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2GOD THE FATHER

Session Overview

In this session the participants will create a list of qualities that best describe human fathers, which will be used later to help them understand the title God our Father. They will explore the nature of clouds and why the Bible uses this imagery to portray God. The participants will also explore how God has revealed himself to us, especially in the image of the Father that was taught by Jesus. Finally, the young people will conclude with a prayerful meditation that will help them listen to the voice of God in their lives. In the optional session extension, the participants will reflect on ways to nurture their relationships with God, family, and friends.

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Objectives

Enable the participants to do the following:

- experience God as a mystery that is beyond our grasp to completely understand
- explain that God has revealed himself to us as Truth and Love
- identify God as the Father of Jesus Christ and listen prayerfully to his voice

At a Glance

A. Quick-Start Activity	(5 minutes)	
B. Welcome and Opening Prayer	(5 minutes)	
C. The Cloud of Unknowing	(15 minutes)	
D. Our Father Reveals Himself	(15 minutes)	
E. Listening to the Father	(15 minutes)	
F. Closing Prayer	(5 minutes)	
Optional Session Extension: Taking Care of Relationships	(15 minutes)	

— Materials and Preparation

Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for every three or four participants:

Gather the following items, one for every three or four participants:

- The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers, chapter 2
- CCC, numbers 198-213, 232-237 (God the Father)
- Exodus 13:20-22, Numbers 9:15-18, 1 Kings 8:12, Matthew 17:5, Isaiah 66:13

Session Steps

A. Quick-Start Activity (5 minutes)

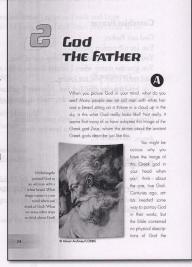
Greet the participants as they enter the meeting space, and invite them to begin the quick-start activity. Point out the following instructions on the board, but also share them verbally for any participants who may need help referencing the board:

> Write three to five good qualities of a human father on the paper with the human outline. No repeats!

Read the introduction to chapter 2, starting on page 24 of The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers.

B. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

- Welcome everyone and make any announcements.
- 2. Light a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
- 3. Pray the following:
 - ▶ God our Father, we gather to ask for your guidance. Remind us that you are always near, ready to guide us with your loving hands. Amen.
- 4. Briefly explain that the topic for this session will be God the Father.



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C. The Cloud of Unknowing (15 minutes)

- Invite the participants to share their experiences of clouds. Use the following questions to start a discussion:
 - Have you ever flown in an airplane? What is it like flying through a cloud? What can you see?
 - Have you ever walked through fog? What is it like being in fog? When you are in the middle of fog, can you see it close to you? Can you take hold of it or put it in your hand?
- Make the following points:

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- In the Bible, God is often experienced in the form of a cloud. Like a cloud, God is difficult to see when he is right in front of you.
- Nonetheless, God the Father makes himself known to us through his Spirit and through his Son, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ God is infinitely mysterious, yet close and intimately known to us.
- Distribute the marked Bibles to four volunteers and invite the volunteers to read the following passages from the Bible. After each reading, ask the questions as indicated.
 - Exodus 13:20–22: What did the cloud offer the Israelites? [direction and freedom]
 - Numbers 9:15–18: What did the cloud give the Israelites in the desert? [guidance]
 - ▶ 1 Kings 8:12: Where does God live? [in the clouds and darkness; be sure to point out that God does not literally live in the clouds]
 - ► Matthew 17:5: What does the voice from the cloud call Jesus? ["My own dear son"]
- 4. Share the following points in your own words:
 - God is mysterious. Trying to understand God can be difficult. It can be like trying to grasp fog. It can be right in front of us, but we just cannot take hold of it. How is God like that? [It is impossible to completely grasp or understand God.]
 - When we are in the middle of fog, we can see it in the distance, but not right in front of us. How is this similar to God? [We sometimes do not know that God is right here with us.]
 - Nonetheless, God the Father is right here to guide us. Through the Holy Spirit, he guides us to freedom and happiness, and he sent us his Son to save us. He is both mysterious and closer to us than our own breath.

D. Our Father Reveals Himself (15 minutes)

- Explain that although God is ultimately a mystery, he has revealed himself to us.
- 2. Ask a volunteer to describe a person he or she likes, naming the characteristics that make the person so likeable (e.g., the person is nice, smart, helpful). Then ask the volunteer how she or he knows these characteristics to be true of this person (e.g., the person helps her or him with homework).
- 3. Explain that this is how we can know about God too. We can describe who God is, the characteristics of God, by looking at what he has done.
- 4. Invite the participants to share what God has done throughout history. Ask them to write on the board what these actions say about who God is. For example, if a participant says that God created the world, then he or she should write

"Creator" on the board.

5. Ask the participants to take out their handbooks and turn to the "Who Is God?" section on page 25. When all are ready, invite a volunteer to read this section aloud.

6. Describe the Catholic perspective on God the Father by explaining the following points in your own words:

> ▶ God the Father has revealed himself to us. God made himself known to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the prophets.



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- ▶ God the Father most fully revealed himself through his Son, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Jesus told us to call God "Our Father" because he wanted us to have a close relationship with God.
- 7. Take out the newsprint drawing(s) of the "father" from the quick-start activity. Review the adjectives the participants wrote as the best qualities of human fathers. Affirm their efforts, but be sure to identify adjectives that may not be appropriate for God.
- 8. Continue describing the Catholic perspective on God the Father. (Refer to page 28 in the handbook.)
 - ▶ God is our Father, but does this mean God is a man? [Being male and female are human characteristics. God is not human and is beyond being male and female.]
 - ▶ Does God also have feminine characteristics? In Isaiah 66:13, the Lord says, "As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you."



the Fother "almighty." No creature in the universe possesses more power. God the Father is all knowing

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▶ We can say two things about God the Father with complete certainty: We (1) God is Truth, and (2) God is Love.

- ► God is Truth, and therefore everything that he tells us is true. We can trust God because he always keeps his promises.
- ► We can say that God is Love because God loves us. He created us and sent his only Son to save us.
- 9. Summarize by making the following comments:

▶ God is mysterious and sometimes difficult to understand. But because he loves us, he has revealed himself to us in many ways, the most important being through his Son, Jesus Christ.

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- ► God is our Father, but that does not mean he is a man.
- ➤ We know that God is both Truth and Love.

E. Listening to the Father (15 minutes)

- 1. Explain how God's title of Father is a title that points to a relationship. If there is a father, there must be a child. Explain that like every other relationship, our relationship with God the Father needs care and attention if it is going to grow.
- 2. Ask the participants what would happen in a relationship where only one person talked and the other person just listened.
- 3. Explain that sometimes we think of prayer as a time to tell God what we need. This is called a prayer of petition. Prayers of petition are fine, but that should not be our only way to pray. We need to listen to God as well.
- 4. Suggest that one way to pray is by using our imagination. By using our imagination, we can open up a place within us to allow God to speak to
- 5. Explain to the young people that you are going to lead them through a meditation, and that they are to let their minds wander freely within the story. Let them know that at times you will pose a question to them and they should respond without thinking about whether their answer is the "right" answer.
- 6. Set the mood for prayer by dimming the lights and lighting a candle.
- 7. Tell the participants to assume a posture in which they are most relaxed and to close their eyes.
- 8. Make the Sign of the Cross and say:
 - ▶ Dear Lord, we place ourselves in your hands. We quiet ourselves. Guide us and let us hear your voice in our prayer.
 - Sit for a minute in silence, or with soft music playing.
- 9. Present the following meditation. Speak slowly, and whenever you see the ellipsis (. . .), pause for a moment to allow the young people time to imagine.

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After walking for a while, you know there is something that you need in there, so you decide to enter the forest. . . . Walking along the path, you notice people from your past and present life all around. They are tending to their own issues, but someone who has always been special to you approaches. This person has a gift for you and something important to say to you. What does he or she give you? . . What does he or she say to you? . . What does he or she say to you?

You thank this special person and continue on. You know that there is something else important down the path. . . .

You arrive at a cave and you go inside. There you find a wise old woman. Her smile reassures you that everything is okay. . . . She tells you that today God will speak to you. . . . She offers you something that she says will help you to hear God. . . . What does she give you? . . .

She leaves you alone in the cave. . . . You listen to the quiet stillness all around you. . . . You look at the gift you received along the way and the gift of the wise old woman. . . . The quiet stillness is peaceful. . . .

God reaches out to people in different ways . . . to some he speaks, to others he moves, to some he writes, and to others he gives visions. . . . In God's own way, he begins to let you know why you are here. . . . What does God have to say to you or show you? . . . [long pause here]

When God has finished, he blesses you and reminds you he is always near. . . . You exit the cave and return along the path that brought you there. . . . You eventually pass all the people you know and return to the place where you entered the forest. . . . You leave on the same dirt path and return to the world you know. . . .

 Invite the participants to open their eyes and bring their focus back to the meeting space. When all are ready, ask for volunteers to share their experiences.

F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to gather around the candle.



- Have the young people take out their handbooks and turn to the "Pray It!" sidebar on page 25. When all are ready, read the prayer in the sidebar aloud.
- 3. Say the Lord's Prayer together and 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 parents.

Optional Session Extension

Taking Care of Relationships (15 minutes)

This session extension works best after step D, the "Our Father Reveals Himself" activity.

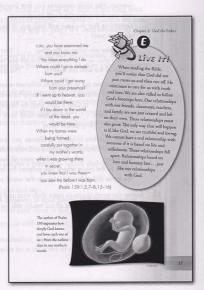
Materials Needed

Gather the following items, one for each participant:

- □ white business-size envelopes
- ten to twelve pieces of string, each 8 to 12 inches long
- ten to twelve circle cutouts, each 2 inches in diameter

Gather the following items, one for every three or four participants:

- sets of markers or colored pencils
- ☐ rolls of clear tape
 ☐ pads of sticky notes



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- Distribute the envelopes, strings, and circle cutouts to each participant.
 Set the markers or colored pencils and the tape in a common area where all the participants can access them.
- 2. Read aloud the "Live It!" sidebar on page 27 in the handbook.
- Explain that God nurtures his relationships, and we too must care for and nurture our relationships.
- Direct the participants to write the names of God, their friends, and family members on the circle cutouts.
- Ask them to write on the sticky notes the things they need to do to nurture each of these relationships.
- 6. Instruct the young people to attach the sticky notes (with tape) to the string, one sticky note per string. They are to tape one end of each string near the opening of the envelope and then connect the other end of each string to the appropriate circle cutout. Explain that the string represents how they nurture their relationship with each person.
- If there is time, invite the young people to present their projects to the rest of the group.
- When they are finished, instruct the participants to tuck the circle cutouts and strings inside their envelopes to take home.

Discussion Starters

- · What are some ways God is like a mother?
- We discussed how God is like a father and a cloud. What are some other images that could represent God?
- God tells Moses that his name is "I AM." How is that a fitting name for God?



Media Connections

In the movie Evan Almighty (2007, 95 minutes, rated A-II and PG), Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman portrays God. This film offers young people a chance to explore the deeper questions about our Creator in an inviting and entertaining manner.

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The Web site "The Interview with God" has a short video in which questions are posed to "God" and "God" replies. This site can be used to start a conversation about how the participants think God would answer the deeper and more difficult questions about life.

Note: For movies with a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops rating of A-II, show only preselected scenes. Obtain parental permission for the participants who are under age thirteen to view an A-II rated movie, and use your best judgment regarding the appropriateness of the film and the advisability of viewing relevant excerpts.