

LearningCycles

THE BODY OF CHRIST

**Using our Gifts for the
Good of the Church**

Written by Tracey E. Herzer
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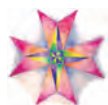
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About LearningCycles

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

We are the Body of Christ. This ancient metaphor gives us a great picture of what the Church is intended to be. Each person has a unique combination of gifts and therefore has a unique contribution to make to the larger body. Each one of us is special – and the Church hopes to find ways to respect, value and cherish each member. When we work together, each person contributing the best of her or his God-given gifts, we truly ARE the Church, the body of Christ. Together we become the hands, the feet, the voice, the presence of God in the world.

Being God's presence in the world is a huge undertaking and it takes all of us to do it. No matter how gifted someone may be, no one person has all the gifts of God's spirit, so we must work together. When churches are functioning at their best, they invite their members in to take part in this important work and add their own special threads of gifts, talents, and abilities to the rich tapestry of all God's people. (One way to illustrate this during this unit is to ask each family to contribute a picture. Then, paste each picture onto a wooden block and stack all the blocks into the shape of a church or a cross.)

Even when we get frustrated or disagree with other members, we are still called to stay together. We are reminded in I Corinthians, *"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'"* (I Cor. 12:21). We cannot give up and strike out on our own, any more than our hand could strike out on its own without the rest of the body. We need the strength we find together as God's gathered people to communally discern God's will, to recognize and appreciate the gifts of other members, and then to get on with doing God's work in the world around us.

As I write this, I realize that these thoughts may be especially poignant for those who are wrestling with divisions, including many in our own beloved Catholic Church. I don't have the answers for us... but I do believe that we need each other. And I do believe that we have to teach our children what it looks like when God's people work together... before their only heritage is what it looks like when we don't.

The whole time I worked on this unit, I kept hearing the words of a communion song in my head: *"One bread... one body... one Lord of all. One cup of blessing which we bless; and we, though many, throughout the earth, We are one body in this one Lord."* This is my prayer for us – for all Christians everywhere: that we can remember that which unites us is infinitely stronger, infinitely more important, infinitely more eternal than that which divides us.

In unity and with great hope,
Tracey E. Herzer

PS – If you are interested in the song **One Bread, One Body**, you can find it on John Michael Talbot's recording "Table of Plenty". You can hear samples of this entire album or purchase it online at <http://www.rhapsody.com/john-michael-talbot/table-of-plenty/one-bread-one-body>. You may wish to purchase this CD and use it each week to begin your class sessions.



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,

In a time where we all seem to know too many communities, parishes and families who have been torn apart by disputes and disagreements, it is so important to teach our children (and remind each other) what it means to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Since the first century, Christians have been referred to as the “body of Christ” with each member playing a distinct role but the entire body working together. Our new unit on the Body of Christ will help us focus on how the church can function as God’s presence in the world today. The great 15th century saint of Spain, Teresa of Avila said: *“Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.”*

Our hope is that this unit will help children realize that a church is not made of bricks or wood, but of people. THEY are the church... WE are the church! Each of us has a place and a role of importance within this Body. Some of us teach Sunday School or help make beautiful music, some act as greeters or work as part of the altar guild; some have leadership roles, while others prefer being a quieter part of the background; some have been here a long time and they help hold the history of who we are, while others arrive on the scene with fresh eyes to help us evaluate who we are and imagine new possibilities of who we might become. We are young, we are old; we are faithful, we are questioning; we are strong, we are faltering; but most of all we are TOGETHER. The circle of our Church family is not complete without each of us here.

Because we are a very large family, we are made up of many types of people. Our diversity can be our finest asset, and yet sometimes it can also be the root of strife and conflict. Sometimes we don’t recognize the gifts that others bring to the Body. Helping your child deal with conflict in the Church is very much like helping them deal with conflict in the home. We may not like how another person behaves or don’t believe that their talents or abilities are the best for the Body in a certain circumstance, but we learn to trust God and try to remember that no matter what, we are connected, so *“if one part suffers, all parts suffer with it”* (1 Cor. 12:26)

During this unit, we encourage you to talk with your children about how precious and important they are to God’s family, just as they are precious and important to your family. Help your child identify different roles they see in the Church and maybe even help them identify some of their own gifts. Take time to share with them the roles you play (or have played) in the Church and in other organizations. Talk with them about what it means to be part of a family, a church, a community and how important it is that we realize our lives are linked to other people. In short, help them learn to be part of the body of Christ.

God’s peace to you,
Tracey E. Herzer



Story for Cycle: The Body of Christ

To be read each week of the cycle

After his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, but his followers remained here on earth and continued to share his words and tell people about God's kingdom. In those early days, there was a man named Saul who worked hard to have the followers of Jesus arrested or even killed. But one day, Saul heard God's voice from a bright light and he decided to believe and help spread word of God's kingdom.

Saul's name was changed to Paul and he became an important leader of the church. Paul spent the rest of his life traveling around, telling people about Jesus and starting new local churches. Each time he would travel on to the next city, he would continue to write letters to the local church he had just started. Many of Paul's letters to those churches are included in our Bible today. One of the churches Paul started was in a city named Corinth. The people who lived in Corinth were called Corinthians and our Bible includes two books called First and Second Corinthians which are our versions of those letters Paul wrote.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul was answering a question the Corinthian church asked him about "spiritual gifts". Perhaps the Corinthians were arguing about who would be in charge or whose gifts or talents were most important... was it better to preach, or to sing, or to pray? Paul answers by giving them a picture of how we are to work together. He tells them:

Think about how your body is made of many different parts that do many different things, but it is still just one body. That's how it is for Christians: there are different members who do different things, but we are one body and Christ is the head. No one part of the body can claim to be the whole body, but every part of the body is important.

What if your foot were to say, "I'm not a hand, so I don't belong to the body" or your ear said, "I'm not an eye, so I don't belong"? That's just silly – all body parts are important. If the body were just one big eye, how would it hear? Or if it were just an ear, how could it smell? But God gave each part of the body its own place and its own job. There are many parts, and together they make up a body that can do all kinds of things!

Paul also told the Corinthians that even when they didn't agree with each other, they had to find a way to get along. Again, he used the image of a body by saying:

The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" God brought together all parts of the body so there is no division, but all the parts work together. If one part is hurting, the whole body hurts. And if one part of the body does well, the whole body is celebrated.

Paul's lesson to the Corinthians is an important lesson for us even today. We are all part of the Body of Christ. We are all important and we all have gifts God has given us to use. We are the hands, the feet, the voice, the touch of Christ. We are God's presence in the world today and that is a BIG responsibility, so we have to help each other in order to get God's work done!

Story re-told by Tracey E. Herzer
(I Corinthians 12:12-26)



Suggested Resources for this Cycle

VIDEOS

In this cycle, we used clips from the film **Mighty Ducks** from 1992. This full-length Disney film tells the story of a children's hockey team that learns to work together to win a championship. It is a great illustration of how we can each use our particular gifts, but also function as a team to accomplish big goals.



Activities Overview for this Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF CLASS PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Create crosses decorated with a Mosaic pattern	We are the Body of Christ – made up of many different parts
PUBLISHING	Activities to talk about what happens when part of the Body is absent	How do we care for the Body of Christ in this parish / community?
DRAMA	Tour different parts of the church, watching for different examples of many gifts coming together	Watching the Body of Christ in Action
MOVIE	Using clips from the movie “The Mighty Ducks” as an example of how a team works together to accomplish a goal	How are we a team?
STORY & GAMES	Make paper representations of our bodies and then illustrate our gifts using words or pictures	What gifts do I contribute to the Body of Christ?
KITCHEN	Baking “monkey bread” which is made up of many parts, but yields one yummy result!	What holds us together?
MUSIC	Using familiar hymns and new music, we’ll explore what it means to be the Body of Christ	What is our foundation?



The Body of Christ: Story & Games

Bible Reference for the Cycle: One Body – Romans 12:4-18 & I Corinthians 12:12-26

Main Verse for the Cycle:

“We, who are many, are one body in Christ”

Romans 12:5 *(New Revised Standard)*

Key Concepts and Life Application:

- The Church is the Body of Christ and God’s presence in the world
- Each of us has different God-given gifts that are essential to the Body of Christ
- As members of the same body, we need each other!
- If we work together, we are stronger and more effective than if we work apart

Summary of Class Plans:

Students will trace the body outlines and identify the gifts or characteristics God has given them which make them unique.

****NOTE:** Be aware that you may have a child who is uncomfortable with this activity, especially if they have negative feelings about their body or they have ever experienced any kind of inappropriate touch. Don’t push students to participate if they don’t wish to, but instead invite them to draw an approximate representation of a body on their paper using a stick figure or “gingerbread person” type figure – you may need to help them draw it.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles and Bible maps – for older classes
- Large sheets of paper (rolls of paper will work or you can tape together sheets of newsprint) large enough to trace the body outline of a child
- Pencils
- Markers or crayons
- Post it notes (optional for filler activity)
- Puzzles or a puzzle game such as Jenga

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. When it is time to begin, gather everyone together and read the cycle story
- **For younger classes (K-2nd grade):**
 - After you have read the cycle story, do a quick recap of the story or ask the class, “What did you hear?” Check to see if there were any words they didn’t understand and see if they can help you “fill in the blanks” of the story, such as:



“Who was Paul and what happened to him?” “What image did Paul use to describe how we should work together?”

- **For older classes (3rd – 5th grade):**
 - After you read the cycle story, have students look up the story of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9:1-22 and read that too. Then ask questions such as:
 - How did Saul become Paul?
 - How do you think his conversion affected his later work and ministry as a great apostle & teacher?
 - What was Paul’s message to the Corinthians?
 - If time allows – look up Corinth on a Bible map. Many Bibles show a map of Paul’s journeys, but even if you don’t have that, help students identify other cities that connect to books we have in our Bible (Romans is a letter to the church in Rome, Ephesians to the church at Ephesus, Philippians to the church at Caesarea Philippi, etc.)
 - How does Paul’s message apply to us today?
- After you have read and discussed the story, tell them we are going to make paper representations of the gifts and abilities God has given us that make us unique.
- Give each person a large piece of paper and have everyone find a partner.
- Have one person carefully lie down on their back on the paper and lie very still while their partner draws a rough outline around them.
- Walk around as students begin this activity. Most of the younger classes will need an adult to do the tracing. Even older students may need help – especially if the paper anywhere is too short or too narrow. If that happens, help sketch in legs, arms, etc.
- Once everyone has a body shape on paper, ask each child to write her or his own name on that body figure and then sit on the floor with his or her drawing and think about the gifts God has given them.
 - Ask students to write words or draw pictures on the shape to represent special gifts or characteristics – my red hair, my green eyes, my hands that play piano, my feet that kick a soccer ball, etc.
 - As you walk around while students work, it might be helpful to call out some of the gifts you might see... “You are always smiling – why don’t you draw in a great big smile on your person?” “You use your words carefully – draw in some happy words” “You are quick to be a friend to others – draw in a big heart” This will help other students think of more ideas, but it will also serve as affirmation that each of us have special gifts that need to be contributed to this expression of the Body of Christ.
- After everyone has had a chance to illustrate at least a couple of gifts or characteristics they have, post the papers up on the wall.



- Give everyone a few minutes to look at the drawings and then close with a prayer such as: “God, thank you for the bodies you have given us and for the ways in which each of us is a unique gift to this world. Help us look for ways to use our gifts to help others and bring honor to you. Thank you for this time together and help us remember that we are all part of the Body of Christ. Amen.”
- If time allows, ask students to write or draw in their journals about this experience.

Filler Activities:

- **For older students**, you may wish to have post it notes (or small pieces of paper & tape) available. Ask students to look at their classmates’ drawings. Remind them that we are called to “build up the body” (Ephesians 4:12) and ask them to use their kindest words to add notes that represent additional positive things about each person. “What do you think is this person’s best attribute?”
- **For younger students**, you can easily fill in extra time by reading stories that either celebrate our unique gifts and talents or teach us the gift of working together:
 - *You are Special* by Max Lucado
 - *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* by Douglas Wood
 - *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox
- For any of the age groups, you could also have puzzles to work – many pieces make up one single picture. Older groups may also enjoy a puzzle game such as Jenga, where you remove different pieces and see if the tower will still stand... a wonderful teaching tool to remind us of how we are ALL needed!



The Body of Christ: Music Workshop

Bible Reference for the Cycle: One Body – Romans 12:4-18 & I Corinthians 12:12-26

Main Verse for the Cycle:

“We, who are many, are one body in Christ”

Romans 12:5 *(New Revised Standard)*

Key Concepts and Life Application:

- The Church is the Body of Christ and God’s presence in the world
- Each of us has different God-given gifts that are essential to the Body of Christ
- As members of the same body, we need each other!
- If we work together, we are stronger and more effective than if we work apart

Summary of Class Plans:

We will use familiar hymns and new music as a way to discover and celebrate the unique gifts we have and the way we are called to be the Body of Christ

Materials Needed:

For Class plans:

- Church hymnals or other songbooks if needed (or printed music sheets)

For optional filler activities:

- Blank paper
- Pens/pencils
- Songbooks or hymnals
- Crayons

Workshop Lesson Plans

- If possible, have some music playing as children come into the room and gather. Remember that different children will respond to different pieces, so try to build some variety in what kinds of music you play for your group.
- 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.
- Some basic tips for teaching music to children:
 - **Be Enthusiastic!** Your mood really sets the tone of the class – if you are bored or intimidated or cautious, chances are the kids will be too!
 - **Be Confident!** Children really don’t care how well (or how badly) you sing – they just want to have fun!
 - **Be Creative!** Use simple instruments, teach them some sign language (available online or in books) or help them make up motions for some words



- **Be Repetitive!** Children – especially pre-readers – will need to sing something several times before it “sticks”. When teaching a new song, you might try singing one line to them and have them sing it back to you
- **Be Active!** It is hard for children to sit still for long so if you want them to really get into the music, encourage them to clap, sway, add motions, etc.
- Begin by reading the cycle story. You may want to have children lay down and close their eyes while you read. You might also consider choosing some soft classical music in the background while you read – for children who learn best using a musical approach, this will help them retain more details about the story.
- After you have finished the story, ask children to open their eyes and slowly sit up and then ask them some of these questions:
 - What did you hear in this story?
 - What was Paul’s advice to the Christians at Corinth?
 - Do you think that advice applies to us today? Why or why not?
 - I wonder what was happening at the church in Corinth to make Paul tell them they needed to work together.... What can you imagine might have happened?
 - Have you ever seen a band or orchestra? How are they like a “body”?
 - What other musical examples can you think of that could illustrate Paul’s point? (A choir is made up of many members, a song is made up of many individual notes, a recording is made up of many different layers, etc.)
 - For older students, pass out hymnals and have them look different hymns dealing with the Church and the Church’s mission and call out words or phrases that describe how the church is to function in ways like Paul’s example of the Body of Christ.
- There are many songs that illustrate some of Paul’s ideas. Choose a few of the songs below (or others that you may think of) as a way to get started:
 - We Are One Body (OCP)
 - One Bread, One Body (OCP)
 - Song of the Body of Christ (OCP)
 - How Beautiful (OCP)
- There are also a lot of songs related to this topic outside of our hymnal, such as:
 - *They’ll Know We are Christians by our Love*
 - *One bread, One Body* by John Michael Talbot, on the album “Table of Plenty”
- After everyone is warmed up from singing, ask everyone to stand up and spread out in the room. Ask them to think about their body as being part of the body of Christ (the Church). Ask everyone to close their eyes and (while staying in one place) move their arms, head, etc in a way that makes them feel like part of the body of Christ. How could we praise God with just our bodies? What does this music make you think of? What do you see in your imagination?
- After a few minutes, ask everyone to open their eyes and return to their seats.



- There is a modern song called “If We Are the Body” by a group called Casting Crowns from their first album (also called Casting Crowns). In the song, the group issues a challenge to the Church – if we are supposed to be the Body of Christ, how come we don’t always act like it? If possible, bring in a recording of this song. Play it for your group and discuss their reactions. Talk about how we can be the best version of the Body of Christ and how we can work together to reach out to the world

- *If We are the Body* by Casting Crowns

Refrain: But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?
There is a way

You can find the full text of the lyrics by searching the song title and artist online.

- Another fun option for a song to use to dig deeper into this theme is a bi-lingual song called We Are the Body of Christ / Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo. It has a great beat and you can hear it free online at <http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/15161>. If you have access to the Internet, you can play this song online and have the children sing along – at least with the refrain. .

- *We are the Body of Christ – Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo*

Refrain: Somos el cuerpo de Cristo.
We are the body of Christ.
Hemos o'do el llamado;
we've answered 'Yes' to the call of the Lord.
Somos el cuerpo de Cristo.
We are the body of Christ.
Traemos su santo mensaje.
We come to bring the good news to the world.

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Filler Activities:

- More Music – In the music workshop, you can always fill up any extra time with more singing or more listening to music!
- One unconventional but popular option is to bring in a recording of *We are Family* by Sister Sledge and just let the kids move and jump around. After the song, ask them how this song relates to our theme? In what ways are we called to be a family?

