



Growing Up Catholic

Fall Learning Centers

for Whole Family Catechesis

Leader Guide

by Paul Canavese

Why Whole Family Catechesis?

Parents are the ones who have the most influence on whether their children will remain Catholic when they reach adulthood (or while they are kids, for that matter). However, most parish catechesis focuses on children, with their parents absent. *Whole family catechesis* takes a different approach, by forming parents and children together.

In the *Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*, Pope Francis encourages this method, saying, “Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young parents to be aware of their mission as evangelizers of their own family.” (#287)

In working with many communities that take a whole family approach, we have found:

- ▶ Most parents have not had faith formation since they were children. They lack confidence and are intimidated by catechetical textbooks. They need help to understand their faith better and to grow in relationship with Christ. Parents can't pass on what they don't have.
- ▶ Families need to *practice* engaging their faith. Encouraging families to pray, talk about faith issues, and have more family time together is not enough. We need to provide a time and place for them to actually *do* it and learn what it looks like.
- ▶ Parents want to pass on faith to their children, and will step up when we give them the tools to embrace their role.
- ▶ Families can have fun learning about their faith! In our busy culture, families have less and less time when they are really present to each other (and having fun). Give this gift to your families.

Why Learning Centers?

One effective method for organizing whole family catechesis sessions is called “learning centers.” In this approach, each family works together on a series of short, fun, interactive activities. These activities are usually spread throughout a meeting space, placed on separate tables. Families rotate through multiple activities during a single gathering, spending five to ten minutes on each.

The activities are self-directed, with a simple instruction sheet listing step-by-step directions. Parents work with their own children to understand and complete the activity together. Activities often use additional worksheets and craft supplies and teach faith insights through action and discussion.

Leaders introduce the session, watch the schedule, and float throughout the room to answer questions, encourage families, and make sure no one gets stuck.

There are many advantages to this approach, including:

- ▶ Hands-on, interactive learning is a very effective way for children (and adults) to understand even abstract concepts. They are especially helpful for non-linear learners who may otherwise struggle.
- ▶ This model makes it easy for almost any parent to both learn and act as catechists of their own children. No parent preparation is required, and they can easily and confidently read the numbered instructions and help their children learn. Learning centers are not intimidating, as a text can be.
- ▶ Families with multiple children can have a shared experience, instead of being split up by age group.
- ▶ Learning centers are much easier to lead than other catechetical models. A session with many families can potentially be run by a single catechist. We have found that it is relatively easy to find volunteers willing to help set up or act as floaters (it is much less intimidating than running a classroom). Discipline becomes a non-issue, since parents are working with their own children.
- ▶ Worksheets and crafts are brought home and serve as faith reminders, whether it's a page posted on the refrigerator, a bookmark slid into a book, or a mealtime prayer on the dining room table. This is an effective way of bringing faith into the home, where it should thrive.

Key Principles

Here are some important guidelines to help you be successful in partnering with your parents. You are called to facilitate and nurture the primary role of the parents as they, together with their children, learn about their faith in a family setting. Be sure to go through these with any volunteers who will be helping at the event so you are all on the same page.

- ▶ **Be welcoming to families of all shapes and sizes.** Pope Francis makes it very clear in *The Joy of Love* that we should walk with all families, not just traditional ones. We want to help all children grow up Catholic and all parents grow closer to God and the Church.
- ▶ **Be welcoming to outsiders.** Remember that some who attend may not regularly attend Mass. Many come to these meetings to support their children. We want to make them feel welcome and comfortable here.
- ▶ **Empower the parents.** Even though some of your parents may not know their faith well and could make mistakes, we never want to make them look ignorant, especially in front of their own children. We have provided answer keys for some activities, for this reason. Be sure that your floaters are attentive to this and gentle while helping.
- ▶ **Don't take over from the parents.** One of the points of having an event with learning centers is to put parents in the driver's seat. By all means, help them out if they have a question or are stuck, but give the families space to work through the activities themselves. There is no need, for example, to explain the steps to each learning center to the large group.
- ▶ **Help the parents grow in their faith.** You may notice that we encourage parents to fill in their own worksheet when it involves personal and faith reflections. For example, we don't just want kids praying to Mary, we want parents to do so too!
- ▶ **Encourage conversation.** Another reason we have parents fill out their own worksheets is that it is one of the best ways to bring families into meaningful faith sharing conversations. It's one thing for mom or dad to help their child think through what he or she is thankful for, but it will make even more of an impression when parents express their own gratitude. Remember, kids learn best by example!

Calendaring Your Learning Centers

We recommend using learning centers as part of a 60-90 minute gathering of families, although you can also use the activities in a variety of ways. We offer a suggested schedule for a full session.

Some communities use a whole community approach during all of their catechetical gatherings, but other popular methods are to alternate between sessions using a regular curriculum and whole family sessions or offering whole family sessions once per month.

Here are good times to schedule the learning centers in this collection:

Mary the Mother of God	Various Marian feasts, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)▶ Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8)▶ Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7)▶ Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8)
Living the Beatitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ All Saints Day, when the Beatitudes are read every year.▶ The Beatitudes also appear in the lectionary on the fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (late January) in Cycle A.▶ Luke's shorter version of the Beatitudes appears in the lectionary on the sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (February) in Cycle C.
Giving Thanks to God	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ It will work best to schedule this one or two Sundays before Thanksgiving.

Preparing Your Event

Preparing Your Schedule

The document for each session provides an outline for a full event. They each begin with a song and prayer, intended to open the hearts and minds of children and parents to hear God's Word. The "Setting the Scene" story helps children and parents to "feel" the reading as if they were there. The song, prayer, scripture reading, and story work together to provide a context for the learning center activities that follow. After completing the activities, participants are invited to share what they have learned. The session closes with a prayer.

Use the outline in the session documents to prepare your schedule, writing target times for each part of the session in the empty column.

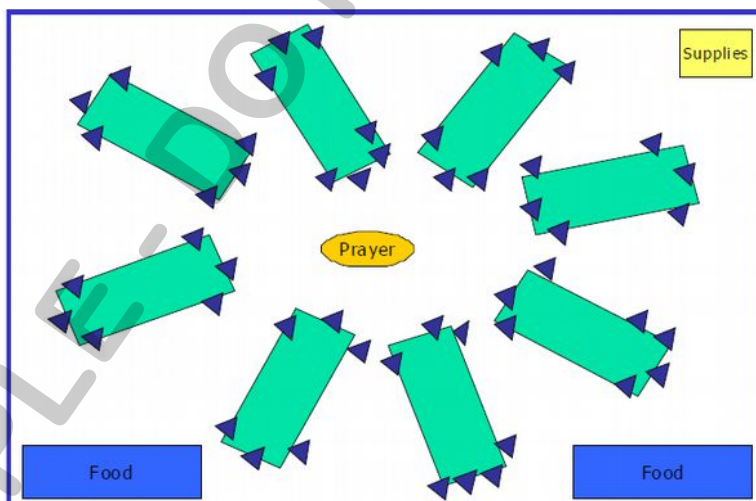
Selecting the Learning Centers

Determine how much of your session is available to working on the learning centers themselves. Allow 8-12 minutes to complete each learning center.

We have provided seven learning center options for each session, but you do not have to make all of them available. Note that some learning centers work better with kids of different ages, so you will want to make sure there are enough for the age groups that will be present.

Preparing Your Space

If possible, hold your event in a large space with various tables and a central table that you can use as a sacred space. An ideal space would look something like this:



Learning centers will be placed on the green tables, and the clumps of blue triangles show families seated together.

You have some different options for how to manage the rotation of the centers:

- ▶ **Rotate the families.** This is the most common model, in which you place one learning center on each table. After a family completes one learning center, they get up and move to another table. This approach is usually the least confusing to participants, as the handouts and other materials for each center are in distinct places. The physical movement and transition can also help wiggly kids.
- ▶ **Rotate the centers.** Alternately, you can keep the families in the same spot throughout the session and have them work through multiple centers in place. This could work well if you have everyone work on the same center at the same time. You simply pass out one center at a time.

You also have two options for managing the rotations:

- ▶ **Self-paced.** Allow each family to work at their own speed and move on to the next activity whenever they are ready. Even if you take this approach, you may want to make some announcements along the way to encourage families to keep moving (e.g. “If you haven't moved on to your second activity yet, you might want to wrap up your first”).
- ▶ **Scheduled.** Tell your group that everyone will move to the next activity at the same time. Give a 1-2 minute warning and let families know that they can always take the activities home to complete them. You may want to use a bell to get everyone's attention.

Preparing Your Supplies

Be sure to read through the “Preparations” section of the particular session for more specific preparations, including supplies for each learning center.

Also be sure to make enough copies of the learning center pages:

- ▶ Each learning center has a single instruction page and sometimes additional worksheets.
- ▶ Instruction sheets and pages that are not written on can be re-used by different families. You will need fewer copies of these.
- ▶ You will need more copies of the consumable worksheets. Note that some will be used only by the children, and others will be used by all family members.

We also recommend that you bring:

- ▶ Name tags and markers.
- ▶ Signs to welcome and announce the event.
- ▶ Beverages and snacks.
- ▶ Music to play softly while everyone arrives.

Preparing Your Catechists

Whole family events require catechists to assume new roles. When planning, decide who will lead the music and prayer, proclaim the scripture reading, and tell the story.

Also prepare several “roaming catechists” who will be available to coach the parents during the family sharing time. Roaming catechists are “extras” in the room who keep an eye on what’s happening and can step in if a family seems to be lost or having trouble.

- ▶ They should be very discreet and limit their interventions to the minimum. In general, it’s best to allow family groups to work their own way through these exercises. Choose people who can be subtle and gentle with folks. Avoid those who tend to say too much.
- ▶ All leaders should carefully read through the event outline and all the learning center pages well in advance, and be familiar with the theology of the topic.
- ▶ Ask all your volunteers to arrive 15 minutes early, in order to be ready to welcome all the participants as they arrive. They should keep introducing people to one another as new people arrive.

And a Special Thank You!

We’re very appreciative of you taking the lead in welcoming your parents and bringing them into the faith formation process. Your ministry will make a difference in these families’ lives for years to come. It’s an honor to support and equip pastoral leaders like you!



Growing Up Catholic

Fall Learning Centers

for Whole Family Catechesis

Fall Marian Feasts

Mary the Mother of God

by Jean L Easterly, Ed.D.



*Statue of Mary – sword piercing her heart
Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem*

Introduction

By pronouncing her "fiat" at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish. She is mother wherever he is Savior and head of the Mystical Body.

The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body.

"We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ"

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #973-974

Mary was Jesus' mother, but she is also a special mother for all of us. The following activities will help us get to know Mary better and learn to live more like her. She loves God, Jesus, and others intensely and always said "Yes" to God. She teaches us how to follow Jesus, even when it is hard.

These learning centers can be used around the time of various Marian feasts, including:

- ▶ Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)
- ▶ Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8)
- ▶ Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7)
- ▶ Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8)

Leader's Guide

For important information about how to use this document and Fall Learning Centers as a whole, please consult the separate Leader's Guide.

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Session Outline

Use the table below to plan your session. Use the empty column to fill in your target times for starting or ending these parts of the session.

Welcome & gathering		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome everyone warmly as they enter, especially reaching out to anyone who is new or not regulars.
Opening song		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Choose your favorite song about Mary, and lead the group in singing it.
Opening prayer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Now introduce the prayer: Today we gather to get to know Jesus' mom better. Mary was a special girl who grew up to be a special woman. She said "Yes" to God and helps us learn how to say "Yes" to God, too. ▶ Now lead the group in praying the Hail Mary.
Setting the scene		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read aloud from the two "Setting the Scene" pages later in this document.
Learning centers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite the families to begin working on the learning center activities. See the leader guide for guidelines and options for the learning centers. ▶ Encourage participants to raise their hands to request help or ask questions.
Large group sharing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite participants to share with the whole group what they learned about Mary (save the prayer scrolls for the closing prayer). Thank everyone who is willing to share.
Closing Prayer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read aloud at least three of the prayers that the children wrote in the "Prayer Scrolls" learning center. ▶ Close with the following: Dear Mary, Thank you for your wonderful example, and for teaching us how to love others. Always help us remember how important your son Jesus is to us. Amen.

Preparations

The Sacred Space

In the center of the room, cover a table with a blue cloth and place on it a few Bibles, a few rosaries, a lighted candle, a vase of flowers, and a statue of Mary. Place one or more cork boards up against the table and have a small container ready with thumb tacks. If possible, have a few rosaries available for families to take home if they don't have one.

Learning Centers

These activities have been designed so that, with the help of a parent, even a kindergartener can succeed. However, the grade levels noted give guidance for matching interests and developmental levels. Copy the handouts and prepare the other materials listed below. Be sure to make enough handouts so parents can do some of the exercises alongside their children, as noted.

1 When Mary Was a Little Girl	K-5	► Pencils.
2 Mary's Heart	K-8	► Pencils, colored markers, and crayons. ► Scissors. ► Safety pins or tape.
3 Our Lady, Undoer of Knots	K-8	► Pencils. ► Scissors and hole puncher. ► Narrow ribbon, each at least 24 inches long, of various colors.
4 Our Lady of Guadalupe	3-8	► Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.
5 The Rosary	3-8	► Pencils, colored markers, and crayons. ► Rosaries for families to take home (optional).
6 Prayer Scrolls	3-8	► Pencils, colored markers, and crayons. ► Construction paper of various light colors, cut into half sheets and rolled up. (Lighter colors will make the children's writing more visible.)
7 How Would You Describe Mary?	3-8	► Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.

Setting the Scene (1/2)

Preparing the Players

A female catechist or parent should take the role of Mary, and a man should take the role of John. Another adult can serve as the narrator. Select a child to bring the flowers to Mary. Make a copy of Jesus' reply to Mary's question and give it to a child who is a good reader. Those assuming the roles of Mary and John would ideally dress in the style that was worn at the time of Jesus, including sandals on their feet. Mary and John should be seated next to the table set aside as sacred space. If possible, have participants memorize their lines.

Telling the Story

Now begin the story:

Narrator: We invite you to be seated. We find Mary sitting outside in the late afternoon sun. It has been many years since Jesus ascended into heaven. St. John has been taking care of Mary just as Jesus asked him to do."

John: Mary, are you well?

Mary: Yes, John, I am, praise the Lord. I was just remembering when Jesus was a boy. He loved to pick the tiny yellow flowers that grew near our home in Nazareth. He would burst through the door with a handful of flowers just for me.

Give a nod to the child with the flowers. He or she will hand Mary a small bouquet of yellow flowers. Mary can place the flowers in the vase on the table.

John: You are blessed with many happy memories.

Setting the Scene (2/2)

Mary: Not all of them were happy. When Jesus was about twelve years old, Joseph and I traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem. All was well on the way there. We greatly enjoyed the company of relatives and friends while in Jerusalem. On the way back to Nazareth, Jesus wasn't with me so I knew that he must be with Joseph and the other men. When I went to look for Jesus, Joseph said he thought Jesus was with me and the other women. We were both frantic and hurried back to Jerusalem, where we found him in the temple listening to the teachers and asking them questions.

John: What did you say to Jesus?

Mary: I asked him, "Jesus, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been anxious looking all over for you." (Luke 2:48b)

John: What did Jesus say?

Mary: He looked at me and said,

Give a nod to the child with the reply.

Jesus: Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house? (Luke 2:49)

Mary: Joseph and I did not understand what Jesus meant. Later, when Jesus began his ministry, I understood what Jesus had told us about being in his Father's house. I knew that Jesus was doing the will of his Father in heaven. When Jesus died and was placed in my arms, I thought my heart would break. Three days later, I rejoiced when I saw my beloved son, Jesus

Mary closes her eyes and rests.

John: Mary, Mary, are you asleep?

① When Mary Was a Little Girl

Background Information

Although the Bible doesn't tell us about Mary's parents, tradition tells us that Joachim ("Yahweh prepares") and Anne ("grace") were the parents of Mary. After years of childlessness, an angel appeared to tell Anne and Joachim that they would have a child. When Mary was born, she was consecrated to God; she was specially blessed for her future life of loving and serving God.

Objective

To compare the way that Mary's family lived with the way we live today

Directions

- ① Carefully read the descriptions on the handout about the ways Joachim, Anne, and Mary lived their lives.
- ② Complete the sentences in the right column by explaining how you live your life today.
- ③ Be ready to share what you created with the whole group at the end of the session.

① When Mary Was a Little Girl

Ways that Joachim, Anne and Mary lived their lives	Ways that we live our lives today
When the family needed water, Mary and Anne walked to the well.	When my family needs water, we
News around the world came from people in caravans who stopped in Nazareth and told people what was happening.	News around the world comes from
After supper Joachim read from the Hebrew Scripture and they prayed together.	After supper we
When Anne cooked supper, she cooked it over a fire.	When my mother or father cook supper, they
When someone in the family needed to send a message, they used broken pottery to write on or possibly the more expensive papyrus.	When someone in my family needs to send a message, we
When Anne and Mary went shopping, they walked to their destination.	When we go shopping, we
The clothing that Mary and her family wore covered their whole bodies and they wore sandals on their feet.	The clothing that my family wears
After dark Joachim lighted an oil lamp so that they could see.	After dark we

2 Mary's Heart

Background Information

One important devotion of our faith tradition is to reflect on the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the way that she loved others so fully, wearing her heart “on the outside.” We are all called to live this way too, not trying to protect our heart from getting hurt by closing it up inside us, but by loving everyone as much as we can.

Objective

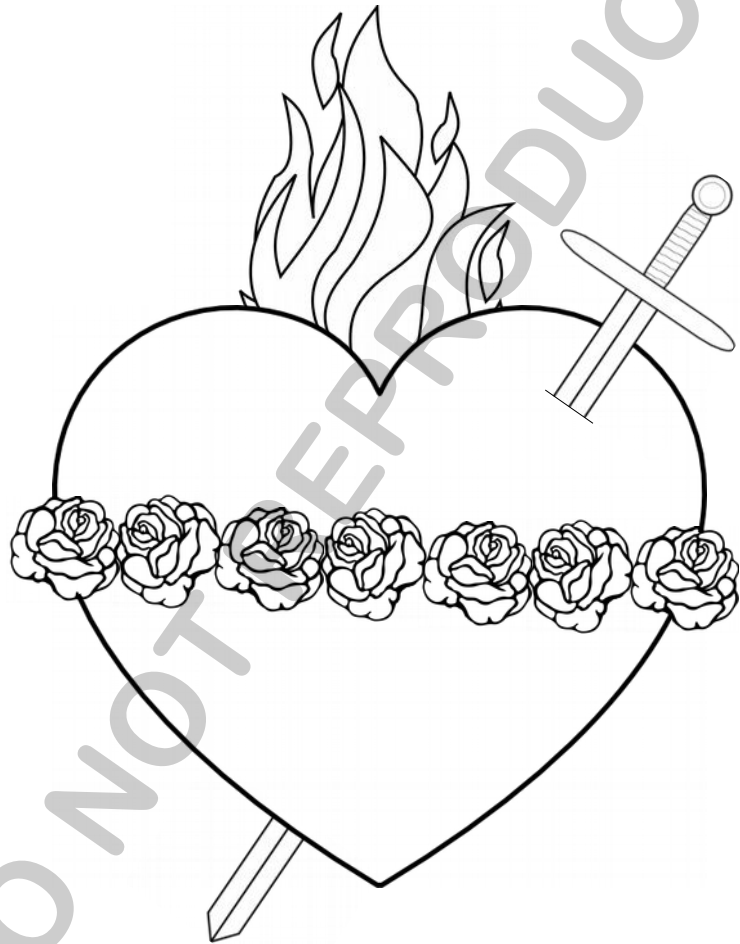
To learn about how Mary loved and how we can love more like she does

Directions

- ① Give a handout to each member of the family. Parents can do all parts of this activity, too!
- ② Color in the **flame** above the heart on your handout. The flame helps us remember how Mary's heart burned with love for God and other people. Then write down examples of what your heart burns for.
- ③ Now color in the **flowers**, which remind us that Mary had a pure, humble heart that always obeyed God. Then write about a time when your heart did what God wanted it to do.
- ④ Next, color in the **sword**, which reminds us that Mary's heart was hurt when sad things happened to people she loved. Write about a time when your heart was hurt because something bad happened to other people.
- ⑤ Color in the rest of the heart and cut it out.
- ⑥ Attach the heart to your shirt to remind you to wear your heart on the outside like Mary did.

2 Mary's Heart

My heart burns for:



My heart obeys God when:

My heart is hurt when:

3 Our Lady, Undoer of Knots

Background Information

Have you ever tied a knot in your shoelace and couldn't get it out? There are times in our lives when we don't know what to do, feel stuck, or need help. Some knots might be small, some really big. Mary can help us untie them.

Pope Francis prays to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. In the Church of St. Peter am Perlach in Augsburg, Germany there is a painting of Mary in heaven surrounded by angels. She holds a long ribbon and is untying a large knot, one of several on the ribbon. An angel on Mary's left is handing her a ribbon with many knots while an angel on her right is receiving a smooth ribbon with no knots.



Objective

To write a prayer to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots

Directions

- ① Fill in the blank space on the worksheet asking Mary what you need help "untying." What is causing you to be upset? Where are you stuck? Parents should fill out their own sheet.
- ② Here are some examples:
 - ▶ Your friend tells you that someone is lying about you.
 - ▶ Your friend is having a party, but didn't invite you.
- ③ Cut out the rectangle that includes your prayer. Punch two holes at the top and thread a ribbon through them. Tie knots in the ribbon and then tie the ribbon in a bow.
- ④ Take your work home to help you remember to pray to Mary for help untying your knots.

③ Our Lady, Undoer of Knots



Dear **Mary, Mother**, I need your help.

See the snarl of knots in my life.

Mary, Mother, I give you the ribbon of my life with all its knots.

In your hands, there is no knot that cannot be undone.

Powerful Mother, take into your hands today this knot.

(Tell **Mary** what you need.)





Growing Up Catholic

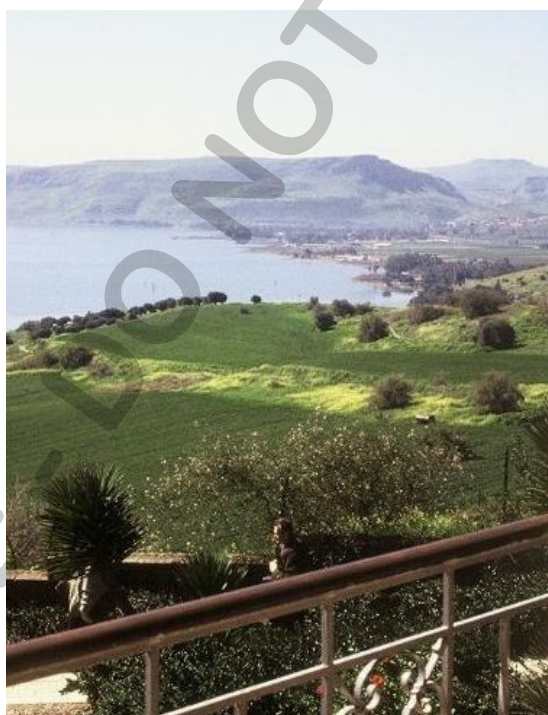
Fall Learning Centers

for Whole Family Catechesis

All Saints Day

Living the Beatitudes

by Jean L Easterly, Ed.D.



Hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee in Israel

Introduction

“The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham. The Beatitudes fulfill the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory, but to the Kingdom of heaven.”
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1716).

The Gospel reading for All Saints Day recounts Jesus' proclamation of the Beatitudes. Use this session of learning centers to help your families get to know them better and learn how they apply to their everyday lives.

Leader's Guide

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Session Outline

Use the table below to plan your session. Use the empty column to fill in your target times for starting or ending these parts of the session.

Welcome & gathering		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome everyone warmly as they enter, especially reaching out to anyone who is new or not regulars.
Opening song		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lead the group in singing “This Little Light of Mine.” <p>Today we celebrate the beautiful Feast Day of All Saints. When we sing “This Little Light of Mine,” we remember that each of us is called to share our God-given light with everyone we meet. Let’s stand at our places while we sing and pray.</p>
Opening prayer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Lead the group in the following prayer: <p>Dear Lord, we ask you to open our hearts and minds today as we study your Holy Word. We want to follow you and know that you will show us the way to live our lives. Bless us as we begin our session today. Amen.</p>
Setting the scene		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read aloud from the two “Setting the Scene” pages later in this document.
Learning centers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite the families to begin working on the learning center activities. See the leader guide for guidelines and options for the learning centers. ▶ Encourage participants to raise their hands to request help or ask questions.
Large group sharing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite participants to share with the whole group what they learned about the Beatitudes. Thank everyone who is willing to share.
Closing prayer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Select four or five completed bookmarks to share as the closing prayer.

Preparations

The Sacred Space

In the center of the room, cover a table with a green cloth and place on it a Bible, a lighted candle, a vase of flowers, and pictures of people from magazines and newspapers (see description of materials for the “Finding the Beatitudes in the World” learning center below).

Learning Centers

These activities have been designed so that, with the help of a parent, even a kindergartener can succeed. However, the grade levels noted give guidance for matching interests and developmental levels. Copy the handouts and prepare the other materials listed below.

1 Beatitude Bookmarks	K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons. ▶ Construction paper of various light colors, cut into strips of approximately 8½ inches long and 2¾ wide. (Lighter colors will make the children’s writing more visible.)
2 People in Need	K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.
3 Living the Beatitudes	2-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Three or four tokens, such as pieces of wrapped candy, coins, or a substitute. ▶ One die. (Using two dice would shorten the game.)
4 Beatitudes Poem	3-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons. ▶ Construction paper of various light colors. ▶ Scissors and glue or glue sticks.
5 People who Help Others	4-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pencils.
6 Road Map to Heaven	4-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.
7 Finding the Beatitudes in the World	4-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Select at least 16 pictures from magazines or newspapers depicting the beatitudes—people mourning, giving to the poor, acting as peacemakers, etc.—and place them on the central table. To better preserve the pictures, mount them on construction paper or laminate them.



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Fall Learning Centers

for Whole Family Catechesis

Thanksgiving

Giving Thanks to God

by Jean L Easterly, Ed.D.



*When we gather around the altar,
we are giving thanks to God.*

Introduction

The Eucharist, the sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all “thanksgiving.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1359-1360

When children hear the word “thanksgiving,” it is likely that they will think of Thanksgiving dinner and eating turkey. The following activities expand that meaning to include the importance of thanking God for our blessings. We also need to thank people in our lives who love, care, and protect us. Children need to understand that we gather around our altars at church to thank God, just as we gather for our Thanksgiving dinner and all of our meals to thank God.

Leader's Guide

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Session Outline (1/2)

Use the table below to plan your session. Use the empty column to fill in your target times for starting or ending these parts of the session.

Welcome & gathering		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome everyone warmly as they enter, especially reaching out to anyone who is new or not regulars.
Opening song		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pass out the song/prayer sheet, and invite them to prayer: As Thanksgiving draws near, we take time to give thanks to God for all of our blessings. When we sing, let us do so with all of our hearts. Let's stand at our places while we sing and pray. ▶ Lead the group in singing "Now Thank We All Our God."
Opening prayer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Now introduce the psalm: We give thanks to the Lord in many ways and in many different places. We gather here today. We gather around our tables in our homes, especially at Thanksgiving. We gather around the altar table in church when we celebrate the Mass. ▶ Now lead the group in praying Psalm 100, from that beautiful book in the Old Testament. ▶ Now lead the group in praying Psalm 100, as found on the handout.
Setting the scene		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Follow the instructions on the "Setting the Scene" pages later in this document.
Learning centers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite the families to begin working on the learning center activities. See the leader guide for guidelines and options for the learning centers. ▶ Encourage participants to raise their hands to request help or ask questions.
Large group sharing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Invite participants to share with the whole group what they learned about giving thanks. Thank everyone who is willing to share.

Session Outline (2/2)

Closing prayer	<p>► Lead the group in closing prayer:</p> <p>Our prayer response is, “We give thanks to God.” <i>Stretch out your hand to invite them to repeat the response.</i></p> <p>For your mercy that spills over us like a gentle spring rain, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For sending your Son to open the gates of heaven for us, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For always being there so we can turn to you at any time, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For coming to us as Living Bread in Holy Communion, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For surrounding us with people who love, protect, and guide us, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For sending us glimpses of your glory in the beauty of the world surrounding us, Response: We give thanks to God.</p> <p>For adopting us as your sons and daughters, Response: We give thanks to God.</p>
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Preparations

The Sacred Space

In the center of the room, cover a table with a cloth and place on it a Bible, a lighted candle, a vase of flowers, and pictures of people, places, and things for which we are thankful.

Setting the Scene

Cut out the role slips, and if possible get a long robe and crown for your king.

Learning Centers

These activities have been designed so that, with the help of a parent, even a kindergartener can succeed. However, the grade levels noted give guidance for matching interests and developmental levels. Copy the handouts and prepare the other materials listed below. Be sure to make enough handouts so parents can do some of the exercises alongside their children, as noted.

1 Thanksgiving Collage	K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.▶ Construction paper of various light colors.▶ Scissors and glue or glue sticks.▶ Magazines.
2 Thanking God for the Beauty of Creation	K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils.
3 We Thank God for Loving People	K-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.
4 What's On My Plate?	3-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.
5 When We Give Thanks to God	3-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils.
6 How do People in the Bible Say "Thanks"	5-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.▶ Construction paper of various light colors, cut into strips of approximately 8½ inches long and 2¾ wide. (Lighter colors will make the children's writing more visible.)
7 Prayer of Thanksgiving	5-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Pencils, colored markers, and crayons.