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Welcome to Stories of God's Love!

This year you will be a teacher in a religion readiness program that helps young children take their first steps on their journey of faith. *Stories of God's Love*:

- teaches children appropriate Scripture stories that tell them of God's love and connects these stories to the children's lives.
- follows the guidelines of the Catechism Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to assist the review of preschool materials.
- incorporates a simple "Teach and Apply" process in every session.
- weaves prayer experiences into every lesson.
- connects your sessions to the home by offering weekly family enrichment.
- supports your religion coordinator with resources to make your religion readiness program effective and enjoyable.

Your Role

Beginning to teach from your new program can be a wonderful experience. As *Stories of God's Love* was being developed, you were thought about every step of the way. We considered the needs of both beginning teachers and the needs of experienced, veteran preschool educators. The result is teacher guides that will make a difference!

We created two guides for *Stories of God's Love*: a guide for those who teach one session per week, and one for those who offer religion sessions on multiple days. You'll find that the session plans are very simple and easy to use. They were written by people who actually teach religion readiness classes just like yours, so we know that these lessons will work for you.

This teacher guide has excellent organizational pages and background information on the topics that you will be teaching—hundreds of ideas you can use. Colorful Teaching Posters and a Music Songbook with CD are also available. In addition, we hope you'll become a regular visitor to our supportive Web site designed to offer even more ideas. You'll find it at RCLBenzigerPreschool.com.

We're looking forward to working with you!



The Catechetical Ministry

Preschool catechists and teachers do more than simply teach religion to their young learners. First of all, catechists are people of faith themselves who let the word of God echo, or resound, through their lives and teaching. Religion teachers and catechists share their faith and help the children to apply and live out their faith day by day.

If you are like most catechists and teachers, you may already have realized that teaching religion is different from most other teaching tasks. Certainly, your storytelling ability and skills for organizing cooperative play activities will serve you well. But there is a different atmosphere in faith formation because you are sharing your own faith as well as your knowledge.

You may be wondering what you are getting yourself into and asking how you can ever help children to grow in faith. You might also be wondering if you are up to the challenge. Well, you are! You are one of the thousands of catechists and teachers who have asked these same questions and have discovered a wonderful secret: Helping young children begin their journey of faith is one of the most important ministries of the Church and one of its most rewarding.

Here is a simple approach to your ministry that will make this year a satisfying one for you:

Relax! Some teachers and catechists find the idea of sharing faith a little frightening. Remember, the Scriptures tell us that our ancestors in faith, including Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, and Mary, faced the same fear. With God's help, they did great things. You will too.

Ask questions! You are not expected to have the answers to every question the children may ask. Your pastor, priests, principal, DRE, preschool coordinator, and other catechists will gladly help you respond to the children. We will too.

Take your time! Remember, you are both a teacher and a learner. Be patient with yourself as you learn. Trust in the Holy Spirit. The important thing is to continue to grow in your ministry.

Use your guide! In the pages that follow you'll find a comprehensive introduction to *Stories of God's Love*, including an overview of the effective and easy-to-use "teach and apply" format. You'll find hundreds of helpful tips and activities to engage young children in the lesson plans that follow. Gradually, you'll find yourself growing in competence and confidence about your ministry.

Examine the children's leaflets. Browsing through the children's leaflets, including the family pages, will help you to capture the flavor of what you are to present to the children. Becoming familiar with the sequence of lessons will also help you plan your calendar.

You are embarking on an exciting journey this year. Be sure to take advantage of all the opportunities for growth as a teacher that are offered by your parish or school. And most of all, have fun!



Getting Started

Your Students

Your success as a teacher depends on your relationship with the children. Welcome the children with warmth and enthusiasm. Be sure to tell them how much you look forward to getting to know them.

Here are some basic principles to keep in mind with all young people:

- Respect them as children of God.
- Honor the children's abilities, their imagination, and their desire to know and love God.
- Value the children as learners.
- Involve the children actively in the learning process.
- Help the children understand what a difference faith can make in their lives.

You will learn more about the special characteristics of three-, four- and five-year-old children on pages 10 and 11 of this guide.

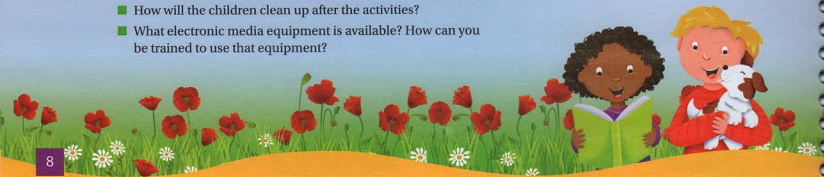


Your Teaching Space

Every teacher and catechist faces the challenge of creating an inviting and safe catechetical teaching environment. With a little creativity and determination, you can transform your setting into a warm and inviting environment for the teaching of religion.

Here are some questions to discuss with your principal, DRE, or religion coordinator:

- What are the safe environment guidelines of your parish or diocese?
- Is your teaching space shared with others? Can you meet with the other people who use the space to discuss needs and to build a spirit of cooperation?
- Are the chairs, desks and tables the appropriate size for the children? Can the seating be rearranged for different activities?
- Can the lighting and temperature be adjusted for comfort?
- Is a chalkboard, a dry-erase board, or newsprint available?
- Are you allowed to tape posters or other materials to walls or bulletin boards?
- How will the children clean up after the activities?
- What electronic media equipment is available? How can you be trained to use that equipment?



Your Prayer Center

The prayer center is the heart of your catechetical teaching space. It tells the children that sharing faith together is a sacred activity. Gather with the children in or around the prayer center for prayer each time you meet with them.

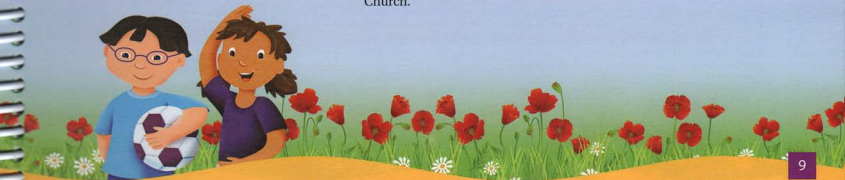
Here are some practical ideas for creating a prayer center:

- Cover a small table with a cloth, preferably with a cloth that is the color of the current liturgical season or the liturgical feast you are celebrating.
- Place a crucifix on the wall or on the table in the prayer center.
- Place a candle on the table as a sign that Christ is the Light of the World. (Be sure to check and follow all fire regulations.)
- Enthroned an open Bible on the table by displaying pages from important passages for the day.
- Place a plant or other objects that symbolize the lesson theme in the prayer center. Invite the children to take turns helping you decorate the prayer center by bringing in objects from home that might be appropriate to symbolize the themes you are covering in class.

Your General Supplies

No matter how well equipped with materials your school and parish programs are, there will usually be additional materials that you will need. Here are some items to have on hand:

- Art supplies such as art paper, construction paper, poster board, newsprint, colored markers, crayons, glue, washable paints, paint brushes, paint smocks, appropriate safety scissors, tape and yarn.
- Audiovisuals such as DVDs and videos, photos, posters, and music tapes or CDs. *Stories of God's Love* Music CD and Songbook are available and specifically designed for this program.
- Materials for your prayer center such as a cloth, a Bible, a crucifix, a candle, a plant, and symbols for the liturgical seasons and feasts.
- A bulletin board reserved for displaying religious projects and education topics such as the liturgical seasons and feasts of the Church.



Who is the Preschool Child?

The development of three-, four- and five-year-olds varies greatly from child to child. Children in these age groups tend to enjoy the same active learning techniques. However, as you read these developmental descriptions, consider that three-year-olds may be at an entry level while five-year-olds are more likely to be working on mastery. Remember that typical preschoolers vary greatly in their development.

Physical Development

While older children may take physical development for granted, young children are generally very proud of their physical accomplishments. Whether growing taller, learning to catch a ball or climbing the ladder of a slide, these physical feats mean a lot to three-, four- and five-year-olds. Activities that capitalize on the preschooler's interest in and need for movement are necessary for instruction to be effective for this age group. In order to do this, be sure to expect your preschoolers:

- To be developing body awareness including the parts of their body and the ability to navigate their body gracefully through space.
- To be unaware of safety issues related to physical activity.
- To be developing both large muscle and small muscle (eye-hand) coordination.
- To enjoy moving their body to music.
- To enjoy some small motor skills, such as scribbling, pretend writing, cutting and gluing, coloring and painting. These skills are just emerging so reward the children's efforts and not the product.

Cognitive Development and Learning Skills

Young three-, four- and five-year-olds make great strides in cognitive development which refers to their growing ability to make meaning of the world around them. They start with what they know and they learn new concepts by comparing new concepts to those with which they are familiar. During these early years, children enjoy opportunities that develop their ability to reason, acquire new knowledge and to solve problems. You can expect your preschoolers:

- To be interested in nature but have gaps in their understanding of the world around them, especially the physical laws of nature.
- To use both fact and fantasy to make sense of their world and, at times, not be able to distinguish between truth and fiction.
- To look at the world through their eyes alone and have limited ability to understand the perspectives of others.
- To learn by touching and manipulating objects.
- To learn by talking to others and by asking a lot of questions.





Language Development

Preschoolers develop language at a rate that is astonishing to most adults. They are learning to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas through language, gestures and facial expressions. Language development is important to both cognitive development and to social and emotional development. If language and communication skills are underdeveloped, young children will likely struggle to understand the language of others or to express their own ideas and feelings. As you support your preschoolers' language development, you can expect them:

- To be learning the rules of language as well as the meaning of words.
- To practice new words, concepts and voice tones in pretend play.
- To copy adults as they imitate their words and expressions.
- To talk in short sentences.
- To understand one-step and some two-step directions.
- To listen to an interesting story for eight to ten minutes.

Social and Emotional Development

Social development refers to the preschoolers' ability to get along with others while emotional development speaks to their ability to develop a concept of "self." This self-concept is the child's mental image of their characteristics and capabilities. The child's understanding of "self" is important in their learning how to interact with others. The feelings that children develop about themselves and about the people around them lay the foundation for their ability to take the risk to make mistakes or learn new things. This "self-concept" is newly forming and is fragile. To help children develop both a positive view of themselves and of others, it is important to know that preschoolers are likely:

- To need to have their feelings and the feelings of others labeled and explained.
- To need positive support from others in order to learn to resolve conflicts.
- To be just developing the language of interaction.

Spiritual Growth and Development

As young children grow and develop spiritually, it is important to remember the cognitive limitations that exist in young children. This series is designed to help children lay a positive foundation for faith formation. The concepts are presented in a positive way that allows children to explore new ideas in safe and familiar terms. Maintaining a positive and responsive classroom will allow young children to explore the concepts while growing stronger in their relationship with God and the Church community.



God Made the World

Background for the Catechist

God the Creator

Psalm 19:1 proclaims, "The heavens declare the glory of God; / the sky proclaims its builder's craft."

Blessed Kateri Tekawitha, the first Native American beatified by the Church, often went into the woods to pray. It was there, surrounded by creation, that she, as the psalmist did, most intensely experienced God's presence.

God created the whole world out of love and "looked at everything he made, and he found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). Through his creation, God invites us to know him and his goodness and love. The awesome, wonderful and almighty Creator of all this, both seen and unseen, manifests himself and his love and goodness through his creation.

This truth about creation gives us hope, both for the present and for the future. The divine plan of goodness God intended from the very beginning of creation has been restored in Christ, the new Adam, and will be fulfilled in him. At the end of time "new heavens and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1) will give honor to God and declare his glory forever.

For Reflection

When do I take the time to see the glory of God the Creator manifested in nature and praise him for his wondrous gifts?

About the Children

Young children learn best when all of their senses are involved. A child's use of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell is important for them to discover and make sense of their world. Movements and activities that engage children also help them learn. When they simply sit and listen for long durations, children often become disengaged, lose interest and do not find ways to be active. For this reason, children learn well through playing and interacting with a partner or in small groups.

A Few Suggestions . . .

Capture the attention of the children. When you tell Bible or present-day stories, make sure that your voice is animated and interesting. Accompany your words by expressive gestures. Involve the children by asking them to respond to simple questions and have them act out the story. It is better to have many children involved and responding together than it is to have them sit still, unengaged and waiting, not-so-patiently, for their turn. Sing songs and teach the children motions that they can use to interpret and give expression to the lyrics in nonverbal ways.

More Background

For further reading and reflection see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§ 293–301; *Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§ 51–54; *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* pages 53–56, 67–68.

Lesson Planner

Faith Focus

God is the Creator.

Bible Story

"God Made All Things Good" (Based on Genesis 1:6–27)

Enriching the Lesson

- RCL Benziger *Stories of God's Love* Music CD and companion Songbook, Song 8
- Visit our preschool Web site www.RCLBenzigerPreschool.com this week.

Chapter Objectives

After this week's lesson the children should be able to:

- recall the story of creation.
- share that all God made is good.
- describe ways they use their senses to learn about what God made.

Materials Needed

In addition to the general supplies named on page 9 of this guide, you will need the following materials for teaching this lesson:

- copies of activity master on page 203 of this guide, one for each of the children
- closed Bible with bookmark placed at Genesis 1:6–27
- box containing variety of nature items, such as piece of fruit, water in small bottle, nuts or other natural items
- items of variety of textures, for example, smooth rock, water, flower, apple and so on
- pieces of soft modeling clay in variety of colors
- cardboard squares

Prayer

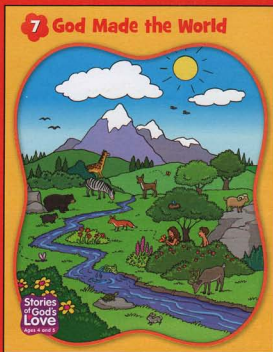
Come, Holy Spirit,
who hovered over the waters of creation.

Enkindle in me
the fire of your love.

May I cooperate with your grace
to guide the children to discover
the goodness of your creation.

Amen.

7 God Made the World



God Made All Things Good

God made the sun and the moon,
The stars glimmering bright.
God looked at his work and said,
"It is good."

God made the sea and the sky,
Full of fish and birds.
God looked at his work and said,
"It is good."

God made the soil and rocks,
Plants and land animals of all kinds.
God looked at his work and said,
"It is good."

God made people,
Different every one.
God looked at his work and said,
"It is all very good."

BASED ON GENESIS 1:6-27

Day One

Lesson Objective

Recall the Bible story of creation "God Made All Things Good."

Welcome

- Place in the Welcome Center copies of the activity master on page 203 of the scene of a lake, trees and mountains (one for each child), and crayons, markers or colored pencils.
- Direct the children to the Welcome Center and have each child take a copy of the activity master. Tell the children that God made all the wonderful things they see in the picture, and much, much more.
- Invite the children to add drawings of other things that they might see or hear or smell or touch near a lake. Remember to give simple clues to help the children. For example: a duck, a squirrel, birds, flowers and perhaps themselves and their families.
- Walk among the children as they are drawing and talk about God's wonderful gifts of creation.

Gather

- Play the gathering song to signal that it is time for the children to clean up and move to the Story Time Area.
- Introduce song 8, the song for unit 2 (chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10) on the *Stories of God's Love* Music CD. Or introduce another appropriate song about creation for the children to sing for chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 if you are not using the *Stories of God's Love* Music CD and companion Songbook.
- Have children bring their drawings to the Story Time Area to share them with the class. Ask each child to name one thing that they added to the picture.
- Tell the children that another word for *made* is *created*. Say the word *created* aloud and ask the children to echo it after you.
- Next, say the sentences "God made the world" and "God created the world" aloud. Have the children echo each sentence after you. Note: Use both *created* and *made* throughout the lesson.

Teach

Introduce the Bible story.

- Show the children the teaching poster or the cover of the children's leaflet for chapter 7. Remind the children, "All that God created is very good."
- Have a child come up and open the Bible to the place marked by the bookmark, Genesis 1:6-27.
- Invite the children to listen to a story about creation to discover what God said when he looked at all he made.

Tell the Bible story.

Take the opened Bible, place the children's leaflet inside the Bible and read aloud the Bible story "God Made All Things Good," using the story on the For My Family Page of the children's leaflet. Pause between stanzas and have the children echo the last line of each stanza after you.

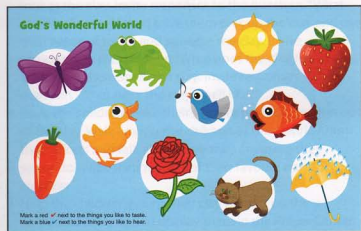
Recall the Bible story.

- Ask the children to name one thing named in the story about creation that they remember God made. (*sun, moon, stars, sea, sky, fish, birds, soil, rocks, plants, land animals, people*)
- Summarize by having the children complete the sentence as a class, God looked at all of his creation and said, "_____." (*It is all very good.*)
- Thank the children for their responses.

Apply

Work on the children's leaflet activity.

- Distribute the children's leaflet for chapter 7 and have the children open them.
- Share with the children that each of our five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching) help us come to know and discover God's creation.



- Have the children look at the things of creation on the page and talk with them about which one they like to taste. Have them mark a red check next to it. Give the children clues as necessary. Then ask them to mark a blue check next to the things they like to hear.
- Continue as time permits until all five senses have been marked with a different color. Note: Some senses may be used for several pictures of creation.
- Summarize by telling the children that God gave us our senses to help us discover all about what he created.

Connect with the child's life.

- Ask the children this question and invite their responses, What are some things you might see or hear near your home this week that will remind you that everything God made is good? Ask the children to look at home for the things they named and tell their parents about them.
- Remind the children to take their leaflet home and share the Bible story on the For My Family Page and the activity with their family.

Pray

- Gather the children at the prayer table.
- Introduce the prayer by explaining to the children that in today's prayer they will pray the words of the prayer aloud after you.
- Invite the children to quiet themselves for prayer, using the breathing gestures. (*Pause.*)
- Lead the children in prayer. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Teacher: Thank you, God, for our world.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for my eyes, ears, hands, mouth and nose.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for making me good.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Together let us pray, "Amen."

All: Amen.

Day Two

Lesson Objective

Share that all God made is good.



Gather

Play the gathering song to signal that it is time for the children to clean up and move to the Story Time Area. Once the children have gathered play the song again and teach them to sing the refrain. Conclude by telling the children how good it was to hear them sing. Praise the children for using the gift of their voice so well.



Teach

- Show the children a box in which you have placed a piece of fruit, water in a small bottle, some nuts or other natural items children know about.
- Ask the children to guess each item. Give them a series of clues that include the senses. For example, "In the box there is something that tastes so good." (Pause.) "It is a piece of fruit." (Pause.) "It is long and yellow." (Pause.) "You need to use your hands to take the skin off of it before you eat it." (Pause.) Continue until the children correctly name each item.
- Conclude by asking the children to recall yesterday's creation story. Then ask, "What did God say about all that he made?" ("It is all very good.")
- Praise the children for their responses.



Apply

Learn a new creation poem.

- Ask the children to listen as you teach them a poem that tells of God's creation. Say aloud and demonstrate the motions:

And God said,

(Touch pointer finger to mouth, then move it out and down.)

"The birds should sing." *(Make bird sounds, tweet, tweet.)*

"The birds should fly." *(Move arms like bird wings.)*

"The wind should blow." *(Make blowing sounds, move body like tree limbs blowing in the wind.)*

"The rain should fall."

(Move fingers making trickling motions.)

"The grass should grow." *(Crouch down, then stand tall.)*

And it was so, it was so!

- Repeat the poem, having the children echo the words and imitate the motions after you.
- Invite children to add their own verses, as time allows. For example, "The dogs should bark." (*Children bark.*)
- Conclude by having the children share together what God said when he looked at all he had made. ("It is all very good.")

Connect with the child's life.

Ask the children, "What are some things in your home that will remind you that everything God made is good?" Remind the children to show those things to their family and tell their parents about them.



Pray

- Gather the children at the prayer table.
- Introduce the prayer by explaining to the children that in today's prayer they will pray the words of the prayer aloud after you.
- Invite the children to quiet themselves for prayer, using the breathing gestures. (Pause.)
- Lead the children in prayer. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Teacher: Thank you, God, for our world.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for my eyes, ears, hands, mouth and nose.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for making me good.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Together let us pray, "Amen."

All: Amen.



Day Three

Lesson Objective

Describe ways they use their senses to learn about what God made.



Gather

- Play the gathering song to signal that it is time for the children to clean up and move to the Story Time Area.
- Show them several natural items, each of which has a different texture, such as a rock and water, a flower and an apple. Let the children touch and smell each item and describe how each feels and smells. (*Hard, rough, soft.*) Tell the children these are just a few of the things that God made that our sense of touch helps us learn about.



Teach

Using the teaching poster or the cover of the children's leaflet, have the children complete these and similar sentences to retell the story of creation.

- My eyes help me see the beautiful colors of (*name colors in illustration*) in God's creation.
- My ears help me hear the beautiful sounds (*name sounds they can imagine in the picture*) in God's creation.

- Thank the children for responding so well.



Apply

Make parts of creation out of clay.

- Provide soft modeling clay and cardboard squares to the children. Have the children use their sense of sight and look at the clay. Invite responses to the question, "What color is the clay?" Next have them pick up the clay and use their sense of touch and squeeze the clay. Invite responses to the question "What does the clay feel like?" Then have them smell the clay. Invite responses to the question "What does the clay smell like?"
- Have the children make their favorite parts of creation out of the clay. Walk among the children as they work. Affirm their efforts and talk about how they are using their senses to make their models of their favorite parts of creation.
- Help the children mount their clay models on the cardboard squares and display them in the Prayer Center.

Connect with the child's life.

Tell the children to ask their families to take them on a walk outdoors. Have them talk about the things they see (*sun*) and hear (*people's voices*) and touch (*rocks*) and smell (*scent of flowers*) that remind them of God's goodness.



Pray

- Gather the children at the prayer table.
- Introduce the prayer by explaining to the children that in today's prayer they will pray the words of the prayer aloud after you.
- Invite the children to quiet themselves for prayer, using the breathing gestures. (*Pause.*)
- Lead the children in prayer. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Teacher: Thank you, God, for our world.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for my eyes, ears, hands, mouth and nose.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Thank you, God, for making me good.

Children: *Echo the words of the prayer.*

Teacher: Together let us pray, "Amen."

All: Amen.

Additional Activity

Use the senses.

Use this activity to help the children use their senses to discover more of the world around them.

- Have some items for the children to smell, for example, flowers, spices, and fruit.
- Invite children to smell each item and to describe the aroma of each item.
- Next show the children a paper bag in which you have placed a variety of small natural items, each of which has a different texture; for example, a rock, an apple, a twig, seeds and so on. Ask the children to put their hands in the bag to feel an item and try to guess what it is by just using the sense of touch. Continue until all the items have been identified.
- Summarize by sharing with the children how wonderful are our senses. Each of them helps us discover God's creation.