

LearningCycles

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

**Creative Activities for
Teaching the Passion**

Written by Tracey E. Herzer



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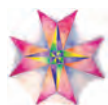
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About LearningCycles

What is LearningCycles?

LearningCycles is an innovative approach to faith formation. It takes seriously the spiritual development of children while providing creative and exciting activities that engage children in a whole new level of learning and retention. The rotation-style model means that children work on the same story or concept for several weeks, using different learning approaches in each workshop room they visit.

Ideas for possible workshops:

Art
Storytelling
Music
Group Activities
Cooking

Science Experiments
Games
Drama or Puppets
Movies
Geography or Map Excursions

Easy to Adapt

You can use the activities in this resource for shorter learning center events, normal classroom use, intergenerational gatherings, and more. Adapt what you find here to best suit your faith formation situation.



Recruiting LearningCycles Leaders

LearningCycles make it VERY easy to increase your number of volunteers, by dividing jobs into manageable parts. Here are some ways that parishioners of ALL ages can be involved:

CYCLE LEADERS sign up as part of a team of 2 or 3 adults who will teach one 4-6 week cycle. Teachers remain in the same workshop room each week of the cycle and teach the same lesson plan to different classes each week. Workshop rooms may use skills in areas as music, dance, cooking, quilting, gardening or painting, but you don't have to have a special skill in order to help. Teachers can sign up to help read stories, turn on computers, make popcorn, hand out art supplies, etc.

SHEPHERDS commit for the entire school year, but they never have to prepare or teach a lesson! Shepherds work in teams and travel with their class through each of the different workshops. Shepherds are the essential relationship part of this program, learning the children's names, providing continuity of leadership and being a friendly, safe presence in the classroom each week.

CYCLE COORDINATORS are needed for each different cycle. These people manage the details of a cycle, contacting all the volunteer teachers for that cycle, distributing the lesson plans, making sure supplies are purchased, etc.

Some churches have also used:

DECORATING TEAM A resourceful group of people is needed to create and plan new and evolving learning spaces. These folks might be interior designers, or they may be people who are just addicted to home improvement shows or have a knack for decorating inexpensively! Churches who share space or don't have the budget for large-scale renovations will need a group of creative thinkers to come up with props or posters that can be used on Sunday, but safely stored away during the week.

RESOURCE TEAM This "big picture" group can be comprised of all your cycle coordinators, as well as interested parents. Together the group handles trouble-shooting, long-range plans and communication to the entire church. For churches that already have a catechist or formation team, that committee can provide the functions of a Resource Team.



General Class Structure

1. **OPENING ACTIVITY** (10-15 minutes, as children arrive)

Welcome students and make sure everyone has a nametag. Opening activities give early arrivers something to start on immediately and provide a warm, busy room for children to enter. The activity could be simply drawing or decorating your nametag. It could also be coloring sheets or simple games. Check the “Filler Activities” of your lesson plan for ideas or ask your Cycle Coordinator.

2. **INTRODUCTIONS** (approximately 10 minutes)

- Introduce yourself: Tell students about you – your family, how long you have been at this church, what kind of work you do, what your hobbies are, why you signed up to help teach, etc.
- Introduce the cycle story or theme: Ask children what they’ve been studying or have done in other rooms on other weeks. Talk about the basic theme or season (see the Overview p. 6 for some ideas). Read the story to children.
- Introduce your activity: Tell the children which part of the story your room is focusing on, and perhaps ask them to re-tell you that part of the story in their own words.

3. **WORKSHOP ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION** (approximately 25-30 minutes)

See attached lesson plans for specific instructions about the main activity. Supplies should be in your classroom, but if you need help, ask your cycle coordinator. If you run low on supplies, please tell your coordinator so they can plan accordingly.

If children finish early, you can use any of the “Filler Activities” provided in each lesson plan. In addition, you may use activity sheets (see “Suggested Resources for this Cycle”) as “quiet work” for the early finishers while they wait for everyone to complete the task.

Try to plan your time so that children finish the activity and still have a few minutes to process the class by journaling or drawing. Encourage them to take their work seriously, and try to foster a semi-quiet atmosphere that allows children to think about what they have heard, seen and experienced. Ask questions like “What did you learn today?” or “How did you feel while doing this activity?” Connect your activity back to the story. Studies show us that quiet reflection time is what helps move items from short-term memory into long-term memory so this piece is VERY important!

4. **CLEAN UP** (approximately 5 minutes)

Have children help clean up and make sure everyone has their papers, jackets, etc. If parents come to the classroom to pick up their children, this is a good time to praise children in front of their parents. This is also a good time to discuss any concerns or questions quietly with parents. Tell the children goodbye. Thank them for coming.



Theological Overview of this Cycle

Many people would name Christmas as the most important holiday, but when we look at our Church Year celebrations in a theological context, Easter is our most significant feast day. We rejoice in the birth of the baby Jesus, but the piece of the story that changed everything forever is the empty tomb the women found on Easter morning.

There is much we will never understand about Easter... much of it is a mystery. None of us were there on that first Easter Sunday and we'll probably never fully understand exactly what it means that Christ rose from the dead, but we do know that we are changed forever by this miraculous, mysterious event. The resurrection was not just about Jesus' new life... it was about a new life for all believers everywhere.

Today, we try to relive the mystery of Easter by walking through a time of preparation called Lent, the six weeks leading up to Easter. We know that Lent ends on Easter Sunday... but what is sometimes difficult for modern Christians to remember is what a surprising event that first Easter was. We have to remember that Easter morning isn't just the end of Lent. Easter overturns Lent and changes the horrific cross of Good Friday into the glorious and surprising good news that "Jesus is Risen!" In our wildest dreams, we could never have anticipated an event like Easter morning... it is a magnificent mystery.

In order to experience Easter as the astonishing good news that it truly is, the Church through the ages has developed a series of liturgies that help us relive the final few weeks of Jesus' life here on earth. We may choose to give up something during Lent, as a way of reminding ourselves of the sacrifice that was made for us. We may go to church on Palm Sunday and wave palm fronds while we shout "Hosanna!" We may go to a somber Holy Thursday service and watch all the beauty stripped from our church or participate in a supper like the Last Supper or wash one another's feet.

These are all ways that we connect again with not just the retelling, but the reliving of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. When we do this, we remember that his story is also our story. WE are part of the mystery of Easter.

This is our mystery to believe in, to wrestle with, to be changed by. We have six weeks of Lent in which to not just get our feet wet, but to fully immerse ourselves in this mystery and see what happens when we meet the God of Resurrection again on Easter Sunday.

During this rotation, the students will be spending some time walking with Jesus in a different interpretation of the Stations of the Cross. Each workshop room (and therefore each week) will give children an opportunity to experience a piece of the mystery, with all its love, despair, hope, forgiveness, tragedy, and other life-changing qualities.

May your journey to Easter be filled with God's mysteries –
Tracey E. Herzer



Letter to the Parents for this Cycle

(We suggest you mail this letter to all parents with a copy of the cycle story, plus the Theological Overview)

Dear Parents,

During this unit, we will be exploring **The Way of the Cross**. Our hope is that by exploring some of the emotions and events experienced by Christ, your children will be better able to understand the celebration of Easter. We will be traveling together the Lenten journey which leads to the cross and ends with the glorious impossible: the empty tomb.

Much of what we focus on this unit is rather dark, and sometimes we wonder how to present such things to our children. I believe the best answer is to tell the story as authentically and simply as possible. The story is powerful enough to touch hearts of any age. We don't need to reduce the story to an over-simplified, sugar-coated fairy tale, but we also don't want to get so mired in the violence and cruelty that we never get to the hope of Easter morning.

At the heart of this story are many complex emotions. Children can understand most of the emotions of this journey – fear, disappointment, compassion, betrayal, surprise, and most of all love. As beloved children of the Risen Christ, this story is their story too. We cannot keep it from them. We must trust that God will work in wonderful and mysterious ways to be more and more revealed to them as they walk this journey.

Although we have shaped this unit around a variation of the traditional Stations of the Cross, most children will not experience the steps in order and they may not experience every station. However, you can talk with your children at home about the events leading up to Easter and here is our outline to assist you in your discussions:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ★ Jesus Carries his Cross | <i>(Publishing workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus is Helped by his Friends | <i>(Drama workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus Falls Down | <i>(Art workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus is Comforted | <i>(Movie workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus is Nailed to the Cross | <i>(Story workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus Dies | <i>(Music workshop)</i> |
| ★ Jesus is Laid in the Tomb | <i>(Kitchen workshop)</i> |

As you can see, we end this unit with Jesus' death, although we touch on the empty tomb during the kitchen activity. Although this leaves the story unfinished, it was an intentional choice to be faithful to the observance of Lent. However, we sincerely hope that you will finish the story with your family during an exuberant Easter celebration of our Risen Lord!

Blessings on your Lenten journey –
Tracey E. Herzer



Supplemental Material for this Cycle

(additional information for teachers and coordinators)

When we envisioned this unit, we had two goals: one was to allow children to learn about and experience Stations of the Cross as a way to understand Lent and Holy Week. The second goal, however, was to allow the rest of the church a glimpse into the spiritual lives of our amazing children. Because of this, we displayed our projects and prayers in the parish hall during Holy Week. Adults from all over our community came in to read the prayers of our children and it was a deeply moving experience for the entire church.

In each lesson, you will find a sentence starter we offered to help children pray about the station they had just experienced. The results were so moving that we ended up typing up sheets with all the prayers to place with our artwork display and many, many people took them home to add to their Holy Week experience. We have included our prayers not as the quintessential example of what to do... but as a way to inspire you about what can happen. Feel free to adapt them in ways that make sense for you.

There are many variations of Stations of the Cross, but here is what we were working with. You may wish to make posters or signs for each classroom that list all the stations you are using so children understand how the pieces of the story fit together.

TRADITIONAL STATIONS OF THE CROSS

- 1 Jesus is Condemned to Death
- 2 Jesus Takes Up His Cross
- 3 Jesus Falls the First Time
- 4 Jesus Meets His Mother
- 5 Simon Cyrene Helps Carry the Cross
- 6 A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus
- 7 Jesus Fall a Second Time
- 8 Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
- 9 Jesus Falls a Third Time
- 10 Jesus is Stripped of His Garments
- 11 Jesus is Nailed to the Cross
- 12 Jesus Dies
- 13 Jesus' Body is Taken Down from the Cross
- 14 Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

STATIONS FOR THIS UNIT

- 1 Jesus Carries his Cross
- 2 Jesus is Helped by his Friends
- 3 Jesus Falls Down
- 4 Jesus is Comforted
- 5 Jesus is Nailed to the Cross
- 6 Jesus Dies
- 7 Jesus is Laid in the Tomb



Story: The Way of the Cross

To be read each week of the cycle

Introduction

The season of Lent helps us prepare for Easter. During Lent, some people “give up” things as a way to remember the sacrifices Jesus made for us. Sometimes people “take on” something extra for Lent – saying special prayers, collecting money or clothes for the poor, reading their Bible, or spending more time at church. Some people do things to help them remember the life of Jesus. We share communion and remember how Jesus gathered his friends for a special supper. We remember how Jesus died and then rose from the dead and we celebrate all the ways that God loves us.

One way we can think about and remember the life of Jesus during Lent is by walking the “Stations of the Cross”. Some churches have special numbered plaques with pictures or symbols representing stories from different parts of Jesus’ life. The stories usually focus on the end of Jesus’ life. People walk to each station and remember things about Jesus as they pray.

During this unit, each workshop activity will become a station to remember an event from the end of Jesus’ life. It is sad to remember what happened to Jesus and how he died. But we also remember what Jesus told his friends before he died. He said, “I will not be here with you much longer. I have to leave, but do not be afraid. I will come back. You are my friends. I love you and God loves you.” We know that after Lent comes Easter, and then we will celebrate Jesus rising from the dead,

Our Story

Did you hear what happened? Some people are so angry that Jesus keeps saying he is God’s son. They don’t believe him and they want him to stop. They had Jesus arrested and made him wear a painful crown of thorns while they teased him about being “King of the Jews”. Even though Jesus is tired and sore, now the soldiers are making him carry his cross up the hill to that place where criminals are punished. Many people have gathered to watch as **Jesus carries his cross**. It is a long walk and the cross is very heavy. Sometimes the cross gets so heavy that **Jesus falls down**.

As he walks, **Jesus is comforted** by some of the people. They see him hurting and want to help, even though they are afraid of the soldiers. Jesus’ mother, Mary, is crying and wishes she could make the hurting stop. She loves Jesus very much. Maybe it makes Jesus feel better just to see her face. After a while, **Jesus is helped by some of his friends**. One woman runs forward to wipe the blood and sweat off his face. A man named Simon helps Jesus carry his cross for part of the way.

When he finally gets to the top of the hill, **Jesus is nailed to the cross** and he hangs there between two other men being punished for crimes they had committed. Jesus hurts all over. He is tired and thirsty. He looks at the people who have hurt him and asks God to forgive them. Jesus had given everything he had and even when he was dying, he still talks of forgiveness and love. He calls out to God, “Into your hands, I give my spirit” and with those words, **Jesus dies**.

This part of Jesus’ life is over and all his friends are sad and confused. They take Jesus body to a place of burial and **Jesus is laid in the tomb**. Some women who loved Jesus prepared some special oil and spices to anoint his body and they go home to wait until the Sabbath is over.



Suggested Resources for this Cycle

VIDEOS

In this cycle, we used our movie workshop to experience when Jesus is comforted. There are lots of film clips you could use, so feel free to make adaptations if you would like. We decided to use a short clip from **The Sound of Music** with Julie Andrews, including the song “Favorite Things” as a way to jumpstart our conversation about things that bring us comfort.

Older classes (4th or 5th) may prefer to watch part of a live action film on the end of Jesus’ life.

MISCELLANEOUS RESOURCES

We found it very helpful to have a couple sets of **Resurrection Eggs** on hand for teachers to use or kids to play with. This teaching tool is a set of 12 colorful plastic Easter eggs. Inside each egg is some symbol of the story – praying hands, a small donkey, a communion cup, small nails, etc. You can purchase Resurrection Eggs at the Pastoral Center at <http://pastoral.center/resurrection-eggs>.

Also, there are many websites that give you instructions on how to create simple Resurrection Eggs at home, such as <http://www.easyfunschool.com/article2110.html>

ACTIVITY PAGES

Having activity pages as a backup time-filler is a good idea to ensure calm classrooms and teachers who do not become overwhelmed. There are many websites that will help you develop activity pages or have coloring pages that can be downloaded for free from the site.

One site we found was <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/> which is great because you can create your own crossword puzzle or find-a-word in less than 2 minutes. You type in a list of words associated with the lesson and the computer generates a puzzle you can save to your computer or print out. You can also create fill-in-the-blank or matching games.

Here are some additional games or activities we found online:



Activities Overview for this Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Talk about falling and create a handprint wall hanging that can be used as a reminder of Lent	<u>Station #3</u> Jesus falls down
PUBLISHING	Learn about different styles of crosses and talk about carrying heavy burdens	<u>Station #1</u> Jesus carries his cross
DRAMA	Talk about friendship and examine the interactions Jesus had with his friends on the way to the cross	<u>Station #2</u> Jesus is helped by his friends
MOVIE	Watch scenes from a movie about being comforted and talk about the ways in which Jesus was comforted	<u>Station #4</u> Jesus is comforted
STORY	Read stories about the Cross and talk about nails. Optional activity for making crosses from nails.	<u>Station #5</u> Jesus is nailed to the cross
KITCHEN	Use “Resurrection Rolls” to talk about how Jesus’ body was prepared and glimpse into the empty tomb.	<u>Station #7</u> Jesus is laid in the tomb
MUSIC	Children will use music, motions, and noises to describe some of the emotions of Holy Week	<u>Station #6</u> Jesus dies



The Way of the Cross: Story & Games

Bible Reference for the Cycle:

Luke 23 & John 19

Main Verse for the Cycle:

Carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him. – John 19:17-18a

Key Concepts and Life Application:

- Jesus experienced many different emotions during the last week of his life
- During Lent (the weeks before Easter), we revisit the events that lead to the cross
- Walking the “Stations of the Cross” is one way to remember events of Jesus’ life
- Easter is a wonderful mystery – new life for Jesus, but new life for all of us too.
- Because of Jesus’ death, we are forever restored to right relationship with God

Summary of Class Plans:

Station Theme for this Workshop: #5 Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Students will hear stories and hold nails while they talk about the crucifixion and Jesus being nailed to the cross. They will also have the option to make small crosses from nails.

Materials Needed:

For Class activities:

- Books for younger classes – Some suggestions for stories:
 - **Benjamin's Box** by Melody Carlson, illustrated by Jack Stockman – this story was written to go along with “Resurrection Eggs” (see page 10) and both resources are usually available in local Christian bookstores.
 - **Journey to the Cross: The Complete Easter Story for Young Readers** by Helen Haidle, illustrated by David Haidle
 - **The Pail of Nails** by Harriet May Savitz
 - **The Tale of Three Trees** by Angela Elwell Hunt, illustrated by Ted Jonke
 - **The Man Who Carried the Cross for Jesus (Arch Book)** by Constance Head
- Nails – we brought a box filled with all shapes and sizes of nails. Each child chose one to hold during our story and prayer time. We even had a large rusty railroad spike that children could pass around to hold.
- Piece of Scrap wood and a hammer
- Sentence Starter: “**Nails are like...**” (written on aboard or small pieces of paper)
- Pencils or pens
- Crayons and/or markers



For optional filler activities:

- Nails & Wire to make crosses
- Pipe cleaners for younger students

Workshop Lesson Plans:

- You can refer to “A General Schedule for Class Structure” (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- Welcome children as they arrive in your room and invite them to have a seat. You may want to have some activity sheets for them to work on as they come in. If you need help finding one, you can use one of the suggestions from page 10.
- When it is time to start, gather everyone together and invite them to find a comfortable position on the floor. Then read the cycle story about Jesus’ journey to the cross.
- After the story, say the following in your own words: *The story of Jesus’ crucifixion and death is probably the saddest, darkest story in the Bible. Jesus spent his whole life modeling love and acceptance and he was still nailed to a cross like a horrible criminal. Talking about what happened to Jesus is difficult, but without the sacrifice and pain of the cross on Good Friday, we can’t get to the joy and surprise of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday, so let’s spend some time talking about this...*
- After the story, ask some questions, such as:
 - What do you think Jesus was thinking about on his walk to the Cross?
 - What do you know about crucifixion? What does it mean to be crucified?
 - What would it have been like to watch a crucifixion?
 - How would you have felt?
- Explain to the children that this workshop focuses on the piece of the story where Jesus is nailed to the cross. Pass around your box of nails and have each child choose one nail to hold. As they do this, ask some of the following questions.
 - What do your nails feel like?
 - Why aren’t children usually allowed to touch nails?
 - When you look at your nail, what does it look like to you?
 - What other things might nails represent? Construction? Violence? Jail?
- If you have pieces of scrap wood and a hammer, have an adult slowly hammer a nail. Ask children to listen to the sound. If you have enough supervision, you may also want to allow children to take turns hammering. Try to keep the rest of the class relatively quiet so that the children can concentrate. Present this as a meditation activity, not as a game.
- After you have had some more discussion about nails, gather the group and read **The Tale of Three Trees** while the children hold their nails.



- After the story, ask children to help you create a closing prayer. Explain that part of what people do during Stations of the Cross is pray. Show them your sentence starter with the words “**Nails are like...**” Ask each child to take a few minutes to write out a couple of answers to this question. With young children who can’t write well, just ask them to say the answers and have an adult write them down.
- Use the sentences the children have written to create your closing prayer. Ask everyone to stand and close their eyes. The teacher reads the sentence starter and each child offers one answer. Then the teacher reads the final prayer below.
 - Nails are like...
 - ... swords
 - ... pins or pocket knives
 - ... sharp things that stick you
 - ... bee stings
 - ... things you hammer into wood
 - ... they make a LOT of noise!
 - ... a shot
 - ... little weights for a mouse
 - ... metal things that make houses, but they killed Jesus too
 - ... they can go through your hands and feet, but it would hurt
 - ... jail
 - ... a porcupine
 - ... sharp teeth that can bite you
 - ... gray, cold things
 - ... scary hammering
 - ... blood
 - ... shoving the crown of thorns down on Jesus’ head
 - ... death
 - ... sadness everywhere
 - OUR PRAYER:

O suffering, generous God, you are patient and sure. Sometimes the world is a painful and violent place. Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you, so that we may be instruments of your peace and lights shining in the darkness. In your name we pray. Amen.

Filler Activities:

- **Making a Nail Cross** – We found several websites that give instructions to make a simple and inexpensive cross using nails and wire. Just search for “Nail Cross Craft” using Google or your favorite internet search engine. Also, we found this website where you can purchase pre-assembled kits for less than a dollar per child:
<http://www.ssw.com/product/?sku=RE291&sourceid=qlbAQ-08ug3XAnj@D1Jf>
- **For younger students** – hand out colorful pipe cleaners and help them twist 2 pipe cleaners into a cross shape

