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*Confirmed in a
Faithful
Community*

A Senior High Confirmation Process

Catechist's Guide

Third Edition



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A Senior High Confirmation Process

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Third Edition

Therese Brown, Maureen P. Provencher,
Tony Tamberino, and Thomas Zanzig

Laurie Delgatto, general editor



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Nihil Obstat: †Rev. Robert S. Horihan, STL
Censor Librorum
September 13, 2006

Imprimatur: †Most Rev. Bernard J. Harrington, DD
Bishop of Winona
September 13, 2006

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

The publishing team included Lorraine Kilmartin, reviewer; Mary Koehler, permissions editor; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the prepublication and production services departments of Saint Mary's Press.

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Printed in the United States of America

2910

ISBN 978-0-88489-813-9

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Introduction

Confirmed in a Faithful Community: An Overview

Effective sacramental preparation attends to the individual faith journey. Preparation for a sacrament is not about clock hours or the length and quantity of content. It is a conversion process. As “source and summit,” the celebration of the Eucharist in liturgy is an important time to acknowledge, celebrate, and support candidates seeking sacramental preparation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324). In addition, members of the community should be seen as resources for and witnesses and stewards of candidates for sacramental preparation.

Allowing Confirmation preparation to be nourished and informed by the principles that flow from Christian initiation promotes effective programs and an integrated vision for sacraments. When Confirmation is presented as something separated from Baptism and the Eucharist, the message is this: Baptism and the Eucharist are for children; Confirmation is the mark of adult faith. Our task is to link Confirmation with the other two sacraments of initiation, while we consider the potential for the distinctive gift of Confirmation.

For youth ministry leaders and religious educators, the challenge is to communicate the gift within the sacrament of Confirmation while challenging candidates to remember Baptism in its fullness and to live the Eucharist as the ever-renewing sacrament and highest celebration of the faith community. This means that we allow the principles of the Christian initiation process to guide and shape our programs.

At the same time, we recognize the distinct challenge and opportunity of applying those principles as we prepare young people who have already received the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist and are now preparing to receive Confirmation. At its heart, Confirmation is further initiation into Christian discipleship. We invite young people to join us in the mission of Jesus to promote justice, service, and healing. Confirmation strengthens young people as disciples in a way that helps them live out their baptismal calling and their life in the Eucharist.

Catechist's Guide: An Overview

This catechist's guide is divided into four sections that reflect the four major periods of the preparation process. The four periods, adapted from the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA), are invitation, formation, reflection, and mission. Each section of this guide includes an introduction to the material designed for that period of the preparation process.

Each period in the process includes a different number of sessions. The period of invitation has five sessions; formation, eight; reflection, nine; and mission, just one. Each session is designed for a 90-minute gathering.

Each session begins with a brief overview, a list of expected outcomes, and background reading that includes a list of corresponding candidate's handbook pages, related paragraphs in the *Catechism*, and scriptural passages. The next element is a suggested schedule, which you can use as a starting point and modify according to your circumstances. A checklist of the preparation required, including all materials needed, is the next part of the presentation of every session. A complete description of the session procedure is then provided.

Active Learning

Active learning is used throughout the sessions. The intent of active learning is certainly not to avoid "teaching"; on the contrary, active learning is based on the conviction that *real* teaching occurs when both the facilitator and the participants see themselves as *colearners*. This is especially the case when the subject is faith. When it comes to faith, we are all beginners. You are not expected to give the candidates faith, much less give them God; rather, you are invited to draw from them and celebrate the faith relationship they already have with a God who is present within and to them.

Journaling Exercises

The practice of journal writing is an optional component of the process of preparation. Because of the program's content as well as the themes of the journal exercises, the candidates may find the practice meaningful. The only rule in journal writing is that the participants be spontaneous and honest. They should not think too much; instead they should just take their pens and begin writing, letting the words or images flow.

Because catechesis requires personal reflection, incorporating opportunities for journaling, whether on-site or off-site, is strongly suggested.

Prayer Experiences

Each session includes opportunities and suggestions for prayer that is focused on the session's theme. Prayer forms include guided meditation, *lectio divina*, shared prayer, music, silence, prayer by young people, reflective reading, and experiences created by the participants. These prayer experiences give the candidates an opportunity to bring their insights and concerns to God in prayer. The time frame for prayer experiences varies from 5 to 20 minutes.

Teaching *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*

Preparing Yourself

Read each session or activity before you facilitate it; then use it creatively to meet the needs of the young people in your group. Knowing your audience will help you determine which strategies will work best. Some activities require preparation. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions include presentations of key concepts and teachings. The session plans offer guidelines for those talks. Preparing for those presentations is vital to the success of each session.

Hospitality

Create a welcoming environment for the candidates. The preferred physical environment is homey and noninstitutional, clean and organized but relaxed and inviting.

Your physical setting might not easily lend itself to the creation of such an environment. You may, for instance, have to use a grade-school classroom or, worse yet, a school gymnasium or cafeteria. But an inviting environment, if not exactly a warm one, is possible even in such settings. Consider the options available for lighting, organization of chairs, music, and so on.

Remember also that beyond all the niceties of the physical environment, the key to establishing a welcoming atmosphere is the manner and attitude of the hosts themselves. Be prepared to warmly greet the candidates as they arrive, addressing them by name if possible. Think of a few opening lines to help ease them into conversation with you and with one another, recognizing that initial conversation between many people, young and old alike, can be uncomfortable. Ultimately, the secret to true hospitality is this: Be prepared to treat the young people as you would want to be treated if you were in their position.

Standard Materials

To save time, consider gathering frequently used materials in bins and storing those bins in a place that is accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Here are some recommendations for organizing the bins.

Supply Bin

The following items appear frequently in the materials checklists:

- *The Catholic Youth Bible*® (CYB) or another Bible, one copy for each candidate
- candidate's handbook, one copy for each candidate
- masking tape
- cellophane tape
- washable and permanent markers (thick-line and thin-line)
- pens or pencils
- self-stick notes
- scissors

- newsprint
- blank paper, scrap paper, and notebook paper
- index cards
- baskets
- candles
- matches or a lighter

Music Bin

Young people often find profound meaning in the music and lyrics of songs, both past and present. Also, the right music can set the appropriate mood for a prayer or an activity. Begin with a small collection of tapes or CDs in a music bin, and add to it over time. You might ask the young people to put some of their favorite music in the bin. The bin might include the following styles of music:

- *Prayerful, reflective instrumental music*, such as the kind that is available in the adult alternative section of music stores. Labels that specialize in this type of music include Windham Hill and Narada.
- *Popular songs with powerful messages*. If you are not well versed in popular music, ask the young people to offer suggestions.
- *The music of contemporary Catholic artists*. Many teens are familiar with the work of Catholic musicians such as Steve Angrisano, Sarah Hart, David W. Kauffman, Michael Mahler, Jesse Manibusan, and Danielle Rose.
Also consider including songbooks and hymnals. You might also check with your liturgy or music director for recordings of parish hymns.
- *Hymnals or songbooks*. Many of the suggested songs in this book are found in *Gather Comprehensive* (GIA Publications, 7404 South Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638; 1-800-GIA-1358); and in *Spirit & Song* (OCP Publications, P.O. Box 18030, Portland, OR 97218-0030; 1-800-548-8749).

Some Closing Thoughts

As a catechist for *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*, you have taken on an exciting and profoundly important task. We hope you find this material helpful as you invite young people into a deeper relationship with the marvelous community of faith we know as the Catholic Church and with Christ. Please be assured of our continual prayers for you and the young people you serve.

Confirmed in a Faithful Community: A Confirmation Planning Framework Process Structure

RCIA Periods and Liturgies	Pre-catechumenate	Catechumenate	Purification and Enlightenment	Mystagogy
RCIA Adapted for Confirmation	<p>Invitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin process on positive note • Establish trust • Help candidates reflect on personal religious experience 	<p>Formation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate or renew candidates' interest in the Gospel story of Jesus • Review essential elements of the Gospel • Call candidates to discipleship 	<p>Reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present core beliefs, moral vision, and sacramental life of Roman Catholicism • Spark candidates' enthusiasm for deeper participation in life of Church • Prepare for meaningful celebration of Confirmation 	<p>Mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on experience of rite of Confirmation • Prepare for transition out of process of preparation • Introduce opportunities for continued involvement, and invite newly confirmed to commit to ongoing formation
Number of Sessions	Five sessions	Eight sessions	Nine sessions	One session

PART A
Period of Invitation



Introduction

Since the earliest days of the Church, a helpful metaphor has been used to describe the process of growth in Christian faith. The process is described as being similar to the growth of a plant. First the ground must be appropriately prepared, and then the seed must be carefully planted. The seed must then be watered and cared for as it develops, until finally it grows into a plant that can stand on its own and produce fruit and the seeds of future growth. In the period of invitation, we till the soil in preparation for planting the seed of faith. Or, more accurately, we establish the nurturing environment in which the candidates can acknowledge, embrace, and begin to care for the seed of faith that is *already* theirs by virtue of their Baptism.

Components of the Period of Invitation

In addition to the sessions provided in this catechist's guide, your parish will want to include a number of other components as it implements the period of invitation. Generally, the responsibility for monitoring or managing these process elements will belong to the coordinator of the Confirmation process. Catechists, however, should at least be aware of these common elements in a sound process:

- a general announcement of the process of preparation and an invitation to participate sent to all eligible young people in the parish
- an orientation meeting for potential candidates and their parents or guardians
- at the orientation meeting, guidance for candidates regarding the selection of a sponsor
- depending on the parish's approach to sponsors, a meeting with them
- an initial retreat
- initial interviews between caring adults and the candidates

All these additional components—some required and others optional—can make the content and strategies of the sessions in this period all the more effective and meaningful for both candidates and catechists. Information about all these options can be found in the coordinator's manual.

The Focus of the Sessions

The sessions for the period of invitation are designed to be precisely that—highly *invitational*. Many young people will enter the process with doubts and questions about their faith and religious experience. Quite likely some will enter the process with deep faith convictions and genuine enthusiasm about their involvement. Some candidates will express their doubts about religious matters with sincere curiosity and will be genuinely open to learning all they can.

The fact is, a group of candidates will likely include representatives of *all* the above attitudes. In fact, some individual candidates might exhibit all these characteristics at different times, if not in any one session. All the sessions in the period of

invitation are designed with such an audience in mind. The sessions in this period have the following key characteristics:

- The sessions are designed to be active, engaging, and fun.
- The sessions do *not* presume prior faith or religious commitment on the part of the candidates. The young people should be assured that a personal commitment to Christianity or Catholicism may be an *outcome* of the process but is not a prerequisite for involvement in it.
- Though the core themes in the period of invitation are clearly religious, the strategies employed to get at those themes are highly evangelizing; that is, they are welcoming, inviting, and even playful.

The Themes of the Sessions

The period of invitation includes five core sessions that treat the central themes of the period. The five core sessions deal with themes that lend themselves to the tone and strategies described above.

- *Invitation 1, Personal Uniqueness: Promise and Pain.* The uniqueness and dignity of the individual is the foundation for understanding both ourselves and the nature of the One who created us.
- *Invitation 2, Identity: Looking for the Real You.* Real understanding of one's personality comes only with patient reflection and inner work. Real acceptance comes only with the recognition of one's self as a unique gift of God the Creator.
- *Invitation 3, Faith: More Than the Eye Can See.* Faith and the search for God require a new kind of vision or perspective.
- *Invitation 4, Trusting in God.* Reflection on one's personal images and understandings of Jesus includes an invitation to approach Jesus and his message with greater maturity.
- *Invitation 5, The Church: A Community of Disciples.* The Church as a community of disciples seeks to know and follow Jesus and the Gospel; the candidates are invited to join in that search by entering the period of formation.

The Goals of the Period of Invitation

- The candidates are caught off guard and pleasantly surprised by how much fun they can have talking about faith and religion.
- The candidates have such an enjoyable experience that they smile when entering the room, not just when leaving it!

Recognizing and embracing such goals will greatly enhance your capacity to enjoy your work with these sessions. View this time as one for "breaking the ice," for building trust with the candidates, for listening *to* them more than talking *at* them, for connecting with their hearts as much as with their heads. With such attitudes and expectations, you will effectively till the soil of each candidate's heart and mind, trusting that growth in faith will inevitably follow.



Invitation 1

Personal Uniqueness: Promise and Pain

Session Overview

This session is important for two reasons. First, it focuses on the uniqueness, dignity, and value of the individual person. Second, it establishes the warm environment and hospitable atmosphere that should characterize the entire process of preparation.

Two activities constitute the central strategies of this session: (1) the One in a Million exercise and (2) the closing prayer service that flows from it. The exercise and the prayer service are introduced and connected to each other by introductory comments, which also briefly describe the Confirmation preparation process and address the themes of uniqueness, dignity, and the value of the individual person. The basic message of the exercise—the wonder of our own uniqueness as persons and the profound implications that reality holds for us—is one of central interest and significance to each of us. The exercise also prepares the group for the closing prayer, an experience that can be powerful and moving, as the young people reflect on the connection between their own uniqueness and the love of God in their lives.

Objectives

- To begin the preparation process on a positive note by creating a welcoming environment for the candidates
- To establish attitudes of openness and cooperation among the candidates
- To help the candidates reflect on and grow to appreciate their uniqueness and dignity as persons

Schedule at a Glance

- Introductions and Orientation (20 minutes)
- One in a Million (25 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Presentation: Promise and Pain of Personal Uniqueness (20 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Background Reading

- This session covers invitation 1 of the candidate's handbook.
- For further exploration, check out paragraph numbers 357 and 1700–1706 of the *Catechism*.
- Scriptural connections: Ps. 8:3–6 (divine majesty and human dignity), 1 Cor. 12:12–31 (We are all important in the Body of Christ.), and Gal. 3:28 (We are all one in Christ Jesus.)

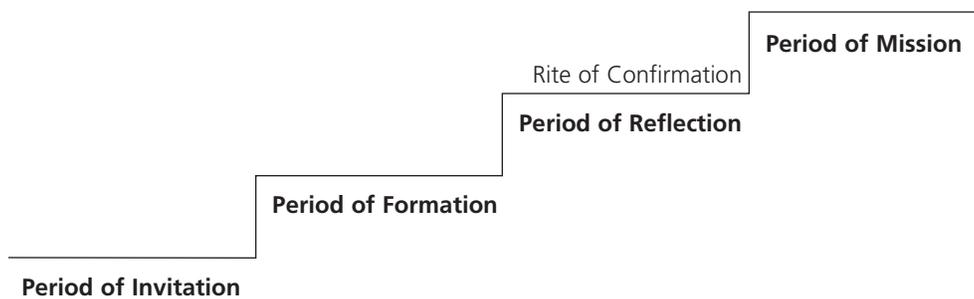
Preparation

Materials Needed

- newsprint, markers, and tape
- one or more dice, depending on size of group. If the group is larger than twelve, have one die for every eight or so candidates.
- stones of similar size and texture, one for each candidate. (*Note:* The stones that work best are commonly found beside large lakes or on beaches. Those stones tend to be well worn and often very similar, yet distinct when analyzed closely. If such stones are not available, check at local nurseries for landscaping stones.)
- a shallow box large enough to hold the stones (optional)
- three narrow strips of dense fabric to serve as blindfolds (optional)
- a tape player or CD player, and tapes or CDs of instrumental music
- a large rock to serve as a Christ symbol. If the gathering space for your sessions can be left undisturbed, consider using a large rock that weighs 50 to 75 pounds. If you regularly have to move the rock or put it out of sight, however, consider something more manageable, but generally speaking, the larger, the better.
- two pillar candles and matches or a lighter
- copies of the *CYB* or another Bible, one for each candidate
- candidates' handbooks
- pens or pencils

Other Necessary Preparations

- Reflect on and determine how to transform the gathering space into a warm and inviting environment.
- On a sheet of newsprint (or on chalkboard), construct a simple outline of the preparation process like the one shown here, and then post it where all can see:



- Select one of the following songs or another song with a similar theme, for the closing prayer service:
 - “With You by My Side,” by David Haas
 - “I Say ‘Yes,’ Lord” (“Digo ‘Sí,’ Señor”), by Donna Peña
- Gather hymnals, songbooks, or other worship aids for the closing prayer service, one for each participant.
- Prepare the musicians and the cantor to lead the song for the closing prayer service, or gather the necessary recorded music and equipment.
- Invite a participant or an adult leader to proclaim Matt. 7:24–28 during the prayer service.
- Prepare the prayer space with the large rock, the candles, matches or a lighter, and the Bible.

Procedure

Introductions and Orientation (20 minutes)

1. Gather the young people into a circle around you in a comfortable manner, even sitting with them on the floor if possible. Welcome them to the first session of their preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation.

2. Take a few minutes to briefly introduce yourself and, if appropriate, other adult leaders present. Be sure to explain why you chose to be a leader in this Confirmation program—why you considered it important enough to make the commitment to be involved.

3. Tell the candidates that you will pass a die around the group. Each person is to roll the die and then share with the group her or his name and as many simple personal facts as indicated by the number on the die. Tell the candidates that very simple facts are fine—their height, their hair color, how many brothers and sisters they have, whatever. The point is to keep the exercise simple and nonthreatening. Give the die to one of the candidates and direct her or him to begin.

If the group is larger than ten, consider forming smaller groups to speed up the introductions. If so, be ready to provide each smaller group with a die. With each young person’s introduction, acknowledge that you are glad she or he is with you.

4. Referring to the chart of Confirmation preparation you prepared, offer the following points in your own words:

- During this process of preparation for Confirmation, remember that Christ is the sacrament of our salvation, which we experience through the life of the Church. The sacrament of Confirmation is an efficacious sign of God’s grace—that is, the sacrament effects change in us and in the world because of God’s power, not our own.
- The sacrament imparts to the baptized person the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and God’s grace bears fruit in our lives when those who receive it have the proper inner attitude and readiness. The celebration of the sacrament, in the visible rite, signifies and makes present this grace.
- Having already been baptized and received first Eucharist, you now begin preparation for Confirmation with the period of invitation. During these sessions, you will get to know your leader and fellow candidates. You will learn about the meaning of faith and the Church. You also will have an opportunity to reflect on God’s call to have faith and to continue the mission of Jesus Christ through full and active membership in the Church. At the end of the period of invitation, you will be invited to continue on your lifelong faith journey by participating in additional sessions designed to help you prepare for Confirmation.
- Each candidate brings her or his own life story to the journey of preparation. The process you are about to begin is designed to help you reflect on and come to terms with many of the big questions of life. In the company of your fellow candidates and with the guidance of leaders in your parish community of faith, you will learn the answers that God has revealed to some of the great mysteries of life: Why are we here? Who is Jesus Christ and what does he reveal about the meaning of life? How do I experience the presence of God in my life? Why does the Church exist and why is belonging to it so important?
- The posted chart summarizes the process of preparation for Confirmation.
- At the end of the period of invitation, you will continue on your lifelong faith journey by participating in additional sessions designed to help you prepare for Confirmation.

5. Next, distribute copies of the candidate’s handbook, along with pens. Ask the candidates to turn to pages 6–7 and briefly review in your own words the following summary of the features of the handbook:

- The core of each chapter is the summary of the content presented during the Confirmation sessions. The summaries will help you track the program’s content, recall information as you need it, or catch up on material if you happen to miss a session. You are encouraged to read and reflect on the material beyond the formal sessions. Take time at home to read, reflect, and pray on what you are learning in preparation for the reception of the sacrament.
- The handbook includes a number of short writing exercises—some intended to be strictly personal, such as the journal-writing exercises, and others to be worked on with the other candidates in your group.
- Prayer is a central part of the process of preparation for Confirmation. The handbook includes resources for both personal and group prayer.

- A recurring feature of this handbook is the “Catholic Connection.” The Catholic faith is remarkably rich, so much so that in this program, we can barely scratch the surface of the many beliefs and practices that distinguish Catholics. We have to make sure we cover “the basics” of Catholicism. The “Catholic Connection” essays provide additional insights into how Catholics understand and celebrate those basics.
- Sprinkled throughout the handbook are brief readings, poems, and short stories that relate to the themes being discussed. They are intended to catch your attention, to provoke thought, or to offer additional insights. Sometimes they’re just for fun! If you find yourself stuck for an idea during the times set aside for journal writing, try browsing through the “Heart Links” for inspiration. To find them, look for the link icon.
- Some verses or passages from the Bible are so significant and memorable that we want you to take special note of them. That’s what the “Bible Bytes” are for. Whenever you see one (look for the computer chip icon), take a minute to read it. Some day when you need them most, you may “hear” these verses echoing from your memory bank.
- The *Catechism* is a valuable resource for learning about the Catholic faith. Though it is intended primarily as a reference for bishops, priests, and others who are charged with the task of teaching, laypeople have found it inspirational as well. Throughout this handbook we use excerpts from the *Catechism* to shed additional light on a topic and to provoke thought.
- Beginning on page 126 of the handbook is a particularly helpful resource—a special section on major Catholic beliefs and practices. Here you’ll find summaries of key Church teachings, a collection of traditional and popular Catholic prayers, and definitions of common terms—many probably familiar and some likely new to you.

Invite the candidates to browse through the handbook, noting that they will use it throughout the process. Announce that, for convenience, you will keep the handbooks until the end of the candidates’ preparation. Then ask the candidates to print their names clearly on the inside cover.

6. Next, in your own words, offer the following brief observations about the period of invitation:

- The primary purpose of this period is to deal with some basic but very important issues before getting into a more in-depth discussion of the Roman Catholic Church, its beliefs and practices, and the meaning of Confirmation.
- This period is also intended to help you reflect rather seriously about who you are and what you currently believe and feel about faith, religion, God, and Jesus.

7. Close this introduction by requesting the candidates’ sincere involvement in and cooperation with all the exercises and discussions that are part of the period of invitation. Advise them that if they participate fully, they will realize quickly how enjoyable their time together can be. Then ask if anyone has any questions or comments. After responding appropriately, move into the following exercise.

One in a Million (25 minutes)

1. Give each candidate a small stone. Ask the young people to study their stones carefully for a few minutes, noting the texture, strange markings, color, and weight. Then ask them to place their stones in a pile in the middle of the room. If the group is large (more than fifteen or so), you may want to use a shallow box to put the stones in. Quickly mix up the stones.

2. Divide the candidates into even-numbered teams of four or six and ask each team, one at a time, to come to the pile to find its members' stones. Allow each team 2 minutes to do this. Tell the candidates that if they are not sure which stones are theirs, they should not take one. Announce that the team whose members all find their own stones within the 2 minutes is the winner of this part of the exercise. (All the teams will probably be able to do this.) Then ask the candidates to return the stones to the pile.

3. Ask the young people to sit in their small teams. Then divide the teams into pairs. Give the pairs about 2 minutes to describe their stones to each other in as much detail as possible.

After time is up, invite just one member of each pair to go to the rock pile. This time each person must find his or her *partner's* stone. Allow three or four candidates from different pairs to go to the pile at any one time. (Members of the same pair should not approach the pile of stones together, as one could give clues to the other.) Tell the young people to return to the spot where their team is sitting as soon as they think they have found the right stone. Explain that they are not to talk with their partners until their partners have gone to the pile and everyone is back with their teams.

4. When all the candidates have returned to their teams, they are to show their partners the stones they picked. Those who did not choose the correct stones must return the stone to the pile and try again. Those who did select the correct stones should give it back to their partners. The team with the most correct selections in the shortest period of time is the winner. (Because the pile of stones is reduced with each correct selection, even those who have trouble at first will eventually select the correct stone.)

Try This

You may wish to add another dimension to this exercise. Have blindfolds available. After the candidates have completed steps 1 through 4, ask the candidates to raise their hands if they believe they are perceptive enough to find their own stone in the pile when blindfolded. Typically, a few will want to try. Blindfold these young people three at a time and allow them to try. Surprisingly, many *will* be able to find their stones. When the first few succeed, others will want to try, and they should be allowed to do so. This addition strongly reinforces the exercise's central point that each person is unique. Note that additional session time will be needed if you choose this variation.

5. For discussion, ask the following questions in your own words:

- Was it easy or difficult to pick out your own stone early in the exercise? Why?
- Was it easy or difficult to describe your stone to your partner? Why?
- When looking for your partner's stone, did you feel different than when you looked for your own stone? How and why?
- Obviously, this exercise is intended to show more than just your ability to identify stones. What, do you think, was the purpose of this exercise?

6. Next, make the following comments in your own words:

- The stones symbolize each of us as individual persons. Even though all the stones are similar, each has something so unique about it that most (or all) of you were able to identify your stone easily. If this is true of stones, how much more true it is of each of us as a person! We are each remarkably unique, not only physically but also in the ways we think and feel, in the dreams we have, and in our fears and frustrations.
- This exercise also points out some characteristics of our relationships with others. With a little extra effort, most of you were able to identify your partner's stone. The reason: You cared enough to listen carefully to the description; you recognized the uniqueness and responded to it.
- However, in our relationships with others, we don't always do that. We don't always see others; we sometimes look through them and beyond them. It is sad but true that for most of us, people are like shadows; they all seem alike after a while because we don't look carefully at them. But we have to learn to do just that if we want to live maturely. We have to look closely at ourselves and at others, and respect ourselves and others as unique and beautiful; otherwise, our life will become dull and meaningless.

Before taking a break, tell the candidates to save their stones for use later in this session. However, ask them to place their stones in their pockets or put them aside where they will not be a distraction.

Break (5 minutes)

Presentation:

Promise and Pain of Personal Uniqueness (20 minutes)

1. Offer the candidates the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 1 of the candidate's handbook:

- Each person is unique and therefore special and important. That uniqueness is a gift from God the Father, the creator of everything that exists. All people are called to share in God's own life and to respond to him with love. Because of this relationship, every person has profound dignity and value.
- Though our origin in God gives us genuine value and dignity as persons, we can forget who—and whose—we are. Sometimes we experience a sense of being lost, confused, unsure about the meaning and value of life, or deeply lonely. Some of these personal struggles, we must admit, we bring on ourselves. We might spend too much time wishing we were someone else, regretting what we think we're missing in life, and envying others who seem to have it all. At other times feelings of doubt, anxiety, and loneliness seem to overtake us when we feel confused about what we're supposed to do in a certain situation, unsure of our abilities, or insecure about the meaning of our life.
- At still other times, however, the feelings we experience go much deeper. We feel an ache in our heart when we least expect it, or maybe we feel all alone in the middle of a crowd of people. We might be haunted by the thought that life has little meaning or purpose, or that we are insignificant in an immense universe.

- That recurring sense of emptiness in life reflects the deepest hunger of the human heart—the hunger for God. All human beings yearn for union with God, the One who loved them into existence, and they ache when separated from him. This sense of separation—from God, from others, even from ourselves—is at times an expression of the reality of sin, which we will discuss in greater depth later in this program.
- But something even more basic is at work here. Over fifteen hundred years ago, Saint Augustine described this experience as well as anyone ever has: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”
- All people have dignity and value that comes from God. He created the universe out of goodness and love and yearns to be in relationship with all his creatures, but especially with human beings.
- We’ve been created with the ability and option to cooperate with God’s will for our lives and for the world or to turn away from him in sin. All too often we choose the latter.
- God the Father sent his only Son to save us from sin and make eternal life possible for us. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, fully reveals his Father and makes a deep, loving relationship with him possible. This is “redemption.”
- Following Jesus’s death, Resurrection, and Ascension from the world, the Holy Spirit inspires us and guides us to holiness.
- We are called by God to live out the Gospel message and continue Jesus’s mission in the world by joining with others in the Church. The Church is in fact the Body of Christ present in the world today, a community enlivened by the Holy Spirit and dedicated to the reign of the Father’s love over all creation.
- We are caught up in the very life of the one God, who has revealed himself to us as the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We live with the hopeful anticipation that after we die, we will be united with God in a complete and perfect way.

2. Conclude the presentation by noting that the purpose of symbols and rituals is to help us get in touch with and express realities that are so real and so deep within us that words fall short in expressing them. Introduce some of these symbols and rituals as examples (i.e. water blessings, incense, candles, venerating the cross, and ordinary symbols that represent Jesus and ourselves, such as bread, vines and branches, rocks). Play some instrumental music as you invite each participant to hold his or her stone, remembering that it is a symbol of them.

Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Gather

1. Invite the candidates to gather in the prayer space. Be sure they sit in a large circle. Provide each candidate with a hymnal, songbook, or the worship aid you prepared. Begin prayer in the following manner:

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all, now and forever.

All: Amen.

2. Then make the following points in your own words:

- We use symbols and rituals to express realities that are almost “too big for words.” The large rock symbolizes Jesus.
- The Scriptures contain many references to rocks and stones. A glance at a concordance reveals almost five hundred references.
- Jesus is sometimes referred to as the rock of our salvation, the one we can cling to and lean on.
- Let us pray. Lord, we come before you with open hearts and minds as we enter into this period of invitation to grow in deeper relationship with you. Be our strength for the journey and may your Holy Spirit guide us, particularly in our times of doubt and confusion. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen

3. Light the two candles, and invite the volunteer you recruited to proclaim Matt. 7:24–28. Allow a few moments of silence to follow.

Respond

4. Respond to the Gospel in song by inviting the candidates to sing the song you chose. After the song, comment on the message of the Gospel, particularly noting its connection to the session theme by making the following comments in your own words:

- Christians view Jesus as the rock of their strength, support, and courage.
- The joy of Christianity is that Jesus is someone who can satisfy the deepest human needs and hungers. He is someone we can lean on in life’s struggles. He is also the source of courage and conviction as we try our best to live a Gospel-centered, Christian life.

5. Direct the candidates to hold their stones and to remember that their stones are their symbols. Ask them to bring their stones *slowly and silently* to the center of the room and place them next to the large rock symbolizing Jesus. As they do this, tell them that this symbolic action is a sign of their commitment to participate in this period of invitation with a spirit of openness, honesty, and respect. Invite them to approach the rock with a special prayer for themselves or for the group as they begin their journey together. During this time you may wish to play some instrumental music.

Send Forth

6. Conclude with the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray. Creator God, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, who calls us to follow him and to grow in relationship with him. Bless our efforts and our hearts as we commit ourselves to grow in your love and to make firm our foundation in Jesus, our rock and our strength. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the almighty and merciful God bless and protect us, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

7. Thank the young people for their presence and cooperation, and before dismissing them, make any necessary announcements about the time and location of the next session. Ask the candidates whether they believe they will be able to identify their stones from now on. They will likely claim that they will. If they have any doubt about this, however, ask that they mark their stones in some way before they leave—perhaps by scratching them in a particular way or by making a small mark with a felt-tipped marker. Tell them that the large rock and their stones will be permanently displayed as part of the session setting and that their stones will occasionally be used as symbols throughout the process of preparation.



Invitation 2

Identity: Looking for the Real You

Session Overview

In the first session, four broad concepts were presented to the candidates: the need for each person to recognize and accept the basic uniqueness of the individual, the sense of loneliness that can accompany individuality, the innate dignity of all persons, and the responsibility of the individual to develop her or his unique potential. In this session, the goal is to move the candidates a step beyond these general considerations to deeper reflection on themselves as specific, unique individuals.

In this session, the candidates have the opportunity to gain some insight into the qualities of their own personality by doing a forced-choice exercise. This exercise is followed by a short reflection on self-image that is intended to help the young people recognize some of the attitudes they hold about themselves. Young people generally respond well to activities like these, which give them some insight into their personal style. Note, however, that the activities in this session are intentionally sketchy, rudimentary, and even entertaining. Though they can provide some thought-provoking clues, they are not intended to reveal any significant personal insights. Be very clear with the participants about the incomplete information these exercises provide. Real understanding of one's personality comes only with patient reflection and inner work. Real acceptance comes only with the recognition of one's self as a unique gift of God the Creator.

Objectives

- To help the candidates examine their own personality traits, including their strengths and weaknesses
- To encourage the candidates to explore the influence of cultural stereotypes on self-image and self-acceptance

Schedule at a Glance

- Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)
- Forced-Choice Exercise: Are You More Like . . . ? (20 minutes)
- Reflection and Discussion (25 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Discussion: Pride and Self-Image (20 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Background Reading

- This session covers invitation 2 of the candidate's handbook.
- For further exploration, check out paragraph numbers 356–358 and 1700–1706 of the *Catechism*.
- Scriptural connections: Gen. 1:26–27 (We are made in God's image.), 2 Cor. 4:5–10 (Christ in us), and 1 Kings 11:1–8 (Solomon's pride)

Preparation

Materials Needed

- newsprint, markers, and tape
- blank paper (optional)
- a tape player or CD player, and tapes or CDs of soft, quiet music and of instrumental music (optional)
- a large glass candleholder (Ask for the sanctuary lamp glass candleholder to be saved after the candle is completely used.)
- a long wax wick (can be purchased at craft shops)
- five or six packets of wax crystal packets, each of a different color, for candle making (can be purchased at craft shops)
- a saltshaker filled with salt
- containers (small paper cups or empty baby-food jars) to hold the wax crystals, one container for each color
- a small table to hold the candle-making items and the saltshaker for the closing prayer
- copies of the *CYB* or another Bible, one for each candidate
- candidates' handbooks
- pens or pencils
- prayer space items: the large rock, the stones, the candles, matches or a lighter, and a Bible

Other Necessary Preparations

- Write on newsprint the list of items on page 15 of the candidate’s handbook. A brief word or phrase for each item will suffice; there is no reason to copy the entire sheet. Leave room after each word or phrase to tally the results.
- Choose and prepare two participants to proclaim Matt. 5:13–16 during the closing prayer service. Ask one to proclaim verse 13; the other, verses 14–15. Have them proclaim verse 16 together.
- Select one of the following songs or another song with a similar theme, for the closing prayer service:
 - “This Little Light O’ Mine,” traditional spiritual
 - “Bring Forth the Kingdom,” by Marty Haugen
 - “We Are the Light of the World,” by Jean A. Greif
- Gather hymnals, songbooks, or a worship aid for the closing prayer service, one for each participant.
- Prepare musicians and a cantor to lead the song for the closing prayer, or gather the necessary recorded music and equipment.
- Prepare the prayer space and then place the small table at the center of the prayer space. Put the empty glass candleholder and the wax crystals, separated by color and in containers, on the table. Put the wick in the candleholder and place the saltshaker near the candleholder.

Procedure

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome the candidates and offer the following brief introduction to the session topic in your own words:

- Who are you? What is your image of yourself? Do you think of yourself as a unique creature of God, endowed with gifts and talents? Is it easier to think of others in this way than it is to think of yourself in this way? During this session, you will have an opportunity to consider these questions and reflect on why you perceive yourself the way you do.

Forced-Choice Exercise: Are You More Like . . . ? (20 minutes)

1. Offer the candidates the following brief overview of this activity in your own words:

- This forced-choice exercise is designed to help you think about the type of person you are and how you might respond in different situations.
- This is not a personality test, even though the choices imply certain personality characteristics. It is simply a fun way for you to name some of your unique traits and at the same time see that others share those qualities with you.
- The choices themselves are interesting, but the reasons why people make the choices they do may be more so. Different people might interpret each option differently. As part of getting to know one another, it is important to share the thoughts behind your decisions.

2. Tell the participants that you will read the question, “Are you more like . . . ?” and then offer them two options, designating a side of the room for each. They are to move to the side of the room that corresponds with their choice.

3. Explain that they are to make their decision based on which option they are *more like*, not which they *like more*. Use the first pair from the list in step 4 as an example: A person who is more like Montana is probably laid-back, quiet, and uncluttered. A person who is more like New York City is probably always on the go, kind of noisy, and involved in a variety of activities.

Stress that each person will have a different interpretation of the choices and that they should be ready to explain why they made the choices they did.

4. When you are sure they understand the instructions, begin reading the following list, pausing after each pair to give the candidates a chance to look around and see how the group divided. It would be too time consuming to get every person’s response to every choice, but ask a few people from each side to explain their choices. Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk at some point during the activity. After the candidates discuss their choices, consider letting them know what choice you would make and the reasons for your selection. It is important that the young people get to know you, along with getting to know themselves and one another.

You probably will not be able to get through the entire list. Limit the time allowed for this activity, and select your favorites to begin with. The number of items you get through is not as important as the interaction between group members. Do not rush through the list just to complete it, but on the other hand, do not let the group get bogged down in a detailed analysis of each option.

■ Are you more like . . . ?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| • Montana or New York City | • a first-and-ten or a goal-to-go |
| • a spark plug or a battery | • a picture or a puzzle |
| • a trapeze artist or a circus clown | • a camera operator or the star of the show |
| • a candle or a lightbulb | • a golf ball or a foam-rubber ball |
| • a bridge or a tower | • a chair or a table |
| • the beach or the mountains | • a stone or a soap bubble |
| • a hotel or a hospital | • a lake or a river |
| • a magnifying glass or a telescope | |

5. Gather the candidates together and conclude the exercise by summarizing your observations about the group’s interaction. Incorporate your own comments with the following points that you offer in your own words:

- This exercise was a chance for you to think about some of your personal style characteristics. Thinking about such things will help you know yourself better.
- When you moved from one side of the room to the other, chances are good that you did not move alone. In other words, some of you share some of the same personal style characteristics. Others have different personal style characteristics, as indicated by their movement to the opposite side of the room.
- Even though you may find yourself on the same side of the room, you each may have had different reasons for making the choice that you did. Each person’s thought process is unique, even though it may lead to the same conclusion.
- It is important for you each to know that you have much in common with other people but also that you are different from others. No one is better than anyone else; no one is inferior to anyone else. Our uniqueness and our shared characteristics are part of God’s plan for humanity.

Try This

This activity can be done as a written exercise by printing out and distributing the list and asking the participants to circle their choices. If you think that the young people are likely to make choices based solely on what their friends do, doing the exercise in written form will ensure individual responses.

Reflection and Discussion (25 minutes)

1. Read the following story to the candidates:

- Joseph is your neighbor and is in your class at school. He's not very good at sports, gets Bs and Cs in school, and doesn't seem to fit in with most other people his own age. He has never had a girlfriend, and he feels awkward and ugly when he's around members of the other sex. People at school make fun of him for the way he looks, the way he dresses, the way he talks, and everything else about him. He hangs out with a couple of other guys in your class and considers these people good friends. The same people who make fun of Joseph make fun of his friends, too.

Little kids really like Joseph, and he is often asked to baby-sit. He also likes to help older people in the neighborhood. His parents keep telling him that he's a good person and that if people really got to know him, they would realize how terrific he is. Besides—what other people think and say about him isn't important. But it is to Joseph. He would give anything to be "one of the guys." Joseph is very lonely. He considers himself one of God's mistakes and puts himself down a lot. On a scale of 1 to 10, he thinks he's about a 2.3.

You've known Joseph since the two of you were little kids. Even though you don't hang around with him much anymore, you still see him around the neighborhood. He seems comfortable talking to you, especially when the two of you are alone.

2. After the story, pose these questions for discussion:

- How might you offer support to Joseph?
- What might you do to challenge your classmates to see Joseph differently?

3. In your own words, share with the candidates the following key points, which are drawn from invitation 2 of the candidate's handbook:

- Sometimes we hear loud and clear messages that contradict what God has revealed about the value and potential of human beings. These messages come from all over the place: pressure from peers to conform, television shows, movies, advertisements, magazines, the criteria for giving awards to individuals at school and in our communities, and so on. They can drown out God's voice and lead us to view ourselves and others with a mistaken set of values.
- For example, they can draw us into placing too much value on physical appearance, the things we own, and being number one. Sometimes these messages take the form of stereotypes that keep us from seeing people—even ourselves—the way they really are.
- When we let these competing messages have power over us, the effect can be likened to keeping salt from sparking fires and putting bushel baskets over lights.
- The true God-given dignity and giftedness of human beings becomes overshadowed by things that do not have lasting value.

4. Read Matt. 5:13–16. Then offer the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 2 of the candidate’s handbook:

- When Jesus’s listeners imaged the words *salt of the earth*, they would have thought of an oven because salt was used to ignite the fuel used to heat ovens. Wood was not plentiful enough to be used as fuel. Instead, they used something that was readily available: animal dung. They collected it and molded it into patties, which were then salted and left to dry in the sun.
- On the oven floor, they placed a block of salt, which functioned as a catalyst, enabling the dung patties to catch fire. After being in use for a while, the salt block lost its ability to set the fuel afire and was no longer be good for anything except to be “thrown out” onto the road and “trampled under foot.”
- Jesus’s affirming words challenge us to see ourselves as salt, that is, as a catalyst that kindles fires. Of course, we are not talking about literal fires here. Jesus is talking about the fire of his Father’s love that binds people together through his Spirit into communities that can transform the world.
- When Jesus says, “You are the light of the world,” he again affirms his listeners.
- Light is an image that is used frequently in the Scriptures to symbolize the loving presence of God. Jesus is telling us who we are in terms of God’s love.
- A human being who is light is one who is loved by God and shares that love with everyone. Jesus’s incredible affirmation quickly leads to a command: “Let your light shine.” Everyone has this God-given potential to be the light of Christ for another person, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

5. Conclude by asking the candidates to consider the reading from Matthew and its relationship to their own lives. If time permits, invite a few candidates to share their thoughts and responses.

Break (5 minutes)

Discussion: Pride and Self-Image (20 minutes)

1. Distribute the candidate’s handbooks and a pen or pencil to each candidate. Invite the candidates to turn to the “Letting Your Light Shine” exercise on pages 14–15. Explain that this exercise is to be done individually. Ask the young people to respect other members of the group by not looking at what they write. Read aloud the directions as noted on page 14. Then let the young people work alone. Allow about 6 or 7 minutes for this reflection time.

2. Post the newsprint that you prepared with the list of items from the handbook page. When everyone is finished, invite each candidate to share with the rest of the group her or his top three choices. As the young people are sharing, tally the results on the newsprint. This should be done quickly with little discussion. The end product will be a composite of some of the good that exists in the lives of this group of candidates.

If you think the candidates are open to sharing the information, ask them to tell the group the one item they want to work on.

Try This

Step 2 could be done in small groups for facilitating a greater willingness to share and for streamlining the reporting process. Form small groups and appoint a group leader for each to tally the results. After the sharing, transfer the totals of all the groups onto the newsprint.

3. Summarize in your own words the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 2 of the candidate's handbook:

- As you search to better understand yourself and to figure out the purpose of your life, try to keep these things in mind:
 - You have been created in the image of God. At your Baptism, you received the remission of original sin and you also received the grace to begin a new life in Christ. This means, for one thing, that you are full of goodness.
 - In your own unique way, you reflect, like a ray of light, God's goodness and wisdom. God willed you into existence because he loves you. He will never leave you alone. We cannot truly understand who we are apart from God.

Challenge the participants to look for the good in every person they see—including themselves.

Optional Journal Activity

Invite the candidates to find their handbooks and their pens or pencils and join you in the prayer space. Ask the participants to open their handbooks to page 16. Point out the journal-writing exercise titled "The Light of the World." If you wish, play quiet music while they write.

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Gather

1. Invite the candidates to form a large circle in the prayer space. Provide each candidate with a hymnal or the worship aid you prepared. Distribute the candidates' personal stones from the last session. Begin prayer by inviting the candidates to join in singing the gathering song you chose.

2. Continue by offering the following prayer:

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all, now and forever.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us pray. Lord, your love is the source of our creation. Help us in our growing and becoming, always attentive to your Word for us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

3. Ask the young people to hold their stones tightly, feeling how hard and cold the stones are. Pause for a few moments while they do this. Make the following points in your own words:

- Sometimes people become cold and hard. They put on masks and put up barriers that are almost impenetrable. Some people refuse to allow others to get to know the real person inside.
- Often these are people who have been hurt by others when they have risked being themselves. As protection, they become who they think everyone wants them to be. Stereotypes are society's way of adding another layer of stone. When this happens, instead of helping others discover and realize the gift they are for the world, we only cover up and hide that reality even more.
- Sometimes we allow others to have this kind of influence on us. Sometimes we do this to ourselves.

Ask the candidates to place their stones in front of them, then continue:

- Jesus used many symbols in his parables. In Matt. 5:13–16, he compares us to the symbols of salt and light—a true affirmation of who we fully are as human beings.

Listen

4. Invite the two readers to proclaim Matt. 5:13–16. Allow a few moments of silence to follow.

Respond

5. Comment on the message of the Gospel by sharing the following comments in your own words:

- Salt has many uses: it is a preservative; it keeps things fresh and prevents rotting. Salt is a healing agent; it sanitizes and aids in the healing process. Salt is a seasoning; it enhances flavor. Jesus tells us we are the salt of the earth—we have the potential to prevent spoilage of others' lives, the potential to bring about healing in our world, and the potential to enhance the flavor of life.
- We know that if salt loses its taste, it is no longer good for anything. We, then, have a responsibility to nourish ourselves not only physically and psychologically but also spiritually, so that our taste—the taste of Christ—is not lost.
- In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as "the light of the world" (8:12). In the passage we just heard, Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world." Through us, the world comes to know and experience Jesus's light, for we are empowered by his Spirit who dwells within us.

Knowing that God has created us as powerful in goodness, we have a responsibility to share that and not keep it hidden. The world depends on our sharing the gifts and the power given to us by God to be used for others.

6. Play some instrumental background music and introduce the ritual by asking the candidates to silently reflect on the person God has created each one of them to be right now. Ask them to consider what they've just heard, as well as the different gifts, talents, and personal characteristics each has been given. Allow for a brief period of silence. Afterward, invite them to come slowly, silently, and reverently to the table, no more than two at a time, and choose a few colored wax beads, which they are to gently spill into the large glass candleholder.

Tell them that the emptying of their colors symbolizes their commitment to be salt of the earth and light for the world by sharing the gift of themselves with others to build up the Kingdom of God on the earth.

7. Once everyone has been given this opportunity, ask the two participant lectors to light the new candle as you proclaim:

■ "You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13–14).

Send Forth

8. Conclude with the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray. Jesus, light of the world, we give you thanks for reminding us of the goodness of our being and for empowering us with your Spirit to be salt and light for others. Help us discover you more fully as we come to discover ourselves. Bless our efforts and our hearts as we commit ourselves to grow in your love and to shine before others so that they may see your goodness and join us in giving you glory. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Leader: May the almighty and merciful God bless and protect us, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us go forth, in the name of Jesus, to be salt and light for the world.

9. Thank the young people for their presence and cooperation, and before dismissing them make any necessary announcements about the time and location of the next session. Explain that the newly made candle will be permanently displayed as part of the session setting and that it will occasionally be used as a symbol throughout the process of preparation.

Evaluation

Shortly after leading this session, briefly reflect on the following:

- Note changes you could make to lead this session in an easier or more effective way.

- Reflect on your experience with the presentation. Was the presentation too long? too short? How would you change or adjust the presentation to make it more engaging and effective?

- Finally, note any changes you would like to make in your guidance of the prayer experience. Suggest changes for improving the experience in the future.

(Parts of this session are adapted from Marilyn Kielbasa and Thomas Zanzig, *Growing in Wisdom, Age, and Grace* [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996], pp. 31–42.)



Invitation 3

Faith: More Than the Eye Can See

Session Overview

This engaging session introduces the candidates to some profoundly important concepts related to an understanding of God and to matters of personal spirituality. Two major exercises form this session's central content. The first exercise effectively makes the point that people tend to lock themselves into certain patterns of thought that can restrict them from seeing all of reality. That important insight is then connected to the need for "seeing with new eyes" when dealing with matters of faith.

The second major component of the session is a guided meditation exercise, which provides an experience of real prayer and will evoke much reflection and discussion on the nature of God.

Objectives

- To make the candidates aware that the experience of and the reflection on matters of faith require a particular mind-set and perspective
- To help the candidates reflect on their current images and understandings of God
- To increase the candidates' awareness and conviction that exploring matters of faith can be engaging, exciting, and enjoyable

Schedule at a Glance

- Welcome and Opening Comments (5 minutes)
- Seeing with New Eyes (30 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Guided Meditation and Discussion on the Search for God (35 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Background Reading

- This session covers invitation 3 of the candidate’s handbook.
- For further exploration, check out paragraph numbers 153–162 of the *Catechism*.
- Scriptural connections: Isa. 12:1–6 (Trust in the Lord.) and Neh., chapter 4 (prayer and faith in God)

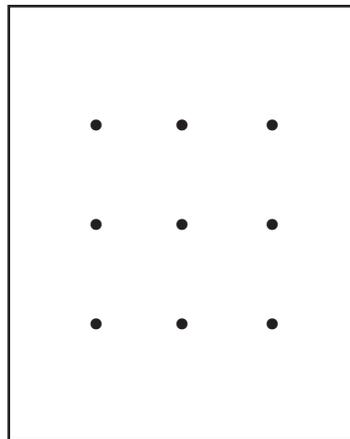
Preparation

Materials Needed

- newsprint, markers, and tape
- a tape player or CD player, and reflective instrumental music appropriate for a guided meditation. Avoid any music with lyrics, which might distract the participants.
- 5-by-5-inch squares of poster board or other stiff paper, one for each candidate
- copies of the *CYB* or another Bible, one for each candidate
- candidates’ handbooks
- pens or pencils
- prayer space items: the large rock, the stones, the candles, matches or a lighter, a small table, a Bible opened to Luke 18:35–43, and the candle made in the last session

Other Necessary Preparations

- To gain a firm sense of the nature of the Seeing with New Eyes exercise, the frustrations it can cause, and the questions it raises, attempt to solve the puzzle yourself before you begin the session with the candidates.
- On a sheet of newsprint, draw the following configuration of dots in a size large enough for all to see clearly and then post it where all can see. Keep the dots in the center of the sheet as illustrated here:



- Prepare to lead the guided meditation first by experiencing it (maybe have a friend or fellow catechist guide you through it) and then by leading someone else through it as a practice. If you cannot lead someone through the meditation before the session, at least practice it out loud in private.
- Select one of the following songs for the closing prayer service:
 - “You are Mine,” by David Haas
 - “Without Seeing You,” by David Haas
- Set up the instrumental music you chose and the equipment for playing it.
- Choose and prepare one candidate to begin and conclude the Gospel reading during the closing prayer service.
- Gather hymnals, songbooks, or other worship aids for the closing prayer service, one for each participant.
- Prepare musicians and a cantor to lead the song for the closing prayer service, or gather the necessary recorded music and equipment.
- Prepare the space for the closing prayer.

Procedure

Welcome and Opening Comments (5 minutes)

1. Greet the candidates as they arrive and invite them to gather comfortably around you.

2. Share the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 3 of the candidate’s handbook:

- The Old Testament tells the story of the Jewish leader Samuel when he was a young boy. One night while in bed, he heard someone calling his name. Thinking it was the priest named Eli, he ran to him and said: “Here I am. You called me.” Eli hadn’t called Samuel, so he told him to go back to bed. Samuel heard his name and ran to Eli again and again. Finally, when Samuel was awakened for the fourth time by the sound of his name, he recognized God’s presence and responded, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (see 1 Sam. 3:1–10).
- Samuel’s response to God is an example of faith. God called out to Samuel and revealed his presence. Samuel trusted him and promised to listen. He was ready to hear and to believe God’s message.
- God calls us too. In fact, he never stops pursuing us. The Father gave us life because he loves us and wants us to love him and share in his life. Every day of our lives, God communicates his love through the Holy Spirit, who helps us to listen and respond to his message.
- The gift God gives us to respond to his call—so that we might better know him and live in harmony with his plan for us—is called grace. It is a gift we neither earn nor deserve. We can have faith in God only because of his gift of grace, so faith is also a gift.
- However, because God the Father created us with free will, it is up to us to accept his amazing invitation and gift of grace. So faith is also our response to God’s grace. It means responding to him with our whole selves—our heart, mind, and will. It means absolute trust in him—letting go and surrendering completely to

God's will—and at the same time, faith means believing what God has revealed to us through his deeds and words.

- However, believing isn't the whole story. Faith includes our acceptance of the "whole truth that God has revealed" (*Catechism*, p. 878).
- When we have faith in God, we recognize that we have our origin in him and that our ultimate goal is to be united with him. Grace inspires us to love him with our whole being. We neither prefer anything to him nor substitute anything in his place. Having faith means that even though God is a mystery beyond words, we realize that he alone is enough—that he is everything we need.
- Faith is a way of hearing, but it is also a way of seeing. The Bible frequently associates faith with words and images related to seeing. Nearly every time the word *seeing* or the notion of seeing appear in the Bible—as, for instance, when blind people are healed or when Jesus accuses someone of "having eyes but not seeing" (see Mark 8:18)—we can be sure the Scriptures are telling us something about the meaning of faith.

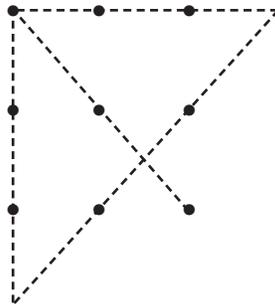
Seeing with New Eyes (30 minutes)

1. Give each candidate a pencil or a pen and a small piece of poster board. Ask the candidates to reproduce on their piece of poster board the configuration of dots you drew on the newsprint. Though you risk revealing a rather significant key to solving the puzzle, you should mention to the young people that they reproduce the dots in the *middle* of their poster board. Mention this subtly or offhandedly, however, to avoid revealing too much.

2. Note that some young people may have already experienced this exercise in their geometry or physics classes in school. Before beginning the exercise, ask whether anyone in the group has done it and knows the solution. Ask those who have already experienced the exercise to keep the solution to themselves. Tell them they will have a special role to play in the exercise in a moment.

3. Tell the candidates that the object of this game is to connect all the dots using no more than four straight lines and *never taking the pencil off the paper*. Repeat these instructions until you are sure everyone understands. Emphasize that under no circumstances should they share the solution to the puzzle if they discover it before others have. Answer any questions and then begin the exercise, giving the candidates up to 5 minutes to try to solve the puzzle.

The following diagram illustrates with broken lines the solution to the puzzle, a solution that maintains the rules of connecting the dots with no more than four straight lines, with the pencil never leaving the paper.



Note that the completed puzzle suggests the image of an umbrella. The puzzle can be solved with the umbrella handle pointed in a variety of directions, depending on which dots are used to create it. But the correct solution *always* has this basic appearance, even if positioned differently on the page. Therefore, you can assure any candidates who present such an image that they solved the puzzle.

4. Expect some candidates to exhibit immediate frustration, while others who enjoy such challenges will readily get into it. Allow the exercise to continue without further instruction as long as you feel it to be constructive or instructive. You may then wish to allow the candidates to work in pairs or small groups to try to come up with the solution. Assure those who get frustrated that there *is* in fact a solution to the puzzle that maintains the rules—no more than four straight lines, all dots connected, and the pencil never leaving the paper.

As individual candidates feel they have solved the puzzle, invite them to come to you one at a time to have their solution verified. Congratulate them if they have it right, or challenge them to try again if they did not follow the rules.

If some of the young people have had previous experience with this exercise, call them together as the others begin to work, speaking to them quietly. Ask them to circulate while others are working on the puzzle, watching carefully and trying to identify why some are having trouble solving it. Challenge them to think of clues that might help those who are struggling, *without actually telling them the solution*. Then, after sufficient time has passed, ask the young people who know the solution to share their clues with those who have not yet solved the puzzle.

5. When all have solved the puzzle, gather the candidates for discussion and reflection on the exercise. (If some have not yet solved the puzzle, reveal the solution by illustrating it on the newsprint.) Use the following questions for discussion:

- Why was it difficult to solve the puzzle? What mental restrictions kept people from seeing the answer?
- If you now had to develop one verbal clue to offer others who were trying to solve the puzzle, what would you tell them, short of giving them the answer? (Such clues may already have been developed during the exercise. Possible clues: “Don’t let the dots ‘fence you in,’” or “Allow yourself to go beyond the boundaries,” or “Think outside the box.”)
- What might this exercise have to do with our understanding of faith and the necessity to see with new eyes?

6. Comment as follows, using your own words:

- For the big questions about faith, we often think too small, limiting ourselves to particular ways of thinking about life or viewing reality. It seems, however, that we must rely on things like poetry, art, parables, stories, symbols, and rituals—all attempts to look at reality with different eyes, a more wide-open, imaginative, even playful way of viewing and participating in life.
- The major difficulty with the puzzle is that on their own, with no one telling them to do it, people tend to restrict themselves to the apparent limitations set by the dots. No rule is stated about staying within the boundaries suggested by the dots, yet for those who cannot solve the puzzle, that is likely what they did—they stayed locked into an attempt to look for “internal solutions.” As soon as someone catches sight of this fact and breaks free of such mental restrictions, the solution becomes clear—even simple.

Continue with the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 3 of the candidate’s handbook:

- Many people live with mental blinders that keep them from truly seeing—seeing the truth of Jesus’s message, seeing the meaning of their own life experience, seeing the Holy Spirit at work in the world, even really seeing other people. Their range of vision is often limited by their inability to see new possibilities, to “think outside the box.” Or they allow themselves to be blinded by the false promises of our culture—for instance, by the illusion that if they just owned more “stuff” or looked different, they would be happy.
- But Jesus calls us to “see with new eyes,” to see life the way he sees it. And he shows us how. His teachings and his actions are like a light that helps us see the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives.
- He reveals a new understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and calls us to a life of faith that promises far more than any material possession could ever deliver. Jesus Christ truly can open our eyes . . . if we let him.

Break (5 minutes)

Guided Meditation and Discussion on the Search for God (35 minutes)

1. After the break, call the candidates together and tell them you want to share a unique approach to prayer called a guided meditation. This approach to prayer can increase their awareness of the presence of God in their life.

2. Direct the candidates to sit up straight and hold their spines erect throughout the meditation. They can rest their hands palms up on their laps, and close their eyes. Allow the room to grow quiet. Then lead the group through 1 or 2 minutes of relaxation and deep-breathing exercises; for example, ask them to allow their bodies to relax as much as possible, to isolate any parts of their bodies that seem uptight and tense, and to allow those parts to go almost limp. Then ask them to focus on their breathing. Tell them to breathe in very deeply through their nostrils, hold their breath for a couple of seconds, and then exhale through their mouths very slowly and quietly. Have them do this several times, each time trying to steady and deepen their breathing.

3. When you the group appears sufficiently quiet, relaxed, and attentive, give the following instructions slowly and in a peaceful tone of voice, pausing for a brief moment (10–15 seconds) whenever you see the ellipses (. . .):

- I want you to imagine that you are sitting on a hilltop overlooking a large city. It is dusk, and the sun is slowly setting over the city. As it does so, the lights of the city begin to burn, and slowly the city begins to look like a sea of lights. You are all alone, gazing at the marvelous sight. . . .

After a while you hear the footsteps of someone approaching you from behind, but you are not afraid. You know they are the footsteps of an old hermit who lives on the mountain. He comes up to you and stands by your side. He looks gently at you and makes just one simple statement: “If you go down to the city tonight, you will find God.” He then turns and walks away. No explanations, no time to ask any questions. . . .

You know that the holy man is trustworthy and knows what he is talking about. What do you feel like doing? Do you want to act on what he said and go into the city, or do you want to stay where you are? . . .

Whatever you might want to do, I want you now to imagine you are going down into the city in search of God. Soon you find yourself on the outskirts of the

city. Now you have to decide where to search for God. . . . Where do you decide to go? . . . Don't be forced to go where you think you ought to go; rather, go where your heart truly leads you. . . .

Imagine that you have arrived at the place you feel drawn to. What do you find here? . . . What are the sights and sounds and aromas of this place? Are you alone, or are other people here? . . . How do you feel in this place? . . .

Try to imagine that you suddenly become aware of God's presence in this place. How do you know that God is here? Is God present in some physical way? Can you see God? If so, in what appearances? If you cannot actually see God in a physical sense, how do you experience God's presence? . . .

Try to imagine that God begins to communicate with you. What do you hear God saying to you at this moment? . . . How do you respond? . . .

[If you wish, pause at this point and invite the candidates to reflect while you play quiet music. Introduce the music slowly; avoid jarring the mood. Then slowly fade the music when you wish to resume the meditation.]

How do you feel about this encounter with God? Are you disappointed? . . . relieved? . . . confused? . . . joyful? . . . What do you do next? Do you want to go somewhere else or stay where you are? . . .

You realize that as much as you would like to stay in that special place with God, you must return to the hilltop. Find some way to end your time with God, and then begin to walk back toward the edge of the city. . . . Off in the distance, you see the hill on which you sat earlier, and you begin to walk toward it. You then climb back to the top of the hill to where you were sitting earlier. Look back over the skyline of the city. Does it look any different, or do you feel differently about it because of what you experienced there? . . .

Once again, you hear the footsteps of the hermit approaching you. Again he stands by your side, and this time he asks you for something. "Tell me," he says, "what you learned about God tonight in the city." What do you tell him? . . .

I want you now to say a brief prayer of thanks in your heart to God and then, when you are ready, open your eyes. . . .

4. Allow the candidates a moment or two to stretch and collect themselves. They may need to express a feeling or thought about the experience to those around them; allow them to do so. Then gather them around you and ask for their reactions to the experience. Explain that this type of prayer (which they may not have recognized as such) is a private experience, and they need not say anything about it if they do not want to. Then pose a question along the following lines:

- When you approached the edge of the city and had to decide where in the city you felt called to encounter God, where were you drawn to go?

Listen carefully to all the responses and make appropriate comments as you wish. Then continue with a question like this:

- What does this variety of responses tell us about the ways we can encounter God?

Stress the point that God is often present in the ordinary, everyday places and experiences of life. Even more important, God is often present where people are hurting and lonely.

Next, ask the following questions in your own words:

- When you were in your special place, you somehow encountered God. Is anyone willing to describe for us what that encounter was like? For instance, did God have a physical appearance of some kind, and if so, what was it like? If God was not physically present, how did you experience God? Again, expect a variety of responses.

5. Conclude by offering the following points, which are drawn from invitation 3 of the candidate's handbook:

- Even though the knowledge we receive through faith is more certain than any human knowledge can be, we often do not fully understand what God has revealed because of the obstacles mentioned, and because of the nature of what is revealed. Faith is a lifelong journey of coming to know and love God through his Spirit, which makes Christ known to us. It involves searching and asking questions and trying, with the help of the Spirit of God, to rid our lives of the things that keep us from hearing his word and seeing with new eyes.
- Searching for God demands "every effort of intellect, a sound will, 'an upright heart,'" along with the help of those who can guide us (*Catechism*, 30).
- God's Spirit dwells in the hearts of those who believe in Christ. He will never leave us alone. The Holy Spirit is with us constantly, opening our ears, eyes, and hearts, unveiling Christ to us through the Father's Word.

(This meditation experience is adapted from Anthony de Mello, *Sadhana: A Way to God*, pp. 79–80.)

Optional Journal Activity

Invite the candidates to find their handbooks and their pens or pencils and join you in the prayer space. Ask them to open their handbooks to the "Seeing With New Eyes" journal activity on page 20 for reflection and writing. If you wish, play quiet music while they write.

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Gather

1. Invite the candidates to gather in the prayer space. Begin by having everyone form a large circle. Provide each candidate with a hymnal, songbook, or the worship aid you prepared. Distribute the candidates' personal stones.

Then offer the following comments in your own words:

- Frequently when the words or notions of "sight" or "seeing" are mentioned in the Bible, the message relates to one's faith.
- "Seeing with new eyes" relates to seeing with the eyes of faith—trusting and believing in God with full surrender. "Seeing with new eyes" is seeing the world, life situations, and others with the eyes of God.

2. Invite the candidates to join in singing the gathering song you chose. Then offer the following prayer:

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all, now and forever.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us pray. God of mystery, you make yourself known to us in the most unexpected, yet ordinary, ways. You are always reaching out to us, wanting to share your life and your love. Create our hearts anew, strengthened in trust and faith in you. Bless our sight so we may recognize your presence and see as you see. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen

3. Distribute the candidates' handbooks and ask the candidates to turn to page 19. To allow for a choral reading of the Gospel, split the group, forming groups A and B. Have one candidate introduce the reading (Luke 18:35–43) by saying, "A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke." The same person will conclude the reading by saying, "The Gospel of the Lord." Then, motion for group A to begin.

Respond

4. Lead the group in a brief discussion to break open the message of the Gospel by asking the following questions:

- What did you hear? What message are you left with?
- What might the message of the Gospel tell us about what we've talked about in our session? How will you respond?

5. Ask the candidates to focus their attention on the large rock, which symbolizes Jesus, as well on as their own stones, which symbolize them. Invite the young people to consider the connectedness between the large rock and the small stones. Ask them to each approach the large rock with their stones, one at a time, and place their stones as close to or as far from the large rock as needed to symbolize the closeness they feel to God right now, or the closeness they desire to have with God. Ask them to do this reverently. You may wish to play some instrumental music during this time.

Send Forth

6. Conclude by inviting the candidates to bow their heads while you offer the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray. Lord Jesus, giver of sight,
 we offer you our thanks and praise
 for the many ways you reveal yourself to us.
 Be light for our eyes that we may see, always,
 with the faith you have given us to respond to the needs
 and injustices of our world.
 Help us discover you more fully
 as we come to discover ourselves.
 Bless our efforts and our hearts so that
 by our work and our living,
 others may see your goodness and give you glory.
 We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Leader: May the almighty and merciful God bless and protect us, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

7. Thank the young people for their presence and cooperation, and before dismissing them, make any necessary announcements about the time and location of the next session.



Invitation 4

Trusting in God

Session Overview

This session is in many ways a transition point in the preparation process for Confirmation. The process moves from the rather general reflection on the adolescent experience of religion and faith in God to a more specific focus on the particular challenges posed by Jesus and faith in him.

The session opens with a forced-choice exercise, where the candidates are challenged to express their current positions regarding such issues as the divinity of Jesus, his Resurrection from the dead, his miracles, and so on. The exercise is intended to awaken both you and the candidates to the starting point of the group as its members move toward the next phase of preparation. A more firm decision regarding such matters of faith is to be the *outcome* of this preparation process, not a prerequisite for participation in it.

The candidates next engage in an enjoyable and often enlightening exercise, the Risk of Faith. You hold before the young people a box of unknown contents and guarantee that those contents will bring fulfillment and peace to their life. All they have to do is turn over to you every cent they have on them! The point of the exercise is clear: The level of difficulty involved in trusting the word of another is directly proportional to the amount of personal risk involved.

This session should be viewed as a kind of brainstorming introduction to an extended in-depth consideration of Jesus and his message during later sessions.

Objectives

- To invite the candidates to begin serious reflection on their attitudes toward and understanding of Jesus
- To awaken the candidates to the fact that any real act of faith, including faith in Jesus and his message, involves some element of risk and, consequently, a degree of personal courage

Schedule at a Glance

- Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)
- Forced-Choice Exercise: Taking a Stand About Jesus (30 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Discussion: The Risk of Faith (30 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Background Reading

- This session covers invitation 4 of the candidate's handbook.
- For further exploration, check out paragraphs 520–521 and 1694 of the *Catechism*.
- Scriptural connections: Luke 9:18–20 (Who do you say I am?) and 1 Pet. 3:13–22 (suffering for doing right)

Preparation

Materials Needed

- three sheets of poster board for the forced-choice exercise
- tape
- newsprint and markers
- a decorated box with a copy of the New Testament or a Bible inside it
- a few one-dollar bills for candidates who may need to borrow one
- hymnals or songbooks, or a worship aid for the closing prayer service, one for each candidate
- a tape player or CD player, and reflective instrumental music
- copies of the *CYB* or another Bible, one for each candidate
- candidates' handbooks
- pens or pencils
- prayer space items: the large rock, the stones, the candles, matches or a lighter, and a Bible

Other Necessary Preparations

- Prepare three posters. The first poster should be labeled “Agree Strongly”; the second, “Not Sure”; and the third, “Disagree Strongly.” Post the three posters, each in a different part of the room, so the young people will be able to see them throughout the session.
- On newsprint, print the following questions:
 - What do you think is in the box?
 - Why did you give or not give your money?
 - Is a person’s willingness to buy the contents of the box always related to how much money she or he has? Explain your answer.
 - Imagine that the money is symbolic of your whole life, your very self. With that image in mind, what connection might you see between this exercise and faith?
- Choose and prepare one candidate to process the Bible and proclaim the Gospel reading during the closing prayer service.
- Prepare musicians and a cantor to lead the song for the closing prayer, or gather the necessary recorded music and equipment.
- Select one of the following songs for the closing prayer service:
 - “The Summons,” a Scottish traditional tune, by John L. Bell, arranged by Bobby Fisher
 - “I Say ‘Yes,’ Lord”/“Digo ‘Si,’ Señor,” by Donna Peña
 - “Here I Am, Lord,” by Dan Schutte
 - “Lord, When You Came”/“Pescador de Hombres,” by Cesáreo Gabaráin, translated by Willard Francis Jabusch
- Prepare the prayer space. Place the prayer table at one end. Open the Bible to Luke 9:18–21 and place it on the prayer table. Also arrange the personal stones on the table so that each person will be able to identify her or his stone.

Procedure

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

After all the candidates have arrived, welcome them and invite them to gather comfortably around you. Inform the young people that the focus of this session is faith in Jesus: what the candidates already understand and believe about him, what questions they might have about him, what his life and message were all about, what it means to follow him, and so on.

Forced-Choice Exercise: Taking a Stand About Jesus (30 minutes)

1. Introduce the exercise by noting that it is designed to help the candidates identify where they stand regarding a number of statements about Jesus. Some of the statements are essential teachings of the Catholic Church; others are not. Emphasize that this is not a test, nor are the participants going to be judged or criticized for having questions or expressing beliefs other than those of Church teaching. One purpose

of this exercise is to affirm the candidates' increasing maturity and ability to deal cognitively with the highly abstract thought associated with theology.

2. Announce that you will be reading statements, one at a time, about Jesus. As quickly as possible after hearing each statement, the candidates should move toward the poster that best represents what they believe or think about that statement. When they get to that spot, they are to quickly share with one another why they responded as they did. Explain that after they spend a minute or so brainstorming, you will ask them for a brief group report on the results of their discussion. Given the limits of time, you should not expect lengthy reports, nor should you comment at length on what the candidates say. Explain that the point of the exercise is to gain some sense of how the group as a whole feels about key Church teachings about Jesus.

Note that the young people need not gather into one large group before each new statement. They can simply move from whatever location in the room they happen to be in to the location that best represents their response to the next statement. At times, they may stay right where they are for two or more consecutive statements.

3. When you feel confident that they understand all the instructions, ask the candidates to stand. Then begin to read the following statements one at a time. The statements do not appear in any significant order, nor does this list exhaust the many possibilities you might want to consider. Feel free to replace or add statements of greater interest to you, but keep them focused on the person and message of Jesus. Keep the exercise moving at a brisk pace.

- Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jesus was a fictional character created by someone. He never really existed.
- Jesus was as human as we are.
- Jesus was a good man but certainly was not God.
- Jesus set up the positions of pope and bishops as we have them today.
- Only people who believe in Jesus will go to heaven.
- Jesus worked many miracles.
- Jesus must have had a great sense of humor.
- Jesus truly rose from the dead and is alive today.
- If Jesus came among us today, people would reject him just as they did two thousand years ago.

4. You may occasionally feel compelled to provide a brief point of clarification about a particular statement, or the candidates may ask a question or say something that you feel demands a response. Just remember that extended discussion on any one point will slow the exercise. It is probably best to make a mental note (and perhaps later, a written one) about points of doctrine you want to clarify later in the process of preparation.

5. Close the exercise by making the following observations in your own words:

- The exercise probably revealed that most of the candidates have already learned a great deal about Jesus, or at least hold strong opinions about what they think and believe. Perhaps, however, the need for a lot more information about Jesus was also evident in the exercise.

- Some candidates may have occasionally chosen the “Not Sure” option not because they haven’t come to a personal decision about the statement, but because they simply did not understand what the statement meant or referred to. This is nothing to be embarrassed about, but it does highlight the young people’s need to have clearer information about Jesus.
- Another scenario is perhaps more common. Many of the candidates may have heard a lot about Jesus but at such a young age that they were unable to understand it. As a result, they hold confused ideas or understandings that are only half true. This is not a cause for embarrassment either. However, the danger here is that as questions about religion and faith naturally arise during adolescence, some young people may choose to reject Jesus and Christianity on the basis of incomplete or confused information. Again, the need for sound information about Jesus is evident, and a major goal of this process of preparation is to provide that information.
- Mature believers know from experience that an inexhaustible richness and depth exist in the story of Jesus and his message. Some of the greatest thinkers in the history of humanity have spent their life studying and meditating on the Gospels, only to feel at the end of their lives that they have just scratched the surface of the meaning of those writings. That is what makes the study and discussion of Jesus so challenging, enriching, and life giving.
- In Jesus’s time on the earth, people couldn’t meet him without questioning their own beliefs, values, and behavior. They couldn’t be neutral in his presence. Nor can we.

Continue with the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 4 of the candidate’s handbook:

- When we look at the life and Good News of Jesus Christ, we confront the question of what makes for true happiness. The questions Jesus asks are drastically different from those posed by popular culture.
 - Popular culture asks, How can I acquire a lot of wealth? Jesus asks, How can I share what I have with those in need?
 - Popular culture asks, What do I have to do to be popular? Jesus asks, How can I love all people, even my enemies, without concern for my social status?
 - Popular culture asks, How can I gain power over others? Jesus asks, How can I serve others?
- The questions Jesus asks lead us to drastically different answers than do the questions posed by our culture. And Jesus’s questions lead us to the right answers, to God’s revealed truth.

Break (5 minutes)

Discussion: The Risk of Faith (30 minutes)

1. Gather the candidates around you in a semicircle. Ask them to take out all the money they have with them and count it. If necessary, allow them to retrieve their money from wallets and purses, coat or jacket pockets, and so on.
2. Show the group the mystery box and explain that it contains something that you personally guarantee will give them all the happiness they need. (This happiness is symbolized by a copy of the Scriptures representing the message of Christ that gives fullness of life. Of course, you do not tell them that!) Ask whether anyone has

previously participated in this exercise. If so, ask them to play along without revealing what is in the box. Announce that at the end of the session you will reveal the contents of the box only to the persons who are willing to give you all the money they hold in their hands. Explain that you can guarantee that you will not keep the money for your own use, but that you *cannot* guarantee that you will give it back to them.

Note: Some candidates will likely have no money on them but will want to buy the box and its contents. Be prepared to loan them one dollar for this, but they must understand that they will be expected to pay it back. (This will no doubt aggravate those who will have to pay much more for the box, but just ignore their complaints and hold firm on your offer.)

3. Give the young people a minute or two to think about the offer and to ask questions. However, at no time give any hint of what is in the box.

4. After 2 or 3 minutes, call for the candidates to make their decision. Some (it is hoped) will give all their money, and others will hold back. Collect the money from willing candidates. Then, without revealing the contents of the box, divide the group into smaller groups of three or four. Post the questions you have listed on newsprint where all can see them, and give the small groups about 5 minutes to come up with responses to the questions.

5. When time is up, go through the questions one at a time and ask for representatives from each group to report the results of their discussion of each question. Comment as you feel appropriate.

6. Close this exercise by offering the following thoughts in your own words:

- What the candidates experience during this exercise can provide insight into the nature of faith and some of the demands it makes on Christians. In this exercise the candidates are asked to trust you, the leader, when you say that the box contains something that will give them total happiness. How they respond reflects in some way their trust in you and your word.

Continue with the following comments, which are drawn from invitation 4 of the candidate's handbook:

- All love relationships, all friendships, involve the willingness to trust in the promises of another—promises of fidelity, respect, truthfulness, and so on.
- The same holds true in our relationship with God. Faith means trusting in God and the truth of his promises—promises made known to us through all he has said and done, but most fully revealed through the life, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Mark 9:14–29 tells about a father who seeks help from Jesus for his son, who is possessed by a demonic spirit. Jesus tells the father that “all things can be done for the one who believes” (23). The father cries out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (24).
- The grace of God is given to us through the Holy Spirit and helps us turn our hearts to God, and it is the Holy Spirit who helps open our minds to understanding and belief.
- Through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, we experience the Holy Spirit drawing us to accept and believe the truths of divine Revelation.
- These truths are not always easy to understand. Sometimes the world we live in seems very different from the world promised to us through faith. What if our willingness to give up our life for others leads only to death—forever and ever? That is where trust and faith come in.

- Our willingness to place our faith in Jesus Christ is influenced somewhat by what we have to lose. That is why, for example, Jesus talked about the dangers of being rich. Accepting Jesus's teaching about giving rather than taking is easier if we do not have a lot to give in the first place. When it might mean losing something we have worked hard for, it is a lot tougher. Accepting a call to identify with and help poor and oppressed people is difficult when we are comfortable in security and freedom.
- The ultimate outcome for responding to God with faith is to live forever in union with God. Imagine eternity with the one God, whose essence and very being is love! Because of our faith, God forgives all our sins and reconciles us to himself. Without faith this salvation is not possible. "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).
- The life of faith is not always easy. We need the support and encouragement of other believers to live the Gospel message even when it is difficult and challenging. That is why faith in Christ means being a baptized and active member of the Catholic Church.
- Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church in a special way, revealing the full truth of the Gospel message.
- This is what Christ calls us to—with the guarantee that it is worth it, that we will find fullness of faith and give effective witness to the love of God the Father if we do. In the end, with faith, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain!

7. Reveal the contents of the box. Also, return to the candidates all the money they paid for the box. As you show the young people the copy of the Scriptures, share your own conviction that the message of God revealed in Jesus and through the Scriptures is guaranteed, as you promised, to bring happiness and fullness of life.

Optional Journal Activity

Invite the candidates to retrieve their handbooks and join you in the prayer space. Distribute pens or pencils and ask the participants to open their handbooks to page 23. Point out the journal-writing exercise titled "Who Do You Say That Jesus Is?" If you wish, play quiet music while they write.

Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Gather

1. Ask the candidates to join you in the prayer space and to sit in a large circle. Distribute the necessary songbooks, hymnals, or worship aids. Allow a few moments of silence for settling down and getting focused.

2. Begin the prayer as follows:

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all, now and forever.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, you reveal yourself to us as one who was like us in all ways, except sin. You call us, like your disciples of long ago, to answer an important question for ourselves today.

Open our eyes, ears, and hearts to your presence and your word, so that we may come to know you more intimately in our lives.

We ask this in your name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

3. Invite a candidate to light the candle, then offer the following in your own words:

- “Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20) is Jesus’s question to his disciples in the Scripture reading we are about to hear. Jesus challenges the disciples to take a personal stand regarding him. He said, in effect, “I know what all the others are saying about me, but I need to know something more: What about you? What do you believe about me?” In one way or another, every person who wishes to claim the name *Christian* must confront and answer that question.

Listen

4. Invite the prepared candidate to stand and to motion for the entire group to stand. Have this candidate go to the table where the Bible is open to the passage, pick up the Bible, hold it high, and process with it to the other side of the room. Have this candidate proclaim Luke 9:18–21 and, when finished, process back to the small table, holding the Bible high. Then, everyone should be seated.

Respond

5. Make the following comments on the passage in your own words:

- The question Jesus poses to each of us, in this moment, is “Who do you say that I am?” Answering that question requires risk, because when we come to discover who God is and name God for ourselves, we quickly realize that it is never enough. Something more is required of us: loving God with our whole being, heart, soul, mind, and strength with everything we have within us, freely, with no measure or conditions.
- This is what being a Christian disciple is all about. Therefore, Jesus asks us how much we are willing to risk. How might you answer him? [Pause after each of the following questions.]
 - Will you believe that I love you without any reservation?
 - Will you trust me?
 - Will you let me be your strength?
 - Will you let go of your own strong control?
 - Will you believe in your own giftedness?
 - Will you walk with insecurity for a while?
 - Will you come to me in prayer so I can empower you?
 - Will you be vulnerable with me?
 - Will you take me to the places in your heart where you hide out?
 - Will you allow me to walk with you?
 - Will you recognize your own weak areas?
 - Will you be quiet enough to hear me?

- Will you talk with me about what is really difficult for you?
 - Will you stand close to Calvary and learn from me?
 - Will you believe that nothing can separate you from me?
6. Invite the group to sing the song you have selected, in response to the message of the Gospel.
7. Offer the following comments in your own words:
- [Begin by playing some reflective instrumental background music.] Like those in Jesus's time, we all struggle to give ourselves fully to God. As a sign of support and commitment to our journey toward greater love and fullness in God, I invite you to approach the center table, two-by-two, to select your personal stone and give it freely to the person with whom you come forth. After the exchange, return to where you were seated, spending a moment in silent prayer for the person whose stone you hold. In receiving this person's stone, together, we make a commitment to offer prayers for that person until we meet again for our next session. Let us all pray that the Lord will show us how to more fully risk loving him through our reaching out to others.

Send Forth

8. Conclude with the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray.

God who dwells within,
 God who is with us in good times and difficult ones,
 we turn to you, and we proclaim that nothing can come between us and your
 love for us,
 even if we are troubled, or worried, or being persecuted.
 We can grow and learn through hard times, because we have the power of your
 love in our lives.

For we are certain of this:

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to
 come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
 will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 (Adapted from Rom. 8:35–39)

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the almighty and merciful God bless and protect us, the Father, and
 the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

9. Thank the young people for their presence and cooperation, and before dismissing them, make any necessary announcements. Ask the candidates to return the personal stones to the prayer table, but to hold that person's name and intentions in prayer until the next session.



Invitation 5

The Church: A Community of Disciples

Session Overview

Whenever Catholic Christians approach concepts and realities such as the dignity of persons, the meaning of life, the nature of God, or the life and message of Jesus, they always do so within the context of a community of faithful believers, a church. Though Catholicism clearly affirms the necessity of an individual's personal relationship with God in and through Jesus, it never suggests that Christian faith is *only* that individual relationship. Roman Catholicism is decidedly not just a "me and Jesus" religion.

This session is designed to offer precisely that kind of introduction. The remainder of the process of preparation, including, in a particular way, the period of reflection, is designed to help the candidates gain a more complete understanding of Roman Catholicism in a manner and depth appropriate for adolescents.

Following a brief welcome and opening prayer, this session begins with an exercise in which the candidates literally build a church—that is, a model of one. In working together on this task (or even in failing to do so), they learn that the real Church is not represented by the physical structure they have created but by the way they interacted with one another during the project. The exercise offers a working definition of the Church and challenges the candidates to embrace both the personal and communal dimensions of faith and religion in this process of preparation.

Objectives

- To introduce or reinforce for the candidates the understanding of the Church as a community of believers committed to living out the vision and values of Jesus
- To generate enthusiasm among the candidates for continuing participation in the process of preparation for Confirmation

Schedule at a Glance

- Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)
- Building a Church (35 minutes)
- Presentation: The Meaning of Church (20 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (20 minutes)

Background Reading

- This session covers invitation 5 of the candidate's handbook.
- For further exploration, check out paragraph numbers 13–17, 947, and 1878–1882 of the *Catechism*.
- Scriptural connections: Acts 2:37–38,41–42 (life among believers) and Matt. 28:20 (I am with you always.)

Preparation

Materials Needed

- for each small group: four sheets of poster board, six sheets of construction paper (assorted colors), three pairs of scissors, three rolls of transparent tape, and two bottles of glue or paste
- tape and a ball of string
- newsprint and markers
- hymnals, songbooks, or worship aids for the opening and the closing prayer services, one for each candidate
- a tape player or CD player, and reflective instrumental music
- copies of the *CYB* or another Bible, one for each candidate
- candidates' handbooks
- pens or pencils
- prayer space items: the large rock, the stones, the candle, matches or a lighter, markers, a small basket, a *CYB* or other Bible, and the small table

Other Necessary Preparations

- Prepare the prayer space: Roll the large rock to the center of the room, arrange the stones around the large rock, and place the small basket near the large rock. Put the prayer table at one end of the space and set the candle and the Bible on it. Place several markers near the large rock.
- Designate a prayer leader and an adult leader to proclaim Acts 2:38–47.