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THEME

# 1 God Calls Us to Use Our Gifts

## Focus

To help the children understand more fully that they are persons of value and dignity, made in the image and likeness of God

## Reflection

Year after year, the Bible tops the list of best-seller books. One of the reasons for its popularity is the reassurance it offers us. From its very first pages, the Bible assures us of our personal value, of our potential. In fact, we are assured of even more — that God, our Creator, loves us and has created us in God's own image and likeness. In the Book of Psalms, we read of God's love for us in creating humankind.

You have made him little less than the angels,  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the  
works of your hands,  
putting all things under his feet.

*(Psalm 8:6-7)*

The Book of Sirach reminds us of our value.

He forms men's tongues and eyes and ears,  
and imparts to them an understanding heart.  
With wisdom and knowledge he fills them;  
good and evil he shows them.  
He looks with favor upon their hearts,  
and shows them his glorious works.

*(Sirach 17:5-7)*



The message of our dignity and value reaches its high point in the New Testament. Here we learn that God values us so much that God has identified with us through Jesus, the Son. Jesus reassures us of the dignity God has given us in calling us to be the Father's children. Jesus reassures us of our capacity to live up to that dignity and to respond to God with love. Jesus revealed that this dignity belongs not just to a few but to everyone.

God calls us to live as God's children, made in the Creator's image and likeness. This message resounds throughout Christian tradition. WE CELEBRATE RECONCILIATION seeks to help children respond freely to this call: to develop a sense of value and dignity as children of our loving God. Only when they appreciate themselves in this way — as uniquely “gifted” by God — can they respond in love to God and see God reflected in others.

**Materials Needed:** *The Lord Forgives* child's book ■ poster paper, cut for name cards ■ poster paper, 24-by-30-inches ■ felt-tip pens of various colors (washable only — recommended for use in child's book) ■ “This Is Me” poster ■ pictures of families ■ drawing paper

## Welcoming the Children

Welcome the children into your session with special warmth and attention. Every effort should be made to assure that the children feel known and valued. This first session is of special importance in setting the tone for the group. Direct the children to their places. Be sure they are comfortable. Tell the children how happy you are to meet them.

Distribute name cards. Have each child put his or her name on the card. Then have each child fold the card and put it at his or her place. Use the name cards during the first few sessions or until you know each child by name. This concern for names will help the children appreciate their uniqueness and value. Collect the name cards at the end of the session.

Introduce yourself to the children through a "This Is Me" poster that you have prepared before the session. This poster is a montage in which you assemble a recent photograph of your family and other important people in your life, and whatever else describes you. Use magazine pictures and other materials to represent your background, talents, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and so on.

Use the poster to share who you are with the children. It is important for them to know what your values are and to sense the appreciation you have of yourself. By introducing yourself, you will be helping the children discover themselves and you will be encouraging them to develop their own sense of self-worth.

## Introducing the Theme

Explain to the children that in the weeks to come they will get to know Jesus more fully. They have already met Jesus in a special way in the sacrament of Baptism. They grew even closer to Jesus through the sacrament of the Eucharist. Remind them that when they celebrate the Eucharist and receive Communion, they receive Jesus, the Bread of Life, and they are strengthened by him and united with others.

Explain to the children that, now that they are older, they can come closer to Jesus through the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church gives us a special way to express our love for God and our desire to return to Jesus and the Christian community whenever we have not lived as children of God. This special way is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*. In this sacrament we renew our friendship with Jesus and are brought closer to him in love and peace.

Share with the children what will be covered in this first session. They will do the following.

- Share together some experiences that will bring out how important they are.
- Think about the great value of other people.
- Have an experience of listening to God's word and praying together.
- Learn about the preparation for the sacrament of Reconciliation.

# 1 God Calls Us to Use Our Gifts



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## LIFE EXPERIENCE

**Presenting The Lord Forgives** Tell the children that you are going to give each of them a very special book, *WE CELEBRATE RECONCILIATION: The Lord Forgives*, which will help them to know Jesus better through the sacrament of Reconciliation. Call each child forward by name as you say the following. “(Name), accept this book, *The Lord Forgives*. May it help you to know more about Jesus through the sacrament of Reconciliation.”

**Discussing the Picture Study** Ask the children these questions.

- What is happening in the largest photograph on page 2?
- Have you ever been present at a Baptism? Describe what took place.

Share with the children that because we are God’s children, each of us is of great worth and dignity in the eyes of God. Each person is a unique image of God and has been given many special gifts and talents.

Now allow the children to study the first two photographs. Ask these questions.

- What gifts and talents is the boy using in the first photograph?
- What gifts and talents is the girl using in the second photograph?



*God gives us many gifts.*

Think about some of your gifts.  
List them below.

Some things I enjoy doing

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Some things I can do well

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Some people who are very important to me

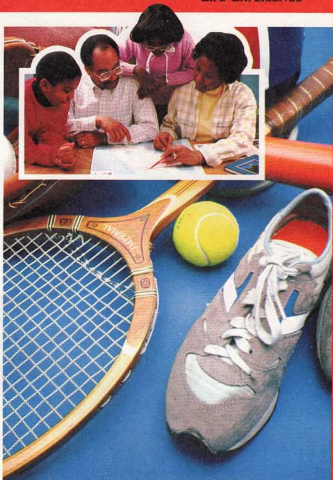
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3

## LIFE EXPERIENCE

**Focusing** Point out to the children the italicized sentence preceded by *The Lord Forgives* symbol at the top of page 3. Tell the children that this type of sentence or sentences will appear four times in Lessons 1–6 and twice in Lesson 8. This special sentence or sentences will summarize the teaching that will be found on those pages.

**Sharing and Writing** Encourage the children to introduce themselves by name and to share with the group one skill or talent that they enjoy having. Affirm each child in his or her response. Help the hesitant child to discover a talent or gift he or she may have.

Next, direct the students' attention to page 3 of their books. Read the directions aloud. Give the children sufficient time to complete the writing exercise. Finally, when the children have shared their written responses, invite them to look through their new books. Tell them that when they complete *The Lord Forgives*, each child's book will be uniquely his or hers because each will have different handwriting, responses, prayers, and drawings. Comment on the main features of the book, such as the photographs of people like themselves, stories from the Bible, prayers, writing exercises, and stories of people who belong to the Christian community.



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## SCRIPTURE

**Focusing** Invite a volunteer to read aloud the summary sentences at the top of page 5.

**Sharing the Scripture Story** Ask a volunteer to read aloud the Scripture passage on page 5.

**Reflecting on the Scripture Story** Begin a discussion about vines and branches, using the illustration. Point out that the vine and the branches intertwine and that the grapes depend on the branches, which in turn depend on the vine. Use a house plant (philodendron or ivy) to help the children see the unity and dependence necessary for the life of the plant. A branch cannot be healthy on its own. It needs the vine or the stem to bring it nourishment and to give it life.

Point out that we, too, are like branches. We must remain close to Jesus who is our vine, so that we can grow in his love and life. This is what we mean when we speak of “bearing much fruit” and becoming Jesus’ disciples.

Lead a discussion of the reading by asking the following questions.

- In this Scripture story, who calls himself the vine?
- Who are the branches?
- What must be done for the branches so that they will have lots of fruit on them?
- What does Jesus mean when he says, “Remain in me and I in you?”



*Jesus is our vine. We are the branches.*

## The Story of the Vine

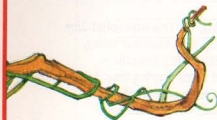
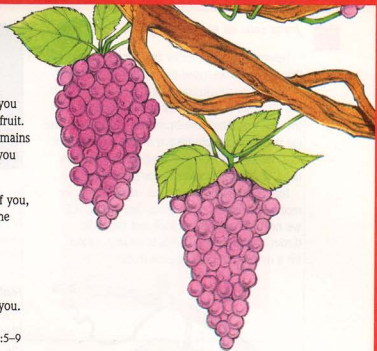
Jesus said,  
 "I am the vine and you are the branches. If you live in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains on the vine, so you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

If you live in me and my words stay a part of you, you may ask what you will and it will be done for you.

You give my Father glory in the fruit that you bear and in becoming my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love.

Based on John 15:5-9



## SCRIPTURE

**Sharing** Write this adapted passage on the chalkboard or on a large sheet of newsprint: *Bear much fruit. Become my disciples. Live on in my love.*

Ask the students to tell you what they can do to live in Jesus' love. Possible responses might include befriending a lonely classmate, helping with chores at home, and remembering to pray each day. Print their responses on the chalkboard or newsprint.

**Imagining** Ask the children to imagine themselves among the group of disciples following Jesus. Tell them that Jesus is speaking to them today about the vine and its branches. Now, read again the adaptation of "The Story of the Vine," found on page 5.

When you have read the story, ask the children to imagine that after hearing Jesus' story, they now return to their families. The members of their families ask them about Jesus' story and what it means.

Allow the children a few moments to consider how they might explain the story of the vine and the branches.

**Writing** Ask the children to write their explanations of the vine and branches story on a separate sheet of paper. Allow volunteers to share their explanations with the group.



*Jesus calls us to use our gifts to help others.*

Jesus wants us to know that his life flows through us as we grow day by day in his love. Jesus uses a comparison when he says that he is the vine and we are the branches. Jesus knows that the vine feeds the branches, giving them the life that makes them lush and green. He knows that the vine gives them the nourishment they need to grow bunches of juicy grapes.

Jesus shares his life with us. At **Baptism** we receive the life of Jesus. Jesus will give us all we need to grow in his love and spread it throughout the world. This is what it means for a disciple of Jesus to bear fruit.



6



Read "Matthew's Story" on page 6 carefully. Think about the gifts that Matthew used to make Brian happy. Then write your own story on page 7. Describe how you use your gifts. Paste or draw a picture of yourself above the story.

### Matthew's Story

Matthew is a fourth-grade student at Elm Street Elementary School. Brian is a first-grade student at the same school.

Every Friday morning, the two boys spend time together. Matthew, who is an excellent reader, tutors Brian in a special reading program.

Brian looks forward to his tutoring time. Matt helps his young friend learn new words and listens to him read aloud. With Matt's help, Brian's reading has improved. That makes both boys feel terrific!

## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**Focusing** Read aloud the summary sentence at the top of page 6. Remind the children that this sentence states briefly what will be taught on these two pages.

**Reading** Direct the children's attention to page 6. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the text about Jesus and Baptism.

**Discussing the Symbols of Baptism** Print the word *Baptism* on the chalkboard or on a large sheet of newsprint. Ask the students to circle the word *Baptism* in their books on page 6. On the chalkboard or newsprint print around the word *Baptism*, the words *lighted candle*, *water*, *oil*, *white*

*garment*, *Sign of the Cross*. Explain to the children that these are all symbols of the sacrament of Baptism. Stress the importance of Baptism as a gift of belonging shared by all Christians.

**Drawing** Engage the children in creating individual posters with the title "Symbols of Baptism" at the top and drawings of each symbol below. Display the children's artwork for all to enjoy. Use these posters for reviewing the symbols of Baptism and their significance throughout the remainder of the lesson.



## My Story



God, Source of all life,  
 you have given us many gifts.  
 You have given us families and  
 friends who love and care for us.  
 You have given us many talents  
 and abilities. It is because you  
 love us that you sent us Jesus.  
 He calls us to follow him  
 through the gift of Baptism.  
 For all this we say, "Thank you!"  
 Amen.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**Reading** Direct the students to the story of Matthew on page 6. Invite a volunteer to read the story aloud.

**Discussing** Discuss the story of Matthew by asking these questions.

- What gifts does Matthew share with Brian?
- What gifts does Brian share with Matthew?
- How does the sharing of the boys' gifts and talents make each boy feel?

**Writing and Pasting** Remind the children that every person has been gifted by God with talents and abilities to be used for others.

Ask the children to write their stories of how they use their talents and abilities to help others on the lines provided on page 7. Encourage the children to paste photographs of themselves or draw themselves above their stories in the space allotted.

**Praying** Ask the children to quiet their hearts before praying together the prayer on page 7. Remind the children to remember to thank God often for all the gifts God has given them.



### God's people share their gifts with us.

Many people throughout the ages have shared their gifts with God's people. And many people today also share their gifts with others. By their examples they show us how we can share our gifts with others, too.

On these two pages are the stories of two people who used their gifts for others. You may recognize them.

Read each story carefully. Then, on the lines below each story, name one gift each person used or uses to help make God's love come alive in the world.



### César Chávez

César Chávez was born to a poor family in California. His parents were migrant workers. This means that they had to move from farm to farm, picking vegetables and fruit wherever they could find work. César's family and the other migrant workers received very little pay for their long hours and hard work.

When César grew up, he knew that he must do something to help migrant workers have a better life. Many migrants were Mexican-

Americans, like César and his family. These Americans were not always treated fairly by others. César wanted to do something to stop all the hurts his people suffered.

César worked very hard for migrant workers. He helped set up stores where migrants could buy things at a just price. He found teachers and lawyers to help them. Later, he helped the migrant workers organize strikes against the land-

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

**Focusing** Read aloud the summary sentence at the top of page 8. Tell the children that the stories on pages 8 and 9 show examples of how two people shared or are now sharing their gifts with others.

**Reading** Ask volunteers to read aloud the story of César Chávez on pages 8 and 9. After reading the story, reinforce the definitions of these words: *migrants, Mexican, strikes, landowners*.

**Discussing the Story** Discuss the story of César Chávez by asking the following questions.

- What type of workers were César's parents?

- How were migrant workers treated by the landowners when César was a young boy?
- How did César use his gifts to help migrant workers?
- What did César want to win for migrant workers?
- Has César given up his work on behalf of migrant workers?

**Reading** Ask volunteers to read aloud the story of Christa McAuliffe on page 9.

owners. These strikes helped to win higher pay and better working and living conditions for the migrants.

César is still working hard today to help the migrant workers of this country. César won't stop working for migrant workers until they are treated fairly.

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### Sharon Christa McAuliffe

Sharon Christa McAuliffe was the first private citizen chosen to fly in a United States space shuttle. She was also a high-school teacher in Concord, New Hampshire, and a wife and mother of two young children. It was Christa's love of teaching that led her to the space program.

More than 11,000 people applied for the chance to fly on the space shuttle *Challenger*. Christa McAuliffe was chosen to be the first teacher to conduct a class from space. Christa believed that her experience in space would encourage and motivate all students everywhere to be the best persons they could be.

On January 28, 1986, Christa and six others boarded *Challenger*. Soon after their launching, something went wrong with the shuttle. All on board *Challenger* were killed.

Christa did not have the opportunity to teach students from space. But Christa taught the whole world a very important lesson in courage that won't soon be forgotten.

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## CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

**Discussing the Story** Discuss Christa's story with the children by asking these questions.

- Before Christa's space flight, how did Christa share her talents and abilities with her family and others?
- Why did Christa want to be the first teacher to fly aboard *Challenger*?
- Did Christa ever teach a class from space? What happened?
- Why will Christa be remembered by all Americans?

**Reviewing** Ask the children to turn to page 62. Point out the review statement for Lesson 1. Encourage the children to memorize this statement before the next session. Ask them to share the meaning of this review statement with their families.

**Praying** Ask the children to turn to the prayer on page 7. Pray the prayer aloud with the class. Allow volunteers to add their own words of thanks for the special gifts and talents God has given them.