SPIRIT sows the Word of God in the good ground of teens’ lives, where it can multiply a hundredfold in our world.

SPIRIT is a teaching tool for catechists and youth ministers. Every issue invites young people into dialogue with the Sunday gospel and Catholic tradition—to question and imagine, to find words and speak for themselves, to share and pray.

SPIRIT makes faith sharing easy and worthwhile. Who will help teens do soul work if parish and school groups don’t? Many families will—and who else?

If your teens are talking about everything but religion, SPIRIT stories and articles can change that. They prime the pump for authentic God talk. They help teens value their own God moments and life questions, work through conflicts and doubts. SPIRIT stories spark the deep sharing that allows teens to know and trust one another and over time share their concerns.

SPIRIT issues call teens to put their faith into action—to live it!

SPIRIT initiates a habit of reflecting on the gospel that cycles the mystery of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection into teens’ lives and over a lifetime transforms the Christian into Christ.

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**HOW SPIRIT WORKS**

Each SPIRIT issue provides four pages written just for teens that include stories about life, the Sunday Gospel in reader parts, and presentations of Christian tradition.

- **Stories and interviews** anchor each session in teens’ experience.
- **Questions** invite teens to interpret what the gospel asks of them.
- **Our Catholic Faith** helps teens explore Catholic tradition in their language.
- **Faith in Action!** activities challenge teens to put the gospel into action globally and locally in their schools, parishes, and neighborhoods.
Using SPIRIT Step by Step

READ
the lesson plan

FORM
a circle
So everyone can see each other face to face.

PRAY
It sets the theme.

LIVE IT!
See, judge, act for justice.
Do works of mercy and love.
Practice ways to pray.
Make commitments.

WARM UP
Icebreakers, music

Reflected on the Sunday gospels is a prayerful habit that aims to transform the Christian into Christ over a lifetime.

READ
the story
It's the catalyst.
Invite response.
Use the questions as needed.

EXPLORE
Our Catholic Faith
Raise questions, doubts.
Share insights.
Invite all to share.

PROCLAIM
the gospel
It's in reader parts.
Ask the questions.
What does Jesus ask of us?

Listen and question rather than lecture.

Have fun!

Let only one teen speak at a time.
SPIRIT is a teen-friendly catechetical program that centers around the Sunday gospels of the liturgical year. This makes SPIRIT a lectionary-based program; the lectionary is the book that organizes the Church’s reading of scripture into three yearly cycles. The SPIRIT program provides 28 weekly issues that aim to instruct teens in the faith the Catholic Christian community lives. SPIRIT instructs through faith sharing, through stories and questions that get teens talking to one another about their experience, values, and all the gospel asks of them in their lives. SPIRIT aims to build Christian community among teens through breaking open the Word, reflecting, and praying together.

Each SPIRIT issue has a one-page lesson plan that outlines a 60- to 90-minute session with teens. These lesson plans are the key to using every SPIRIT issue effectively. Lessons are numbered and dated, so catechists can find the guide to the SPIRIT issue with ease.

Each SPIRIT session follows a three-step plan:
1. Sharing Life Stories
2. Reflecting on the Gospel
3. Living Our Catholic Faith.

SPIRIT’s clear design makes preparing for sessions as quick and easy as reading through the issue and guide.

How to Use a SPIRIT Issue

Pray  SPIRIT provides a prayer on its cover for each session. The prayer opens the theme of the gospel and lesson. Lesson plans suggest gathering your teens in a prayer circle and inviting them to bring any concern they have about people in their lives or events in the news into the prayer. Some teens may always keep these concerns in their hearts; some may welcome praying about them in the group.

Music  A separate publication called SPIRIT XTRA suggests popular music to fit the theme of each weekly issue. SPIRIT’s music editor describes the theme of each song, provides key lyrics, and suggests questions that teens can discuss after listening to the song. As new music comes out, SPIRIT updates its music suggestions on its website: goodgroundpress.com.

Icebreakers  SPIRIT lessons often provide easy and fun activities to help groups feel at ease and connect with themes in the issue. Some of these icebreakers are part of making their own moral judgments and expressing their own spiritual values.

Familiarize yourself with the story or article before the session. Always let teens respond freely to the piece when the group finishes reading it. Let their responses be a starting point for discussion.

Read  In every issue SPIRIT provides fiction, articles, or interviews by or about teens. These stories and articles provide teens a common medium for discussion and a catalyst for surfacing their own experiences. These stories are not an end in themselves but a means for teens to talk about their own issues.

The purpose of the story or article is to provide the group a common starting point for surfacing experiences in teens’ lives to which the gospel may speak.

Step 1  Sharing Life Stories

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Many adolescents have difficulty talking about themselves in any way or finding words for their feelings. Being able to talk about a story or interview can be a stepping stone to faith sharing in the group. Teens need to talk because they often feel isolated and alone; without talking they won’t know others have similar feelings.

Building up the trust that will make teens comfortable talking about their real struggles takes time. It can take a year for them to realize you as a catechist or teacher will listen and help them think things through, not just put them down or tell them an easy right answer.

The questions SPIRIT raises in no way exhaust the possible meanings of the gospel but are questions the editors think relevant to teens. Don’t hesitate to go beyond these questions. The aim of SPIRIT is conversion and transformation in Christ. The questions invite faith sharing—reflecting on one’s own life experience. This is a transforming process. Teens and catechists open themselves to the possibility of Jesus and his teachings claiming their hearts, giving them direction, vision, and hope. A single insight may be enough to change a teen’s life.

Questions SPIRIT questions invite teens to interpret the story. Make the questions your own, but don’t be afraid to ask them as written. Ask your own questions, too, and invite teens to do the same. Don’t have group members write answers out. That makes a faith-sharing group too much like school.

### Step 3 Living Our Catholic Faith

**Our Catholic Faith**

Besides a story and the Sunday gospel, SPIRIT issues include each week a feature presenting Christian tradition—the doctrines of the Apostles’ Creed, the sacraments, Christian moral life, ways to practice prayer. These features flow from the gospel. SPIRIT often supplies a short quotation from the Catechism of the Catholic Church to summarize a doctrinal concept. Teens can find the Catechism of the Catholic Church online and use the paragraph number to find further readings.

**Faith in Action**

SPIRIT lessons lead teens toward action in their communities. The Live It activities especially call young people to do or act on the word Jesus speaks. SPIRIT faith-sharing groups can become small Christian communities that reflect on and practice the gospel in an ongoing process.

**Social Action**

Live It features often emphasize Catholic social teaching and concrete ways to do the work of both charity and justice. Social action takes both forms. The work of charity involves addressing immediate needs for basics, such as food, clothing, shelter, health care. The work of justice involves changing systems that leave people out or behind. Many of these references provide Internet sites that link teens to national and international groups working for human rights.

**Concluding Prayer**

The SPIRIT lesson plans provide prayer for the end of each session. In some cases, SPIRIT issues provide whole prayer services or directions for teens to create prayer services together. Lesson plans suggest that teens gather in a prayer circle. Catechists and teachers can follow the plan’s suggestions for prayer or lead teens in making their own.

A catechist’s or teacher’s willingness to pray with teens gives powerful witness to the importance of God in our lives. It is a concrete way of sharing our deepest faith and of bonding together as a community. Do a simple prayer conclusion for every session.
Called to Be the Body of Christ in Our World

The first eight SPIRIT issues form a unit that explores some of Jesus’ most memorable parables about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ parables invite us to see ourselves in the mirrors his stories hold up to us. These gospel passages come from Matthew 21-25, after Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the temple, and proceeds to teach and heal the sick in the temple courtyards. The priests challenge his authority and other teachers test and debate with him. Jesus uses parables to draw them into seeing themselves.

As we hear the parables two millennia later at our Sunday worship, Jesus confronts us as Church, as the assembly of the people of God, and asks us to judge how fruitful our stewardship of God’s vineyard is, to decide whether we will attend the Messiah’s wedding feast, and to assess whether we belong among the sheep or the goats at the last judgment.

All of Jesus’ parables this fall address us as Church, as those who can be his hands, feet, and heart in our world. Jesus teaches us the great commandments and insists those who serve are greatest in his community. These parables and teachings and every eucharist call us to be the Body of Christ in our world.

Throughout 2020, the Church has read from the lectionary the Cycle-A scripture readings, which follow the gospel of Matthew on the Sundays in Ordinary Time. The lectionary moves Jesus’ death and resurrection, which come at the end of the gospel, to the middle of the liturgical year, when we celebrate Holy Week and Easter. After Easter we listen to the Sunday gospels as a post-Easter people, as the Church that gathers in Jesus’ name to continue his mission.

Jesus’ parable of final judgment gives Christians the works of mercy as our mission. We hear this gospel on the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the liturgical year. What we do for the least we do for Jesus.

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SCRIPTY BACKGROUND

Sunday’s first reading from Isaiah 5.1-7 describes God as a farmer who cultivates a vineyard on a fertile hillside. The farmer digs up the dirt, digs out the stones, terraces the hillside, and plants vines where they will flourish—a picture of God planting Israel in the promised land.

In the parable Jesus invites the chief priests and elders to see themselves as the tenants of the vineyard, those charged with helping the people of Israel flourish as a holy people. Instead the chief priests and elders identify with the owner of the vineyard and judge themselves by wanting to punish and kill the rebellious tenants.

The killing of the heir of the vineyard links the parable to Jesus. For Christian Jews, Jesus is the heir of Israel, the messiah. He is God’s son (in Hebrew, ben) who was crucified, the stone (in Hebrew, eben) rejected by the builders which God has made the cornerstone of a new community.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will get to know one another.

Icebreaker: Names Create an accepting and hospitable atmosphere at this first SPIRIT session. If your group members don’t know each other, have them pair off, interview each other, then introduce each other to the whole group. See also the Introductions section of Icebreakers for Teen Groups.

Music: See SPIRIT XTRA for a song that fits the gospel theme.

Pray (cover) Ask group members if any of them have special concerns in their hearts they wish to name or for which they wish to make a prayer petition. Make a petition or name a person or concern yourself to model how to join in this opening prayer. To conclude, invite your teens to find and pray the prayer with you.

Objective: The young people will identify and evaluate ways they stereotype others and make choices.

Icebreaker: What immigrants do you know? (cover) Invite your class to look together at the cover photos and questions. Have the group sit in two circles with young people facing each other. Explain that they will talk about the cover questions in pairs and you will ask them to rotate to a new person for the questions in the blue, red, green, and three purple backgrounds. Start with talk about the questions in the blue oval. Allow two minutes or less per question.

Stories: Two Views (pages 2-3) Divide your class or group in half. Have half read the story on page 2, and half read the story on page 3. Then ask two teens who read the first story to be Juan and Pedro and tell the whole group what happened in town as if they were telling their friends back at the migrant camp. Then have two teens who read the story on page 3 be Luke and Murph and tell their version of what happened. This should make teens aware of how differently each of the four boys experiences the pool game and choices they make as a result of the game.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize the kind of harvest Jesus expects.

Who yields a good harvest? (cover) Have six young people proclaim the gospel. Invite your group to ask questions about the gospel, so they gain skill in using their thinking ability to reflect on the gospel. Hold the questions; this passage is a complex and highly symbolic parable.

Discuss questions 5-6. 5. Talk about why your young people identify with the people in the parable. Note the chief priests identify with the owner. People who rent may have sympathy for the tenants or the servants who seem caught in the middle. Stress that as Christians we identify with Jesus, who was put to death, but rises from the dead and becomes the cornerstone of a new community—us. 6. All of us are tenants who should care for Earth but we tend to use Earth for our own ends without considering sustainability.

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize their capacity to choose.

Our Catholic Faith: Choices (page 4) Allow time for the group to check the choices they have made today. Invite them to reflect on the questions as they finish. Have the group divide into twos or threes to talk about the patterns they see in their checks. Have the pairs form groups of four and give each person time to describe the pressures they feel.

Human beings are free to choose (page 4) Use the photo at top right to recall the choices involved in the story “Two Views.” Have volunteers take turns reading a paragraph of the feature to the group.

Faith in Action (page 4) Direct the small groups to do item 1, and create a visual (item 2) that shows what the world might look like. Have them use the visual to tell the whole group. Item 3 suggests identifying steps in making a choice. Invite the group to act out what other alternatives Murph might do.

Concluding prayer Gather in a circle. Have a volunteer read aloud Jesus’ final words in the gospel. Invite your group to say how they think Jesus is the cornerstone of our Church and our lives. Invite them to make petitions for their group and their concerns. Pray together again the prayer on the cover, upper left.
**SCRIpTUrE BACKGROUnD**

Gospel writers Matthew and Luke both tell the parable in Sunday’s gospel. In Luke the parable is about a man who gives a big dinner. When his invited guests refuse to come, he instead invites the poor. In Matthew the parable is about a king who invites guests to a wedding banquet for his son. The guests not only refuse to come but kill the king’s servants who invite them to the banquet. The king responds by sending troops, destroying the guests, and burning their city.

By elaborating details in the story, Matthew creates an allegory, a built-in interpretation. By turning the meal into a wedding banquet for the king’s son, Matthew makes attendance at the wedding into a matter of faith in Jesus as the messiah. Messiah means the anointed one or king. The first servants who go out to invite guests symbolize Israel’s prophets; the second group of servants who in Matthew gather guests from the highways and byways symbolize the Christian missionaries, who preach to Gentile peoples.

Matthew’s allegory also explains why war breaks out between the host and guests in the middle of the parable. The invited guests seize, mistreat, and kill the king’s servants, which provokes him to send troops, destroy them, and burn their city. In these details, Matthew makes the parable refer to the Romans’ destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (A.D. 70), a watershed in the experience of first-century Jews, both Christian Jews and Jews who follow rabbis other than Jesus. With the temple gone, those who study Torah in synagogues and those who break bread in Jesus’ name in house churches can no longer come together for common temple feasts. Differences between these two inheritors of Israel’s traditions begin to grow.

**SHARING LIFE STORIES**

**Objective:** The young people will identify ways people include and exclude others.

**Music:** See SPIRIT XTRA for a song that fits the gospel theme.

**Pray (cover)** Invite your group to join hands and to mention any prayer concerns they bring to your circle. To conclude, pray the prayer at top left on the cover together. It expresses the theme of the issue.

**Parties sidebar:** Have the young people break into small groups to discuss the sidebar questions on page 1. After ample time, gather together as a large group. Make a list of what makes people feel welcome and included (they are invited and greeted, there are fun things to do that they feel part of, their friends are there or they make new friends, there are good things to eat and drink, they laugh a lot, openended); or unwelcome and excluded (they are not greeted and are ignored, the groups are uninterested in new people, there is nothing to do, openended).

**Story: Real Victory (pages 1-3)** Invite teens to brainstorm what builds bonds and forms healthy groups among young people in high school, especially across ethnic, racial, or economic barriers. Have volunteers among your teens read the story aloud for the group.

- Let teens respond to the story. Raise and discuss questions 1-5.
  1. Tom and Bart connect and become friendly with Akey and Hussein on the cross country team. The team’s success builds acceptance.
  2. Invite teens to talk about being in other cultures.
  3. People of two cultures come to appreciate one another.
  4-6. Openended. Encourage teens not to name individuals but talk about differences they have overcome. Teens may reject peers who use drugs, who are active sexually, who are dedicated underachievers, who are too uncool to risk hanging out with, who don’t like the same activities. Teens will tend to accept people who are like them but hopefully they stretch their acceptance or broaden their experience of other people.

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

**Objective:** The young people will recognize Jesus invites all people into relationship with him.

**Who are the king’s guests? (page 3)** Have three members of the group take the three parts to proclaim and dramatize the gospel. Discuss question 6.

6. Teens may see themselves turning God down in not going to church, not praying, not reaching out to teens without friends, not respecting themselves. Discuss also what invitations from God they accept.

**Living Our Catholic Faith**

**Objective:** The young people will understand the meaning and purpose of parables by examining Matthew and Luke’s versions in Sunday’s gospel.

**Our Catholic Faith: Jesus tells parables (page 4)** Read aloud the first two sections. The first section explains scripture as a mirror for seeing ourselves. The second describes the differences between Matthew and Lukes’ version of the parable.

- Have teens in your group read aloud the next section which explains the allegory, the built-in interpretation Matthew creates in his version of this parable.
- Read the last section aloud, highlighting the questions and answers in the first paragraph.

**Faith in Action (page 4)** Discuss the possible actions with the whole group.

**Concluding Prayer:** God, wipe away the tears from the faces of people in pain. Help us to invite people at our school and church to belong, even when they are different from us. Help us do our part in giving hope to people who have given up, especially those we mention now. (Invite teens to mention people.) Exchange a sign of peace.
Scripture Background

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” says Jesus in Sunday’s gospel. His saying allows Christians to obey both civil and religious laws and calls us to participate in wrestling with where our allegiance will lie when the two spheres conflict. His saying does not tell us what to give to Caesar and to God. It gives us a principle that calls us to make our informed, conscientious judgments.

In Jesus’ time, paying taxes was a much-debated issue for strict observers of the Mosaic law. The tax had to be paid in Roman coin, which had the image of Caesar on it, an image distasteful to Jews. The Pharisees were against paying Roman taxes. However, those who set out to trap Jesus into taking sides between themselves and the Roman-oriented, Herod supporters apparently paid the tax, for when Jesus asks to see the coin for paying the taxes, they had one, graphically illustrating Jesus’ point, “Give to Caesar what has Caesar’s image on it.”

Spirit explores the ministry of Glenmary priest John Rausch, who works on Justice issues in Appalachia. In its back-page feature Spirit explores the civic duties of Catholic citizens and Catholic social teaching.

Sharing Life Stories

Objective: The young people will discuss the importance of the common good and political involvement.

Music: See Spirit Xtra for a song that fits the gospel theme.

Pray (cover) Have your teens pray the prayer at the top left together. The prayer invites them into the concerns of Sunday’s gospel.

Icebreaker: Where Do You Stand? Do this exercise before reading the article. Have students stand in a group. Designate a line in the room, with one end of the line indicating “strongly agree” and the opposite end indicating “strongly disagree.” Ask students to arrange themselves according to their response to each of the following questions. Invite students to make just a few comments while they are still standing in position; more detailed discussion is best saved until after the exercise.

- My vote makes a significant difference.
- I am well-informed on local politics.
- One person can have a significant impact on a political issue.
- People should bring their religious beliefs into the political process.
- I know the name of my state senator and representative.

Invite students to discuss their responses to the above questions. Do they wish they had a different answer to some questions? For example, do they wish they were better informed or that individuals could have a bigger impact?

Article: Father John Rausch, Adventures in Justice (pages 1-3)

Have teens look closely at the photo on page 2 and read the cutline together, which introduces mountaintop removal as a justice issue in Appalachia.
- Read aloud the first three paragraphs, which introduce the sense of fairness that animates Father Rausch’s vocation and ministry. Have teens take turns volunteering to read the article aloud.
- Discuss questions 1-3. 1. He gives his energy and enthusiasm, his sense of justice and fairness, his insistence on bringing everybody to the table. 2. Initially drawn in by the adventure of being a missionary in a remote area, he is now passionate about justice for the ‘forgotten’ people and about caring for the land. 3. Through giving the tours and the prayer services, Fr. Rausch draws attention to issues of injustice, influencing change on personal and civic levels.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Objective: The young people will reflect on the influences that pull them toward God and community involvement.

What is Caesar’s? What is God’s? (page 1) Have four teens proclaim the gospel in parts for your class or group. Discuss questions 4-5. 4 and 5. Invite teens to identify what they give to God and to Caesar.
- Have them divide into fours. Provide large sheets of paper and markers. Have each teen draw circles, write in the circles the names of groups to which they belong, and then work and discuss together to identify possible conflicts among the competing values of the groups. For example, does commitment to sports or a job compete with time for worship or family? What and who pulls them toward God? What and who pulls them toward active participation in their civic communities? What and who pulls them in ways they don’t want to go?

Living Our Catholic Faith

Objective: The young people will explore the meaning of the fourth commandment on the duties of citizens.

Our Catholic Faith: Duties of Catholic Citizens (page 4) Read aloud this feature which explores how the fourth commandment calls young people to active involvement in their Church and world.

Faith in Action (page 4) To address items 1 and 2, invite your teens to make a list of issues that concern them in their state or in their local communities or schools. Have teens form groups by issue to identify ways they might get involved. Have each group report to the whole. Encourage teens who want to follow through on getting actively involved. Identify any action steps the group as a whole might take.

Concluding Prayer Gather teens into a circle. Pray about each of the political issues you discussed earlier. Ask teens to share what each has chosen to do in order to make a difference.