

Growing Up Catholic
Learning Centers for Parents
How to help my child meet Jesus

To the Leaders:

- Please read through the Leader's Guide for Parent Learning Centers for the details about how to plan, organize, and succeed with these wonderful events.

Objectives of the learning for this theme:

- To recognize that the whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silence, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his way of the cross, and his resurrection.
- To understand that in his teaching, Jesus announced the reign of God.
- To appreciate that Jesus fulfilled the law with such perfection that he revealed its ultimate meaning.
- To more fully grasp that we are called to live out the paschal mystery as Christ did.
- To learn how to talk with your child about Jesus in ways that will help them grow into a lifetime of faith.



The opening moments

Step	Timing	Talking Points
1. Check in and Get Started	2 minutes	<p>The lead catechist introduces him or herself and welcomes everyone formally from the front of the room using a microphone, if needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the pastor and pastoral staff to everyone.• Introduce the Learning Center leaders.
2. Prayer	2 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn down the recorded song which has been playing as people arrived.• Begin with the Sign of the Cross.• The leader prays a brief prayer, such as this: <p>Jesus, Messiah, through you, we know the depths of God's love for us. You raise our eyes toward all that is good and holy, and teach us to live as bearers of your Good News.</p>



		<p>Through your life and goodness, you help us to be open to your call to be people of compassion and mercy, forgiveness and peace.</p> <p>Continue to shape us, Christ, in your love. We ask this in your name, you who are one with the Father and the Spirit, now and forever. Amen.</p>
3. Introduce the theme	3 minutes	<p>The Theme</p> <p>The lead catechist speaks to the group, using these or similar words:</p> <p>This meeting will focus on The Person of Jesus Christ. As we begin our time together, let us listen to the word of God:</p> <p>Reader: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mathew. (16: 13-17)</p> <p>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”</p> <p>The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.</p> <p>As the disciples came into a closer relationship with Jesus, accompanying him as he went from town to town, teaching, healing, forgiving, and ministering to people, it became important for them to realize who Jesus is. Likewise with us: as we listen to the Gospel, we can hear our Lord say to each of us, “But who do you say that I am?” This is a question of faith and of great consequence. How do you respond? This is where we will begin our time together tonight.</p> <p>Share now about your own relationship with Jesus, especially how you are aware of his presence with you and how often he has welcomed you back into the embrace of his loving arms after you have been selfish or sinful.</p>



<p>4. Dismissal to the 1st round of Learning Centers</p>	<p>about 2 minutes</p>	<p>Your options tonight for Learning Centers include: Here list what those options will be, using these or similar words (mention that there are 3 rounds of visits, then everyone meets back here for evaluation and closing prayer): Option #1 will be led by [name] and will meet [location]. This option is for you parents with younger children, ages 3 or 4 through about 8 or 9.</p> <p>Option #2 will be led by [name] and will meet [location]. This option is for you parents with children ages 9 through about 12, depending on the maturity of your child.</p> <p>Option #3 will be led by [name] and will meet [location]. This option is for parents with junior or senior high children, or young adults.</p> <p>Option #4 will be led by [name] and will meet [location]. It will explore the theological background to our theme.</p> <p>Option #5 will be led by [name] and will meet [location]. This option will make concrete suggestions on how you can take this home for the season of [name the season] and add Catholic elements to your home, respecting also the non-Catholics who may live there.</p>
<p>5. 1st Round</p>	<p>12 minutes</p>	<p>Note: The outlines for each learning center below are also the handout for that Learning Center. It's important to send the parents home with something in their hands to help them remember what we did here. Continue rotating parents among Learning Center groups until three Learning Centers have been visited by all.</p>



1

Learning Center for Parents

Parents with children age 3 or 4
through age 8 or 9

Getting Started:

Share this information with the parents, using these or similar words. Offer an example from your own experience as a parent or catechist to illustrate these points. Remember you have only 12 minutes!

Young children learn many things by listening to stories (and early readers love being able to read the stories on their own or with help). Our sacred stories of Jesus draw young children into Christ's life and teachings in ways that help them to learn what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ.

You can help your children grow as a young disciple by

- Sharing the ways in which Christ's love has touched you.
- Fostering an openness to Christ through prayer; when they see you praying they will be led to prayer themselves.
- Being attentive to Christ's call to reach out to those in need.
- Being willing to be shaped more by Christ with each day, seeing life and the events of the world through the lens of the Gospel message and talking about that at home.

When we live in this way, our very young children will learn from our witness, and will be more likely to embrace living discipleship as well.

Invite the parents to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences about the questions below with each other in groups of 2 or 3. Ask them to note their answers for a large group discussion to follow. When the small groups are finished, spend a few minutes with the whole group, inviting people to share their response for all to hear. This helps concretize the conversation.

- Name some ways in which you think your child can recognize faith in how you live, talk, and pray.
- What helps you grow in your own faith? In other words, where do *you* as an adult Christian find the kind of growth you want to foster in your child?



- What is your favorite story about Jesus Christ?

Going a bit Deeper: After the parents have shared, offer these additional points.

When we speak of **The Person of Jesus Christ**, we come to the heart of our faith as Christians: God created all of life, including us. Then God entered into our life, offering us renewed life and love. Christ is our model of holiness and teaches us how to live in God's friendship. Through Jesus Christ, we know God's love in deep and lasting ways: in mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption. In God who is so determined to be with us always, we have been given a share and partnership in Christ's mission, to bring God's love to the world. As you interact with your child at home, draw his or her attention to these concepts through your words and actions:

- Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Mary.
- Jesus teaches us to love God above all things and to love others as we love ourselves.
- Faith is the gift of believing in God. We receive this gift from the Holy Spirit and it is a gift offered to every single human person.
- The Great Commandment is about love of God and others. We are called, first and foremost, to love, and to that above all else.
- Jesus shared the good news about God's kingdom of justice, love and peace. He is our teacher.





Handouts

Creating Households of Faith – Sending it all home!

- **Read the Gospels and help them come alive.** Tell the stories of Jesus in ways that will help your child develop a living relationship with Christ.
 - Act out (or invite your child to act out) scenes from a gospel story. There are some wonderful resources available to help you with this. Visit the web site for more information.
 - Make comparisons with your own lives and those of the characters in the gospels.
 - Invite your child to read to you; help them as needed, then put the book down in your lap, and invite your child to retell the story in his or her own words. What fun!
- **Talk with your child about love**
 - Make a list with your child of the ways we can love others as we love ourselves (sharing, helping someone in need, playing with a lonely peer, and so forth).
 - Ask your child to tell you about people who show him or her love, and invite them to tell how she or he can show love in return.
 - Mark a calendar with a heart each day that your child has shown love to another; invite your child to share ways they have shown love at school or at play.

Ask the parents to make a list of other ways they have helped their children to love Christ and to live as Christ teaches.

- **Learn from the example of others.** Read the life of a saint or remember the life of a loved one. What do they show your child about loving as Jesus loves?
- **Teach love.**
 - Help your child learn to share and care.
 - Thank him or her for doing so; point out ways in which a sibling or friend did something special.
 - Encourage forgiveness, discourage selfishness.
- **Take a walk together in nature, or explore the beauty of creation in a magazine or book.** Talk about how God created everything: people, animals, and the world.
 - Help your child see the world through the lens of faith.



2 Learning Center for Parents

Parents with children ages 9-12,
depending on the maturity of the child

Getting Started:

Share this information with the parents, using these or similar words. Offer an example from your own experience as a parent or catechist to illustrate these points:

As our children mature, their ways of relating to Christ and responding to Christ's love should also mature. For elementary children, this will mean

- developing a personal rhythm of prayer
- developing a lifestyle that is responsive to God's love and forgiveness
- relating to others in a Christ-like fashion
- serving selflessly and willingly.

Of course, this sort of life does not develop overnight, and there will be many moments in which your child will want to fall into more self-centered ways, but that is true for each of us! Become the example for your child. Teach them this by showing it to them.

Children at this age need constant encouragement. You should hold a relatively high loving expectation of Christian attitude and behavior in order to keep from falling into the selfish tendencies of this stage of development. Active participation in the sacramental life of the Church is really important, as this is where we encounter Christ's sacramental presence, nourishing us and strengthening our resolve. So is the living witness of parents and other influential adults in their lives, as are healthy and holy friendships with others.

Invite the parents to take a moment to think about the questions below, and ask them to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with each other in groups of 2 or 3. Ask them to note their answers for a large group discussion to follow. When the small groups are finished, spend a few minutes with the whole group, inviting people to share their response for all to hear. This helps concretize the conversation.

- If your child asked you to, how would you describe the presence of Christ in your own life? In the world around you?



- List for yourself the key features from the life of Christ (forgiveness, generosity, an open heart, and so forth). How can you demonstrate each of these to your child, and also let them know you draw your own life-decisions from your faith?
- To whom does your child look as a model of faith or as a hero?

Going a bit Deeper: Here are the next points to share:

When we speak of **The Person of Jesus Christ**, we come to the heart of our faith as Christians. Children at this age can come to understand that Christ enters into our human life and makes it possible for us to be close to God, as he is. Christ is our model of holiness and teaches us how to live in God's friendship. Through Jesus Christ, we know God's love in deep and lasting ways: in mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption. God is determined to be with us always. We have been given a share and partnership in Christ's mission, to bring God's love to the world. As you interact with your child at home, draw his or her attention to these concepts through your words and actions:

- The Great Commandment is to love God with all your heart, strength, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself.
- The Great Commandment sums up all the teachings of the Ten Commandments, but Christ adjusted them to reflect his teaching about love.
- Jesus is both human and divine, truly God and truly human, the Messiah described by the Old Testament prophets.
- God's kingdom is present and grows until God's reign comes in fullness.





Handouts

Life Connections for the Household of Faith

- **Make a Love List.** With your child, make a list of the ways in which she or he can show love for God. These will include forgiving others, being generous, including the ones who are rejected, and so forth.
 - Keep the list handy and add to it as your child matures.
 - Watch for signs of this kind of love in your child and affirm each loving action your child learns to take.
 - Remember that your child will learn to love from watching you. Tone down your own judgments of others, and reduce gossip, criticism, and negative talk. In general, become Christ for your child.
- **Make a Great Commandment Poster**
 - Read together Luke 10: 25-28.
 - Invite your child to make a poster that includes the Great Commandment and uses photos, pictures from magazines, and other phrases or words to illustrate this key teaching of Jesus.
- **Get Connected to Others.** Being connected to your parish is one of the best ways to grow in a relationship with Christ and to help your child to do so as well. Let's be realistic. Young people of this age are very sensitive to the actions and attitudes of their peers. If they are not connected to others their age who make faith an important part of their lives, young people feel that living faith is for someone other than themselves.
 - Spend social time with others in the parish.
 - Invite your child and her or his friends to go out for breakfast following Sunday Mass.
 - Attend parish social meals like a fish fry, festival, or Mardi Gras.
 - Serve together at a parish function.
 - Participate in a parish organization.

Sharing and Learning

This is a good point at which to stop and invite parents to share their experiences. How do their lives at home encourage a living relationship with Christ? How do they respond when their children act in ways that are counter to what Christ would ask?



3 Learning Center for Parents

Parents with children ages 12 or 13 through age 18, and young adults

Getting Started:

Introduce this topic using these or similar words:

By our teenage years, we may well be on our way to a lasting, lifelong relationship with Christ, or we may already be slipping into a pattern that keeps Jesus Christ at a distance from our heart and mind. Through action (or often through *inaction*) we make other things greater priorities. Encouraging our youth to keep their friendship with Christ alive requires genuine care and compassion, patience, and the witness of loving adults who are living what they say they hope the youth will live. Remember, young people can spot a phony from a mile away!

Teens are very comfortable with the abstract nature of the mysteries of our faith, and will readily make the connection between the ways they experience love through parents, caring adults, friends, and family and the ways God loves them. Still, youth are often uncomfortable with themselves and often do not see themselves as being lovable; they tend to depend on the reinforcement of social interactions with peers to define their worth and meaning. Helping your teen to consider his or her true value in God's and your eyes will be crucial at this stage of life and faith.

Invite the parents to take a moment to think about the questions below, and ask them to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with each other in groups of 2 or 3. Ask them to note their answers for a large group discussion to follow. When the small groups are finished, spend a few minutes with the whole group, inviting people to share their response for all to hear. This helps concretize the conversation.

- What do you think your teenager believes about God and the Church?
- Teenage years are ones during which we develop physically, sexually, and emotionally. How can you introduce faith to this process with your young adult child?
- To whom does your teenager go with questions of faith and life?



Going a bit Deeper: Here are your next points:

When we speak of **The Person of Jesus Christ**, we come to the heart of our faith as Christians. For a young adult, this can be a point of real contact with Christ. Christ enters into our human life, dying to himself and rising to new life. So with us. Christ is our model of holiness and teaches us how to live in God's friendship. Your young adult child can learn the meaning of personal sacrifice, of dying to self, by watching you. The more you give of yourself, the more your child will follow suit.

Through Jesus Christ, we know God's love in deep and lasting ways: in mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption. These are all ways in which we enter into the "paschal mystery," which is another way of saying what we just said above. We allow our own personal giving to reflect that of Christ.

As you interact with your child at home, draw his or her attention to these concepts through your words and actions:

- Jesus became human to show us how to live and reach our full potential as God's children. We grow to maturity only when we let Christ become our guide and power.
- The Beatitudes reveal values of the kingdom and how to live in harmony with God and one another. Each of them calls us to enter into our baptismal calling – to die to ourselves in Christ.
- Jesus conquered death and makes it possible for those who have faith to experience new life.
- Conversion is an on-going process, nurtured by the Holy Spirit. It goes on throughout life.
- Through Jesus we are forgiven and made whole again. There is nothing we can do to separate ourselves from the love of God in Christ. Helping your child understand this will help keep them from despair.





Life Connections for the Household of Faith

- **Ask your teen to create a playlist of music.** Music can powerfully express our feelings, hopes, fears, and dreams in ways few other forms of communication can. Invite your teen to create a playlist of music to use on family outings, during meal preparation, or for informal time at home.
 - The music does not need to be “Christian,” but should convey feelings or attitudes that are in keeping with our faith.
 - The music can be of any style, and could easily represent a variety of styles. The music you play at home will also influence what they choose.
 - The music should be acquired legally. This is a great time to discuss with your child the ethical issues of downloading music without paying for it.
- **Share ah-ha moments, and faith challenges.**
 - Use time in the car or at home in relaxed interaction to discuss moments in which you sense Christ’s presence or call. You don’t need to lace all your conversations with faith-talk, but now and then, you do need to allow them to see your faith explicitly affecting your choices.
 - Invite your child to do the same with you as she or he feels comfortable. Ask them to think through a decision based on what they believe, based on the message of the Gospels and the Church.
 - Occasionally describe situations in which your faith requires a difficult choice, and talk with your child about this. Help them see your thinking. A young adult is ready for mature decision-making.
- **Choose a beatitude each week.**
 - Read together Luke 6: 20-23.
 - Invite your young adult child to choose one beatitude for each week, or do this together as a family.
 - The beatitude could be written on a card to be placed at the family table, on the child’s bedroom door, or on the bathroom mirror.
 - As a family, keep this Beatitude in mind, and at supper, ask how each family member lived it that day.
- **Invite your young adult child to make a youth retreat.**
 - This is the perfect time to strengthen their faith journey by an in-depth encounter with Christ through the Sacraments. We recommend TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) or another Catholic retreat based on the Sacraments.



4

Learning Center for Parents

Theological background

<p>Developing the theme.</p> <p>Optional use of <i>Growing Faith</i> booklet #11</p>	<p>10 minutes, more or less</p>	<p>The leader continues now to develop the content of this event, using these talking points:</p> <p>The lead catechist now continues: Tonight's theme of <i>The Person of Jesus Christ</i> has invited us to allow ourselves to recognize God's great love for us and to think about our response to that love. Now as we develop this a little, let's look at some of the Church's teaching about Christ. We draw this from our Catechism.</p> <p>Continue with the key points found in the outline below. Use the suggested activities also found in that outline which can also serve as a handout.</p>
<p>Ideas to send home as a way of extending this event</p>	<p>2 minutes</p>	<p>If your family does not have a crucifix at home, purchase one (many can be found inexpensively at local Catholic shops or online) or make one. Place the crucifix in a location in your home that is visible to the family each day, and begin the practice of saying a brief prayer, looking at the crucifix for a moment of silence, or touching the feet of the corpus (Christ's body on the cross) as a reminder of your faith each day.</p> <p>Jesus' commands are simple yet profound: love one another; serve as one who washes the dirty feet of another; forgive as we are forgiven; offer compassion, mercy, companionship, and care as though we were doing so for God, because in doing so, we serve Christ. Talk about this with your family, and determine one concrete action you will do as a response to Jesus this week.</p>





Handouts

Talking Points for theology about Jesus Christ

Who do we say he is?

“Jesus.”

In Hebrew the name means “God saves.”

And indeed, through Jesus,
through his life, death, and resurrection,
God is saving us,
bringing all of salvation history
into one shining moment.

Human sinfulness, that inclination to reject God,
is forgiven
and we are made whole again.

This is a holy name,

which summons for us the image of God.

The name of Jesus is at the heart of all our prayer,
concluding as we do in these words:
“through Christ, our Lord, Amen.”

“Christ.”

It is a Greek title, which means “Messiah.”

In Hebrew it carries the meaning “anointed.”

And indeed, Jesus Christ is the anointed one of God
the one who announces the Reign of God.

Anointed by the Spirit in the river,
anointed by God on the mountain,
Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

He was of royal family ties,
born as a descendent of King David.

His teaching and his many works
made clear that he was the holy one of God.

Anointed

And he himself came to Nazareth as a young man,
as Luke’s Gospel retells it in chapter 4,
to the synagogue, on the Sabbath,
and standing to read, was handed the scroll
of the prophet Isaiah.

He unrolled the scroll with great purpose,
found the passage he wanted,
and read aloud for all to hear.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” he read,



because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor...”
His audience was stunned!

And within hours,
or perhaps days at the most,
the work of teaching and healing,
of calling disciples
and shaping them as community,
had begun.

Dangerous work

From almost the beginning, it seems,
Jesus understood the dangerous work
to which he was called.

For when you announce the Reign of God
you must at the same time
announce the end of darkness.

Darkness never goes easily into the night.

In your very person,
you become a servant,
you become a lover,
you become a forgiver.

In a word, you prepare to die to yourself in love
and only that, you realize,
will lead to joy,
glory,
and resurrection.

Jesus offered his life to liberate us,
and this great act of love
opened the Reign of God for all.

Invite participants to discuss this:

What is dangerous about following the teachings of Christ?



“Son of God.”

The title is given to angels in the Old Testament,
to the chosen people,
to the children of Israel,
and even to their kings.

But for Peter is it a different story.

He names Jesus as the Christ,
the Messiah,
the Son of God.

And Jesus assures Peter that this insight into his divinity
came from “my Father who is in heaven”
according to Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 16, verse 17.

And for Paul as well, after his conversion.

While still in Damascus,
within days of having met the Lord,
he is already proclaiming about Jesus,
“He is the Son of God”
in Acts, chapter 9, verse 20.

Invite participants to do this exercise:

Write out in a few lines your own central beliefs about Jesus Christ. Match this against the Apostles’ or Nicene Creeds which we pray as Church. What is affirmed for you? How are you challenged?



5 Learning Center for Parents

Seasonal and Household Activities

This Learning Center is one that must be created and developed by you and your leaders. Here are some suggestions from us:

- Remember that each Learning Center runs only about 12 minutes. In this amount of time, you could develop one or two main points.
- **Advent:** A short workshop on how to build an Advent Wreath and suggestions for how to spend Advent as a Catholic household would fit into this period.
 - You may want to offer a take-home Advent Wreath Kit either for sale or as a free item.
 - Or you may provide each household with an Advent Calendar. (We make a reproducible one available on the web site annually.)
 - Or you may send everyone home with a day-by-day Advent booklet for use within the household. (Again, we make these available on the web site.)



- **Lent:** A short workshop on how to make Lent a season of faith within the household would be very helpful. This workshop should treat the various elements of Lent:

- Fasting, almsgiving, prayer, & abstinence. (We offer an annual resource on the web site called “Getting Started with Lent” which is reproducible.)



- The Stations of the Cross and how to pray them at home could be a workshop all its own. (We offer a Stations of the Cross booklet for families and children on the web site.)

➤ **Households of Faith – outside of Lent or Advent:**

- **Teach homemaking!** Offer parents a short workshop on the importance of sharing meals as a family. (We offer an excellent PowerPoint and handout for this purpose on the web site. It's called *How to Have Supper.*)



- Invite parents to share their own experiences about suppertime – or whatever meal they're able to share as a family.
- **Offer a short workshop on family prayer** – including demonstrating some good family Bibles, prayer books, or other resources.
 - Again, invite parents to share how this is going for them at home now.
- **Opportunities for Service.** Ask the social concerns ministry group in the parish to provide a short workshop on opportunities for families to work in service ministries together:
 - Meals for the poor or homeless
 - Visits to senior care facilities
 - Holiday needs for households with illness or immobility
 - Or others
- **Your own local ideas!**





The closing moments

Evaluation	2 minutes	<p>Hand out a short written evaluation tool (see below) that can be quickly filled in and briefly shared in the table group.</p> <p>Ask the table leaders to briefly sum up their table's comments to the larger group. Have table leaders collect and give the written evaluations to the lead catechist for further evaluation for the team later.</p>
Closing Prayer	2 minutes, if time permits and the room set-up allows for it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may wish to play the song used at the beginning once again here at the end.• You may wish to simply end with an Our Father or Hail Mary.• Or you may close with a spontaneous prayer.
Shared food		<p>Invite everyone to share refreshments. You may want to have sugar cookies frosted with crosses or hot cross buns.</p>





Handouts

Evaluation of this Experience

1. How well did this experience connect to your daily life?

circle one please

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
---not very well ----- poorly-----pretty well-----very well!-----excellently-----

Please explain:

2. How did this experience help you grow in your faith and connection to the parish and the church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
---not very well ----- poorly-----pretty well-----very well!-----excellently-----

Please explain:

3. What could we have done better in your opinion?

4. What other kinds of faith formation would you like to see for the future here in our parish?

5. Who else would you like to invite to take part in lifelong faith formation?

