

LearningCycles

WHAT MAKES MY PARISH SPECIAL?

Developed by Tracey E. Herzer



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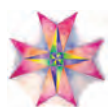
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About LearningCycles

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)
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.



Overview of this Cycle

Children are an important part of our parish family, and it is important that they feel connected and involved. If we can foster feelings of family and community, children will begin to feel like “this is MY church” which can lead to greater participation in worship, as well as parish events.

This cycle is one that can be easily adapted for any church or parish. In the following pages, you will find suggestions for activities, but you may wish to adapt the lessons to reflect special things about your community. Each parish is a unique combination of gifts, personalities, ministries and resources. Think about what makes your community special and what you would like the children of your parish community to know about the place where you all come together to worship and celebrate the mystery and life of the Body of Christ.

This is a great cycle for including people who aren’t often involved with children. Take some time to talk with your oldest parishioners and find out what they remember about the church or community from the time they first arrived. Dig out some old photographs or church bulletins. Invite people from all different kinds of ministries within your church to come tell the children more about what they do. Remind guests that this time commitment would only involve a few hours but could have a long-lasting effect on the children of your parish.

Another great use for this cycle would be in the weeks surrounding All Saints’ Day, which is November 1st. This cycle affords a wonderful opportunity for talking about the “great cloud of witnesses” who have gone before us!

Tracey E. Herzer

Then Jesus took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around the child and said, “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me, but also the One who sent me.”

Mark 9:36-37



Story for Cycle: My Parish

To be read each week of the cycle

This story will look different for every parish, but basically it should be a simplified version of the history of your church, along with what your church is like now or what ministries are important to your congregation. After a couple of weeks, children should be able to tell you the staff members' names and roles, etc. if you ask them. Here is one sample:

Our parish was founded in 1925, which is before you were born, before your parents were born... maybe even before your grandparents were born! At that time, very few people had cars and nobody had a television set. Where our shopping mall is now, there was only a cornfield and the closest parish was 20 miles away, so the diocese decided to start a new parish, which has become a home for our community!

When our parish first began, we met in a school house until we could figure out how to raise enough money to build the church building. We built our church in 1926 and had our first Mass on November 24, 1926. Later, as more families moved into this area and started coming to our church, we added another building for parish activities, religious education and more offices for other people who worked here at the parish.

Today, our parish / rectory has 2 rooms for nurseries, 5 rooms for children and teenagers and 2 rooms for adult faith formation. Our parish priest, Father George, was sent to this parish in 1995, and he works here and lives in the rectory. We also have Mrs. Thompson, who runs the office; she greets you or answers the phones if you call or visit during the week. Jimmy helps keep our buildings clean and makes sure everything works okay. Most of you also know Mr. Kingsley who directs our choir and Mrs. Davis who organizes all our religious education activities and classes. These are just some of the people who help at our church. Can you name some others?

There is a special group of people who help Father Jim make decisions. They are called a parish council, and maybe some of your parents have helped with this group. The parish council helps decide what programs we offer and how we spend our money. Some of the things we have done in the past include bringing blankets and food to people who don't have anywhere to live or helping families who have moved here from other countries get settled in their new homes. What are some other things we do here at the parish?

People have lots of different reasons why they choose a parish. Sometimes it is the parish where they grew up, where their families are or the one to which they live the closest. Sometimes they love the music or they really enjoy listening to the homilies. Sometimes they like the programs that are offered for children. What are your favorite things about our parish?



Suggested Resources for Cycle

VIDEOS

This cycle will be a bit different, in that you probably don't have a full-length video of church activities. Showing video clips from retreats, festival days, VBS or other children's activities or any other videotape of church events is a good idea if you have it. Also, showing slides set to music will work. We recruited some church members who knew a great deal about our church history and they gathered some of the old pictures together. Then, using our church scanner, we scanned the pictures and made a slide show! We then used a computer, projector and screen to show the slide show to the children and they loved seeing the old buildings, antiquated fashions, etc.



Activities Overview for This Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Stained glass windows	Worship space
PUBLISHING	Create newspaper about parish	Events
DRAMA	Scavenger Hunt	Learning your parish campus / buildings
MOVIE	Videos or Slides of your parish and its past	History of your parish
STORY	Storytelling from members	Meeting members and learning about different ministries
KITCHEN	Bread for hospitality or communion	Your parish Community
MUSIC	Singing – Meet the Choir?	Worship / Music



My Parish: Publishing Workshop

Summary of Class Plans:

Children will create a class newspaper about your parish. Children will write stories and draw pictures for the newspaper project.

Materials Needed:

- A current church newsletter and/or bulletin with announcements
- You may also wish to bring in a Sunday paper so kids can get even more ideas from the “real thing”
- Large sheets of plain newsprint or other kind of paper
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Plain paper for drawing pictures, creating comics, etc.

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.
- After reading the story, ask the children to help you make a list of all the activities they can think of that happen at your church – worship, Sunday School, choir practice, meetings, outreach, etc. Tell them that together you are going to try to make a newspaper that tells other people about your parish.
- Children can work in teams if they like, but help them divide up who is going to do what. Ask children what kinds of things are in a newspaper and then help the groups decide what might go in your paper. Have fun! Be creative!
- Here are some suggestions for your newspaper:
 - Write a front page / headline piece about current church events
 - Have a Q&A section about things in worship
 - Create a simple crossword puzzle
 - Make up some creative classified ads
 - Do an interview with someone
 - Draw pictures / illustrations for the stories
 - Write an advice or opinion column
 - Make up your own comics page!
 - Write ads or coupons for “inserts”



- All the children can help with the writing of articles or illustrations, and then groups of children can help with the layout, organizing all of the content / contributions onto larger pages. Help them decide which "sections" different pieces should be organized into. Have them look at the real newspaper to see how the stories / content is broken up by topic or region or theme!
- As children finish their part of the paper, have them gather back together to share what they created. Talk about all the different things that are happening at your church. Ask them what things their families are involved with.
- If you have access to a copier, you could have another adult go run copies of your newsletter while the children are discussing their project. You can hand out copies of your newsletter to children and parents after the class / workshop. If this is not possible in the time you have available, try to have copies on hand the next week so that children can see what they created and so can the parents!



My Parish: Drama Workshop

Summary of Class Plans:

The children will try to complete a scavenger hunt that will take them to different parts of the church, while learning about different ministries and places within the parish / church.

Materials Needed:

- “How well do you know your church?” scavenger hunt (A sample is included on the next page, but you will need to adapt it for your own church)
- Pens or pencils

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.
- After reading the story to the children, talk to them about what things they have learned about their church that maybe they had never heard before. You might ask the children how long they have been at the church and see what the children who have been there a long time can tell the children who are newer to the church. Are there “secret places”? Has religious education / children's faith formation always been in the same place? Where are some of the fun places to discover?
- Tell children you will be going on a scavenger hunt to discover new things about their church. Tell them this is a fun activity, but remind them not to run or be too noisy, since there will be other groups meeting. Also, tell them that for some questions, they may need to ask other adults for help and to be polite and explain to the adults about the game they are playing.
- If you have a class of more than 10, you may want to divide the class into teams and have them compete to see who can finish first. (Essential survival tip: Make sure you send at least one adult with each team!!) 😊
- Hand out the scavenger hunt forms, distribute pencils and tell children an exact time they must be back in the classroom or risk being disqualified from the game. I would suggest you have them back in the room at least 15 minutes before class is over so that they can share what they learned.

Filler Activities:

- The scavenger hunt and sharing time at the end should easily fill up your entire class time, but if it doesn't, you can ask the children to help create a list of additional clues that you can possibly use with other classes or maybe even the parents!



HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR CHURCH?

1. Who / What is the parish named after? Are there any images or things inside the church that depict that person / group of people after which the church is named?
2. What words are engraved on the altar?
3. How many swings are on the playground?
4. Who works at the church / rectory during the week?
5. Whose picture hangs in the library?
6. Who coordinates our religious education?
7. What is painted on the wall of the nursery?
8. Who is the lector next Sunday?
9. Who made the large cross in the Parish Hall?
10. When was Mullen Hall built?
11. What is the name of our parish's pastoral associate?
12. Who keeps the building clean and ready for worship / activities?
13. When was our church built? (HINT: see stone at front of church)
14. How many coat hooks are in the back of the church?
15. How many steps lead up to the altar?
16. What is the first hymn we will sing in the Mass this Sunday? (Name & Number)
17. How many rows of pews are there in the sanctuary?
18. How many rows of pews are there in the chapel?
19. How many stained glass windows are in the sanctuary?
20. How many stained glass windows are in the chapel?
21. Our church is located at the corner of which two streets?
22. How many chairs are in the priest's office?
23. What color is the carpet in the room in which the youth group meets?
24. How many outlets are in the sacristy?
25. What color is the candle next to the tabernacle? Is it lit?

