

**GROWING UP CATHOLIC**

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Faith Activities  
on what makes us  
**CATHOLIC**

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# INTRODUCTION

As Catholics, we have a treasure chest of customs, traditions, rituals, and symbols, all of them reminding us who we are and how we live as disciples. This book explores just a few of them.

I hope the ideas here will lead children and youth to understand these treasures more deeply and to live them more faithfully—all in creative, engaging, enjoyable, and engrossing activities.

Many of these activities can be changed and adapted to explore other symbols, rituals, and customs of our faith. In choosing and working with activities, remember nine noteworthy necessities:

**① Activities are theologically sound.** All that we do needs to help learners delve deeper into and remember the meaning. Oftentimes, our choice of activities might concentrate on the details (not that details aren't important) but neglect the core meaning, the religious import.

In studying the creation story, for example, rather than drawing (or coloring) seven pictures of the seven days, making a room-length mural of all of creation, with the words "God saw that it was good," emphasizes the foundational meaning.

Rather than some type of project concentrating upon all the animals in the story of Noah's Ark (cute as it might be), a large rainbow filled with some of God's promises recorded in Scripture would depict the scriptural meaning of the story: God keeps promises.

**② Activities are catechetically/educationally valuable.** Activities are used to deepen the learner's understanding or appreciation of the theme by illuminating the truth, the personal implications of the belief, and the relevance of faith.

Rather than simply reviewing by inviting the children/youth to list/make a poster of the Corporal Works of Mercy, invite various pairs/groups of learners to draw a picture, or do a PowerPoint or video, of how each work is or can be lived by those their own age.

**③ Activities belong to the learner.** The essence of the activity is self-expression: how does what we have just learned apply to my life? Therefore, there is no need for patterns or samples to illustrate "what it has to look like." There are no rules proclaiming "it has to be *this* way."

Because the activity helps the learners interpret and deepen—not just repeat—what has been learned, it takes them beyond the presentation. After a study of the Psalms, rewriting a psalm in one's own words or writing a psalm for today, from the learners' everyday experiences/needs, will help to make the meaning of psalms more personal.

After a discussion on God: if you were to paint God, what color would you select?

After the Scripture story of Zacchaeus: if you were Zacchaeus, what would you say in a thank-you note?

**④ Activities touch upon each person's creativity.** The skilled catechist invites the children/youth, saying just enough to spark their thoughts but leaving them with freedom so that they can imagine, dream, think, and apply.

Rather than doing a puzzle, or a fill in the blanks, etc., about the call of the disciples, children/youth can be invited to imagine they were there; they were called by Jesus. They might write a letter to their family about what happened, their feelings about it, and what they will now do.

Rather than using a word game that only uses memory, create a newspaper about a Scripture event or a billboard that advertises God's love; this approach calls upon individual creativity and imagination and deepens learning and appreciation.

**5 Activities take various expressions.**

Activities are much more than crossword puzzles, drawing pictures, etc. Wouldn't it be wonderful if each new session invited the learners to respond through a new type of media, different materials, participative experiences, employing the various creative expressions of our heritage, of who we are as humans?

**6 Everyone doesn't need to do the same thing.** Children/youth will have different abilities and interests. Whenever possible, suggest options for any given session. Within a lesson on prayer, for example, give four options from which they can choose: using paint, show what you feel when praying alone or with others; rewrite the *Magnificat* in your own words; design gestures to accompany your favorite psalm; select a popular song that can be used as prayer accompanied by PowerPoint.

**7 Activities aren't fillers.** In lesson planning, catechists don't dream things up just to keep the learners busy. Activities/projects flow from the theme and reinforce the core teaching.

Neither do activities have to always take place at the end of the session, during the last ten minutes. At the very beginning, invite the learners to mold a sculpture from clay that expresses their idea of God's forgiveness. These

sculptures can then be referred to throughout the session and might be a focal point for a closing prayer service.

**8 Activities relate to life outside the group session.** Faith formation sessions, of course, are never an end in themselves. They send children/youth forth to a life of discipleship, a life of prayer and witness, a life of serving in their everyday lives. All learning answers the "so what?" question. What does this truth, doctrine, belief, or practice of our heritage have to do with my everyday life?

Invite the learners to interview someone, such as the owner of a store or the principal of a school, about respect for property and possessions. How do these real-life encounters deepen the discussion and learning that happened during the session?

**9 Utilize the full potential of each activity.** Even though the process (what happens within) is more important than the finished product, learners quickly figure out what is/what isn't busy work by the way catechists care for and take an interest in their work.

The more useful the better: with pictures of children living the Beatitudes, don't just post them. Compare, discuss, make an album, show and explain to another class; display in the church gathering space; publish.

The more prayerful the better: write a prayer to accompany a drawing or activity; bring written/drawn activities in procession to the prayer corner to use/to offer during prayer.

# ADVENT

## Objective

To prepare for the season of Advent by making Family Envelopes of Activities

## Background for Catechists

The liturgical year begins four weeks before Christmas. Advent means “coming”; we celebrate the three comings of Jesus: into our world some two thousand years ago, the Second Coming in the future, and how Jesus comes each day into our lives. Advent calls us to slow down and reflect on the gift of Jesus in our lives. Yet, in many ways, with all the events and preparations surrounding us, this is probably the busiest, most rushed time of the year. The church invites us to take the slower time, to find ways to live in the present moment, deepening and understanding the gift we have been given.

## Materials

- ☐ 24 (or so) envelopes for each child/youth
- ☐ Copies of the handout
- ☐ Blank slips of paper
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Pencils, markers

## Lesson Starter

Ask: *What did your family do during the days before Christmas last year, the days of Advent?*

Acknowledge the busy schedules of the season; then share with your learners the church’s invitation to make Advent a slower time, a time of rituals that bring us closer to Jesus and to one another, including our family.

Share with the children/youth that many families have rituals during the Advent season to celebrate the meaning of the season and to spend time with each other. Ask: *What are some things that families might do during the Advent season?*

## Activity

Invite the children/youth to think of and choose what they would like their family to do during this Advent season to remember Jesus. They can cut out ideas from the handout, or write down ideas that were suggested by the group or other ideas that come to them.

Place each one in a separate envelope, dating the outside of the envelope. A few of the activities are designed for a specific date; the others can be determined by the children/youth. They might want to decorate the envelopes.

Invite the children/youth to take the envelopes home. Suggest placing them on their family dinner table, opening one each evening and discussing as a family how they might do the suggested activity.

## Prayer Together

*Emmanuel, God with us in every moment, during this Advent season slow us down. As we celebrate the coming of your Son, Jesus, deepen our caring within our families and our reaching out to all in our human family.*

## Options

- Prior to this session communicate with the parents, asking for activities their families have done in the past and what they might like to do this year. Add these into your discussion with your learners.
- Instead of envelopes, these ideas might be placed on an Advent Chain. One of the advantages of the envelopes is the experience of waiting—an Advent theme—to discover what suggestion is in each envelope.

# ADVENT

## Objective

- To prepare for the season of Advent by making Family Envelopes of Activities.

## Step-by-Step

1. Begin by asking your child the following questions:
  - ▶ What is Advent? When do we celebrate it?
  - ▶ Do you remember any of the things we have done as a family during Advent?
2. Explain to your child that the word **Advent** means “coming.” We spend four weeks before Christmas preparing for Jesus to come into our world. Advent is a time for slowing down and reflecting on the gift of Jesus in our lives.
3. Using the handout to get you started, brainstorm with your child what your family might do this year to celebrate the meaning of the season and to spend time with each other.
4. Cut out the ideas that you will use from the handout and write down any other ideas you are going to use. Place each one in a separate envelope, dating the outside of the envelope. Note that some of the activities are designed for a specific date; the others can be determined by you. If time allows, decorate the envelopes.
5. Take your envelopes home and place them on your family dinner table. Open one each evening and discuss as a family how you might do the activity.
6. End your time by praying this together:

*Emmanuel, God with us in every moment,  
during this Advent season slow us down.  
As we celebrate the coming of your Son, Jesus,  
deepen our caring within our families  
and our reaching out to all in our human family. Amen.*

ACTIVITY SHEET 1

Make an Advent Chain to count the days throughout Advent to Christmas.

Make a family trip to the library and check out some books about Christmas.

Read the Christmas story from the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Begin tonight to put up your nativity scene. Talk about the part that each person or animal had in the Christmas story.

Tonight is a no-television night. Spend time tonight reading those books you checked out of the library.

Today (Dec. 6), celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas. Exchange your gift certificates. Telephone a loved one long distance for a surprise.

Make a list of love and appreciation. Talk about what you love/appreciate about each person on your list. Be sure to have someone take notes; then give the notes to each person.

Tonight, make a family Christmas card for one of the special people on your list.

Whoever opens this envelope gets to choose what the family will do together this evening.

We are getting ready to remember the birth of Jesus. Take out your picture albums and remember the birth of each family member.

Give someone a simple gift and don't take credit for it. You could leave baked goods, candy, or an anonymous Advent greeting on a neighbor's doorstep.

Make cookies for a lonely neighbor, for a soup kitchen, etc.

Take all of your Christmas books, wrap them, and put them in a box. Each night—or once a week—take one, unwrap it, and read it together.

Pray the O Antiphons before dinner each evening (the week before Christmas).

First Sunday of Advent:  
Set up your family Advent wreath.

Go shopping together to buy a new toy for a charitable organization.

Tonight, play Christmas music and make decorations for your tree.

Tonight, take a family walk in your neighborhood and look at Christmas decorations.

Tonight (Dec. 5), get ready for the feast of St. Nicholas by making gift certificates for everyone in the family.

Today (Dec. 8) is one of the feasts of Mary. As part of your family prayer together, pray the Hail Mary. How do you think Mary felt while she waited for Jesus to be born?

Pray together: Thank you, God, for the excitement we feel. It is very hard to wait to find out what will be under the tree. Help us to think more of you. Give us the peace of Christmas as we continue waiting.

Let everyone take a turn telling what she or he thinks was the best thing about last Christmas.

Write a prayer together that you can use when you place the Infant Jesus in the crib.

Have a wireless evening/day. Unplug everything and decide on a way to just enjoy/be together with your family.

Read about the Old Testament people that are featured on the Jesse Tree. Make one or two ornaments of Jesse Tree people.

Decorate a mini-Christmas tree and take it to someone in a nursing home.

As a family, record a Christmas voicemail message—in the spirit of the meaning of Christmas.

Offer to babysit for another family so the parents can go shopping.



# BAPTISMAL DAYS

## Objective

To enable learners to learn more about the sacrament of baptism, especially their baptismal day, through interviews of people who celebrated the day

## Background for Catechists

Baptism, the sacrament of the beginning of new life in Christ, is just that: a beginning. Baptism isn't a once-and-done sacrament. We live our baptism and our baptismal promises each and every day.

One of the ways to keep our focus on the centrality of our baptism is to remember and celebrate the anniversary of our baptism: remembering with our families, reminiscing over photos, bringing out our baptismal candle and baptismal white garment, having a special meal, and praying together, especially renewing our baptismal promises.

## Materials

- ☐ Copies of the handout
- ☐ Blank paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens

## Lesson Starter

Ask: *Do you remember the day of your baptism?* (Some might say yes because their family has talked about it with them, shown them the pictures, etc.) *Do you know the date of your baptism? Who was there with you? Why did your parents have you baptized?*

Talk with your children/youth about the importance of baptism in our lives: initiation into the Christian community, the bestowal of a name (our personal name and the name "Christian"), renunciation of sin, the celebration that God has chosen us, the gift of grace, and the beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ.

## Activity

Invite your children/youth to interview some people who were present at their baptism (their parents, godparents, grandparents, other relatives and friends, etc.). (Interviewing is a helpful catechetical activity that involves family members/others in the community in the child's faith formation, helps the children/youth benefit from the wisdom of the larger community, and helps the learners to connect their classroom learning with the "real" world.)

Distribute copies of the handout and use it to help your learners prepare for the interview. Distribute blank paper and invite the children to write down some questions to ask for their interview. Then draw them together to discuss some of their questions. Encourage them to use the papers as they conduct their interview.

Provide time in subsequent sessions for the children/youth to share their findings with the rest of the group. Invite them too to share all that they found out with their parents.

## Prayer Together

*God of New Life, in baptism we were signed with the cross, immersed in the saving waters, and anointed with holy oil. You call us by name, calling us to grow in wisdom, age, and grace. We promise to walk with others in your love, to care for others, and to be peacemakers in our world.*

## Options

- Invite the learners to create something to help them remember all that they have discovered: a booklet, a PowerPoint, a poster, etc., about their baptism.
- Encourage families to celebrate the baptismal anniversaries of every family member.

# BAPTISMAL DAYS

## Objective

- To enable learners to learn more about the sacrament of Baptism, especially their baptismal day, through interviews of people who celebrated the day

## Step-by-Step

1. Begin by asking your child the following questions:
  - ▶ Do you remember the day of your baptism?
  - ▶ Do you know the date of your baptism?
  - ▶ Why do you think we decided to have you baptized?
2. Explain that baptism is the beginning of **new life** in Christ. We live our baptismal promises each and every day! It is a celebration of God choosing us to be a **child of God**.
3. Using the handout, have your children interview you about their baptism. Take the questions home to interview other people who were there.
4. If you don't do it already, start a ritual in your family to celebrate baptismal anniversaries.
5. End your time by praying this together:

*God of New Life, in baptism we were signed with the **cross**,  
immersed in the **saving waters**, and anointed with **holy oil**.  
You call us by name, calling us to grow in wisdom, age, and grace.  
We promise to walk with others in your love, to care for others,  
and to be peacemakers in our world. Amen.*

# Interviews about My Baptismal Day

## A Few Interview Pointers

Make a list of the people you will interview. Your parents can help by telling you who was present.

What kinds of questions will help these people share their experiences with you?

Write your questions down and decide on a logical order for the interview.

Go to the interview prepared to jot down the answers. (You might want to ask the person if you could record them.)

Listen carefully to each answer. Sometimes the answer will tell you what your next question should be.

Look at the person when she or he is talking with you.

Even though you write down or record the answers, don't concentrate so much on getting the information that you don't really listen to what the person is saying.

At the end of the interview, thank the person for talking with you.

Afterward, let the persons you interviewed know how your report went with the group—how it helped them and you.

## Some Suggested Questions to Ask

- 1 What was I like on the day of my baptism?
- 2 Is there one thing you especially remember about the celebration of the rite when I was baptized?
- 3 How did you feel during the celebration of my baptism? Did it remind you of anything?
- 4 Did you make the sign of the cross on my forehead? How did you feel when you did that?
- 5 Do you remember the message of the homily?
- 6 Was I baptized by immersion or by pouring of the water?
- 7 (Parents): Why did you have me baptized?
- 8 When and where were you baptized? Do you know who was there with you? Do you celebrate the anniversary of your baptism?
- 9 What does the sacrament of baptism mean to you?
- 10 How do you live your baptismal promises today?

# THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## Objective

To imagine ways that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are lived in everyday life

## Background for Catechists

We are gifted—at baptism and confirmation—with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. When we are guided by these gifts, our lives generate specific characteristics: the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Just as a tree produces fruit when properly nourished and cared for, people who develop the Spirit's gifts show concrete evidence of their faithfulness.

Scripture (Galatians 5:22–23) lists nine fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* delineates twelve: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity” (no. 1832).

## Materials

- ☐ A bowl of fruit
- ☐ A large bowl with several slips of paper, each containing the name of one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- ☐ A bowl containing slips of paper listing movie or TV genres (e.g., news show, action movie, commercial, history, adventure, musicals, fantasy, documentary, game shows, animated shows, court show, hidden camera, interview, talk show, variety show)
- ☐ Copies of the handout

## Lesson Starter

As the children/youth look at the bowl of varied fruit (invite them to enjoy a piece), ask: *What enabled these fruits to grow?*

*Because of the many gifts of God (rain, sun, nutrients in the soil, etc.), each plant/vine/*

*tree produced delicious fruit. The same is true for us. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts (wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe). These gifts enable us to live good, holy lives. Because of them, we are able—with the Spirit's guidance—to produce loving actions, to bring forth wonderful fruit: the fruits of the Holy Spirit in all the aspects of our lives.*

## Activity

Form groups of three or four. Have each group draw one slip of paper from each bowl. Using the handout—and your discussions—invite each group to talk further about the actions associated with their fruit.

Invite them to create a skit to explain and give practical actions that illustrate their fruit, using the movie or TV genre they also draw.

Invite the groups to present their skits one at a time. If there is not time for everyone to present in one session, one group could present at each subsequent session, thereby keeping the theme of living the fruits always before the learners.

## Prayer Together

*Holy Spirit, you are generous in responding to our needs. Teach us generosity. Holy Spirit, you reveal the faithfulness of God. Draw us to live more faithfully with you.*

## Option

Invite the learners to write a “review” of each skit—but not about the performance or the quality of the skit; the review would be about the fruit: its advantages in our Catholic life, the challenges as we live that fruit, etc.

# THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## Objective

- To imagine ways that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are lived in everyday life

## Step-by-Step

1. Look at the bowl of varied fruit and ask your child the following question:

- ▶ What enabled these fruits to grow?

2. Explain that because of the many gifts of God (rain, sun, nutrients in the soil, etc.), each plant/vine/tree produced delicious fruit. The same is true for us.

The **Holy Spirit** gives us gifts: **wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and wonder and awe**. These gifts enable us to live good, holy lives. Because of them, we are able to produce loving actions, to bring forth wonderful fruit: the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

3. Using the handout, discuss the fruits of the Holy Spirit with your child.

4. Create a skit about one of the fruits.

- ▶ Draw a fruit of the Holy Spirit from the large bowl.

- ▶ Draw a genre from the other bowl.

- ▶ Using your chosen fruit and genre, create a skit that explains and gives practical actions that illustrate your fruit.

5. End your time by praying this together:

*Holy Spirit, you are generous in responding to our needs.*

*Teach us generosity.*

*Holy Spirit, you reveal the faithfulness of God.*

*Draw us to live more faithfully with you. Amen.*

# The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

**Charity/Love:** This fruit especially shines forth when we reach out to those around us and beyond us who are in need, including the poor, the sick, or victims of injustice. We are constantly concerned about the needs of others.

**Joy:** Joy is beyond happiness. We can be happy when we eat a good dinner. A joyful person celebrates life, even in the midst of pain and confusion, because of a deep relationship with God.

**Peace:** Peace is having a restful relationship with God. Life becomes less worrisome because we know God is present in the good times and the bad; we realize that God never leaves.

**Patience:** Knowing we are truly loved, we can endure hardships, suffering, and the insensitivity of other people. We let the moments of distress pass.

**Kindness:** Kindness is showing concern for those in need, through actions or words of encouragement.

**Goodness:** Because of God's great love, we desire to always do what we know is right, loving everyone without exception and working for everything that is good for them.

**Generosity:** We live generously when we share our gifts, time, and possessions with others. At times it might mean we have to sacrifice something, but the needs of others are our first concern.

**Gentleness:** Gentle people act calmly and avoid actions that might lead others to anger or resentment.

**Faith/Fidelity:** We are faithful when we live out our commitment to the teachings of Jesus, the Scriptures, and the Catholic Church. Because of our faith relationship with God, we also have faith in—a deep trust in—people.

**Modesty:** We exhibit modesty through balance, fairness, and discipline in all our actions, especially our conversations and behaviors. Modesty is a sign that we give God credit for our talents and successes.

**Self-Control:** We are self-controlled when we work to overcome the temptations we face and we try always to do God's will.

**Chastity:** Because of chastity, we form loving and caring friendships, which help us to act appropriately with our gift of sexuality.





## GESTURES IN PRAYER

### Objective

To learn more about the importance of gesture in prayer, especially by designing prayerful gestures

### Background for Catechists

Throughout the ages, the church has used many gestures in prayer, which reminds us that prayer is not just words; our whole bodies pray. The website of the U.S. bishops explains: "In the celebration of Mass we raise our hearts and minds to God. We are creatures of body as well as spirit, so our prayer is not confined to our minds and hearts. It is expressed by our bodies as well. When our bodies are engaged in our prayer, we pray with our whole person. Using our entire being in prayer helps us to pray with greater attentiveness."

Some of the gestures used during liturgy and sacraments:

- The sign of the cross
- Using holy water as we enter and leave church
- Bowing from the waist
- Bowing the head
- Genuflecting
- Striking of the breast
- Standing, kneeling, sitting
- Making the sign of the cross on our foreheads and lips, and over our hearts
- The sign of peace
- Laying on of hands
- Washing of the feet

### Materials

- ☐ Copies of the handout
- ☐ Bibles

### Lesson Starter

Ask: *How do we use gestures in everyday life* (wave, handshake, nod of the head, hug, etc.)?

*Why do we use them? What do they "say"? Do you think they are important? Helpful?*

Help the children/youth to review some of the gestures we use in liturgy, and to see that gestures, at times, can take the place of words; at other times, gestures intensify our words, making very explicit our feelings and thoughts.

During our personal prayer and group prayer (outside of our liturgical prayer), we can also use gestures: gestures from our liturgy, other gestures that we might even make up that convey our thoughts and feelings, and, at times, sign language. Using all these gestures will enhance our prayer and make us more attentive to the gestures we use in liturgy.

### Activity

Invite small groups of children to design gestures for each line of a prayer. Invite each group to use a different prayer: Our Father, Hail Mary, a prayer they have written, one of the psalms, or a liturgical song.

The gestures on the handout are only some of many possible gestures; at times, the same gesture might also mean different things.

### Prayer Together

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,*

*and to the Holy Spirit. (BOW HEADS)*

*As it was in the beginning, (STRETCH ARMS*

*FORWARD, POINTING TO THE EARTH)*

*is now, and ever shall be, (RAISE ARMS ABOVE HEAD)*

*world without end. (BRING ARMS IN FRONT IN A*

*CIRCLE AS IF YOU WERE CIRCLING THE EARTH)*

*Amen. (FOLD HANDS IN PRAYER)*

### Option

Have the small groups teach their prayer and gestures to another group of learners, perhaps a grade or two younger than they are.

# GESTURES IN PRAYER

## Objective

- To learn more about the importance of gesture in prayer, especially by designing prayerful gestures

## Step-by-Step

1. Begin by asking your child the following questions:
  - ▶ How do we use gestures in everyday life? (*e.g. wave, handshake, nod of the head, hug*)
  - ▶ Why do we use them?
  - ▶ What do they “say”?
  - ▶ Do you think they are important? Helpful?
2. Explain that we use gestures in liturgy to help us pray. Sometimes the **actions** take the place of words, and sometimes they intensify our words. Using gestures enhances our prayer and makes us more attentive to our prayer.
3. Using the handout, create gestures for a prayer. You can use a known prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.), a Psalm, or you can write your own prayer. The gestures on the handout are only some of possibilities. Feel free to create your own!
4. End your time by praying this prayer or the prayer you created together:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.* (Bow heads)

*As it was in the beginning,* (Stretch arms forward, pointing to the earth)

*is now, and ever shall be,* (Raise arms above head)

*world without end.* (Bring arms in front in a circle as if you were circling the earth)

*Amen.* (Fold hands in prayer)





## Some Prayerful Gestures

**Hands uplifted  
and extended outward**

*(gesture of asking)*

**Arms crossed  
over the chest**

*(sign of drawing something/someone close to us)*

**Arms raised upward**

*(sign of praise)*

**Hands folded**

*(gesture of drawing our whole body into prayer or of  
being united with God)*

**Hands joined  
with others**

*(gesture of unity)*

**Palms up**

*(gesture of asking)*

**One hand holding  
the other with both  
palms up**

*(gesture of offering ourselves)*

**Head bowed**

*(gesture of meditation or humility)*

**Head lifted up**

*(gesture of openness, anticipation, receptivity)*

**Arms outstretched**

*(gesture of petition)*

**Standing attentive**

*(gesture of waiting, receptivity, readiness)*

**Eyes closed**

*(gesture of meditation, reflection)*

**Eyes looking upward**

*(sign of anticipation, expectation, longing)*

## WATER – HOLY WATER

### Objective

To learn about holy water, one of our sacramentals; to write family blessing prayers

### Background for Catechists

Throughout the history of God's people, we often encounter water, including the creation of the world, Noah and the flood, Moses and the Red Sea, John the Baptist baptizing with water, Jesus speaking about living water, and Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

In our faith, water is used often: baptism, sprinkling at the beginning of Mass (the *asperges*), at the doors of the church, in various rites of blessing, at home for the blessing of persons and things, for the washing of the priest's hands during liturgy, and for the washing of feet on Holy Thursday. Water is also mingled with wine prior to the consecration at Mass.

Many churches today place their baptismal font at the entrance of the church as a reminder of the centrality of baptism in our faith lives.

### Materials

- ☐ Bowls of water—one for every two or three children/youth
- ☐ Copies of handout
- ☐ Samples of blessing prayers
- ☐ Paper, pens or pencils
- ☐ Assembled booklets for each child
- ☐ Small bottles of holy water

### Lesson Starter

Invite your learners to dip their fingers in the water. Invite them to take a moment to just feel it. Ask them to think of all the ways water is used—in their lives and in the life of the world.

Water is often used in the rites and celebrations of our faith. Invite them to name some. Talk with them about the meaning of each, reminding them of some they might not have

mentioned.

Share with them that holy water is used often in various blessing rites within the church and within the home.

### Activity

Use the handout to help your learners think of family times and occasions and reasons when family members might bless each other.

Distribute paper and pens. Invite each child/youth to choose one occasion/reason from the list, and to write a blessing prayer that can be done within the family. You might want to share with them some sample blessing prayers (verbally) and talk about themes/items to be included; you might not want to give them the prayers, as there might be a tendency to simply copy the prayer. Encourage their personal reflection and creativity.

After the prayers have been written, collect them, making copies and assembling them into a booklet of family blessings for each child/youth to take home with a bottle of holy water. Send home the handout as a way to encourage family blessings.

### Prayer Together

*God of all blessings, your Son, Jesus, welcomed and blessed the children. Continue to look with love on each of these children gathered here. May each one continue to grow in wisdom and grace, growing closer to you and united to everyone in your family. We ask this blessing, Loving God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

### Option

Contact the parents before the book is assembled. Invite them to write a family blessing prayer to be included in the book.

# WATER – HOLY WATER

## Objective

- To learn about holy water, one of our sacramentals; to write family blessing prayers

## Step-by-Step

1. While looking at and touching the water, begin by asking your child the following questions:
  - ▶ What are some ways that water is used in your life?
  - ▶ What are some ways that water is used in the life of the world?
  - ▶ Why is water so important?
  - ▶ Can you think of any times that water is used at church?
2. Explain that **holy water** (water that has been blessed) is used often in the church for various **blessing rites**. We can also use holy water at home for special times.
3. Using the handout, discuss the times and reasons for family blessing prayers.
4. Choose one occasion/ reason from the list and write a blessing prayer for your family. Take the prayer home along with a bottle of holy water to use with your family.
5. End your time by praying together:

*God of all blessings,  
your Son, Jesus, welcomed and blessed the children.  
Continue to look with love on each of us.  
May each one of us continue to grow in wisdom and grace,  
growing closer to you and united to everyone in your family.  
We ask this blessing, Loving God,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Dear Parents,

Throughout our long Catholic history, holy water has often been taken home from church and kept there to be used in family blessings. The website of the U.S. bishops reminds us: “there are blessings that can be prayed by anyone who has been baptized, ‘in virtue of the universal priesthood, a dignity they possess because of their baptism and confirmation’ (Book of Blessings, no. 18). The blessings given by laypersons are exercised because of their special office, such as parents on behalf of their children.”

After learning about the importance of water and the church’s use of holy water, your children/youth have written some family blessing prayers that are contained in the booklet they are bringing home, along with a bottle of holy water. The prayers may be used in a number of ways:

- Trace the sign of the cross (with or without holy water) on the person’s forehead
- Sprinkle holy water over the whole family
- Place your hands upon the head or shoulders of the person being blessed

We encourage you to keep the booklet and the holy water on your family meal table or with your family Bible for frequent use. You might also wish to purchase a holy water font to place near the door that your family uses most often throughout the day.

Thank you for the blessings that you are to each other in your family and to our parish community.

Gratefully in the extravagant blessings of our God,

## Some Times and Reasons for Family Blessing Prayers

To begin a new day

Mealtimes

Bedtime

Before leaving the house

Birthdays

Baptismal anniversaries

Patron saint’s day

To celebrate a special achievement

Time of illness

In times of trouble

The start of something new  
(new week, new school year,  
New Year’s Day)

When grandparents visit

When friends visit

Blessing of home

New baby

A blessing for a car

Advent blessing

Valentine’s Day

Ash Wednesday

Lenten blessing

Easter blessing

Mother’s/Father’s Day

On a great day

A blessing for strength

# THE WORKS OF MERCY

## Objective

To understand the Works of Mercy, discovering various ways to live them in daily life

## Background for Catechists

Because we are the recipients of God's love and mercy, discipleship compels us to mirror God: to be loving and merciful to all in God's family.

The Corporal Works of Mercy are seven kind acts, helping our neighbors with their material and physical needs. The Spiritual Works of Mercy are seven acts of compassion, helping others with their emotional and spiritual needs.

The Works of Mercy flow from the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the church. They are derived from Jesus' teaching that "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" (Mt 5:7), and the Great Commandment of love of God and love of neighbor (Mt 22:37–39).

The first six Corporal Works are rooted in the parable of the sheep and goats (Mt 25:31–46); the seventh was added as early as the third century based upon Tobit 1:16–17.

## Materials

- ☐ Copies of handout
- ☐ Large sheets of paper
- ☐ Pencils, pens
- ☐ Crayons, markers

## Lesson Starter

Say: *If someone loves and cares for you, what do you want to do in return? Perhaps this is one of the most important things about our faith: because we have been loved and cared for by God, we want—we are called—to act the same way toward others. Since earliest times, the church has reminded us of ways to show love: the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Think about some of the ways you live the Works of Mercy in your everyday life:*

- *Sharing snacks and treats rather than keeping everything for yourself*
- *Donating clothes to the poor*
- *Taking meals to those who are sick*
- *Caring for your family and relatives when they are sick*
- *Helping people who are angry or sad or confused rather than judging or ignoring them*
- *Praying for your family and friends*

*Living these works happens often with those we are closest to; following Jesus calls us to always go deeper. How can we practice these loving acts for more and more people, even those whom we do not know?*

## Activity

Divide the children into seven groups. Give each group one of the Corporal Works of Mercy (on another day you can do the same activity with the Spiritual Works). Invite each group to make an edition of a newspaper based solely on their Corporal Work: news stories (local, national, international), editorials, want ads, cartoon format, puzzles, letters to the editor, announcements, weather reports, entertainment section, etc.

## Prayer Together

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow your love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy.*

## Options

- Display the newspapers at the parish or at local businesses.
- Instead of a newspaper, make a video or PowerPoint about the Work of Mercy.

# THE WORKS OF MERCY

## Objective

- To understand the Works of Mercy, discovering various ways to live them in daily life

## Step-by-Step

1. Begin by asking your child the following questions:
  - ▶ If someone loves and cares for you, what do you want to do in return?
  - ▶ What are some ways you can show someone you love them?
  - ▶ What are some ways you take care of others?
2. Explain that this is one of the most important things about our faith: because we are loved and cared for by God, we want – and are called – to act the same way toward others. The **Works of Mercy** give ways to do this by addressing people's physical (**corporal**) needs and emotional (**spiritual**) needs.
3. Using the handout, discuss the Works of Mercy. Have you done any of them?
4. Choose one work of mercy and create a newspaper based solely on your work. You might include:
  - ▶ news stories (local, national, international)
  - ▶ want ads
  - ▶ announcements
  - ▶ cartoons
  - ▶ weather reports
  - ▶ editorials
  - ▶ puzzles
  - ▶ entertainment section
5. End your time by praying together:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow your love.*

*Where there is injury, pardon.*

*Where there is doubt, faith.*

*Where there is despair, hope.*

*Where there is darkness, light.*

*Where there is sadness, joy. Amen.*

## The Corporal Works of Mercy

### FEED THE HUNGRY

- Participate in a food drive
- Buy your favorite foods to give to a soup kitchen
- Bake cookies for a homeless shelter

### GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY

- Watch for ways to save water or keep it clean
- Hand out water at a race that raises money for a charity
- Help someone who is “thirsting” for a friend or someone to talk to

### CLOTHE THE NAKED

- Participate in a coat collection
- Buy socks and underwear for people in homeless shelters
- Look for clothes on sale or non-name brands. Donate the money saved to an organization that helps people in need

### SHELTER THE HOMELESS

- Participate in a Blanket Drive
- Participate in a Walk for the Homeless
- Send cards or gifts to new neighbors or parishioners

### VISIT THE SICK

- Visit a nursing home
- Send a card to someone who is sick
- Prepare meals for Ronald McDonald House

### VISIT THE IMPRISONED

- Collect books for a prison library
- Help someone who is “imprisoned” by a disability or handicap

### BURY THE DEAD

- Call the local cemetery, asking if they need help with cleanup around the grounds
- See if there are any other ways to assist: putting flags out around Memorial Day or Veterans Day

## The Spiritual Works of Mercy

### ADMONISH THE SINNER

- Be a witness; refuse to take part in things you know are wrong
- Gently help others make good decisions

### INSTRUCT THE IGNORANT

- Help a sibling with homework
- Share a gift/talent with another

### COUNSEL THE DOUBTFUL

- Encourage someone who is down
- Share positive thoughts

### COMFORT THE SORROWFUL

- Make a card for someone who is grieving
- Give comfort to those with sick loved ones
- Make a butterfly for someone who has died and give it to their relatives.

### BEAR WRONGS PATIENTLY

- Turn the other cheek
- Don't get upset if you're treated unfairly

### FORGIVE ALL INJURIES

- Reconcile with someone who has hurt you

### PRAY FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

- Make a prayer list, using it daily
- Pray for people listed in the church bulletin