good-bye," which could serve as a natural lead-in to the sacrament of reconciliation, if you choose to celebrate that during this retreat. One recommended format would look like this:

Day 1

Arrival and group-building activities

Session 1: "A Time of Change"

Meal break

Session 3: "Creating a Mission"

Meal or snack break

Session 2: "Saying Good-bye"

Celebration of reconciliation

Games or sing-along

Lights-out

Day 2

Meal

Morning prayer

Session 4: "Living the Mission"

Meal break

Session 5: "Embracing Change"

Closing liturgy or ending prayer service from session 5

Clean up and departure

Be flexible with your planning so that you are able to cover the material most suitable for your group's particular needs. You are strongly urged to have a follow-up session after the retreat to help the young people reflect on and bring closure to any issues or concerns that developed during the retreat or that were not adequately addressed due to time constraints. You may wish to save session 5, "Embracing Change," for a follow-up session, which would allow you more time during the retreat to address the specific issues, concerns, and fears that

arise from the scenarios the young people develop during session 4.

Another consideration for using this course as a retreat is the number of teacher presentations that would need to be prepared at one time. Consider recruiting a team of young adults to help with the presentations, the activities, the discussions, and the preparations. Not only would they add a lot of recent life experience to the various discussions, but they would serve as helpful role models for the retreatants.

Disadvantages

Doing this course as a retreat does have some drawbacks. First, a retreat format is a make-or-break experience, and it is important that the retreat facilitator be familiar with the specific dynamics and logistics inherent in a retreat atmosphere. All the organization, lesson planning, and session preparations need to be done before the one retreat experience, thereby increasing the workload immediately before the event.

Second, retreats require appropriate space, preferably away from the parish community of the young people. Additional resources such as bedding, food, and shower facilities are required, as are extra adult supervision and participation. All these factors mean a higher program cost, which may or may not be affordable to all the participants, possibly requiring the parish to assist financially.

Third, a retreat may be difficult to schedule. Young people today lead such hectic and busy lives that you may not find a weekend when all participants would be able to attend. In addition, many retreat facilities book up quickly, oftentimes a year in advance, limiting the availability of open dates during certain peak times, such as the fall and early spring, when you may want to offer the retreat.

Special Preparation Needs

Involving Young Adults

Although complete preparation needs are spelled out in each session of this course, you may want to give advance attention to arranging for additional adult assistance. Some of the session activities would benefit from the involvement of a group of young adults who recently graduated from high school.

Their participation and leadership would serve a dual purpose: they would serve as role models for the young people, and they would find a way to express their own emerging desire to serve and minister to others. Furthermore, their recent experiences of the transition to life after high school can offer fresh and concrete examples to the various group discussions. For all these reasons, you may wish to recruit a few young adults from the parish to serve as resources, teaching assistants, and role models for the participants.

Opening Prayer Ritual

Each session begins with a prayer ritual in which a particular ingredient symbolizing the session theme is introduced to the young people, as follows:

- Session 1: Honey, symbolizing the sweetness of the growth the young people have experienced thus far
- Session 2: Saltwater, symbolizing the tears shed over having to say good-bye and to reconcile broken relationships
- Session 3: Water, symbolizing the nourishment needed to develop one's principles and values into a specific life mission
- Session 4: Sweet-and-sour sauce, symbolizing the difficult yet rewarding experience of living out one's mission and principles
- Session 5: Salsa, symbolizing the zest and spice associated with heading into an unknown future filled with excitement, mystery, and possibilities

Consider what you might like to include as part of this prayer setting in addition to the required items identified in session 1 (a small table, a candle, a plant or tree seedling, bowls for the ingredients, and a Bible). For example, you may want to decorate the table in a special way, or include items that have ethnic or cultural meaning. The five symbolic ingredients identified above are integrated into session 5's closing prayer ritual, which serves to both summarize the course and offer a final challenge to the young people. A plant or tree seedling and a parting gift can also be used effectively in the course's closing prayer ritual:

A plant or tree seedling. The central symbol, both for the prayer area as well as for the course as a whole, is a plant or tree seedling. This serves to symbolize the ongoing growth and formation needed to mature into a faith-filled young adult who is guided

by principles and a personal mission. In fact, session 3, "Creating a Mission," uses the symbol of a tree to help the young people in developing their personal mission statements, which are then used throughout the rest of the course. The plant or seedling also serves as a parting gift from the young people to the parish at the end of this course.

It is important, therefore, to think carefully about what type of plant or tree you want to use. Discuss the possible options with the appropriate staff person to find out what would best suit your parish's environment. Because it is to be a gift from the young people to the parish, it would also be appropriate to ask the participants to make a donation at some point during the course to help pay for the plant or seedling. Depending on the number of people participating, the cost of the gift may be a factor in the type of tree or plant you select.

A parting gift. Giving the young people a parting gift is by no means required, but it would be an appropriate acknowledgment of their participation and presence in this program. Consider presenting to them framed copies of their individual mission statements, developed in session 3. You could have the statements reproduced in calligraphy or with computer-enhanced printing. Check with parishioners or parish staff to see if anyone with the skills of calligraphy or computer printing is willing to help with this project. If you choose to do this, it is important that any young people who miss session 3 have the opportunity to develop their own mission statement before the final session.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Moving On: Embracing the Future* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might want to develop these connections by doing the following:

- Plan a Senior Sunday where all high school seniors are invited to a Sunday Mass and honored by the community. Invite one or two of the seniors to share their personal reflections on the scriptural readings. Have the presider or the entire community offer a special blessing upon the young people at the end of Mass. Encourage them to be lecturers, eucharistic ministers, and gift bearers. Plan for the communion meditation song to be sung by or for the seniors.
- Hold a video night at which you show two or three movies that involve the themes of seniors, graduation, saying good-bye, or letting go. Discuss them and how they compare to what the seniors are experiencing.
- Prepare a youth group session in which the younger youth affirm the high school seniors by sharing specific stories and examples of how the seniors affect their life. Conclude the session with a blessing. Or invite the younger teens to do a laying on of hands for the seniors, as they are sent forth to continue to grow and follow God's call in their life.
- Hold a Next Step Night where young adults from the parish are invited to come and talk with the high school seniors about what life is like in college, the world, the military, or other arenas that might await people finishing high school.

This issue is dealt with in the Horizons mini-course *Senior Year: Last Things and Lasting Things*. You may want to check with the program coordinator or the teacher of that course before doing this activity.

Family Connections

Many of the themes contained in *Moving On: Embracing the Future* are well suited for integration and discussion with the seniors' families. It is no secret that families, especially parents, go through a major life change when their children leave home after high school. This "empty nest syndrome" offers a wonderful opportunity for family ministry, as well as some parent outreach and education, to occur. Just as the graduating seniors have some specific and unique needs during this time of transition, so too do the families of these seniors as they come to terms with their child-turned-young adult and the change that this transformation is bringing about in the family's system.

Several ideas for programs to help reach out to the seniors and their families during this time are as follows:

- Hold a senior brunch prepared and served by members of the youth ministry program for the seniors and their parents.
- Hold an evening of reflection for seniors and their parents to prayerfully focus on the young adult the senior is becoming and to acknowledge the process of letting go with which the parents and seniors are struggling. This may be especially powerful after session 2, "Saying Good-bye."
- Invite all the parents of high school seniors to a special evening just for them to share and discuss their pending empty nest situation as well as to share different ideas for embracing the changes they may be going through. Consider inviting parents who have recently been through this experience to come and share what helped or hindered them during this time of transition.

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended 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 Horizons 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 Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire 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 the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of Moving On: Embracing the Future

Goals

This course has three goals:

- That young people examine the tasks of young adulthood in light of the lifelong process of human development and the ideals of a Christian life
- That they reflect on and evaluate the personal values, attitudes, and principles that shape their life and that determine their life’s mission
- That they articulate their concerns and fears about the present and their immediate future, and then experience a sense of God-centered hope as they enter this period of transition

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which together help realize the course goals:

Session 1: “A Time of Change”

- To assist the young people in assessing the development they have accomplished during the past few years of adolescence and to identify the immediate changes that await them in the transition to young adulthood
- To encourage the young people to begin identifying the many choices and decisions they will face
- To bring to prayer the many developmental tasks and transition decisions with which the young people are, and will be, struggling

Session 2: “Saying Good-bye”

- To help the young people understand some of the losses, fears, and unresolved emotions that are typically experienced by seniors in high school
- To assist the young people in reflecting on the personal effect of the different losses they might experience and to help them say good-bye in healthy ways
- To encourage the young people to examine the need to reconcile key relationships in order to bring closure to this period of their life

Session 3: “Creating a Mission”

- To encourage the young people to develop a personal mission upon which they can base their decisions and choices
- To help them more deeply reflect on the values and principles they need to possess in order to live out their life’s mission
- To present to the young people Jesus’ values and sense of mission as a model for them to seriously consider as they discern their life mission

Session 4: “Living the Mission”

- To introduce the young people to a discernment process that can be applied to the various issues and situations they are, and will be, faced with as high school seniors
- To help them apply their personal missions and stated values to situations they are facing as seniors in high school

Session 5: “Embracing Change”

- To help the young people identify the characteristics that they value in mentors and supportive communities and to encourage the young people to be proactive in their selection of both
- To discuss the process of change and the various reactions people have toward it and to relate these insights to the transition that the young people are undergoing
- To celebrate, through prayer, the growth of the young people as well as the mystery of what is yet to come in their life

Suggested Resources

The following resources on the topics of transitioning into young adulthood might be useful to you as you prepare to lead this course:

- Bagley, Ron. *Families and Young Adults*. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1992. A helpful resource and guide for the integration of the developing young adult with his or her family of origin, and application of this to their particular faith journey.
- Bagley, Ron, ed. *Young Adult Ministry: A Book of Readings*. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1987. See especially the section “Early Young Adults,” by Faith Mauro and John Roberto, for a succinct summary of the various issues facing those in transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Covey, Stephen R. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989. A good overview of why having a changeless core or a guiding set of principles is a must for living a full, proactive, and contributing life.

Covey, Stephen R., A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill. *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994. Assists with the understanding and process of developing a personal mission statement and how this can root a person to their changeless core values and principles.

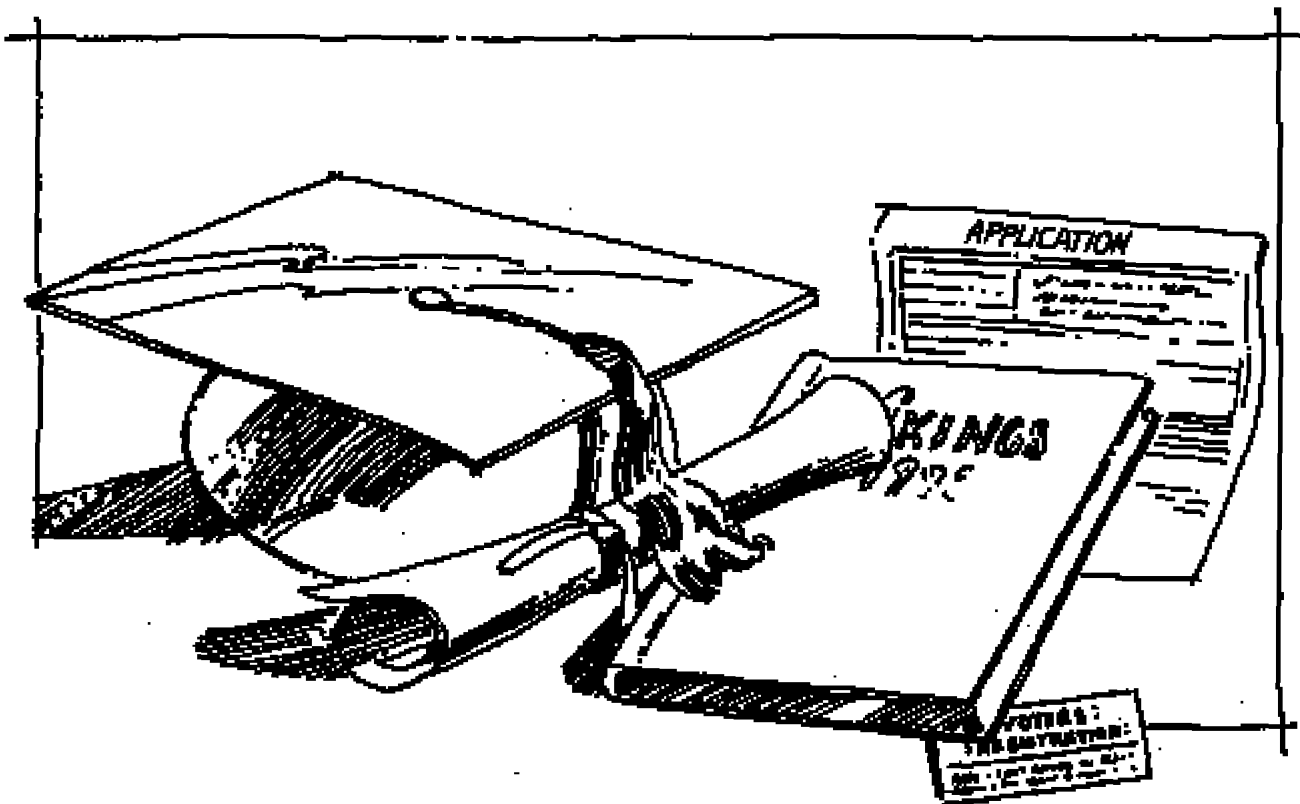
Gibbon, Robert T. *Developing Faith in Young Adults: Effective Ministry with 18–35 Year Olds*. New York: Alban Institute, 1990. A helpful overview and introduction to young adults and their faith development.

Viorst, Judith. *Necessary Losses*. New York: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1986. See especially pages 166–172 for information that speaks of the various losses associated with the transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

Parks, Sharon. *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment*. [San Francisco:] HarperSanFrancisco, 1986. A thorough overview of the young adult years, especially as they relate to the search for faith and meaning in life.

SESSION 1

A Time of Change



Objectives

- To assist the young people in assessing the development they have accomplished during the past few years of adolescence and to identify the immediate changes that await them in the transition to young adulthood
- To encourage the young people to begin identifying the many choices and decisions they will face
- To bring to prayer the many developmental tasks and transition decisions with which the young people are, and will be, struggling

Session Steps

- welcoming remarks and an opening prayer (15 minutes)
- an activity regarding significant moments in high school (20 minutes)
- a developmental assessment exercise (25 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a presentation and discussion on the five transitional tasks of young adults (30 minutes)
- a guided meditation and prayer (20 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

The first session of *Moving On: Embracing the Future* examines the key transitional tasks that await young people as they begin moving from adolescence to young adulthood. Keep in mind that these young people are, in fact, “in between.” They are nearing the end of one of the fastest and most significant times of growth they have ever experienced. Additionally, they are more consciously and concretely confronted by the challenges of the future, which for them is a mixture of uncertainty, excitement, and possibilities.

This session sets the stage for each of the subsequent sessions by introducing both the prayer area and the notion of symbolic ingredients. One ingredient is introduced at the beginning of each session to symbolize a particular issue that the young people are being called to embrace. All the ingredients are then used together in a closing ritual in session 5.

The ingredient for this session is honey. It symbolizes the joy and sweetness of the growth and development the young people have so far achieved. This ingredient, along with the other ones to be added each week, and the prayer area symbols of fire (a candle) and life (a plant or seedling) are designed to help center the young people in the mystery that God, the creator of the universe, has been, is, and will continue to be present to them throughout their journey.

Carefully and thoughtfully attend to the prayer area and the symbols associated with it, because they serve as the connectors for all the sessions and are the centering point for the course’s closing ritual in session 5. Also, consider whether the centering symbol should be a tree seedling or plant, because one of the options at the end of the course is to allow the young people to offer the tree or plant to the parish. Offering to plant a tree can serve as a living and growing sign of the young people’s continuing presence within and ongoing contributions to the life of the community. It is also a symbol that the young people can return to in subsequent years, remembering their part in planting it.

After the opening prayer, the activities lead the young people to reflect on the growth they have experienced in their life and the significant moments that marked that growth, especially during high school. Seniors especially love, and need, to reminisce. This enables them not only to name the growth they have accomplished but also to begin celebrating it.

Following the break the session introduces the young people to the five transitional tasks that make up much of the content for this course. Take the time needed to adequately prepare and present these tasks. You are asked to share brief stories from your own life that serve as examples and allow the group to get to know you better as an individual. By sharing your stories, you help build the group’s sense of identity and trust.

The session ends with a guided meditation based on Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” This course invites the young people to reflect on the various paths that await them in the coming year and introduces the reassuring fact that they do not walk these paths alone—that Jesus walks with them, no matter which path they choose.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- items for the prayer space: a small table, a candle and matches, a plant or tree seedling in a planter, five small glass bowls, honey, a colored cloth (optional), a Bible (optional)
- five sheets of 8½-by-11-inch paper
- markers
- masking tape
- pens or pencils
- copies of handout 1–A, “A Time for Growth,” one for each person
- a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective instrumental music
- newsprint
- copies of handout 1–B, “Transitions,” one for each person
- additional candles for the guided meditation (optional)

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

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

- For step A. Decide whether to use a plant or a tree for the prayer area.
- For step A. Set up the prayer area as directed in step A.

- ❑ For step B. Prepare five 8½-by-11-inch signs, each with one of the following terms written on it: “Pre-high schooler,” “Ninth Grader,” “Sophomore,” “Junior,” “Senior.”
- ❑ For step E. Prepare a talk on the five transitional tasks, using a brief story from your own life to illustrate each point.
- ❑ For step F. Rehearse the script for the guided meditation by reading it over a few times or practicing with a tape recorder.
- ❑ Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches described at the end of this session plan.

Opening Teacher Prayer

Recall your last year of high school and reflect on some of the thoughts, feelings, friendships, decisions, and situations that you experienced at that time. Try to visualize yourself as one of the young people coming to this first session, with all the mixed emotions that are part and parcel of the life of high school seniors.

Keep that image and those feelings in mind as you pray the following prayer:

God of all journeys,
be with me this day
as I prepare to be with the young people
you have sent my way.
Help me to keep their thoughts,
their questions,
their laughter,
and their concerns
in mind and heart as the session unfolds.

Allow your infinite peace to fill my soul,
your ageless wisdom to be evident in my words,
and your always-inclusive love to shine forth
as I greet each of your unique creations.

May this prayer bring me closer
to seeing you in each young person this day.
Amen.

Procedure

A Welcome and Opening Prayer (15 minutes)

Before the session. Discuss with the program coordinator or parish staff whether to use a plant or a tree seedling in the course. Explain to him or her that if a tree is chosen, the group would like to plant it on parish grounds at the conclusion of the course. The parish, of course, must approve such a plan. Set up the prayer table in an area of the room that is prominent yet out of the way enough so that the table will not be disturbed. Use the same area for each session. If you were granted permission to obtain a tree seedling (that will eventually be planted on the church grounds) or a plant (to be offered as a gift to the parish), use it as the centerpiece of the prayer table. Place five small glass bowls around the centerpiece. Put a bit of honey in one of the bowls. Place an unlit candle and matches next to the bowl that contains the honey. Add other touches, such as a colorful tablecloth or an open Bible, to make the area special.

1. As the participants arrive, greet them warmly and introduce yourself. When all have arrived, introduce yourself more fully to the group, perhaps offering some information about your family, occupation, and so on. Then introduce the theme of the course *Moving On: Embracing the Future*. Explain to the young people that their participation in the course will help them reflect on the many “lasts” they will be experiencing during their final year of high school. It can also help them clarify the values and principles that will shape their life’s mission. Briefly review the topics of the five sessions that make up this course. Share briefly why you chose to teach this particular course, perhaps including some brief memories from your own senior year of high school.

2. Direct the group’s attention to the prayer area and explain that each item on the table has particular significance related to what will be talked about during this course:

- *The plant* represents not only the growth that the young people have achieved thus far but also their values and beliefs, symbolized by the roots that cannot be seen, that each has developed over time.

- *The candle* represents Christ’s continuous presence with us and within us, which is especially reassuring as the young people enter their final year together.
- *The bowls* represent the themes of each of the five sessions of the course. In each session the young people will be invited to “taste” a different ingredient symbolizing a developmental task they are confronting. The ingredient for this session is honey, representing the sweetness of the growth and development that they have achieved thus far in their life. Tell the group that it will be reminiscing a little more about this growth in a few moments.

3. Ask the group to become centered for a moment. Then invite one of the young people forward to light the candle. Next, hold up the bowl of honey and offer the following prayer in your own words:

- God of our journey, we ask your presence with us this day as we are invited to taste and embrace the sweetness that has been a part of our life up to this moment of our journey. May we know of your constant presence with us as we take this next step toward young adulthood. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. Conclude by sharing your presumption that they are young adults and are coming to this program because they want to and that, therefore, you expect them to openly share their thoughts, to contribute to all discussions and activities, and to support and challenge one another in an appropriate and Christian manner.

B Activity: That Was Then . . . (20 minutes)

1. Invite the young people to help you post on different walls of the room the signs that you made before the session: “Pre-high schooler,” “Ninth grader,” “Sophomore,” “Junior,” and “Senior.” Instruct them to listen to each statement that you read aloud and go to the sign that names the year in which it *first applied* to them. Explain that some of the statements are easy to figure out and others demand that they think a little. Assure them that there are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements and that if the statement does not apply to them at all, they may just wait for the next one.

Read aloud three to five of the following statements that you think would work best for your group. Pause after each to allow the young people to move to the signs. After they move to their selected sign, tell them to join with one or two other people who chose their sign (or, if there are none, with those from a neighboring sign) and share briefly their remembrance of the identified event.

- the year of your first one-on-one date (not group or double date)
- the year you began your first “real” job (other than babysitting or yardwork)
- the year you physically grew the most
- the year you began thinking for yourself and making important decisions
- the year you personally discovered God’s presence in your life
- the year you met the person who is now your best friend
- the year you felt most alone and isolated
- the year you did your best academically
- the year you began to excel at a sport, hobby, or other interest that right now has lots of meaning for you

2. After you read the last statement and the young people have shared their experiences, ask the group members to sit down where they are and face you. Lead a discussion using the following questions:

- As you were sharing and remembering the stories from your past, what feelings or thoughts struck you?
- Did you share any stories from your early high school years? If so, in what ways have you changed from the person you were then? Are you more content with the person you are now? Why or why not?
- If you could go back to any one of the experiences named, but with the maturity and skills that you have today, which one would you revisit? What would you do differently?

3. Close this activity by noting how important it is that the young people acknowledge the growth and development they have experienced thus far in their life, especially over the past four years. Often, when people are caught up in the process of growing, it is difficult for them to see the small but important strides they have made. It is often easier to look back one or more years to see how much they have grown.

Explain that the next activity will help the group members assess the amount of growth they have undergone and name some of the reasons for that growth.

C Brainstorming Exercise: This Is Now (25 minutes)

1. Distribute handout 1–A, “A Time for Growth,” and explain that the participants are to take the next 5 to 8 minutes in quiet time to assess their own growth in various developmental areas. Explain that they can do this by completing the sentences on the handout for each age level, as indicated. Let the group know that they will be asked to share some of their responses in small groups after the quiet reflection time.

If space allows let the participants find a place apart from the group to work. Consider playing reflective instrumental music in the background.

2. After 5 to 8 minutes, invite the young people to get into small groups of three to four people and, beginning at the age six level, quietly share their handout reflections. Stress that they should spend most of their discussion time on the person they are now. Announce that they have just 10 minutes for this small-group sharing.

3. After 10 minutes invite the small groups to develop a list of the people, places, and events that have been the most influential in forming and shaping them into the persons they are today. Instruct them to use general titles or categories rather than specific names of friends, adults, or institutions. Give the groups about 3 minutes to brainstorm this list. Have them each assign a recorder. The recorder’s job is to jot down the group’s comments on the back of his or her handout. Tell the recorders to be prepared to share their list with the large group.

4. After the small groups have developed their lists, call everyone together and invite the recorders to share three of the significant people, places, and events that their group listed. Write these on a sheet of newsprint. If a small group repeats another’s category, simply place a check mark by it. Continue giving each group additional turns to share up to three responses until all items from every list have been written on the newsprint.

5. Conclude the activity by summarizing the following points in your own words. Personalize your presentation by sharing experiences from your life.

- The person you are today depends on a wide variety of factors, including your individual personality and unique gifts, the different people (both friends and adults) you happened to encounter growing up, the accomplishments as well as the tragedies you experienced, and the places and environments that were part of your upbringing.
- Only in looking back can you see the growth that has been accomplished in your life, as well as gain a better sense of the person you have become. Such reflection is important before looking ahead to envision the person you hope to be in the future.
- A primary task for all high schoolers is that of developing a sense of their own identity—answering the significant question, Who am I? This is a question that, through a variety of ways, they spend the majority of their high school years trying to answer.
- Many of the pieces that make up your identity are formed through the feedback you receive from friends, significant adults (teachers, youth ministers, parents), and other people you meet through the various involvements, jobs, and hobbies you undertake. Unfortunately, some of that feedback may be negative, even damaging. As people mature, they must assess the affect of such experiences and deal with the consequences of them. Slowly your experiences and the people you know begin to help you form, and finally claim, the unique identity that makes you who you are.
- The bottom line to all this is that you cannot confidently and successfully take the next steps required in young adulthood until you have named and embraced your own sense of personal identity—in other words, to have come to at least some satisfying answer to the question, Who am I?

Explain to the young people that after the break they will explore the specific tasks and issues that are awaiting them during this final year as well as in the near future.

D Break (10 minutes)

E Presentation and Discussion: This Will Be in the Future . . . (30 minutes)

1. Invite the young people to brainstorm some of the tasks and issues they will be undertaking or facing in the next five years. Have one or two young people write the responses on newsprint as they are called out. If the group is not sure of what type of tasks or issues you are referring to, offer a couple of examples, such as finding a job or choosing a major in college.

2. Invite the group to look over the list for a minute and privately identify the top three issues and tasks that they think they need to face in the coming year. Go down the list, asking for a show of hands to the question,

- How many had this as one of your personal top three?

Note the total next to each list item. Circle the top three vote getters.

3. Distribute handout 1–B, “Transitions,” to the young people. Then give a talk based on the presentation notes at the end of this session plan. Try to offer a *brief* concrete example from your own life or from the life of someone you know that can illustrate each of the five transitional tasks. (If the stories take more than 2 to 3 minutes each, the presentation will take too long.) If any of the five transitional tasks in the presentation were listed or circled during the brainstorming activity, refer to that as you discuss it.

As you talk about each of the five tasks, invite the young people to circle the number on their handout that best correlates with where they are right now in terms of accomplishing that task. Be sure they use the phrases listed under each task on the handout as a way to honestly measure where they are in their transition. Announce that you will collect the completed handouts after this presentation, but that the young people will get them back at the end of the course.

4. After the presentation and after everyone has marked their handout, lead a discussion using some of the questions below:

- Which of the five transitional tasks of young adulthood struck you as the most important? Why?

- Which of the tasks seems to be the easiest for you? the most difficult? Why?
- Are there other tasks that you think should be included on this list? Why?

Collect handout 1–B from the young people.

5. Conclude this discussion with remarks like the following:

- Dealing with these five transitional tasks begins with *awareness*. People who are aware of the choices, challenges, and issues awaiting them in the future will be better prepared to face decisions in the present too.
- In contrast, people who deny, escape from, or ignore current issues will bring that “baggage” into young adulthood, thereby slowing down, and sometimes halting, the process of growth and development of the person’s dreams, aspirations, and hopes.
- Throughout this course, we will look more closely at each of the tasks introduced in this session. Integral to each task is our rootedness in God, who walks beside us, especially during these moments of mixed emotions and blessings.
- In order to reflect more deeply on this notion of God always with us, we will conclude this session with a guided meditation to help you become centered in your own unique journey to young adulthood.

Note: Be sure to save the newsprint used to brainstorm the young people’s top three issues. These sheets will be reused in session 4.

F Guided Meditation: “The Road Not Taken” (20 minutes)

1. Invite the young people to situate themselves comfortably, whether sitting or lying down, anywhere in the room. Suggest that they stay away from anything that may distract them. If possible, dim the lights and light a couple more candles. In a slow, reflective tone of voice, introduce and then guide this meditation with words like the following:

- I am going to guide you through a meditation exercise. It is similar to others you may have experienced in other Horizons Program courses.

We can get in touch with much of what was talked about during this first session by visualizing a path that leads to the edge of a woods. The path is clear and well worn, much like your life

so far during high school—it has become familiar and comfortable. However, as you near the woods, the path branches off in many directions. Where the paths lead is unclear, because they are hidden by the woods up ahead, much like the many decisions and tasks that you must begin attending to in this final year of high school.

The scene I've described is reminiscent of one the poet Robert Frost wrote about many years ago. He tells of a traveler who comes upon two roads that diverge, and the traveler is forced to make a decision about which direction to go.

I want you to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and exhale. Relax and listen as you begin your own journey with the words of Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken":

[Begin softly playing reflective music and continue it until the meditation ends. Pause several seconds at every ellipse (. . .). A few pauses should be as long as 30 to 45 seconds. These spots are noted within the meditation.]

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

(Robert Frost)

You are now on a path. . . . Feel the sunshine streak through the green leaves of the trees as you confidently walk along the well-worn path that leads to the woods. You feel safe, at peace and are eagerly looking forward to the journey that lies ahead.

As you walk along the path, you think about all the friends and family members who are part of your life right now. . . . You think about the fun and fulfilling experiences you've had over the past few years with the people in your life . . . the different involvements you are part of . . . and the places you like to hang out at. . . . You think about all the different things you could do with your life in the future . . . the many directions, jobs, and places your life could be headed. . . .

As you near the woods, you begin noticing that the clear path you are on suddenly splits into many paths. One of the paths is smooth and well worn and looks pretty easy, but it leads into the woods, and you cannot see what it leads to. But you think you might know. . . .

Another path is rocky and has a few puddles in the way. It doesn't look too comfortable, but there is a certain amount of adventure for one who would risk taking it. You think you know where this path may lead. . . .

A third path is covered with brush and weeds. You can tell that only a few people have taken this one before. You feel uncertain as you look at the path, which leads into the dark woods. But you are not threatened by it. Rather, you are intrigued. You wonder what might lie at the end of it. . . .

A fourth path looks like it combines a little bit of the other three paths. It is decorated with wildflowers and bushes, but not so as to block the traveler's way. You also notice a few stones and puddles here and there, but they are intermingled with soft grass and smooth dirt stretches. This path also leads into the woods, and although you cannot see where it goes, you are certain that it leads to a place you have been thinking about venturing to. . . .

As you are contemplating which path to walk down, out of the corner of your eye you see someone walking toward you. You turn to find Jesus standing near you. You walk toward him and the two of you embrace. He invites you to sit down on a nearby log. He asks you to tell him of the different paths that lie ahead and the choices you are faced with as you look at each one. [Pause for 30 to 45 seconds to allow this internal conversation to occur.]

Jesus hears not only what you say but what you are feeling inside about all the things you will need to do before you begin your journey

down the chosen path. . . . You think of the people, places, and events that you will be leaving behind when you begin your journey. You think about the many opportunities that await you, and you share all this with Jesus, who continues to sit beside you, listening. . . . [Pause for 30 to 45 seconds to allow this conversation to occur.]

As you speak, you become aware that whatever path you choose, you will not be alone . . . that Jesus will journey with you. . . . You also know that you can always return from a path that leads to a place you don't like . . . that there is always a way back if you should choose to take it . . . and that Jesus will not abandon you or leave you alone. . . .

As you are filled with a sense of Jesus' presence, you and Jesus set off together down the path you have chosen . . . walking together as you both enter the woods ahead. . . . [Pause 30 to 45 seconds before proceeding.]

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes, be aware of this moment, and remain at peace.

2. To complete the meditation, invite the young people to sit in a circle. Ask them to join hands if you think they would be comfortable doing so. Then invite them to prayerfully share with the group a name, phrase, or personal need that emerged during their meditation experience. After someone shares a point, invite the group to respond, "Lord, walk with us."

Conclude this shared prayer experience with the Lord's Prayer.

Alternative Approaches

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 these alternative approaches:

For step B. If space is limited or the group is too small for the sign method to be effective, name one high school year at a time (ninth grader, sophomore, junior, senior) and invite the group to call out some of the major events or firsts that occurred during that year. If the responses are few, use the list of statements in step B as idea starters.

For step E. Invite a group of recently graduated young adults to help with the various components of this session. They might be able to help especially in step E by sharing some of their reactions to or experiences with the five transitional tasks. Set aside time at appropriate points of your presentation to let them speak. Or direct the young adults to do the entire presentation by dividing up the five tasks and sharing part of their own story to illustrate their assigned task. Note, however, that this would significantly affect the timing of the activity.

For step F. Rather than telling the young people to spread out around the room, gather them around the prayer area or have them form a circle and move some of the prayer objects (e.g., the candle, the glass bowls, and the plant or seedling) to the middle of the circle.

For step E. Before the meditation give each person a plastic zipper bag half filled with soil. Invite everyone to put one of their hands into the bag and grasp the soil during the meditation visualization. Afterward, during the shared prayer, invite the young people to place their soil (representing the path they walked) into the planter, holding the plant or seedling as they offer a prayer. Explain that the gesture symbolizes their walking this journey together as well as letting go and allowing God to share in the journey with them.

For step F. If you do not use the soil option, consider inviting the young people to dip the tip of their finger into the honey as they share their prayer, to symbolically taste of the sweetness that is part of this time of their life.



Family Connections

- Encourage the young people to discuss with their family some of the major decisions and tasks the adults in their family made or were faced with toward the end of their high school years. Discuss how such decisions and tasks were similar to or different from those that high school young people of today face.
- If the parish is not planning to use the Horizons minicourse *Senior Year: Last Things and Lasting Things*, recommend that families do the memory lights activity from session 3 of that course.



Journal Options

- If you decide to include journal writing in the course, invite the young people to write about how they interpreted each of the four paths (smooth, rocky, overgrown, and a mix of all three) visualized in the meditation. Tell them to describe in writing the pros and cons of traveling down each path.
- If the young people have been keeping a journal throughout high school, encourage them to look over the entries. Suggest that they read entries that were made at about the same time of year as it currently is, for each year of high school (e.g., if it is October, have them reread the October entries from their ninth grade, sophomore, junior, and senior years). Ask them to write about how the entries reflect changes and growth in their thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

Presentation Notes

Use these notes for your presentation in part 3 of step E. Have newsprint and a marker available for your use during the presentation.

Refer to the list the group brainstormed in step E and comment on how many choices and decisions await people in the last year of high school. Ask if anyone feels a little bit overwhelmed just looking at the list.

Explain that it is common for seniors to go through many emotions as they grapple with the decisions and tasks facing them at the end of high school. These feelings seem to intensify during the second semester of the senior year. Some people have named these varied emotions “senioritis” or “the senior slump.”

Explain that you would like to discuss *five transitional tasks* (write this on the newsprint) that young adults face. Explain that these five tasks are called *transitional* because they serve as a pathway between the life they now know and the one that awaits them after high school.

Note that these five tasks must be embraced no matter if an individual decides to stay at home, go to work, attend college, join the military, and so on. Also explain that the order in which the tasks are presented has no bearing on their priority. Each task

must be addressed to a reasonable degree in order for a young person to embrace the future.

1. Accepting one's self-identity. One of the greatest issues that young people face in the adolescent years is the gradual breaking away from the childhood roles they played out within their family and among their peers. This process of identity formation comes to a crucial moment during the last year of high school as the young people must embrace their own emerging sense of identity—of who they are becoming—apart from how they have been seen and identified in the past by others.

Seniors must claim and accept their identity for themselves in order to have a healthy sense of who they are and who they are becoming. This sense of self is crucial as they venture into the future and away from the familiar roles and sources of support that they enjoyed during the teenage years. If young people do not name and embrace a clear sense of self, they will continue to be confused by the various roles expected of them by family, friends, and other groups.

2. Seeking autonomy. One of the key tasks of teenagers is the gradual but persistent development of their own independence. This type of independence is not the recklessness or rebelliousness that is oftentimes associated with teenagers (although those traits do mark the beginning of this process), but rather their increasing self-awareness and responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Autonomy means to “self-govern,” and the achievement of a sense of autonomy is essential for young people who are entering young adulthood and will be required to make good decisions that will affect their current and future life. When making decisions, autonomous people balance the input from those around them with their own thoughts and values. Those who have not achieved autonomy rely too heavily on the advice and input of others.

The long-term goal of autonomy includes an additional step, one toward *interdependence* (an acknowledgment of our mutual reliance and dependence on all people in order to grow and thrive). However, we cannot reach interdependence until independence is first achieved.

3. Creating a dream and a mission. While young people are well known for their idealistic hopes and dreams, such idealism becomes a powerful force as they prepare to leave the familiarity of high school

for the “real” world. It has been accurately stated that if you do not know where you are going, you’ll have a hard time getting there. This is particularly true for seniors preparing for their next major life step. Young peoples’ task of developing a dream or a mission to guide their life is foundational to successfully navigating many of the choices and obstacles they will face in the coming years. If they have a clear sense of direction (even if that direction changes in the future), chances are high that they will achieve much more than if they had never taken the time to develop a dream or a mission for their life.

4. Bringing closure to present situations and relationships. Seniors need to say good-bye to the many people, involvements, and roles they have developed over the years. Even if they are not leaving home, the relationships and places that are part of their lifestyle now will change, because their life will change. It is important for seniors to begin naming these significant people, involvements, and roles and then letting go of them in healthy and life-giving ways.

Sadness, grief, joy, and even relief are some of the emotions that accompany this transitional task. No matter the feelings associated with a particular person or place, leaving it behind as they enter a new stage of life is a loss to which closure must be brought. If they do not bring closure to a particular situation or relationship, then the extra “baggage” will haunt them, weighing them down emotionally, physically, and socially.

5. Seeking a mentor and a community. One of the most immediate tasks awaiting young adults upon graduation is the search for a community that accepts them and their values, ideals, and goals. The need to belong—to be supported and challenged by a group that accepts them as an individual—is a primary need for young adults in transition.

Oftentimes, groups and organizations—not always healthful ones—seek out or recruit emerging young adults. Young adults need to know ahead of time the types of groups they wish to belong to and the goals and values the groups espouse. It is important to be the one who decides which group to seek out, as opposed to being sought out by a group.

Closely related to seeking out a community is the search for a mentor, someone who might serve as a professional, moral, or spiritual guide. Every young adult seeks out, whether consciously or unconsciously,

ly, someone to serve as their role model. Depending on the needs of the young person, the adult may become a model for a particular career aspiration, spiritual avenue, or moral character. Mentors can have a powerful and profound effect on young adults. The connection with a mentor can happen by chance, or it can be intentionally pursued—by the young adult or the mentor. In either case, mentor relationships need to be carefully nurtured.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



Closing Teacher Prayer

I shall guide them to streams of water,
by a smooth path where they will not stumble.
(Jer. 31:9, NJB)

This session spoke of paths that invited the young people into different directions. Think of the paths your own life has taken as well as the one you are on now and then pray the following prayer:

God, my constant companion
during good times and bad,
lead me along the paths
that refresh my heart
and nourish my exhausted spirit.
I may often feel lost,
but I turn to you,
my steady guide,
who shows me the way of truth.
(Simsic, *Garden Prayers*, p. 65)



Evaluation

Take a few moments after the session to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions, and for future reference, write your thoughts in the spaces provided.

1. Something that really worked well in this session was . . .

2. Something that would make this session better next time is . . .

3. On the following scale, circle the number that best describes how well this session met the objective of helping the young people begin to identify the choices and decisions they will face.
 Did not meet objective ↔ Met objective completely
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:

4. Things I wish to follow up on during the next session are . . .

5. General comments:

A Time for Growth

In response to each of the unfinished sentences, jot down some key thoughts, words, or phrases that best illustrate what you thought or felt about that item at age 6, age 12, and now. Be honest. There are no right or wrong answers.



At age 6

At age 12

Now

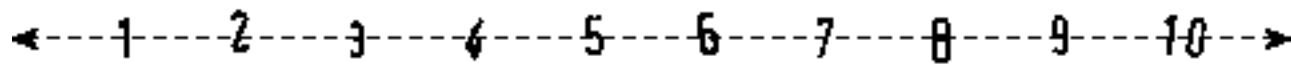
My family is . . .			
I'm most happy about . . .			
My biggest fear is . . .			
My favorite subject is . . .			
Church is . . .			
My best friends are . . .			
What I value most is . . .			
To me, Jesus is . . .			
My goal in life is to . . .			
I spend most of my time . . .			
I seem to struggle with . . .			
A big question is . . .			

TRANSITIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

Do not circle a number until you are instructed to do so by the teacher. Use the descriptions below each rating scale to accurately assess where you *currently* are in regard to the corresponding transitional task. These papers will be collected and given back to you later in the course.

TASK: ACCEPTING YOUR SELF-IDENTITY



1 = Starting it!

When friends tell you to “get a life,” you ask to borrow one of theirs.

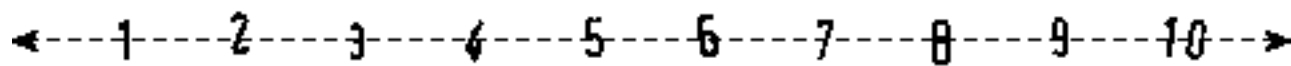
5 = Doing it!

You recognize your uniqueness and are beginning to struggle with the fact that you are not, and never will be, totally together and accomplished in every way—that you have limitations and imperfections.

10 = Done it!

You realize and accept that you are who you are, including the good, the bad, and the imperfect! You are taking this total sense of self and applying it toward being an adult in the world.

TASK: SEEKING AUTONOMY



1 = Starting it!

You still let your parent pick out the clothes you’ll wear to school each day.

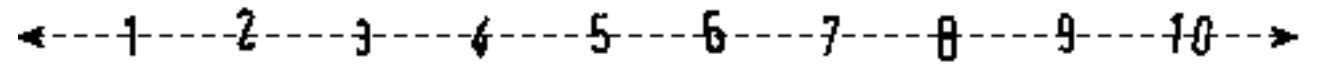
5 = Doing it!

You are separating from parents and friends and making decisions for yourself, based on your own values, beliefs, and interests.

10 = Done it!

You rely on yourself, but recognize that interdependence is needed to grow as an individual and to participate fully in life.

TASK: CREATING YOUR DREAM



1 = Starting it!

You realize that this is the last year of high school and you feel like you need to figure out what you are doing with the rest of your life!

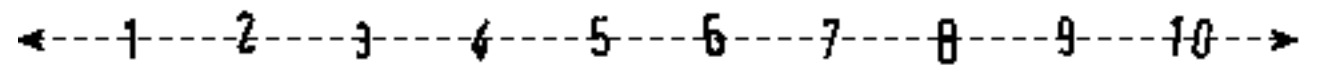
5 = Doing it!

You are reflecting on and talking with others about your gifts, values, and strengths and in what careers they can be best put to use.

10 = Done it!

You have created a personal mission statement that identifies your gifts and values and states how you intend to incorporate those into your life’s pursuits.

TASK: SAYING GOOD-BYE



1 = Starting it!

You are bummed out by having just discovered that within this next year you will need to let go of many of your friendships and involvements.

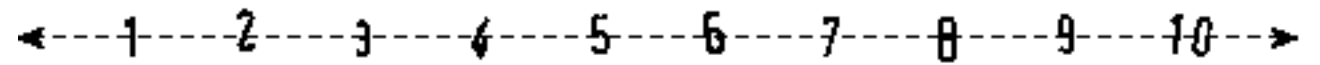
5 = Doing it!

You are making plans to celebrate the many “lasts” that will be occurring with people, places, and events. You are starting to say good-bye and to make plans for leaving behind the life known during high school.

10 = Done it!

You are celebrating and saying good-bye to the significant people and places in your life. You are already forming new relationships and involvements. You are committed to keeping in touch with the friends and family that you said good-bye to.

TASK: SEEKING OUT A MENTOR AND COMMUNITY TO BELONG TO



1 = Starting it!

Who needs other people, anyway!

5 = Doing it!

You are beginning to think of where you will be after high school and what groups and individuals you would be interested in connecting with in order to be supported in your values and vocation.

10 = Done it!

You have identified one or more groups for young adults that support your beliefs and interests. You are investigating the leaders within your field of interest whose behavior and work you admire and wish to use as a model.