

*Believing
in a Media Culture*



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With special love and thanks to the Hailer, Brown, and
Levy families and the community of the Sacred Heart
of Mary.



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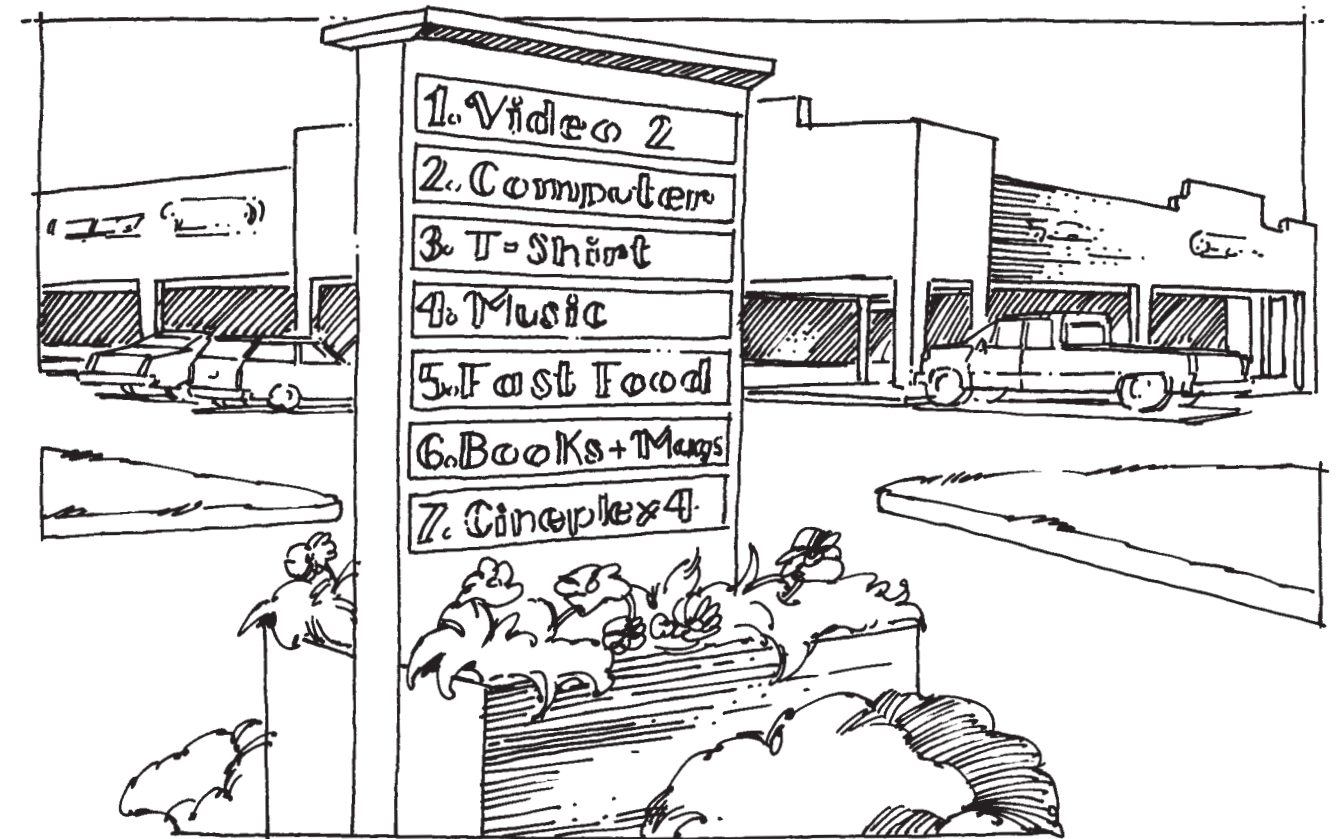
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

Anthony de Mello, SJ, a spiritual guide from India, relates the following story in *The Song of the Bird*:

“Excuse me,” said an ocean fish.

“You are older than I, so can you tell me where to find this thing they call the ocean?”

“The ocean,” said the older fish, “is the thing you are in now.”

“Oh, this? But this is water. What I am seeking is the ocean,” said the disappointed fish as he swam away to search elsewhere.

(“The Little Fish,” p. 12)

This little story illustrates the effect of the media on our psyche. Just as the young fish was unaware of the ocean that surrounded him, nourished him, and provided him with a perspective on the world, so too are many people unconscious of the media environment that pervades every aspect of their life.

The purpose of *Believing in a Media Culture* is to help young people become aware of the existence and influence of our popular culture, as it is transmitted through the mass media. Culture is easier to describe than to define. At its core it embodies the attitudes, values, behaviors, and institutions of a particular society. It is a shared consciousness, subtly absorbed as people grow up, that shapes people’s view of reality. Fueled by symbols, myths, and rituals, it is the way people make sense out of their

world. It is the reason why an American child becomes American, not Swiss, and why a Swiss youngster grows up Swiss, not Zambian.

But culture does more than simply mold a national personality: it also expresses a position within a society. For example, the culture that reflects the elite aspects of a society is often described as the *haute* (from the French, for “high”) culture. This is the culture most easily seen in Paris fashion, fine cuisine, classical music, and masterpieces of art. The so-called popular, or pop, culture, by contrast, expresses the experiences of ordinary people, and its outlook and conduct are readily absorbed by most of the society’s population. In the United States, this is the culture of T-shirts, fast food, alternative music, and billboard art.

Critics may scoff at popular culture, but it exerts a tremendous influence over us. An awareness of the subtle messages of this pop culture and the media environment that brings it to us is necessary to help us resist attitudes and behaviors of the culture that are contrary to the meaning of the Gospel. As believers we are called by our baptism to be countercultural, to stand for strong values that in some cases are very different from the ones the media hold up to us daily. A consciousness of the media milieu can enable us to discover and support the life-giving values of Jesus.

So, the starting point for this minicourse is the popular culture as it comes to us through TV shows and commercials, movies, electronic games, magazine ads, MTV, the Internet, and so forth. *Believing in a Media Culture* addresses the strong influence of the media and their power to transmit all kinds of values and attitudes. As the title of the course suggests, some young people will accept, unquestioningly, the “creed” of the media culture and the behavior that it inspires. With their emphasis on conspicuous consumption, quick fixes, and superficial relationships, media can become for these people a sort of religion. Other young people will bring the eyes of faith to the media culture and find there traces of their hidden God. From this perspective they might hear the media call them to witness to such Gospel values as simplicity, peacemaking, and respect for human dignity. These young Christians may learn to believe within the culture, rather than just blindly believing in it.

The challenge for believing Christians, especially those who try to share their faith with young people, is to take the popular culture seriously. Young people (and also adults!) need to be reminded of the

power of the popular culture and encouraged to acquire the skills necessary to interact intelligently with it. They must also become aware of the media that transmit that culture, and allow those media to build up their faith.

Believing in a Media Culture is designed to be taught as three sessions lasting 2 hours each. Because of the interrelatedness of the topics of the sessions, it is best to present the material in three consecutive weeks.

The activities in the course are designed with a group of about ten young people in mind. If the number of participants in your group varies considerably from that, you will need to make appropriate adjustments. Your program coordinator should be able to help you with this task.

This course may be led by one teacher or by a team. Using the team model will allow you to tap into the technical savvy of others for preparation of the media materials needed for each session. It will also offer a wider pool of creative ideas for adapting the course to better meet the needs of your unique group. Team members can either divide up the group and be responsible for smaller, more manageable clusters of young people, or work together with the large group, alternating leadership for various activities in each session.

The first session, “Wheat and Weeds Together,” introduces the world of pop culture and the variety of ways that culture is communicated in our society. The parable of the weeds among the wheat reminds the participants that in the “field” of media, one must be careful not to confuse the good “grain” with the noxious “weeds.”

Session 2, “Enlightened Values,” teaches the young people a simple strategy called media mindfulness, which they can apply in their critical interaction with the media. This time-honored scheme, long employed by poets and sociologists alike, is based on a model of reflection known as the experiential circle. It identifies four easy questions for the young people to ask themselves whenever they encounter media.

“Needs Versus Wants,” session 3, deals with advertising and its messages. It uncovers various techniques that advertisers use and provides the young people with the skills and practice they need to demystify the world of consumer propaganda.

We hope that together these three sessions will equip your young participants with the skills to understand the media culture and remain free in it, and with the tools and practice to find God in the midst of this electronic world of ours!

Background for This Course

The United States is one of the few developed countries in the world whose youth are not required to study the media. In the English-speaking world, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have developed very practical curriculums for young people that address a need for this type of education. It seems ironic that the United States, which has had much to say about the information superhighway, has little to say about the need to train young people in this area.

In a cover letter announcing the *Media Literacy Resource Guide, 1989*, to principals and teachers in grades 7 to 12, the director of the Centre for Secondary and Adult Education of the Province of Ontario, Canada, reminds educators that “the ultimate purpose of media education is to enable students to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to become critically autonomous citizens in a media-dominated world” (Roy, p. 1). For those of us trying to nurture young citizens in the Reign of God, these words provide helpful motivation as we make media literacy a part of the religious education curriculum.

A lack of media savvy, combined with a heavy diet of media messages, makes many young people particularly susceptible to manipulation by the popular culture. Media literacy empowers people, young and old, to understand various forms of cultural communication and how they affect daily life. When young believers become media literate, through courses such as this one in the Horizons Program, the popular culture can become for them a graced locus for encountering Jesus, the living word and authentic image of the invisible God.

The Adolescent and This Course

The media culture *is* the culture of youth. This is hardly surprising, because youth and young adults, with their impressive buying power, are the preferred target audience of the values, attitudes, and behaviors preached by the media culture.

Many young people spend more waking hours interacting with the media than they do with parents, educators, and, certainly, other members of the believing community. Music, films, television, magazines, CD-ROMS, electronic games, the Internet, and so forth, are the means of social communication that shape the attitudes and behavior of impressionable young people today. These same media, so read-

ily available, can also provide youth with exciting means of discovering important Christian values. *Believing in a Media Culture* shows young believers that when they become media literate, they, in turn, can provide their peers and family with the countercultural witness that marks the life of a Christian.

The Theology of This Course

The Roman Catholic Tradition is deeply rooted in the belief that God is both transcendent and immanent. Our faith challenges us to believe that the Holy One, mysterious and beyond the grasp of our limited intellect, was held in the arms of a very human mother at the beginning and end of a very human life on earth. Because of this belief in a God who, in Jesus, fully engages our world, we can say, with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, that “*nothing . . . is profane* for those who know how to see” (*The Divine Milieu*, p. 35).

This Catholic emphasis on incarnation spills out in our understanding of sacramentality, which stresses the value—indeed, necessity—of using all the senses to celebrate God’s action in our life. And what stronger appeal to the senses than that offered by the media: image, sound, vibration, and so forth.

Jesus used the words and images of the popular culture of his day to bring ordinary people to an understanding of God’s presence within. Jesus said he taught using parables, *the* medium of his day, because

“much as you hear, you do not understand; much as you see, you do not perceive.

For the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears hardly hear and their eyes do not dare to see. If they could see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, they would turn back and I would heal them.” (Matt. 13:14–15, Christian Community Bible)

The Catholic church, too, following the creative example of Jesus, has always been attentive to the value of the current media culture. Witness the images of the catacombs; the popular mystery and morality plays; homilies in stained glass; the Gutenberg Bible; the Vatican radio station, founded by Marconi; Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and his weekly TV program in the 1950s; and now the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and papal documents on CD-ROM: all used, in their own time, by the church to transmit the message of the Gospel.

The contemporary *Catechism of the Catholic Church* takes a very balanced view of the media,

which it often identifies as a “means of social communication” (no. 2496). It notes the role of the media in the promotion of culture (no. 2493) and the need to be “vigilant consumers” of what is said and shown (no. 2496).

The most recent, amplified view of the Catholic church’s understanding of the role of the media and the effect of the media on society is found in the 1992 Vatican pastoral instruction *Dawn of a New Era (Aetatis Novae)*. *Believing in a Media Culture* attempts to follow this document’s exhortation “to plan and carry out programs in media education and media literacy for teachers, parents and students” (Pontifical Council for Social Communications [PCSC], no. 28D). This course aims to help contemporary Catholic youth get in touch with a long tradition that the church has handed down. It continues the celebration of the belief that God can be discovered in the here and now, in the “software” of everyday 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.

Believing in a Media Culture might, at first glance, seem to have little to do with the Gospel. But, at heart, it is deeply religious, designed to help young people find God in the midst of the everyday environment of the media culture. The pastoral letter

Dawn of a New Era describes the principles this course has adopted:

The use of media is now essential in evangelization and catechesis. . . . The media of social communications can and should be instruments in the Church’s program of re-evangelization and new evangelization in the contemporary world. . . .

But even as the Church takes a positive, sympathetic approach to media, seeking to enter into the culture created by modern communications in order to evangelize effectively, it is necessary at the very same time that the Church offer a critical evaluation of mass media and their impact upon culture. (PCSC, nos. 11–12)

On Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Believing in a Media Culture*. 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.

The leader of the learning process in *Believing in a Media Culture* does not have to be a media expert. As many experienced teachers know, the best way to learn anything is to become a co-learner. In fact, the ever-changing content of today’s media culture almost forces the leader to learn along with the group. Adopting the attitude of a co-learner will not only lessen the stress of being a leader but also provide a surefire way of becoming media literate yourself.

You can prepare for this course in a number of practical ways. One easy approach is to begin to look at your own interaction with the popular and media cultures. Then start asking young people and others you encounter about their relationship with

media. Ask them to identify their favorite medium and to explain why they like it. Inquire about the type of films, music, TV programs, magazines, games, multimedia offerings, and so forth they prefer. And then take time to watch, listen to, read, or participate in some of their top choices.

Regularly reading the entertainment or community events section of the daily or weekly newspaper is a handy way to keep abreast of current films and TV programs, concerts, and other media experiences. Other ways to enter the media culture are to read current magazines along the lines of *Entertainment Weekly*, which can be purchased from a local store or read at the local library, and to watch a daily or weekly TV program devoted to the media culture.

In addition to assuming the attitude of a co-learner, it is wise to adopt a positive outlook about the media. If you prejudge the media as fundamentally evil, you will not only fail to embrace the traditional Catholic perspective on the world but also limit your ability to lead this course.

Other attitudes to nurture in yourself while leading *Believing in a Media Culture* include the following:

- a willingness to learn about and from the media
- a readiness to listen to viewpoints different from your own
- a playfulness that will allow you to re-enter the world of youth
- an openness to creativity and experimentation

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Believing in a Media Culture* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. Young high school students are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating 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. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. In fact, because *Believing in a Media Culture* requires the availability of various pieces of electronic media equipment (including a VCR and a TV monitor, tape and CD players, video game equipment, an AM/FM radio, and computer

equipment), you might want to conduct the sessions of this minicourse in someone’s family room or in the parish lounge, if your church has one. Another alternative is to create a “family room” specifically for this course within the parish hall. Still another alternative is to replicate a youth bedroom, complete with the necessary media hardware and enhanced with the stuff of popular culture: celebrity and film posters, concert programs, logo caps, slogan or team T-shirts, video game equipment, a multimedia set-up, and so on. The traditional classroom is the least desirable environment for this course. If such a room is your only option, try outfitting it with some of the paraphernalia listed above.

Clarify expectations. Because *Believing in a Media Culture* focuses on audio and visual material with which the young people are familiar, they might be tempted to view the sessions as mere entertainment. For this reason it is important at the beginning of the course to impress upon the participants that although the sessions may be fun, they are still learning experiences and require everyone’s attention and cooperation.

Stress the need for cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect. Encourage the participants to remember that everyone has certain favorite media, certain views, certain questions—in short, a unique way of being in the world. Remind the youth that everyone in the group, not simply the leader, is responsible for maintaining the environment of respect.

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. The activities in *Believing in a Media Culture* all require preparation. This could range from writing a simple list on newsprint to videotaping a series of commercials from television.

Allow plenty of time to get ready for each session, and involve as many others as you can in your preparations. Family, friends, and the young people themselves can all assist you by, in advance, collecting a variety of current magazines, taping segments of popular TV and radio programs, identifying and befriending people in the media industry who can help in various ways, or checking out possible sites for parish field trips.

Before beginning the course, consider recruiting a small team of young volunteer “technicians” (you might encourage them to choose their own catchy title) who can put together the media presentations required for the sessions, far in advance of their use. This same team might later become a production unit to videotape various activities of the Horizons Program or make itself available to assist other parish groups with similar projects. (Note: The taping and use of broadcast materials are governed by the fair-use doctrine of copyright law. Under this doctrine educators may videotape broadcast materials for nonprofit, limited use within the classroom. Keep in mind that copyright infringement is more than illegal; it deprives others of their livelihood. See the Suggested Resources section at the end of this introduction for sources of copyright information.)

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, whereas others clarify the connections between the media culture and the participants’ life as a believer. The session plans include guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and relaxed and hold the attention of the participants. 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. Just sharing memories of your experiences of the media can be educational and enriching (here, your age is a definite asset!). Describing for the young people what television was like in the “old days” or recounting a rock or folk concert that you attended can send the message that telling one’s personal story in the group is not only okay but also a way to communicate something of interest to others. 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 can help you share your story in a way that adds to the experience for 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 young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let 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 the Scriptures

The Horizons Program relies heavily on the Scriptures as a source of wisdom and the starting point for prayer. Each session of *Believing in a Media Culture* takes its direction from a Scripture passage. The same Gospel excerpt provides the focus for the opening and closing teacher prayers and for a quiet Sounds of Silence reflection time for the participants during the session.

Using Music

Most young people today spend more time listening to music than participating in other forms of media entertainment. These adolescents are often affected not only by the messages contained in the lyrics but also by the values expressed in the lifestyles of the celebrity performers. For this reason music is an integral part of *Believing in a Media Culture*.

When dealing with the medium of music, it is important to avoid stereotyping young people. Happening to be between the ages of thirteen and nineteen does not automatically make someone a devotee of a particular type of music. Like everyone else, young people have personal preferences in music. It is good to remember this when you are choosing music or music videos for an activity. You might even consider forming a music advisory group of participants, whose job is to listen to music of varying types (rock, pop, rap, alternative, etc.) and record selections for use as optional material in *Believing in a Media Culture* and other courses in the Horizons Program. (Note: This group might also work with

the media technicians to select music for the media presentations in this course.)

Popular music for prayer. The role of music in the experience of young people is a part of this course, so the participants are encouraged throughout to see the value of popular music in their prayer life. Because popular music is constantly evolving, it may be comforting for you to assume again the posture of a co-learner. Get into the habit of asking young people for their advice well before you need to choose any music for prayer. That way, your young advisers can be on the alert for pieces that can enhance a prayer activity.

Background music for reflection. Many adolescents spend most of each day bombarded by the clamor of music and other forms of media. To counteract the effects of this constant noise, a Sounds of Silence reflection exercise in each session of this course gives young people the opportunity to sit quietly, media free, in the presence of God’s word. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence or resists a time of quiet, you might want to compromise and play background music to help the participants focus. Use slow, soothing, instrumental music, 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.

Using This Course as a Retreat

You might want to consider using *Believing in a Media Culture* as a retreat. If so, weigh the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- The natural appeal that the topic of this course already has for youth will make a *Believing in a Media Culture* retreat a reasonably easy sell.
- Focusing attention and energy on the theme of media for an entire day—commonly referred to as having an immersion experience—highlights the influence that the media have on believers and may make the young people more aware of

the media’s constant influence on their life of faith.

- A retreat experience offers young people a great opportunity to experience the world and others around them in a different way.

Disadvantages

- Interacting with media for an 8-hour period pretty much mirrors the daily media experience of youth.
- Unless the theme is approached in a serious and organized way by both leaders and participants, the retreat model can fail to situate media as a locus of growth in faith.
- The Family Connections activities that are suggested after each session are less likely to be used, unless the retreat is an intergenerational experience.

If you decide to explore the possibility of doing *Believing in a Media Culture* as a retreat, talk with your program coordinator beforehand.

Using Prizes for Quizzes and Games

To find the prizes suggested for activities in this course, you might cruise the candy and novelty aisles of drugstores, discount stores, and specialty stores. Popular items to look for are bubblegum-filled “cellular phones” and “beepers,” candy bars with catchy names, popular media magazines, and so forth. You might also check with local businesspeople to see if any would be willing to donate gift certificates for movies, CDs, videotapes, and other media goodies.

Whenever you plan to give out prizes, have several on hand in case you have a tie or there is some debate about who has won. Then you can give out as many as the situation warrants.

Special Preparation Needs

Before beginning to lead the young people through *Believing in a Media Culture*, it will be helpful to prepare yourself. If you are teaching this course as part of a team, this time of personal preparation can also be used for discussion and community building. Some suggestions are as follows:

- Because the content and activities of *Believing in a Media Culture* rely heavily on current media (audio and visual), begin early to follow the suggestions in Preparing the Material.
- Read over and acquaint yourself with the recording guidelines outlined in the appendix, and decide to what extent you will implement them.
- Develop a strategy for preparing the necessary materials in advance of each 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. *Believing in a Media Culture* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by organizing the following:

Music mixer. Help the participants of *Believing in a Media Culture* sponsor an intergenerational parish music event. Before playing hit songs from various earlier decades, young DJs can ask adults who were young people during those years to give a quick overview of the music. The DJs might even entice one or more couples to demonstrate popular dances

from each era. This is a great way to nurture the multigenerational and multicultural community of the parish, and also offers potential as a fund-raiser for the youth group.

Media culture mass. Contact the pastor or other priest in the parish and ask about planning a eucharistic celebration for youth and young adults that highlights the positive aspects of the media that your group has discovered. A special liturgy committee, including the priest presider, might consider incorporating a medley of current song hits (pop, rock, country, rhythm and blues, etc.) with strong Christian values as a gathering rite, a video homily facilitated by the celebrant, and a communion meditation using the Media Psalm closing prayer from session 1. The homily, prepared in advance by a youth production crew, the presider, and the liturgy director, might include a segment from a movie or multiple excerpts from various TV shows, highlighting positive values. Your planning group will likely come up with many good ideas in addition to these.

Popcorn-and-parables event. Arrange a weekly afternoon or evening with popcorn and a rented video celebrating Advent or Lent or some other liturgical season or special topic. Make bulletin and pulpit announcements to invite all members of the parish to attend. You might use suggestions and study guides available in Values and Visions Video Guides, from Values and Visions Circles (see Suggested Resources at the end of this introduction).

TV discussion. If there is a particularly popular (and perhaps controversial) TV show that attracts a large youth audience, tape one of the episodes in its entirety, or schedule this event for the same time as the show. Use the episode, commercials and all, as an example for a group discussion of wheat and weeds. Plan this gathering for sometime after session 1, so that participants will have the necessary background for their discussion.

Media literacy team. Form a media literacy team with a catchy, contemporary title, comprising interested members of your group. Invite the team to develop and lead activities about commercial ad messages for younger children in the parish. If the project is done in the midfall, it can help prepare the youngsters for the barrage of television ads that will attempt to lure them into wanting everything they see for Christmas.

Media field trip. Consider arranging a parish field trip to a local media company (e.g., a radio or TV station, newspaper, or ad agency). Prepare some questions related to the course content for the participants to research while visiting the facility, and have the young people discuss these at a follow-up gathering right after the event.

Sacred celebrations. Several religious feasts and events during the year have a particular relationship to media. For instance, one or more of the following could provide an "excuse" for scheduling some of the activities suggested above:

- the feast of Saint Gabriel, patron of communicators (October 2)
- the Annunciation of the Lord, or Good News Day (March 25)
- World Communications Day (May) (The Pope always has a special message for this event, which is published in Catholic newspapers in advance of the celebration.)
- the feast of Saint Clare, patron of television (August 11)
- the feast of Saint John Bosco, patron of advertisers (January 31)

Family Connections

Believing in a Media Culture deals with a topic that is particularly timely for both young people and their parents. It should be a comfort for families to know that young people are being educated about the media and their effect. However, some parents might see the content as a waste of time ("What do *media* have to do with religion?") or even as suspect ("Why are you teaching them about that junk? It's bad for them"). Parents need education about the media, too! Because of this a number of the activities in the course are adaptable for parent or family participation as well.

There are several ways to inform parents about the course. The most convenient method is to write a letter giving an overview of the course, including its goals and objectives. If you choose to incorporate the Family Connections activities, the letter can highlight these as well as any special events you have planned for the parish community.

Although a letter gets information about the course home to the parents, it may not be the best way to make them part of the program. For optimum parent involvement, a short, informal gathering is probably better. At this function you can

introduce yourself and any other team members and then explain briefly what the course is all about. For a fun exchange, especially if the young people are present, you can use the Pop Culture Bingo activity from session 1. This exercise can help parents experience the context of *Believing in a Media Culture* and pique their interest in the family activities that are part of the course. You can also use this meeting to determine if any parents are involved in some aspect of the media world. If so, encourage them to volunteer their help in some way for the course.

Note: Some parishes require attendance at so many meetings that parents become resentful. Check with your program coordinator before planning a parent meeting, to see whether a separate gathering for this course is desirable.

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 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 Believing in a Media Culture

Goals

This course has four goals:

- That the young people recognize the power of the popular culture in their world and examine its effect on their life as a believer
- That they identify various ways in which the mass media communicate and promote certain values, attitudes, and behaviors
- That they learn a particular strategy, called media mindfulness, for interacting critically with the media culture
- That they explore the media's role as a graced locus to uncover God's presence in the world right now

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which help the leader and participants realize the course goals. The objectives of *Believing in a Media Culture* follow:

Session 1: "Wheat and Weeds Together"

- To help the young people identify the content and context of the popular culture and of the media that transmit it
- To help them realize the presence and role of the media in their daily life
- To invite them to discover and celebrate some positive elements in the media culture
- To encourage them to name and confront some apparently noxious elements in the media culture

Session 2: "Enlightened Values"

- To help the young people differentiate the values of the media culture from those of the Gospel
- To introduce them to the strategy of media mindfulness as a tool for interacting with the media culture

- To give them an opportunity to apply the strategy of media mindfulness to their own interactions with current films, TV programs, songs, music videos, electronic games, and so forth
- To encourage them to discover how certain media values either strengthen or challenge their faith

Session 3: "Needs Versus Wants"

- To help the young people understand the purposes of advertising
- To help them distinguish between needs and wants
- To invite them to examine some techniques used in advertising
- To challenge them to apply the strategy of media mindfulness to commercial messages
- To show them how to find the message of the Gospel hidden in advertising

Suggested Resources

Books

The following books are well worth the time and energy it takes to track them down and read them. They provide an excellent overview of the material presented in *Believing in a Media Culture*.

Babin, Pierre, and Mercedes Iannone. *The New Era in Religious Communication*. Trans. David Smith. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Articulates a new Christian approach to communications media in light of the contemporary quest for religious experience, a new youth culture, and new forms of religious education.

Greeley, Andrew. *God in Popular Culture*. Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1988. Illustrates how the popular culture, with its ever-changing celebrities, symbols, and stories, can still provide a place to encounter God today.

Schultze, Quentin J., et al. *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. Presents an application, prepared by an interdisciplinary team from Calvin College of literary, sociological, artistic, and historical analyses to the question of how the electronic media transmit popular culture to youth.

Magazines

A regular scanning of one or several of the following magazines can keep you up-to-date with the media culture:

Advertising Age or *Ad Week* are both weekly industry publications that have great ads about advertising as well as articles about advertising campaigns.

Billboard is a weekly publication for the music industry that contains helpful charts for top-rated music of all types (alternative, classical, country, jazz, rhythm and blues, rock, salsa, etc.), concert returns, video rentals and sales, movie box office receipts, and so forth.

Entertainment Weekly is a weekly magazine that gives an excellent overview of the media culture, as well as charts ranking popular music, films, multimedia software, and so forth.

Top Music Countdown is a quarterly resource produced by Cornerstone Media. Its one-of-a-kind poster gives the twenty-five top songs within a three-month period and critiques each in relation to Christian values. The material also gives ideas for using the media culture for prayer, liturgy, and youth programs.

TV Guide is a top-selling resource for articles on the media and for an overview of scheduled TV programs.

Copyright Information

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Other Resources

Catholic Connections to Media Literacy is a resource kit on using the media and includes a videotape. The kit and a magazine called *Connect* are available from the Center for Media Literacy, 4727 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 403, Los Angeles, CA 90010; phone 800-226-9494 or 213-931-4177; fax 213-931-4474.

Values and Visions Guides is a series of over 250 study guides that provide suggestions for teaching with videotapes. These guides offer a variety of short questions for current and classic videos on a range of themes. They are inexpensive and easy to use. For more information contact Values and Visions Circles, P.O. Box 786, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159; phone 800-929-4857.