

**Parish Edition**

***Catechist Guide***

saint mary's press



***Catholic  
Connections***  
*for Middle Schoolers*

***Sacraments  
and Prayer***

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***Patricia E. Clement***

SACRAMENTS  
PRAYER

***Sacraments and Prayer  
Catechist's Guide***

***Catholic Connections***



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# INTRODUCTION

## Catholic Connections Program

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

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

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

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

## Tips for Leading Sessions

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

### Session Time Frame

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



## Materials and Preparation

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

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

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

## Quick-Start Activities

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

## Prayer Times

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

The young people should be involved in the prayer times as much as possible. For the closing prayers in most sessions, the participants read together a prayer from the handbook. If they are willing and able, participant volunteers

can read the Scripture passages and prayers, even if the instructions do not indicate the need for a participant to read.

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

## Making the Most of the Activities

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

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

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

## Options

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

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

- Have the cards out on the table as the young people arrive. They can quiz one another while waiting for the session to start.
- After four or five sessions, plan to leave the last 10 minutes or so of the remaining sessions to hold *GAME ON! Games for Catholic Connections* tournaments.

- Invite parents to attend the final session. Have the young people test their own knowledge by playing one of the card games with (or against!) their parents.

## **Course Project**

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

## **Using *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* Effectively**

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

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

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

## Overview of *Sacraments and Prayer* *Catechist's Guide*

This course is designed to help young people better understand and more fully participate in the Church's sacraments and prayer life. The sessions connect directly to *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* and cover basic teachings about the sacraments and prayer. The participants will begin with an overview of the Church's Seven Sacraments and then explore the sacraments in more detail. They will also explore the topic of prayer and address two life issues relevant to young people in light of course material. The importance of the central place of the Eucharist in Catholic life will also be emphasized.

### Course Themes

#### **Core Session: 1. Sacraments: Celebrating Christ's Presence**

This session introduces the participants to the Seven Sacraments and how they help us to recognize the invisible reality of Christ's presence.

#### **Core Session: 2. The Eucharist**

This session looks at the Church's central sacrament, the Eucharist, and provides the participants with an overview.

#### **Core Session: 3. Baptism and Confirmation**

This session uses a sports metaphor to explore Baptism and Confirmation and how the Church initiates new members.

#### **Core Session: 4. The Sacraments of Healing**

This session helps to increase the participants' familiarity with the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick so that they will be comfortable asking for them when they, a friend, or a family member would benefit from them.

#### **Core Session: 5. Matrimony and Holy Orders**

This session provides an overview of the Church's two Sacraments of Service and encourages the participants to consider how they can use their gifts to serve others.

#### **Core Session: 6. Prayer: Tuning In to God**

This session focuses on God's constant presence and desire for relationship with us. It encourages the participants to consider ways they can tune in to God's presence.

### **Core Session: 7. The Lord's Prayer**

This session looks at the meaning of the Lord's Prayer and involves the participants in exploring the prayer's seven petitions.

### **Life Issue Session: 8. The Ultimate Question: Why Am I Here?**

This session draws on course material to help the participants explore one of life's big questions and encourages the participants to recognize that they were created with a God-given purpose.

### **Life Issue Session: 9. God, Where Are You?**

This session focuses on finding God when God seems far away and considers how helpful the Church's sacraments and prayer can be.

### **Concluding Session: 10. The Eucharist in Catholic Life**

The final session returns to the topic of the Eucharist and emphasizes its central place in the life of the Church.

## **Essential Resources**

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

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

## **Strategies for Helping Young People to Pay Attention**

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

### **A Million Miles Away**

Think back to when you were in school. Did you ever find yourself day-dreaming in the classroom? Most of us at one time or another have become

lost in thought and disconnected from the action in the classroom. But did you ever *decide* to daydream? Ever say to yourself, “I’m bored with this lesson; I’m going to daydream instead”? Most of us “wake up” from daydreams not remembering how or when we lost touch with our environment.

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

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

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

## Attention Differences

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

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

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

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

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

## Around the World with Carlos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They all responded, “Yes.”

“Did he pay attention?”

“Nooooo!”

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

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

“And were you successful at paying attention?”

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

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

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

It would be an oversimplification to say that a stress ball is the cure for attention issues. For some it works wonders; for others it may have no

effect, or it may make things worse. Try having a variety of items on hand for participants to try out. You can include squeeze balls, bean bags, putty, pieces of cloth, and other items that can be grasped.

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

## **Strategies for Arranging Your Meeting Space**

### **Create Order**

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

### **Be Open to Alternative Seating**

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

### **Limit Visual Distractions**

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

### **Allow Breaks**

Adults take coffee breaks, get up to stretch, or chat by the water cooler. Taking a break helps us to reduce stress and maintain focus. Sometimes breaks are scheduled, but often they are spontaneous responses to stiffness, fatigue, and distraction.

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

## **Strategies for Giving Instructions**

### **Use Multiple Modes**

Throughout this guide you will read suggestions for expanding the ways you share instructions. You may be asked to write the instructions on the



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

### **Check for Understanding**

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

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

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

### **Communicate One Step at a Time**

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

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

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

### **Physical Proximity**

Sometimes simply walking close to a participant is enough to reestablish attention. This is a great tool for refocusing young people who are lost in thought or engaged in private conversations. Try to integrate this into

your natural movement throughout the meeting space. If the only time you move from the front of the room is when participants are off-task, the young people will quickly see it as a correction rather than a gentle “bringing back.”

### **Special Delivery**

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

### **Secret Signals**

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

### **Techniques to Avoid**

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

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

## **Working in Groups**

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

## **Making a Difference as a Catechist**

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

# SACRAMENTS: CELEBRATING CHRIST'S PRESENCE

## Session Overview

This session begins with a self-directed quick-start activity in which the participants will attempt to prove that air (an invisible reality) exists. They will then explore common rituals that use symbols to celebrate invisible realities. The Seven Sacraments will be introduced as visible events that celebrate the invisible reality of Christ's presence. In the optional session extension, the participants will examine the many ways in which parish life helps to make Christ a part of the community's daily life.

## Objectives

Enable the participants to do the following:

- understand that visible objects and actions help us to recognize the invisible realities in our lives
- understand that the sacraments are visible encounters that help us to recognize the invisible reality of Christ's loving presence

## At a Glance


<b>A. Quick-Start Activity</b>	<b>(5 minutes)</b>
<b>B. Welcome and Opening Prayer</b>	<b>(5 minutes)</b>
<b>C. Celebration Super Sleuth</b>	<b>(15 minutes)</b>
<b>D. Seven Sacraments Super Sleuth</b>	<b>(20 minutes)</b>
<b>E. Sacraments in My Parish</b>	<b>(10 minutes)</b>
<b>F. Closing Prayer</b>	<b>(5 minutes)</b>
<b>Optional Session Extension: My Parish Celebrates Faith</b>	<b>(15 minutes)</b>

## Materials and Preparation

### Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- name tags (optional)

- 
- copies of handout 1–A, “Super Sleuth Detective Agency”
  - Bibles
  - sheets of blank paper
  - copies of handout project–A, “Project Global Connect,” from the “Optional Course Project” section at the end of the guide (only if your group is participating in the optional course project)
  - session 1 “Mirror Meditation” cards from resource 1–A, “Mirror Meditation’ Cards”
  - copies of handout 1–B, “Personal Journal Sheet” (optional)

Gather the following additional items:

- a package of balloons

### Preparation Tasks

- Place the opened package of balloons where the participants will see it.
- Write on the board the following instructions for the quick-start activity:

Fact or Fantasy?

You have 5 minutes to create a winning debate or scientific proof that air really exists, even though we can’t see it. Work alone or in small groups.

### Catechist Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the opportunity to share faith with young people in my parish during the upcoming weeks. I offer my heart, my hands, and my voice to your service. Fill me with the Holy Spirit, so that the time we spend together will become a time of spiritual growth for us all. I ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 23
- *CCC*, numbers 1077–1112 (liturgy), 1113–1134 (sacraments), 1667–1679 (sacramentals)
- Matthew 28:18–20, Acts of the Apostles 2:1–4, Luke 22:19–20, John 20:23, Luke 4:40, Ephesians 5:31–33, Hebrews 5:5–6

## Session Steps

### A. Quick-Start Activity (5 minutes)

**Greet** the participants as they enter the meeting space, and invite them to begin the quick-start activity. Point out the following instructions on the

board, but also share them verbally if any participants need help referencing the board:

Fact or Fantasy?

You have 5 minutes to create a winning debate or scientific proof that air really exists, even though we can't see it. Work alone or in small groups.

## B. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Welcome** everyone and make any announcements.
2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
3. After a moment of silence, **say** the following:
  - ▶ Take a moment to think about God. How do we know God exists?  
*[Pause for a moment.]*
  - ▶ Take a moment to think about love. How do we know love exists?  
*[Pause for a moment.]*
  - ▶ Listen as I read a short prayer that was written by someone who considered this question a long time ago. His name is Origen, and he was a well-known Church leader who lived in the third century:
 

May the Lord Jesus touch our eyes, as he did those of the blind.  
Then we shall begin to see in visible things  
those which are invisible.  
May he open our eyes to gaze, not on present realities  
but on the blessings to come.  
May he open the eyes of our heart to contemplate God in Spirit,  
through Jesus Christ the Lord,  
to whom belong power and glory through all eternity. Amen.


*(Origen, ca. 185–254)*

**Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

4. **Introduce** the course by explaining that over the upcoming weeks, the participants will explore the concrete and visible ways God expresses love for us and interacts with us in our lives.

## C. Celebration Super Sleuth (15 minutes)

1. **Invite** a few volunteers to quickly offer their "proofs" from the quick-start activity. If no one has already done so, blow up a balloon. Hold it up for all to see, and point out that something must be inside the balloon to keep it stretched out; therefore air must exist.

- 
2. **Ask** the participants to raise their hands and, one at a time, share examples of visible “proof” that love exists (e.g., weddings, newborn babies, hugs, shared meals, family and friends offering support).
  3. **Introduce** this session by stating that there are a lot of invisible realities in our lives. **Explain** that we use concrete items—things we can see—to represent these realities. **Draw** a dollar sign on the board and ask the young people what the symbol represents (wealth). **Ask** them to name other visible symbols or objects that represent love (a heart, a wedding ring), spring (a flower), and happiness (a smiley face).
  4. **Explain** that it is common for people to use rituals to celebrate invisible realities. **Mention** that rituals combine objects with actions and words. **Distribute** a copy of handout 1–A to each participant. **Draw** the young people’s attention to side 1 of the handout. Explain that each row describes a common ritual. Invite the participants to put on their detective hats and work with you to identify the events.
  5. **Read** (or invite a participant to read) the descriptions in the first row. **Encourage** the participants to name the event and the invisible reality that each represents (e.g., birthday, a year of life, growth). **Repeat** this process for the next two rows.

### D. Seven Sacraments Super Sleuth (20 minutes)

1. **Divide** the large group into small groups of two or three. Be flexible about allowing some young people to work in pairs or even solo if group size is a problem for them.
2. **Introduce** the activity by writing “Sacraments” on the board and saying the following:
  - ▶ As Catholics we believe God loves us and showers us with love every day. We call God’s loving presence in our lives grace.
  - ▶ The Church has seven special celebrations, called sacraments, that help us to encounter fully the presence of Christ.
  - ▶ Sacraments are much more powerful than the rituals we just studied. Sacraments do not simply represent an invisible reality; they are actual real-life encounters with our loving God! [See *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers, pages 254–255.*]
3. **Direct** the participants to take out their handbooks. When all are ready, invite them to turn to page 261. Then ask for volunteers to read aloud the section titled “Signs of Grace.” As the readers mention the Seven Sacraments, **write** them on the board.

**A**

4. **Ask** the participants to turn to side 2 of handout 1–A. **Invite** them to use their detective skills to discover some things about the sacraments. **Distribute** a Bible and a pen or pencil to each participant. **Assign** one row on the handout to each small group and provide the following directions, allowing the small groups to complete each step before going on to the next one:
  - ▶ Locate and read the Scripture passage listed in column 2.
  - ▶ In column 1 write the name of the sacrament most closely related to the passage. Refer to the list of sacraments on the board for clues.
  - ▶ In column 3 write down any words spoken or visible objects or actions mentioned in the passage. If none, leave blank.
  - ▶ Leave column 4 blank for now.

If the participants would benefit from an example, go through the first row together as a group. After the groups have completed the first row, **assign** another, this time allowing them to complete the steps on their own. **Move** around the meeting space to make sure the groups are on

track and following the directions correctly. **Invite** those groups that finish early to list their “evidence” on the board near the applicable sacrament name.


5. **Review** the results by going through each sacrament and inviting the small groups to share. Here are some possible responses for column 3:

- **Baptism:**  
“name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”
- **Confirmation:**  
Pentecost, wind, fire, Holy Spirit

**A**

## Signs of Grace

Chapter 23: Sacraments: Celebrating Christ's Presence




In the sacraments, we encounter God's grace in tangible ways. That means that in the sacraments we can see God's love. We can touch it and taste it. We can hear it and smell it. God calls us to participate in the sacraments so we can encounter his loving grace in our lives in unique and powerful ways.

God calls us to encounter new life in Christ through Baptism and Confirmation. Christ's Body and Blood feed us in the Eucharist. God calls us

**LIVE IT!**

At the Second Vatican Council, held in the 1960s, the bishops said, "It is necessary that the faithful come to it [the liturgy] with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [Sacrosanctum Concilium]*, number 11). To be attuned means to be "in sync or in harmony." It's like a band. If the members want to make good music, their instruments need to be in tune with each other. The bishops ask that our minds be in tune with our voices when we celebrate the liturgy. This means we should pay attention to what we say and sing at Church. Next time you participate in a liturgy, listen to what you say and sing. Find ways to sync your actions and thoughts during the week with what you pray on Sunday.



Do you think most people realize that sacraments like the Eucharist are encounters with God? If not, what might help them see this?

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- the Eucharist: bread, wine, “This is my Body.”
- Penance and Reconciliation: “Peace be with you.”
- Anointing of the Sick: friends brought the sick, laying on of hands
- Matrimony: The two become one, man and woman.
- Holy Orders: “You are a priest forever.”


6. **Conclude** this activity by drawing the participants’ attention to column 4, which they have left blank. Direct them to take out their handbooks. When all are ready, **invite** them to turn to page 256. Then invite a volunteer to read aloud the short section titled “Humanity, Meet Divinity.” Point out that the invisible reality is the same for all the sacraments: Christ is with us. **Explain** that in the weeks to come, the young people will take a closer look at all the sacraments and see how they touch our lives and the lives of those we love.

### E. Sacraments in My Parish (10 minutes)

1. **Invite** the participants to think about the celebration of sacraments in your parish. Challenge them to identify a favorite symbol, phrase, song, or action. **Ask** them to think about how it might help them to recognize the invisible reality of Christ’s presence. **Be prepared** to offer an example by commenting on your favorite symbol and how it helps you to recognize Christ’s presence.
2. **Distribute** a sheet of blank paper to each participant. **Tell** the young people they will have 1 minute to draw the symbol or describe the phrase, song, or action.

Part 4: Liturgy and Sacraments

The birth of Jesus shows us that God became man, born as a baby—like each one of us.



**C** **PRAY IT!**

Creator God,  
You have made everything—  
time and space, plants  
and animals,  
even me and  
everyone I love.  
You called all your  
creation good,  
and I know you are  
with me wherever I go.  
Bless this day, which  
you have made.  
Let me spend it  
imitating you  
by creating only good  
things and blessing the world  
with love.  
Amen

**B** **Humanity, Meet Divinity**

In a sacrament, ordinary human beings come face to face with God. No, you don’t actually see some guy with a beard and angels. Remember how we said liturgies use symbols to communicate? Sacraments are liturgies that use symbols. This means they use movement, gestures, and things like water and light, in addition to words, to communicate. Sacraments communicate that God is present in the midst of the community. Through sacraments we encounter Jesus Christ and his saving power, called grace.

The amazing thing about sacraments is that they use basic things like water, oil, bread, and wine. Yet these are signs that something extraordinary is present. They are things we can see that help us recog-

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3. **Invite** volunteers to share their work (or sing their song). Have them explain what they like about the symbol they chose and what invisible reality it might represent.

## F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

**Invite** the participants to take out their handbooks. When all are ready, invite them to turn to page 256, and lead them in saying the short prayer.



1. **Gather** everyone around the prayer table. Place the “Mirror Meditation” cards for this session on the table. **Explain** that each week the young people will receive a “Mirror Meditation” card. Encourage them to take the card home, tape it to a mirror, and say the prayer each time they see it.

*Note:* Consider encouraging the participants to memorize each week’s “Mirror Meditation.” You may opt to offer small prizes to reward anyone who does.

2. **Invite** everyone to direct their attention to the “Mirror Meditation” cards while you pray for God’s blessing, saying:
  - ▶ Lord, bless us and bless these prayer cards. Let them remind us that even though we cannot see you, you are always with us.
3. If the participants have not yet picked up a “Mirror Meditation” card, ask them to do so now. **Invite** everyone to read the prayer aloud. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

*Note:* If doing the optional course project, you may wish to take time now to explain the project and hand out any take-home instructions for families. Distribute the copies of handout project–A, “Project Global Connect.” Encourage the participants to bring in bulletins for the next session.

*Note:* If time allows and you are opting to invite the participants to journal, distribute the copies of handout 1–B, “Personal Journal Sheet.”

## Optional Session Extension

### My Parish Celebrates Faith (15 minutes)

This session extension works best just before the closing prayer.

#### Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- ☐ copies of your parish bulletin

1. **Distribute** the copies of your parish bulletin. **Share** the following points:
  - ▶ Catholic parishes provide much more than sacramental celebrations.

Every aspect of parish life can help us become aware of Christ's presence.

- ▶ A simple parish bulletin can often show us many ways we can experience Christ in our lives.

2. **Invite** the participants to look through the bulletin for ways their parish helps people experience Christ (e.g., service projects, choir, youth groups, parish suppers). As the young people discover “clues,” have them come forward and list them on the board. If any parish activity is unfamiliar to the group, ask a volunteer to investigate it and report back to the group at a later date.
3. **Ask** the participants to share examples of other ways they experience God's presence in their lives (e.g., nature, family, friends, private prayer, Bible reading).

*Note:* If your group is participating in the optional course project, “Project Global Connect,” direct the participants' attention to handout project A-1.

**Explain:**

- ▶ There are thousands of Catholic parishes throughout the world, and each has its own personality. Learning about other communities in our country and around the world can give us insight into how God shares life and love with all of us.

As a group discuss possible strategies for contacting other parishes and collecting their church bulletins. Make initial plans to implement those strategies.

### Discussion Starters

- If you had to choose just one symbol to remind you of God's love, what symbol would you choose? Why?
- Have you ever attended a celebration of a sacrament in which some participants were so touched by God's love that they cried? Explain.

### Media Connection

- *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who* (2008, 88 minutes, rated A-I and G) is a children's classic that features Horton, an elephant, who discovers the microscopic town of Whoville on a speck of dust. Unfortunately, only Horton's elephant-sized ears can hear the voice of the Whoville mayor. Trouble erupts when the jungle's head kangaroo insists that if you can't see something, it doesn't exist. This confrontation between the unbelieving kangaroo and Horton takes place in the first 15 minutes of the film. This segment could be used as the session opener, right after the prayer.