

2023-2024

SPiRiT Guide

*Using **SPiRiT** is a transforming process that encourages teens to wrestle with what the Sunday gospels and Church tradition ask of them in their lives.*

PASTORAL VISION

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

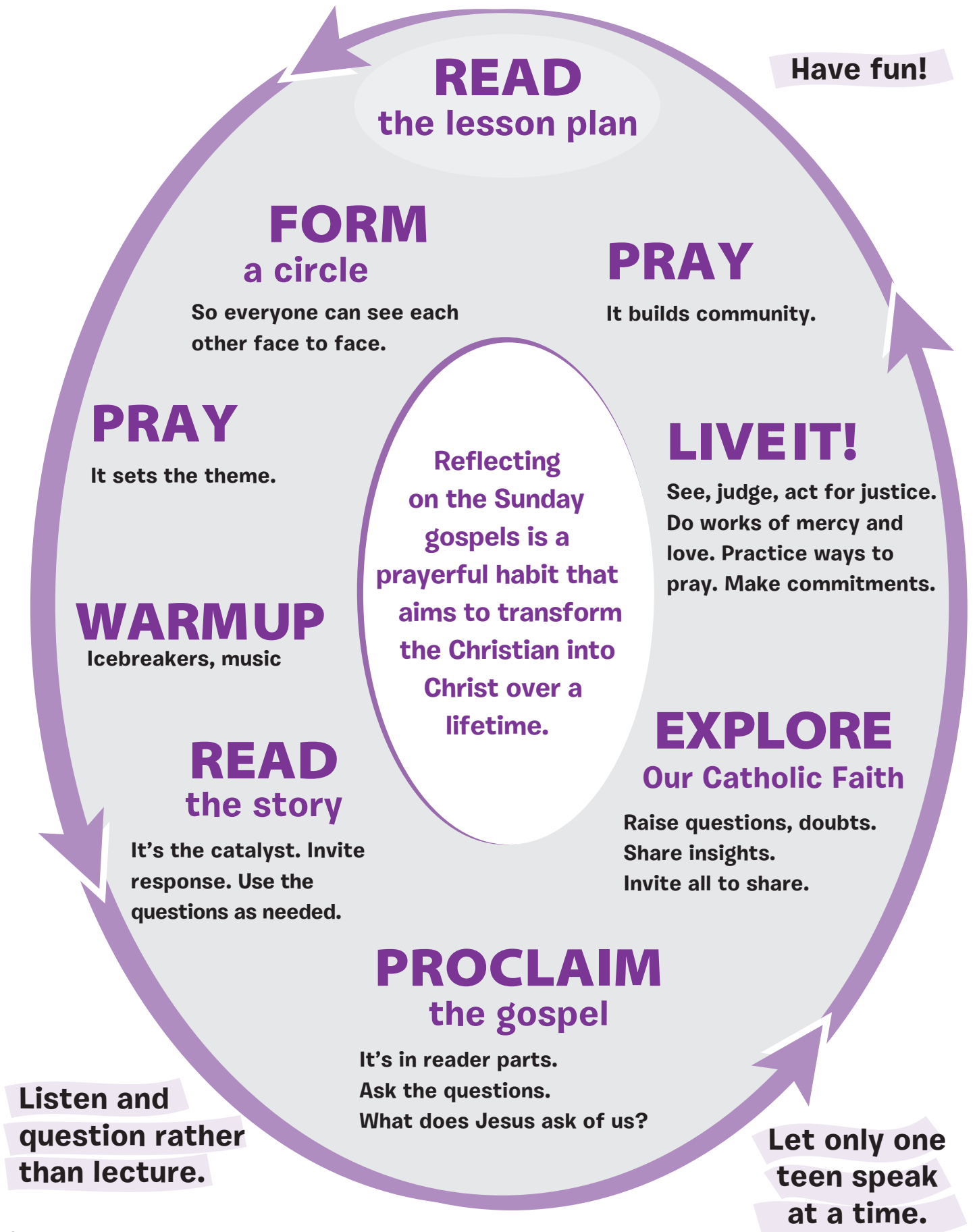
Each *SPiRiT* issue provides four pages written just for teens that include stories about life, the Sunday Gospel in reader parts, and presentations of Christian tradition.

- **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.

Lesson plans inside



Using SPIRIT Step by Step



How to Use a *SPIRIT* Issue

S*PIRIT* 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.

STEP 1 Sharing Life Stories

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

the lesson plan. Many of them come from the *SPIRIT* book, *Icebreakers for Teen Groups*, which is available from Good Ground Press: 800-232-5533 or goodgroundpress.com.

A good icebreaker gives each group member a chance to speak, to hear his or her voice aloud talking about something non-threatening. Checklists, short games, remembering exercises, and preference questions invite participation rather than right answers. Icebreakers help groups bond in fun.

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.

Stories work like magic in helping young people explore their own experience. By struggling with the dilemmas of believable fiction or real-life characters, teens gain practice in

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.

Look over the questions in each issue. Make them your own, so you can work them into a session creatively. Look over the answer section in the guide to confirm what a question is getting at.

To read the stories, articles, or interviews, have teens take turns reading the piece aloud, breaking for a new reader at each large capital letter. Some stories lend themselves to silent reading. Some lesson plans suggest that teens read aloud to each other in small groups.

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.

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.

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 2 Reflecting on the Gospel

Gospel *SPIRIT* puts the gospel in drama form to invite teens to step into conversation with Jesus and the other people in the stories. Putting the gospel in reader parts allows several teens to take an active part in proclaiming the gospel each week.

Be creative in proclaiming the gospel. Invite members of your group to create a gospel skit or do a contemporary version of the gospel situated in our time. If you have teen liturgies, have teens dramatize the gospel for these eucharistic celebrations.

Invite teens to respond to the gospel. Notice if someone has a question or an insight. Use the questions to interpret the gospel but not to limit faith sharing. If something in the gospel hits a chord, let the Spirit speak in the teens.

Questions Questions ask teens to interpret the gospel and challenge them to make links between the *SPIRIT* story or article, the gospel, and their lives. Talking about the gospel helps teens interpret it at their own level and explore its meaning for them in today's world.

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.

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.

UNIT 1

27th to 33rd Sundays in Ordinary Time,
to the Feast of Christ the King
October 8, 2023—November 26, 2023
Vol. 36, Nos. 1-8

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.

Sundays/Seasons		Gospel/Theme	Teens' Lives	Catholic Faith, Practice
October 8, 2023 27th in Ordinary Time	Unit 1 Called to Be the Body of Christ in Our World.	Matthew 21.33-43 Tenants	Two views, making choices	Humans can choose
October 15, 2023 28th in Ordinary Time		Matthew 22.1-14 Wedding Feast	Welcoming immigrants as friends	Bible: Jesus teaches in parables
October 22, 2023 29th in Ordinary Time		Matthew 22.15-21 God and Caesar	A priest's adventures in justice	Catholic social teaching: obligations of citizens
October 29, 2023 30th in Ordinary Time		Matthew 22.34-40 Great Commandments	Honoring diversity	Christian Life: loving God and neighbor
November 5, 2023 31st in Ordinary Time		Matthew 23.1-12 Humble/Exalted	Encountering Death	Church: the communion of saints
November 12, 2023 32nd in Ordinary Time		Matthew 25.1-13 Wise and Foolish	Prayer	Basics of Catholic social teaching:
November 19, 2023 33rd in Ordinary Time		Matthew 25.14-30, 19-21 What Does God Ask?	Recognizing talents	Christian Life: using talents
November 26, 2023 Feast of Christ the King		Matthew 25.31-46 Works of Mercy	Ending hunger	Catholic social teaching: charity and justice

SCRIPTURE 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.

● Raise questions 1-4. 1. At first, teens may assume that Murph really didn't have a choice and stayed in the truck with Luke. It is important to point out that Murph is capable of choosing not to go along with Luke. The way students perceive the ending will be revealing about how they respond to peer pressure. 2. Teens may identify with Murph, choosing between friends and making difficult decisions; with Pedro and Juan, feeling like outsiders; or with Luke, incapable of understanding difference in others. Have teens explain why they identify with a certain character. 3. Luke feels humiliated that he lost and has to get even. 4. It would take risking the loss of a friend and maybe retaliation.

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.

SPIRIT explores the gospel allegory on page 4 and explores the themes of accepting and refusing invitations in this issue.

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 Luke's 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.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The whole of Matthew 22 reads like the editorial page of the *New York Times*, highlighting the most hotly-debated issues of Jesus' time—Gentiles, taxes, law, resurrection, Messiah. In Sunday's gospel, which comes from this chapter, Pharisees raise the question, "Which of the 613 laws of Torah is greatest?" Torah is the Jewish name for the first five books of Israel's scriptures, which are also called the Pentateuch.

Torah includes three versions of the ten commandments: Exodus 20.1-17, Deuteronomy 5.5-21, Leviticus 19.1-37. These commandments are apodictic law; that is, absolute statements, thou shalt and thou shalt not. Torah also contains collections of case law—legal precedents accumulated as people applied the absolute law in concrete situations at different times. Sunday's first reading is an example of case law—what to do in the case of holding a poor neighbor's cloak as a pledge of repayment.

The Pharisees who question Jesus want to sift through the accumulated 613 laws, resolve conflicts, and identify what's most important. In his response Jesus binds love of God, neighbor, and self irrevocably together. To love God one must love one's neighbor and self; to love one's self one must love God and neighbor. *SPIRIT* explores student actors' experience of performing *The Laramie Project*, a play about how people in Laramie, Wyoming, respond to the 1998 hate crime—the fatal beating of a 22-year-old gay man Matthew Shepard.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will recognize how love of God, neighbor, and self are inseparable.

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

Pray (cover) Invite your teens to bring to mind people and concerns they carry in their hearts and wish to pray for. Invite those who want to express these concerns. End by praying together the prayer on the *SPIRIT* cover, which sets forth the concern of this issue.

Checklists (page 3) Have your teens read and check all the boxes that express their actions and attitudes toward God, neighbor, and self. Hold discussion of their responses until later in the session.

Interview: Not Alone (pages 1-3) Read aloud to your group the sidebar on the cover, left, that recalls the facts surrounding Matthew Shepard's death and the origin of *The Laramie Project* and *The Laramie Project Epilogue*. More information: matthewshepard.org.

- Look with your teens at the cover photo. Actors portray people at Matthew Shepard's funeral. Read aloud the cutline about what is happening in the play.

- Have your teens take turns reading aloud the interview with the student actors and their directors.

- Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Putdowns of each other as gays or lesbians is extremely common in high schools. Encourage your teens to articulate hate rhetoric particular to their school. Help them articulate alternatives.*

2. *Teens have the brain power to see themselves the way others see them and to adapt. Ironically, teens tend to work on their identities by fitting in with groups. Differences carry special weight because they can signal one is in or out of a group. Developing a secure individual identity is the life task of the teen years, which enables one to take up the life task of the young adult years—intimacy.* 3. *The speech is powerful, response opened.*

Checklists: How do I treat myself? God? Others? (page 3).

Have your teens do the three checklists individually. Then have them form small groups and discuss what connections they see among the three categories. For example, if I'm never happy with what I accomplish or with what God does to end evil, how am I likely to treat others.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will explore how love of self affects love of God and neighbor.

Which law is most basic? (page 3) Have four teens proclaim the gospel for your group. Discuss questions 4-5. 4. *Jesus inextricably binds love of self with love of God and neighbor. I treat others with the same respect and generosity I want for myself. Love of neighbor as one's self opens my boundaries to include others and grow; someone who is secure as a self is more able to appreciate diverse others.* 5. *We cannot build world community without valuing all people as God's creatures, without being secure in our selves, and without being open to people very different from ourselves.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will discuss how to live out our obligation to God, neighbor, and self.

Our Catholic Faith: Loving God and neighbor (page 4) Have teens read the feature aloud to each other in groups of four.

Faith in Action (page 4) Respond to items 1-2. Share ideas as a large group.

- Ask teens to think of ways to meet people at school, church, and in their neighborhoods. Meeting people and building relationships allows us to feel more empathy and connection with them. Meeting others is an invaluable skill to build peace and practice justice.

- Invite people from the parish to share how they keep the golden rule.

- Discuss *Faith in Action* items 3-6. Ask for additional ideas. Encourage students to learn more at tolerance.org and bring their research to class.

- To summarize, read aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, page 4. Read more on this topic by using the link to the whole Catechism online.

Concluding Prayer: *Heavenly Creator, open our eyes to see our neighbor, our earth, and ourselves the way you see us.*

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The beatitudes confound us: How can the poor or the sorrowing or the down and out or the persecuted be blessed? The beatitudes reverse what people in Jesus' time and in our time consider important. Jesus insists that in the world of God's blessings the marginalized have center stage, the lowly inherit, peacemakers are children of God and not traitors to the state. Jesus' beatitudes describe a world in which showing mercy, seeking God, taking insults, hungering for justice, grieving for loved ones bring God's blessings among us. The beatitudes have a jubilee perspective, a vision of wholeness that leaves no one out.

The beatitudes immerse us in mystery, especially the mystery of suffering and injustice. In the SPIRIT story "Big Brother" a younger brother learns courage from his older brother's battle with cancer.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people recognize ways people live their faith and influence others.

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

Check In Ask your teens to describe briefly in a sentence or two one of the best things that has happened to them this week.

Prayer: Tree of Faith (cover) Have your group read over the prompts for reflection on the nine leaves of the tree. Explain the activity invites them to reflect on who their ancestors in faith are and who influences the way they live the setting of their hearts. Give them time to think and write names and notes on the leaves.

- Create an interactive dimension by having the young people form two circles of chairs or the floor. The inner circle faces the outer circle. Call out the statement on one of the leaves and invite teens facing each other to share. Give them a minute or a little more if the group needs it. Then have the inner circle rotate one person to the left. Call out a second statement and invite the new pairs to share their responses. Do all nine leaves.

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to breathe in and out with you three times and bring to mind people in their lives or in the news who need healing or who need to be included in their school community. Pray together the prayer at top left, which draws teens into the healing focus of Sunday's gospel and this issue.

Story: Big Brother (pages 2-3) Have teens take turns reading this story aloud as a class. Young people in your group may have friends or family who have struggled with cancer whose stories they can tell in the group. Discuss questions 1-2. 1. *Jason is competitive, strong, and athletic before cancer and chemo treatments weaken and age him, leaving him without hair and looking old.* 2. *He doesn't change in how he thinks Danny should be, insisting he keep pushing his basketball prowess.* 3. *Danny identifies with his brother and doesn't want to play and make headlines when his brother can't.* 4. *Jason teaches Danny not to stop competing because he can't. Danny learns from how Jason contends with cancer how to be truly courageous in real life, not just victorious in sports.*

Reflecting on the Gospel

Objective: The young people will identify the values Jesus expresses in the beatitudes..

The humble will be exalted (page 3) Have five young people proclaim the Gospel—one to read the opening narrative part, and the others to read the beatitudes. Discuss question 5. 5. *Help teens identify people they know whom these sayings describe. Poor people know what it is like to find used clothes and furniture, stretch food, and share what they have. Those sorrowing know the pain of losing people they love. The lowly know what it is like to be invisible and without voice. Those who show mercy, hunger for justice, and make peace do the work of mending breaks in the social fabric; they do God's work. The single-hearted and the persecuted have God as their center in how they live. Help your teens see they live the beatitudes among their peers, when they stand up for a geek who is being picked on or talk to kids invisible to most.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will appreciate the saints as mentors in Christian living.

Our Catholic Faith: We Celebrate the Communion of Saints (page 4) Begin by reading aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Identify the three groups that belong to the communion of saints—*pilgrims on earth, dead being purified, and blessed in heaven*. Read aloud the first four paragraphs to explain and define the communion of saints.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have your teens finish reading page 4 aloud in threes or fours and respond to items 1 and 2.

- Plan ahead to invite parish elders to come to your session or to visit your parish cemetery. Consider inviting elders next week to help teens learn about the faith of people who have gone before them in their parish.

Concluding Prayer Invite your teens to spend a quiet minute recalling an experience of holy communion with all that is (Item 5). Give your teens time to share their experience in pairs. Then pray the prayer on the *SPIRIT* cover again.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Many early Christians expected Jesus to return in glory in their lifetimes. The Romans' destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, fueled people's expectations that the time had come. But by the A.D. 80s when Matthew wrote his gospel, most Christians no longer expected Jesus to return soon.

Sunday's gospel is a parable stamped with concern about how to live during the delay in Jesus' return. Ten young girls wait long into the night for a bridegroom who is delayed in coming. The wedding setting echoes an important biblical metaphor. Marriage symbolizes the relationship between God and the people of Israel and Jesus and the communities of his disciples.

Palestinian wedding customs made delays frequent because a bridegroom went to his bride's home where he had to settle bride prices before he could bring her back to his home and the feast. Sunday's parable asks us how we can best live faithfully in this elastic time between Jesus' first and second comings.

The Herodian lamps from Jesus' time fit in the hand and hold small amounts of oil. People used these lamps all the time and must have known they usually burned out overnight. Not to take extra oil is a dumb, practical mistake like running out of gas when one has seen the gauge near empty. In this issue SPIRIT explores the importance of prayer in our relationship with God.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The teens will recognize the value of reflective prayer.

Ask your teens what the word *zeal* means—an all-consuming, wholehearted commitment. Invite your teens to reflect quietly, identifying needs in our world for which they feel zeal. Invite any who wish to name these aloud. Pray together the prayer, top left.

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

When do I pray? (page 1-2) Have your group read the responses from students at St. Joseph Church in Bakersfield, California, to the question, "When do I pray?" Invite volunteers to respond briefly to the question from their own experience. *Stress that prayer isn't like a down payment on success but more a focusing of our whole person on what God asks of us. A prayer before a game doesn't guarantee a win but focuses our desire to play well and play fair. A prayer before a test may ask for a passing grade to substitute for a failure to study, but it can also call us to set new priorities so study gets more time. Prayer is basic to our relationships with God, each other, and ourselves. In prayer we are who we really are and want to be.*

Article: Soul Walk (page 1) Read this article on meditative walking aloud. Ask your teens to describe similar experiences. Discuss question 1. *No one automatically switches gears from busyness into reflection, give yourself the time and opportunity to make the transition. 2. Jogging integrates our body/mind/spirits. We experience ourselves being alive, attentive, grateful, one with the bigger world.*

Article: Zeal for Prayer Consumes Ignatius (page 2) Have two volunteers read the article on Ignatius Loyola aloud; the second reader starts at the first large capital A. Invite your teens to listen for what zeal means to Ignatius.

● Discuss questions 3-4. 3. *The long recovery gives Ignatius the time to pray. He refocuses his life from putting all his energy into success in soldiering to putting his life energies into continuing Jesus' mission.* 4. *Openended. Feelings, positive or negative, help us to know what we really value and believe. They can be guideposts pointing to the action we need to take.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will consider Jesus' call to be a wise Christian.

Who is wise? Who is foolish? (page 3) Bring teens into a large group to read the gospel. The gospel has seven parts. Have several teens take the wise and foolish girl parts. Have teens proclaim or act out their parts in the gospel.

● Discuss questions 5-7. 5. *Openended. Examples—not studying for a test, staying up late before an important event the next day.* 6. *Light often represents knowledge and presence. The oil is the means to keeping the light burning. For Christians it represents prayer and reflection that keeps fueling our alertness and presence to God and the value of one another.* 7. *Openended. Reflecting on daily happenings can help us change for the better as we notice what gives us life and what we regret.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will practice praying the examen.

Prayer Practice: Pray the Examen (page 3) Lead your group step-by-step through the practice of the examen. This prayer method has been used by many since the time of Ignatius as a way to come to see, over time, where God is present and working in their lives. Have pencils and paper ready for teens to reflect by writing. Have them choose either the most/least grateful question or one of the others to reflect on. Make this process solely a personal one.

Objective: The young people will examine key themes of Catholic social teaching.

Our Catholic Faith: Catholic Social Teaching (page 4) Have your teens work either in small groups or as a whole group. Read aloud this feature, which describes eight key principles of Catholic social teaching.

Faith in Action (page 4) Lead your teens in deciding if small groups want to work on any of the suggestions or if the whole group wants to focus on one issue and try to follow through on it during the year.

Concluding Prayer Invite teens into a circle to share their insights about prayer. Ask them to sit quietly and reflect for a couple of minutes about what or who stirs them to feel zeal, what or who takes their time and life energies. Pray the opening prayer together from page 1.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Matthew 25, the chapter from which the last two gospels of the Church year come, is dynamite. This Sunday's gospel, the parable of the talents (25.14-30), comes before the description of final judgment (25.31-46) in which Jesus separates good people from bad on the basis of who has fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger. The chapter holds out to us a clear picture of Christian discipleship.

The parable of the talents challenges Christians to recognize that Jesus entrusts us with the world and to invest ourselves in caring for the human community and world in his absence. The works of mercy gospel for next Sunday challenges us to see Jesus in those around us, especially in the least of our brothers and sisters.

This week's feature distinguishes between first- and second-level talents. Second-level are the special capabilities individuals have for such activities as art or logic or mechanics. First-level talents are the basic capacities all humans have for showing mercy, reconciling differences, sharing, making human and Christian community. The gospel challenges us to risk fully developing both kinds of talents. Developing compassion and the ability to put ourselves in others' shoes are essential. In the *SPIRIT* story, a teen decides which talents to develop.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will identify ways they can invest themselves.

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

Pray (cover) Invite your teens to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Then pray the prayer on the cover together, which introduces the gospel theme of using talents.

Icebreaker: Now that your group is getting more familiar with one another, you may want to shift where your teens sit. Use the *Seat Shifting* activity on page 25 of *Icebreakers* or have your teens line up single file according to height (or birthdays) without talking. Once they form the line, have them sit in that order and form a circle for this session.

Story: There's Always Next Year (pages 1-3) Divide teens into small groups of four. Have each group read the story aloud. Have teens answer the questions in their small groups first and then return to the large group.

● Discuss questions 1-3. *1. Some may share stories about sports while others may talk about playing an instrument, learning another language, performing in a play, or participating in speech team. Teens sacrifice time with friends, concentration on study, family time, and development of other talents. However, teens also benefit from increased self confidence and awareness, new friends, and different experiences that come from participation.*

2. Chris quits soccer because he feels his talents have not been recognized. His coaches bench him in important games despite his hard work. Chris takes a risk and chooses to develop other talents rather than continue with

soccer after his frustrating season. Ask teens what they would do in a similar situation. Do they think Chris is a quitter or smart to develop other talents? 3. Chris has other talents to develop. Openended.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will respond to the call Jesus speaks in the parable of the talents.

What does God ask? (page 2) Have five teens proclaim the gospel, taking the different parts.

● Discuss questions 4-6 in a large group. *4. Use them. We have talents so we can care for the world and its people. Jesus asks us to take risks, such as using our talents to write and submit a story to SPIRIT. 5. The third servant buries his talent out of fear. He prefers the sure thing of keeping his talent to the risk of investing. 6. Invite teens to identify talents they have taken no risks to develop. Let them run with this question. A problem that afflicts middle-class folks is unwillingness to try what we are not sure we can succeed at. We don't try out for basketball because we may not make the team or we find working with the homeless too discouraging because the problem persists. Peer pressures, fear of being laughed at, low self-esteem can contribute to burying talents, too.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore who helps them develop their first-level talents and whom they can help.

Our Catholic Faith: What are talents for? (page 4) Introduce the difference between first- and second-level talents. First level talents are those everyone can develop; second-level are those only some people have. Use Chris in the story as an example. His first level talents make him captain—he's friendly, enthusiastic, hard working, accepts rookies, drives to games. His second level talents are stronger in music than soccer.

● Give your group time to read this feature aloud in threes or fours and name people who have helped them develop first-level talents.

Faith in Action (page 4) Suggest the teens do items 1 and 2, especially 2. In order for your teens to generate a list of their unused second-level talents, item 3, have them do affirmation groups. Form groups of four. Invite a teen to initiate talking about someone who has helped him or her recognize a talent, and let one teen's input spark others' memories and recognition.

● After all teens in your group have talked, pass out slips of paper for teens to identify and write down unused second-level talents.

● In small groups, have teens discuss possible results of using all of these talents. When teens have put their slips in a container, have them follow the directions in item 3 to consider how the world might use their talents.

Concluding Prayer Gather in a prayer circle. Have a volunteer read the poem "Our Deepest Fear," page 4. Invite your young people to share lines they like from the poem. Then have each say a way they want to manifest the glory of God within them, a way their light can shine.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Sunday's gospel compares the final judgment to a shepherd separating sheep from goats. The sheep are people who have fed the hungry, given drink to people who are thirsty, sheltered the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned. These works of mercy are actions we can all do but we frequently neglect.

The theology of this parable depends on both the mystery of the incarnation and the mystery of redemption. In becoming one of us in the incarnation, God's Son identifies with all of us. How we treat the least among us becomes the measure of how we treat God's Son. Love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable.

Matthew places this parable just before Jesus' passion in the flow of the gospel narrative. In his passion Jesus himself becomes the least among us, suffering the kind of execution aimed to shame and subdue rebellious slaves. This is the mystery of redemption. Jesus is the Son of Man, the king who sits on a royal throne to judge all the peoples of the earth. He is God. Yet, he is the crucified messiah, who identifies with even the lowliest human being.

SPIRIT explores the vocation of Rev. David Beckmann, Lutheran missionary economist and President of Bread for the World, who challenges Christians to end hunger. In *Our Catholic Faith*, *Spirit* distinguishes between the work of charity and the work of justice.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

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

Pray (cover) Lead teens in breathing in and out deeply three times together. Invite them to mention people in their lives or in the news for whom they wish to pray. Pray together the prayer at top left, which introduces the theme of working for justice and peace.

Objective: The young people will appreciate the work of advocacy to end hunger.

Article: Advocate to End Hunger (pages 1-3) Use the cover photo and cutline to introduce David Beckmann. Invite your group to listen in the article for what the work of advocacy is. If your parish or school works with Bread for the World, have leaders join your class for this session.

- Read aloud the first three paragraphs to introduce the article. Have volunteers take turns reading sections aloud to the group up to the capital H. Instruct teens to raise questions during the reading if they don't understand something. Ask if they might want to study hunger issues and join in writing letters.
- Have your teens complete reading the article aloud in threes or fours and discuss questions 1-4. Then bring the group together to share their reflections.
- Questions 1-4: 1. *Advocacy is lobbying, is working for policies and structures that help alleviate hunger. The works of mercy offer direct service to people in need. Page 4 develops this distinction.* 2. *Openended. Young people like to put their faith into action. This is one way to learn about hunger issues, how government policies help and hinder. The organization works to be bipartisan*

and ecumenical. 3. *Beckmann's family were devout Lutherans who stressed God's love for him, who joined in civil rights work, who knew poverty firsthand, and put their faith into practice.* 4. *As a pastor Beckmann has deep religious values and biblical background. As an economist he tracks and analyzes economic indicators on a global scale. As an advocate he has skill shaping policies to work for poor people.*

Bishops' Pastoral: Table of Plenty (page 2) Talk about each of the four legs of the table. Identify examples of each leg. Government programs include food stamps, WIC, Earned Income Tax Credit, school lunches. Businesses give percentages to charities, take part in Habitat and other groups. Have teens suggest ways their parents take part at work and what their families do. Identify parish efforts.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will name the works of mercy and wrestle with all they ask of Christians today.

Who inherits God's kingdom? (page 3) Have individual volunteers take the parts of Narrator, Jesus, and King. Have half of the rest of your group take the part of the just and half the part of the unjust. Proclaim the gospel together.

- Discuss questions 5-7. 5. *Have teens develop lists or posters for each work of mercy. Stress work teens can participate in. Start with parish, school, and local groups. A food pantry needs help with a food drive, a tutoring program needs volunteers, a school library needs books, a neighborhood makes welcome baskets for immigrants. Encourage teens to research national organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, H2O, Rotary Clubs, Get on the Bus. Use the table illustration.* 6. *Visit PovertyUSA, Network, Bread for the World, which lobby nationally. The Spirit website identifies groups among its social justice resources.* 7. *Encourage teens to identify what they see in front of them.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will examine how actions for charity and justice work together.

Our Catholic Faith: Walking with justice (page 4) Have your teens take turns reading this feature aloud. Invite their responses, especially ways they do the acts of mercy in their lives.

- Use the actions identified in the two feet shapes to talk through the differences between the work of charity or mercy and the work of justice. Use local examples of each kind of work that teens do or can take part in.
- The activity *I Always, I Sometimes, I Rarely, I Never* in *Icebreakers for Teens Groups* (page 50) can help teens explore their experience of people in poverty.

Faith in Action (page 4) Divide teens into fours. Have them respond to items 1, 2, and 3 as individuals, and talk about each idea as a possible group experience. When finished, report back into their large group. Discuss the possibility of setting up a box for edible leftovers at their school.

Concluding Prayer *God of mercy and compassion, open our hearts to all creation. Help us to see with eyes of love.*

UNIT 2:

1st to 4th Sundays of Advent
December 3, 2023—December 24, 2023
Vol. 36, Nos. 9-12

Each year just after the busiest shopping day of the year (the Friday after Thanksgiving), the Church celebrates the 1st Sunday of Advent and begins a new liturgical year. This Advent we begin the Cycle B scriptures readings from the lectionary, which come mainly from the first gospel to be written—Mark.

In our North American culture the religious messages of the Advent season intermix with our consumer culture. “Peace, Joy, Sale!” says one Christmas window. Ours is not the only culture dulled to God’s presence. In the gospels of the Advent season, we hear prophetic voices from the Old Testament and from the gospels insisting, “Our God is here,” the theme of this four-week unit.

The word *Advent* means *coming*. The season of Advent celebrates three comings: the coming of God among us in the birth of Jesus; Jesus’ promised coming at the end of time; and Jesus’ coming in word, sacrament, and the experiences of our lives today.

The gospel for the 1st Sunday of Advent always looks toward the

end of time. Mark’s gospel insists in the passage we read on Sunday, November 27, that we don’t know the day or the hour Jesus will come. The gospel challenges us to watch, to stay awake. The door of the future opens every moment.

In the science fiction story “The Sky Is Falling,” *SPIRIT* taps into current threats to the capacity of Earth’s life systems to sustain our human overconsumption. This theme raises concern about the future and the end results of our lifestyles.

In the gospels of both the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of Advent the Church hears the prophetic voice of John the Baptist, whose preaching prepares the way for Jesus’ ministry. *SPIRIT* urges young people to wake up to the meaning in traditions, and to begin to see, judge, and act as prophets themselves.

A teenager accepts a call from God in the gospel for the 4th Sunday of Advent. The angel Gabriel asks the teenage Mary to be the mother of God’s son. Her prophetic yes is a model of faith for every Christian. She agrees that God can take flesh

in her womb. She will care for this child, rock and feed him, walk with him in his life. Our God is here, one of us, in Mary’s child.

The first readings for the first three Sundays of Advent come from the book of Isaiah. This book contains the prophetic words of at least three different prophets in three different centuries. Each adds chapters speaking for God in their own time. The Isaiah of chapters 40-55 comforts Israel in the 540s B.C. and calls the exiles home on the highway God is making through the wilderness.

The Isaiah of chapters 56-66 speaks to the people who are rebuilding Israel as a religious community in the 400s B.C. This Isaiah promises a Spirit-filled prophet who will bring good news of God’s favor to the poor. We Christians see Jesus as this prophet and take his mission to the poor as our own.

Every generation has its own work to recognize that our God is here. Every generation is an unfinished chapter in the unfolding history of God’s people.

Sundays/Seasons		Gospel/Theme	Teens’ Lives	Catholic Faith, Practice
December 3, 2023 1st Sunday of Advent	Unit 2 Waking Up to God’s Nearness	Mark 13.33-37 Stay Awake	Caring for our earth	Prayer: staying awake to life
December 10, 2023 2nd Sunday of Advent		Mark 1.1-8 Prepare the Way	Christmas traditions	Catholic traditions, Las Posada
December 17, 2023 3rd Sunday of Advent		John 1.6-8, 19-28 John the Baptist	A peer as prophet	See, judge, act
December 24, 2023 4th Sunday of Advent		Luke 1.26-38 Annunciation	Praying with Mary	We are God’s home

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The liturgical year begins on the 1st Sunday of Advent. In Advent we begin a new lectionary cycle of scripture readings. This Sunday we begin Cycle B during which we read semi-continuously from Mark's gospel on the Sundays of Ordinary Time. Strangely, however, we read from near the end of Mark's gospel, 13.33-37, this Sunday before reading Mark 1.1-8 next Sunday. Like people who read the end of a mystery book before deciding to finish reading it, the Church imagines how the mystery of God's coming among us turns out in the end before we begin exploring the mystery from the beginning.

Mark 13 is a chapter set apart in Mark's gospel by its apocalyptic character. Apocalyptic is a highly-symbolic kind of writing that pictures good and evil locked in a battle that good will win. In Christian apocalyptic Jesus is the savior, the one who will come again in glory. His second coming will be the end of the world—its goal and fulfillment. Mark 13 is the only apocalyptic chapter in Mark's gospel. It comes just before Mark's telling of the passion in chapters 14 and 15; it anticipates the challenge of following Jesus in the post-Easter church.

In the science fiction story "The Sky Is Falling," *SPIRIT* taps into current threats to the capacity of Earth's life systems to sustain our human overconsumption. This theme raises concern about the future and the end results of our lifestyles.

NOTE: As a Christmas gift for your teens, consider asking their parents to write letters in which they express their dreams for and appreciation of their sons and daughters. Write a letter to parents to suggest doing this. If you aren't sure all parents will come through so everyone in your group gets a letter, suggest parents do a letter as a gift they give to their teen at home.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will recognize God is present from beginning to end of creation.

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

Pray (cover) Have your teens make an Advent wreath for your gathering space, or gather for your prayer around the Advent wreath in your church. Light one candle. Invite your teens to mention people for whom they want to pray during the Advent season. Use your *SPIRIT* issue to pray together the prayer at top left.

Icebreaker: Consider using Arches of Trust, *Icebreakers for Teen Groups*, page 35.

Story: The Sky Is Falling (pages 1-3) To introduce the story and theme of Sunday's gospel, have your teens use the cover visual and story title to suggest what the story is about. Invite them to read and respond to the quote from Pope Benedict on page 2 about global warming.

● Have your teens take turns reading a few paragraphs at a time and respond to the story. Raise questions 1-4 as you need them to prompt discussion. 1. *Life on Ariel's planet is threatened; people are reluctant to explore the threat or to make any changes in their lives to deal with the threat.* 2. *Real*

change can be difficult. Sometimes it seems easier to bury our heads in the sand rather than face the truth about a situation. 3. *Openended.* 4. *The nursery story is a tale of mistaken belief that disaster is imminent. People are reacting to the threat of climate change in our world today the way they do in the story: some believe it, some don't.*

● Conclude by asking if any teens have visited the website mentioned on page 2 or computed their carbon footprint in another way. Have them read the box on page 3. Invite them to share all they know about changing our lifestyles to help sustain Earth. Perhaps they will want to take the St. Francis Pledge.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will appreciate Jesus' call to stay awake to who he is.

Stay Awake (page 3) Have two teens take the parts of Jesus 1 and Jesus 2, and proclaim the gospel.

● Discuss question 5-6. 5. *Encourage teens to talk personally about what keeps them awake to the significance of life and to God's presence in their lives. Perhaps activities in nature such as canoeing, backpacking, skiing awaken them to God's presence, or quiet time to reflect, or worship with other teens on retreats, or being with friends. If some teens find Sunday Mass puts them to sleep, encourage them to get involved with their church to improve the music.* 6. *Openended.*

● Have two students read the gospel a second time. Take a reflective minute to have group members echo aloud the words or phrases in the gospel that most touch them.

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will evaluate what keeps them awake as Christians.

Our Catholic Faith: Stay Awake/Wake Up (page 4) Ask your teens to identify ways their faith in Jesus or in God has changed from when they were children. Explain that in Sunday's gospel Jesus anticipates his disciples will have to grow in their commitment to him. Read the opening paragraph aloud. Divide your group into fours to read the rest of page 4.

Faith in Action (page 4) Ask them to share one way to stay awake to what is important in life. Invite them to share kinds of prayer each likes. Perhaps some do centering prayer or have Advent customs in their families. Invite the small groups to share their ideas with the large group. Stress the importance of participating in parish worship.

Two Feet of Charity and Justice Both feet invite teens to use the Internet to learn about pressing human needs in the two-thirds world. Identify who can research the recommended sources and help the rest of the group plan ways to reach out to people in need during the Advent season.

Concluding Prayer Invite teens to name one person or insight for which each feels grateful. Pray together again the prayer on the *SPIRIT* cover.

Scripture Background

John the Baptist preaches *repentance*. The word in Greek, *metanoia*, means *a change of thinking, a change of heart in one's attitude toward God*. In English the word *conversion* means *to turn around, transform, get a life*. In Sunday's gospel, John the Baptist calls people to turn their attitudes toward God around, to open a path for God in their lives. He baptizes all those who want to straighten out and transform their lives. John points the way toward Jesus. He heralds one after him who will do more than offer a cleansing bath in the river. Jesus will plunge people into the life of God's Spirit.

The gospel writer Mark identifies John the Baptist with Second Isaiah, the prophet who called the exiled people of Israel to recognize God was at work in the victories of Cyrus the Persian. Cyrus defeated their captors, the Babylonians, about 540 B.C., allowed the exiled people to return home and rebuild their temple, and in doing so, rescued our ancestors in faith from oblivion as a people. Both Second Isaiah and the Baptist are prophetic voices in their time, voices in the wilderness, calling people to God.

In this issue *SPIRIT* invites teens to reflect on what Christmas traditions mean. The research in the book *Soul Searching*, by Smith and Denton, finds American Catholic teens more like cultural than committed Catholics, more like the voice in the second of the two stories about traditions in this issue.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will identify the values underlying their Christmas traditions.

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

Pray (cover) Lead teens in breathing in and out deeply three times together. Have them light two candles on your Advent wreath. Invite them to mention people in their lives or in the news for whom they wish to pray. Pray together the prayer, top left, which introduces the theme of recognizing God's presence in all others.

Story: It's a Tradition (pages 1-2) Introduce the story by explaining it tells about how a family tradition originated. Ask your teens to think about family Christmas traditions they have as they listen to the story.

- Have volunteers read the story aloud, changing readers at each paragraph that begins in large, red words.
- Invite your group to respond to the story by describing examples of their own family Christmas traditions, their meaning and origin—question 1. Deepen the discussion by raising question 2. *2. The spirit of giving at Christmas arises from Jesus' gift of himself to us. Many families make gifts to poor families, invite people without families to their own celebrations, celebrate Jesus' birth with a manger at home.*

Story: It's a Tradition? (pages 2-3) Author Kate Maruyama writes this second story from the point of view of a teenager in Japan who participates in family traditions without knowing all they mean. Ask a strong reader to read aloud for the group. Invite the rest to weigh how close this teen's reflection is to their own. Discuss question 3-4. *3. Openended. 4. The author doesn't know the meanings of the traditions in which she joins.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize John the Baptist as a prophet.

A clear path for God's coming (page 3) Have five teens proclaim the gospel for your class or group. Ask volunteers to express John the Baptist's message in their own words. Discuss questions 5-6. *5. John the Baptist is a prophet who reads the signs of his times as we must read the signs of our times. He calls people to turn to God and insists someone filled with the Spirit is coming. We feel the Spirit of Jesus' self-giving in many ways at Christmas. 6. Encourage teens to express how Christmas brings out what they believe about Jesus.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore the origins of three Advent traditions—the crèche, Our Lady of Guadalupe, La Posada.

Our Catholic Faith: Why Traditions? (page 4) Have your teens work in pairs or small groups. Read aloud this feature, which describes the origins of three Advent traditions they may or may not be familiar with. The feature goes on to explain the tradition of Eucharist as Catholic sacramental tradition.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have your teens consider the questions in their small groups. Join together as a large group for discussion. Consider having research books available to look up traditions of unknown or unclear origin. Or have the young people do the research on their own and report back to the group. As a group, brainstorm possible new traditions and their meanings.

Concluding Prayer Invite teens to name one family or community tradition they cherish. Pray together again the prayer on the *SPIRIT* cover.

Scripture Background

John's gospel begins with the dramatic prologue describing the preexistent Word who was with God from the beginning and who in Jesus becomes flesh and dwells among us. The first three verses of Sunday's gospel break into the prologue to describe a man sent from God to testify to the light coming into the world. This man is John the Baptist. The light is Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate in the darkest time of year in the northern hemisphere.

After its prologue ends in verse 18, the fourth gospel begins with the testimony of John the Baptist that one stands among us whom we do not recognize. His testimony forms the rest of Sunday's gospel. It occurs as priests and levites from Jerusalem press John about who he is—the messiah or a prophet. The Baptist insists he not the messiah but he does identify himself as a prophet by quoting Second Isaiah, "I am a voice in the desert, crying out, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" (40.3).

Sunday's first reading comes from a prophet whose words form a third installment in the book of Isaiah. This prophet speaks of God's nearness to the people who were trying to rebuild their community in the 400s B.C. The lectionary wants us to hear in Third Isaiah's words a description of Jesus' mission—"The Spirit of God is upon me, for God has anointed me and sent me to bring good news to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from God." Jesus is this Spirit-filled prophet who comes to free and favor the people of his time. Jesus' identity is crucial for Christians, for we accept in baptism the lifelong call to let Jesus' values reform ours, to join Jesus by serving others.

In this issue *SPIRIT* explores how the influence teens have on one another can be prophetic.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

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

Pray (cover) Have the teens light three candles on your Advent wreath. Invite them to mention people in their lives or in the news for whom they wish to pray. Pray the prayer at top left.

Objective: The young people will identify conflicting values they experience in the Advent season.

Icebreaker: Who do you see living the spirit of Advent? (cover)

Have your teens use the cover collage to identify conflicting values they experience in preparing to celebrate Christmas in our consumer culture. *The crèche and Advent wreath point to Jesus' incarnation. The lighted train points to market strategies to get shoppers into stores. Cookies mark family traditions. The Salvation Army bellringer symbolizes giving to people in need.*

- Ask what photos your teens might put in the star shapes, what slogans they might add to the tree shape.

Objective: The young people will recognize they can have prophetic, positive influence on one another.

Interview: Witness to the Light (pages 2-3) Read aloud the opening five paragraphs to introduce Brian Smith. Call attention to questions 4 and 5, which ask them to think about who is a prophet in their school as Brian is in his.

- Have your group read the interview aloud in threes or fours and discuss questions 1, 4-5. Then have the small groups report their reflections to the whole group.

- Give the whole group time to journal or reflect quietly on questions 2 and 3, which are personal, openended questions.

Questions 1, 4-5: *1 Brian witnesses to the light of his musical and creative abilities. These are gifts uniquely his which he practices and risks using to perform. He witnesses to integrity, living what he raps and sings, living without doing drugs, working hard at athletics and academics. 4. Openended. Encourage teens to talk about peers who influence them for good. 5. The desire to belong and fit in is strong in the teen years. Friends who value study, performing, sports, youth groups have a prophetic, positive influence.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will articulate who they are as Christians.

A bright light in the darkness (page 3) Ask your teens to share as a group all they know and remember about who John the Baptist is. Then assign the reader parts Narrator 1, Narrator 2, and John the Baptist. Divide remaining teens to take the parts of the levites, priests, and Pharisees. Have your teens proclaim the gospel as a group.

- Discuss question 6. *6. John the Baptist witnesses to the light that comes into the world in Jesus, God becomes human—the incarnation. He is a prophet preparing the way for Jesus, preparing people to open their hearts to God.*

- Give teens time to journal in response to question 7. Invite individuals who wish to share their responses.

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will see, judge, and act as prophets.

Our Catholic Faith: Listen to the prophets among us (page 4) Read aloud the first four paragraphs on Advent. Then read aloud the cutline below the photo of Craig Kielburger, an example of a prophet during his teen years and have group members share what they know about the work of Free the Children. Read the suggestions for Advent actions in the two feet.

Faith in Action (page 4) Invite your teens to describe what a prophet does. Have your teens form working groups of three or four. Read aloud paragraph five about who prophets are and their work. Have them write the words *see*, *judge*, and *act* on a large sheet of paper and leave space between the words. If any teens are already working on a justice issue, have them work together.

- Have working groups read the feature, then select a justice issue, and work together to plan what they need to *see* in order to *judge* and *act* on their justice issue. What facts can they gather where? What do they want to see firsthand? What judgments have others made about the issue? What organizations work on this issue? How can teens become involved?

Concluding Prayer Create a litany by having your teens name contemporary prophets and describe their cause or message. Have the group respond to each: You call us to see, judge, and act.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Sunday's gospel tells the story of Mary's call to become the Mother of God. The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that God favors her, that the Holy One is with her—"Hail, Mary, full of grace." These words trouble this young teenager less than the angel's second announcement, "You will conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus." Mary wants to know how this can possibly happen, since she says, "I do not know a man." The angel explains that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, and the child will be the holy child of the Most High.

The familiar words of this call narrative hold deep theological truths. When Mary says yes to the angel's announcement, she becomes *Theotokos*, the Godbearer, the one in whom God becomes human, the one whose faith makes a home in herself and in the world for God's own child. In Jesus, God becomes Emmanuel, God with us.

Mary gave God her flesh in her womb. She also made a home for Jesus. She nursed the child, rocked him, played with him, picked him up when he started learning to walk, taught him words, protected him from danger. When he began his mission, she believed in him, followed him, held him dead at the foot of the cross, and prayed among the community of believers who experienced Jesus' continuing risen presence with them. Mary made inner space for the Spirit to work in her and bring the child to birth, but also made a public commitment to the healing work of her Son.

In the *SPIRIT* story a woman finds in Mary a strong support who wears overalls, work boots, and gloves and helps her lift the weights that help her recover after an accident. *SPIRIT* invites teens to use Mary's giving birth and making a home for Jesus as images of how God is at work in their lives.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

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

Pray (cover) Invite your teens to bring to mind people and concerns they carry in their hearts and wish to pray for as Christmas approaches. Invite those who want to express these concerns to do so. Pray together the prayer on the *SPIRIT* cover.

Objective: The young people will appreciate Mary, Jesus' mother, as a strong and inspiring support.

Story: To Roll the Stone Away (pages 1-3) Invite anyone in your group who has done physical therapy to overcome an injury to tell about the pain and process. Have your teens use the photos to imagine Mary, Jesus' mother, in jeans, boots, and work gloves, as someone who works out and is strong. This is both a Mary story and a resurrection story.

● Have your teens read the story aloud in threes and fours and discuss how they like the Mary for the new millennium. Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Imagining focuses the brain in a place different from pain. Praying calls all one's courage and strength into use and invites God's help to do what seems impossible alone. Mary is another real woman who digs in and helps.* 2.

She can't take any physical functions for granted. She has to learn to draw her spiritual power to aid her physical workouts. She becomes a more integrated, strong person. 3. *The power of prayer and Mary's support are ours to draw on.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize Mary is a teen when she becomes Jesus' mother.

Mary welcomes a child (page 2) Consider playing a beautiful musical version of Mary's story, an *Ave Maria*, or a Christmas carol such as "What Child Is This?" Have three teens proclaim the gospel.

● Discuss questions 4-5, as well as any other questions the teens raise. 4. *Mary chooses having a baby, raising the baby, believing in her Son, suffering through his suffering, believing God can do the impossible even when death seemed to have won.* 5. *Mary's yes forever makes her not only a mother but a mother of a prophetic figure, the mother of God. Her faith in Jesus will shape her life; it will stretch her as his prophetic ministry stretches all. It will give her a place at the center of the new community that gathers in his name; indeed, she is among those in the upper room on Pentecost. Like Mary we must make a home for God in our lives, listen to Jesus' teaching, imitate his example, and give of ourselves as he does.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore how Mary's identity as the Godbearer exemplifies their own call.

Our Catholic Faith: We are God's home (page 4) To introduce this feature on Mary as a model believer, read aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on page 3 beside the picture of Mary and child Jesus. Have your teens form threes or fours and read the feature aloud together. Ask teens in each group to say a way they bring Emmanuel into the world.

Faith in Action (page 4) Help your teens prepare to celebrate the Advent Prayer by writing a contemporary verse for the song *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. Bring materials for teens to make Christmas cards and draw pictures.

● If you have invited parents to write letters to their teens as suggested in the guide for the 1st Sunday of Advent, consider inviting parents to join the group and distribute their letters.

Concluding Advent Prayer (page 4) Light four candles on your Advent wreath. Pray and celebrate the Advent Prayer together. Plan to sing your teens' verses to *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* or another Christmas carol at the end.

UNIT 3:

Epiphany to 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 7, 2024—February 11, 2024
Vol. 36, Nos. 13-18

Jesus' Mission, Our Ministry

This unit turns with the liturgical year to focus on the first days of Jesus' public ministry. When John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, the heavens split open, the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus, and a voice affirms Jesus is God's beloved Son and servant. *SPIRIT* provides an article on the whole of Mark's gospel as the Church begins the cycle B readings.

The gospels of the 2nd through the 6th Sundays of Ordinary Time bring us the dynamic opening days of Jesus' ministry from the first chapter of Mark's gospel. Jesus preaches from village to village in Galilee, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."

Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who respond immediately. He raises up Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, and she gives her life to the new community as a disciple. He heals the people who gather at his door and frees them from demons. He heals a leper who tells everyone about what Jesus did for him. Jesus' ministry of preaching, healing, and freeing people from demons becomes a mission he hands on to his followers and to us.

As the Sunday gospels narrate the first days of Jesus' ministry, *SPIRIT* invites teens to explore their own call to ministry. His mission continues as our ministry today. How does God call us?

The *SPIRIT* stories in this unit describe many ways—in making a pilgrimage, in experiencing life in a global village, in seeking help with a mother's drinking, in surviving the first year of high school, in peer ministry. As Jesus calls disciples in the gospels, he calls us to come, see who he is, stay with him, and follow his example of reaching out to others.

Sundays/Seasons		Gospel/Theme	Teens' Lives	Our Catholic Faith
January 7, 2024 Epiphany of the Lord	Unit 3 Jesus' Mission, Our Ministry	Matthew 2.1-12 Beloved Son	Who is God?	The Holy Spirit animates our lives.
January 14, 2024 2nd in Ordinary Time		John 1.35-42 Come and See	Experiencing life in a global village	How does God call us? Vocation
January 21, 2024 3rd in Ordinary Time		Mark 1.14-20 Jesus Calls	Mark's Gospel	Jesus' new community.
January 28, 2024 4th in Ordinary Time		Mark 1.21-28 Jesus Frees	When parents fail	Catholic social teaching: No longer bystanders
February 4, 2024 5th in Ordinary Time		Mark 1.29-39 Jesus' Ideal Disciple	Finding support: teen pregnancy	Jesus' women disciples
February 11, 2024 6th in Ordinary Time		Mark 1.40-45 Jesus Heals a Leper	Bullying	Jesus calls us to minister.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The feast of the Epiphany celebrates the coming of the peoples of the world to Jesus. In Matthew's gospel, written for Gentile Christians in the AD 80s, the journey of the three magi to worship Jesus is a longer story (12 verses) than Jesus' birth and naming (8 verses).

Did the visit really happen? Did a star appear? Matthew didn't write to answer these questions we contemporary readers ask. The events in this gospel tell the true story of Gentiles responding in the early missionary decades of the Church's life. Jesus' disciples spread his good news around the Mediterranean. Matthew writes after the Romans put down the Jewish uprising in A.D. 70, destroying the temple and city. The original Christian community fled the city. Herod's interest in killing any potential competitors for his throne reflects the growing conflict between Christian Jews and Jews who follow other rabbis after the temple no longer stood as a place where all could worship together.

The magi from the east represent all non-Jewish peoples—the Gentiles. Only Matthew tells this story, the Gentiles' Christmas story. The magi's reputation for wisdom and learning shows in their study of the stars. Their journey to find the significance of a new star rising moves them from observing the natural world to accepting the revelation that for Christians is ultimate truth: in Jesus, God becomes human.

The magi embody the Gentile readiness and openness to honor the holy where they find it. The journey of the magi and their encounter with the Christ child change the magi. The magi interest people today because they are seekers. They seek God and meaning in the natural world. They observe a new star and wonder what it means. Telescopes, microscopes, and colliders have helped scientists today discover the long 13.7 story of evolution that unfolds from the big bang. In this issue *SPIRIT* explores teens searching and thinking about who God is.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will share their experience of who God is.

Music: See *SPIRIT XTRA* for music to fit the theme of this Sunday's gospel.

Pray: (cover) Invite your group to look closely at the *SPIRIT* cover. The background is a NASA photo of stars and space. The words tell the story of the birth of the cosmos as science now helps us tell it.

- Assign a teen to read aloud the year and description of each of the 11 moments in our history that this litany identifies. Have the group find the statement at the top, "We live in the mystery of God who gives life," which all will say after each statement in the litany. Pray the litany of evolving creation.

Objective: The young people will appreciate their experience of God moments and the value of seeking to understand who God is.

Story: Seeking G*D (pages 2-3) Invite your group to imagine themselves as the human figure in the photo on page 3. Give them a couple of minutes of quiet to use the photo to surface questions they have about God and the cosmos. Ask what stars symbolize for them.

- Introduce the story by explaining it is a conversation about a term paper topic and a character named Lane who has chosen his term paper topic. Have two teens read the first column and second up to the red capital letter.

- The conversation that follows has five friends talking. Have five teens take the parts of Stacy, Lane, Nick, Jorge, and Camille.

- Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Stacy thinks Lane just wants to be different in how he thinks about God. Her confirmation program has influenced Stacy to choose the Christian faith in which she has grown up. Lane thinks religion prevents questioning and progressing. Families and communities influence how teens pray and worship.* 2. *Invite teens to explain whose ideas are like their own. As examples of God moments to help teens recall their own, use Stacy's description of feeling God with her and Jorge's ice fishing on a lake at sunset.* 3. *Openended.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people recognize the magi symbolize Gentile peoples seeking and finding Jesus.

Gospel: All nations worship Jesus (cover) Have five teens take parts and proclaim the gospel for your group. Invite them to respond to the familiar story by telling what struck them especially in this hearing. Discuss questions 4-5. 4. *The magi seek meaning in studying and observing the stars. When they see something new, they want to find what it means. The wonders of the natural world commonly inspire people today to feel awe. Evolution has added to the wonder we experience and the challenge to conscious beings to participate in creating a just and holy human community.* 5. *Talking stimulates and clarifies thinking. Talking about our questions about and experiences of God often leads to sharing faith.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Our Catholic Faith: The Spirit animates our lives (page 4) Ask your group what the spirit is like in their school. Ask how they take the temperature of school spirit, its highs and lows. What are the indicators? Explain that this feature explores how the Holy Spirit animates our lives. Read the first paragraph aloud; then invite a strong reader to read aloud each of the seven paragraphs to the whole group. Ask for questions or comments after each paragraph before choosing a new reader. Give your teens time to use the checklist on page 4 to reflect on their own experiences of Spirit. Then, have them pair up to share with one other person an experience of Spirit. Give each person two minutes to talk.

- Invite the group as a whole to respond to *Live It!* 2.

Concluding Prayer Gather your teens in a circle. Tell them you will lead a prayer about the activity of the Spirit that they can add to. *Spirit of God, you are always with us. In our sorrows* (add on). *In our joys* (add on). *In our angers* (add on). *In our hopes* (add on). Exchange a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

"What do you seek?" Jesus asks Andrew and a friend when he notices them hanging around him in Sunday's gospel. Andrew answers with a question, "Where are you staying?" "Come and see," Jesus says simply. This dialog makes the way God calls us seem simple. Come, see, stay. These familiar verbs outline a whole process of becoming Jesus' disciples.

One finds Jesus' way by walking it every day. Andrew, Peter, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind become Jesus' disciples by staying with him through misunderstanding, bewilderment, his death—to the relationship he promises in his farewell address. "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. You are in me, and you are in the Father."

Andrew and Peter hear Jesus' call in Sunday's gospel through relationships. Andrew is a disciple of John the Baptist. John the Baptist points out Jesus to Andrew and another disciple as the lamb of God. Because Andrew has a discipleship relationship with John, he meets Jesus. After Andrew spends time with Jesus and becomes convinced he is the messiah, Andrew calls his brother Simon to meet Jesus, too. On account of his brother Andrew, Simon meets Jesus.

"Come and see" are words that call. The call to discipleship and community run through the gospels of the six Sundays in Ordinary Time. As with Andrew, Jesus speaks to young people today through their relationships with others and through our experiences. The *SPIRIT* story takes teens to Overlook Farm, a Heifer International Learning Center, and its Global Village, an experience that calls participants to come and see ways to help end poverty and hunger.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will appreciate the value of meeting people of other countries and cultures.

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

Pray (cover) Lead teens in breathing in and out deeply three times together. Invite them to mention people in their lives or in the news for whom they wish to pray. Pray together the prayer at top left, which introduces the theme of seeing as Jesus sees.

Article: Overlook Farm (pages 1-3) Introduce the Heifer International Learning Center by having your teens survey the activities in the photos and read the cutlines. Have any of your teens who have taken part in Heifer's programs tell about the experience—perhaps they have raised money for an ark of animals or done Read to Feed as younger kids.

● Have your teens take turns reading a paragraph at a time and discuss questions 1-3. 1. *How much work people in developing countries put into going to market, building fires, caring for animals, cooking. Also they go without showers and eat what they can bargain for. They struggle with the economic problems of poor families.* 2. *The teens experience the conditions poor families live in, the work they do to survive, and the problems they face. Participants seek to live in a different culture, know its problems,*

and imagine its solutions. 3. *An aha moment is a personal experience that awakens one to how others live. Seeing should lead to acting.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize Jesus calls disciples through their relationships.

Gospel: Come and See (page 3) Have four teens proclaim Sunday's gospel for your group. Invite your teens to imagine what spending the day with Jesus was like for Andrew.

● Discuss questions 4-6. 4. *His mentor John the Baptist pointing out Jesus intrigues Andrew and so does calling him the lamb of God. Jesus calls Andrew to come and see where he lives and who he is. Andrew calls his brother Peter to meet Jesus because he believes Jesus is the messiah.* 5. *Staying with Jesus, hanging out, convinces Andrew to follow Jesus. In John's gospel the words stay and remain express the abiding relationship between Jesus' disciples and himself—they in him and he in them. Jesus perhaps shared his intent to bring God's love into people's lives, to heal and free.* 6. *Jesus calls them to gather together a new community, to give their lives to his mission.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore how God calls people.

Our Catholic Faith: How does God call us? (page 4) Have your teens work in threes or fours to read the back-page feature on call and vocation. Introduce the concept by asking your teens what questions they have about calls from God. How calls happen is likely to be a question. Read the first two paragraphs aloud slowly to your group. Each paragraph describes a call. Direct your teens to read the rest of the feature aloud in their small groups.

Faith in Action (page 4) Give teens five to seven minutes to journal a conversation with God, item 2.

● Then have separate small groups read and report to the whole group on the biblical calls of Samuel as a child (1 Samuel 3), David as a teen (1 Samuel 16) and Jeremiah as a youth (Jeremiah 1.1-10).

● Encourage your teens to do item 1 on their own, or have three volunteers interview a pastoral council member you have invited to your session. This can be an invaluable opportunity. Adults don't usually share their motivations in ministry without being asked.

Concluding Prayer Gather your teens in a circle. Tell them you will lead a prayer about the activity of the Spirit that they can add to. *Spirit of God, you are always with us. In our sorrows* (add on). *In our joys* (add on). *In our angers* (add on). *In our hopes* (add on). Exchange a sign of peace.

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SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

When Jesus begins his public ministry, he enters people's lives and brings the time of fulfillment to them; in him the reign of God is near. In his preaching, Jesus makes a very contemporary point; he calls his hearers to get an attitude—an attitude of believing, a change of heart that turns their lives toward God rather than themselves.

Getting an attitude is at the heart of conversion. Attitude is a person's stance, one's basic relation to others, self, and God. Jesus' first move in his public ministry is calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. He wants them to become community builders who give up gathering fish in nets and begin gathering people together in his name.

The four disciples respond like adolescents—confidently, wholeheartedly, without thought of turning back. Fifteen chapters later in Mark's gospel, these disciples badly need new attitudes again. Judas has betrayed Jesus. Peter has denied him. The rest of the men disciples have fled Jesus' company, fearing for their lives. These four fishermen who begin following Jesus in Sunday's gospel do not begin fishing for people until after the time Mark's gospel reports. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection do they become missionaries and give their lives for the sake of the gospel. Mark realizes faith is a relationship that must grow and develop. In this *SPIRIT* issue teens explore Mark's gospel.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Music: See goodgroundpress.com/spirit for a song that fits the gospel theme.

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Invite them to pray for missionaries they know, young people who struggle with disabilities, doctors who heal. Pray the prayer on the cover together, which expresses the theme of the issue.

Icebreaker: Who is your role model? (cover) Have your teens read the responses of students from St. Michael the Archangel in Leawood, Kansas, to the question, "Who is your role model?" Invite your teens to respond to the same question. Conclude by noticing how many of the students who responded in the issue have parents, relatives, and siblings as role models. Reflect if this is true of your group. Those who call and inspire us are close to us. Our mentors tend to be everyday heroes close to us.

Objective: The young people will appreciate the gospel is a testimony of faith.

Article: Mark writes the first Gospel (pages 1-3) Invite your teens to brainstorm all they know about what a gospel is. List their input on newsprint or a chalkboard.

● Have your teens read the article aloud in threes or fours and prepare responses to questions 1-2. 1. *Mark writes to call a new generation of disciples to faith in Jesus, to follow and serve his evolving community, to testify that Jesus is Israel's messiah, God's Son and servant.* 2. *Young people today might fear not knowing the real Jesus after so many centuries, or being too apathetic about religious questions, or being too involved in other worries to give time to what Jesus asks of them.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize Jesus calls disciples to follow him.

Gospel: Jesus gathers followers (page 3) Have the teens in your group notice the photos and cutlines on pages 1-3. Capernaum was the hub of Jesus' early public ministry. The photos will help situate the gospel in a real place. Have two teens proclaim the gospel, one as Jesus, one as Narrator. Discuss question 3. 3. *The four respond wholeheartedly. This reflects their response after Jesus' death and resurrection when the four become missionaries who proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection and gather believers into Jesus' new community, just as once they gathered fish into nets.*

● Discuss questions 4 and 5. *Openended.* Have the teens share their answers to question 6 in pairs.

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize ways the Christian community has grown over the centuries.

Our Catholic Faith: Jesus' new community (pages 3-4) Illustrate the concept in the first four paragraphs of this feature. Read the first two paragraphs. Have a teen draw Jesus in the center of a chalkboard or a piece of newsprint. Surround Jesus with followers, such as Jesus' mother, Peter and the other fishermen, Mary Magdalene, Peter's mother-in-law, other women from Galilee, or people Jesus healed in recent gospels.

● Read the third paragraph, and draw Mark standing apart from Jesus and his first followers. Draw a circle around Jesus and the group in the middle to show they are the eyewitness generation from whom Mark must have heard the story of Jesus.

● Read the fourth paragraph. These hearers are farther away from Jesus than Mark. Draw someone reading from a gospel book. This is the generation in the 70s, forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, for whom Mark wrote his gospel.

● Have group members take turns reading the rest of the feature. This short Church history shows the Church always needs renewing and seeks new ways to bring Jesus' good news to each generation.

Have fun making a list with your teens of what is old and new in the Church. Have them do the same with their parents and grandparents at home and report what they find next week. Speculate together on item 3. The Holy Spirit stirs in our faith and commitments. Item 4 suggests a project that could become huge. Many in the Church are working for greater lay involvement.

Faith in Action (page 4) These items suggest ways to put the solidarity with the poor that Vatican II urged to work.

Concluding Prayer Invite your teens to gather in a prayer circle. Each states something they have learned in this session about calls from God. Pray the prayer on the cover together.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

In Sunday's gospel Jesus confronts a person with an unholy spirit. From our contemporary point of view, this person is sick rather than possessed, perhaps mentally ill or suffering from seizures. We can disagree with Mark's medical diagnosis but still agree with his vivid picture of Jesus' healing, freeing power. Jesus demonstrates life-giving power and calming authority. What he says happens.

The New Testament term *unholy* or *unclean* means *outside the boundaries of the holy*. The term comes from Israel's holiness laws in Leviticus 11-15. These laws create a fence around Israel to keep out ungodly, unholy influences. The term has to do with ritual. In Old Testament times, if one became unclean—through sickness or contact with a dead person—one couldn't enter the temple for worship without purification. Women couldn't enter after childbirth until they fulfilled the purification rituals, nor could women join the community at worship during menstruation. Jesus' healing breaks the boundary that keeps the sick and possessed apart from God's power.

These categories clean and unclean make more sense in our time as holy and unholy, or godly and ungodly. Jesus' message is to rid ourselves of anything that gets in the way of love among people.

SPIRIT invites young people to recognize wholesome and unwholesome influences in their lives and find their own voices. The *SPIRIT* story explores the tough love addictions demand and the stresses teens face whose parents are alcoholic.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will explore how Alateen supports teens whose parents drink.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Mention all the families that struggle with a family member who drinks or uses drugs. Pray the prayer at upper left of the cover together.

Icebreaker: *Pass the Compliment*, page 37, *Icebreakers for Teen Groups*, offers teens peer support, an affirmation teens who struggle with addictions in their families need especially.

Story: Wish Upon a Star (pages 1-3) Introduce the problem in the story by reading with your teens the statistics on page 1 that indicate how many young people have to contend with alcoholism.

- Have your teens take turns reading this story aloud.
- Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Her mother accuses Christie of not taking care of her baby sister when she has been taking care of her as well as worrying where her mother was. Christie has lost sleep and stable family life, lost the mother who called her an affectionate nickname.* 2. *Christie leaves because her grandmother has counseled her to come to her house, not to try to handle the situation alone, to recognize her mother is ill. Christie doesn't want more arguing with her mother when she's drunk, nor threats to the baby, nor more mornings of pained silence.* 3. *She has happy memories of her mom from before her drinking.*

- Talk with your teens about Alateen. Find an Alateen group that is near enough for any who wish to attend at the website alateen.org Talk through the Alateen learnings on page 2. Teens may not be able to make their parents stop drinking, but Alateen can free them from thinking it is somehow their fault or responsibility. Read aloud the quotation from Ryerson on page 2, top.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will interpret how Mark characterizes Jesus.

Gospel: Jesus speaks with authority (page 3) Have four teens dramatize the gospel and the rest of the group take the part of the people. Use the questions to launch reflection on what teens hear in the gospel. 4. *The authority with which Jesus teaches amazes people in the synagogue. He is not citing legal precedents but speaking on his own authority. Unlike the unholy spirit that recognizes Jesus is God's Son, the people question what this new teaching can be.* 5. *It might be someone you know that cares about you, or a person you look up to or respect.* 6. *Openended. Jesus might confront issues such as bullying, addiction, racism or sexism, apathy, poverty.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will role play ways to stand up to discrimination.

Our Catholic Faith: Who does Jesus stand by? (page 4) Read the statement against all forms of discrimination from the *Catechism* on page 4. Have teens brainstorm where they see discrimination in their school, community, or family.

- Have three teens take turns reading the feature aloud, breaking at the large capital letters. Then divide into groups of four.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have each group prepare a skit in which a person experiences discrimination and another person intervenes as item 2 suggests. Have groups perform the skits, and evaluate the interventions after each. Was it effective? Did it escalate or calm down the situation?

- Conclude by asking your group to identify scripts that seem to work most effectively to confront prejudice as item 1 asks. Some group members may be interested in item 3.

Closing Prayer Gather in a prayer circle. Invite teens to pray silently for all the people they know whose families struggle with a family member's addiction to drugs or alcohol. Pray silently for all those for whom this day is the first day sober. Pray together the prayer on the cover to conclude. Invite teens to share a sign of peace with each other.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

In the ten verses of Sunday's gospel, Mark describes two days in Jesus' Galilean ministry—the first Sabbath of his mission and the next day. His pace is fast, his word authoritative, his actions healing, his ministry snowballing. On the Sabbath he goes to the synagogue with his four disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—accompanying him. Afterwards they go to Peter's home. There Jesus raises Peter's mother-in-law up from a fever, and she responds by beginning to serve the new community. By evening people crowd his door. Mark creates a sense that Jesus' ministry is exploding by following what Jesus does for individuals with a generalizing scene in which he helps crowds of people, their needs calling forth his wholesome, healing power.

Before dawn Jesus goes to a deserted place to pray. His disciples seek him out because, they tell him, "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus sets off to other villages to repeat what he has done in Capernaum. He explains this is what he has come to do—bring the good news to the people.

A detail in Sunday's gospel that goes easily unnoticed is Peter's mother-in-law becoming Jesus' first woman disciple. She responds to Jesus' act of raising her up from a fever by serving him. In this story the disciples and Jesus are those who come to be served and Peter's mother-in-law is the one who serves, the model disciple.

SPIRIT explores how two pregnant teens and their families heal and support one another as the teens decide on their child's future.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will identify Christian values important to them.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Pray the prayer at upper left on the cover together which invites the teens to heal and free one another.

Objective: The young people will identify why Catholics value life and ways to support one another.

Interview: 16 and Pregnant (pages 1-3) Introduce this true story by asking any in your group who have watched the reality television program *16 and Pregnant* what they think about the decisions teens on the show make. Note the pregnancy test and sonogram in the cover photos. Have volunteers read sections aloud for the group, or have your teens read the interview aloud in threes and fours. Ask your teens what they think of Megan and Dan's decision. Allow discussion.

● Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Megan and Dan value their child's life and their parents' and friends' support. They want what is best for their child. They reverence the child rather than think of the baby as a toy or pet. They value thinking through their options.* 2. *Openended. Peers may be supportive or critical, may value carrying a child or consider abortion.*

Megan finds her close friends supportive. Stress that parents are much more likely to be supportive than teens assume. 3. Megan and Dan were not ready to support a child. They break up within a year, finding out they don't want to stay together.

Objective: The young people will recognize why the Catholic Church teaches abortion is wrong.

Question: Why does the Catholic Church teach that abortion is morally wrong? (page 3) Raise this question with your teens. Read aloud and talk about the three quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will identify Jesus' actions in his first days of public ministry.

Gospel: Jesus Heals the Sick (page 3) Introduce the gospel as two days in the first week of Jesus' ministry. Have four teens take parts and proclaim the gospel for the group. Discuss questions 4-5. 4. *By healing people and freeing them of their demons, Jesus brings the good news of God's love to people in Galilee. These actions show God wants people to be whole.* 5. *Openended. Jesus might say to Megan, "You are a young woman full of life, both your own independent spirit and the life of your child within you. You have found support through your relationships for yourself and your child. You have loved and blessed your child."*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize women follow Jesus as disciples throughout his ministry.

Our Catholic Faith: Jesus' women disciples? (page 4) Read aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* about Jesus' women disciples on the bottom of page 4. Have teens note the three women standing at the cross in the art (upper right), and a contemporary young woman disciple standing beneath a processional cross today. The gospels tell us much more about Jesus' men disciples than about his women disciples. However, feminist bible scholars teach us not to overlook women's stories but to bring them to the foreground for study. Three words are key in this study—*raise up*, *follow*, and *serve*. From the beginning Jesus had women disciples.

Faith in Action (page 4) Direct interested teens to item 2, comparing translations of the word *serve* in various bibles. Move teens off the page into parish community with items 1 and 3. Consider making hand shapes and displaying them in your church to let other teens know ways they can serve in the parish or civic community.

Concluding Prayer Gather in a prayer circle. Pray the *Our Father* together. Invite teens to share a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The opening of Sunday's gospel dramatizes the suffering of a leper in Jesus' time. A leper implores Jesus for healing, begs for it, kneels in hope. The story provides no ugly details of the man's appearance but rather stresses how intensely he seeks wholeness and how certain he is Jesus can make him whole.

Lepers in Jesus' time and until our century lived their lives apart from other people. The contagiousness of the disease isolated its sufferers at the edges of the community. Leprosy, like many other grounds for making people outsiders, shows visibly on the body. Race, gender, and age also show. Poverty often shows; people often assume sexual orientation shows. Body appearance figures in how communities establish social boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

The social dynamics between insiders and outsiders is often brutal in the teen years. Taunting, labeling, ostracizing create agony for many teens. The students who have turned violent in school shootings have often experienced labeling and taunting. The social dynamic that creates insiders and outsiders prevents the building of community. Adolescence is a time when what others think influences us. Rejection is destructive.

In this issue *SPIRIT* examines insider/outsider dynamics. Two stories about young teens' body image and social status at school point out many ways teens experience their differences as inferiorities and magnify their noses or extra pounds into massive reasons for self-doubt. Insiders often prey on others' vulnerabilities to maintain their own status. The two *SPIRIT* stories encourage teens to talk about their own experiences of the "Troll Years." Such sharing helps teens know others have similar fears and doubts about themselves. It can help them support one another and resist taunting.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will talk about their own feelings and difficult experiences in the early high school years.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to breathe in and out with you three times and bring to mind people in their lives or in the news who need healing or who need to be included in their school community. Pray together the prayer at top left, which draws teens into the healing focus of Sunday's gospel and this issue.

Story: Troll Years (pages 1-3) This week *SPIRIT* features two stories, both called "Troll Years," one a girl's perspective, one a boy's. Have your teens examine the titles and photos on pages 1 and 2.

- If you have a large mixed group, have the boys read the girl's story and the girls read the boy's. Begin discussion by having them tell each other what made the person feel like a troll.

- Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Most young people will have painful experiences to look back on. Invite sharing.* 2. *Bullying, which is touched on in both stories, is a serious issue. Teasing can very quickly escalate into bullying, which does not have to be physical to be damaging. Help teens*

articulate what kind of response they can give to bullying behavior when they see it happen to others and when it happens to them. In many cases adults need to intervene. 3. *This question asks who kids make into outsiders in their schools. Discuss what group members can do together to counter the disrespect.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize Jesus reaches out and touches a leper.

Gospel: Jesus heals a leper (page 3) Have four teens proclaim the gospel for your group. Discuss questions 4 and 5. 4. *A troll can never be assured that he or she fits in the school society. Just when Monica was feeling confident, the sneer by the football player put her in her place—outside. The law and custom kept lepers outside the village and temple to prevent contaminating others, just as teens seek to prevent getting labeled loser by those with whom they associate.* 5. *Jesus touches the leper, a contact the law of Moses forbids. His action expresses his compassion for the outsider and his mission to free people from physical and mental pain and bring them from isolation into his community. Jesus breaks the law to heal, but does not set himself apart from the law; he tells the healed leper to present himself to the priests.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will respect others.

Our Catholic Faith: Peer Ministry (pages 3-4) Make a transition from the gospel by reading aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on page 4. It stresses Jesus' intent to gather a new community together.

- Read this feature on peer ministry and community building aloud. If you do not have a peer ministry program in your parish or school, it will give you ideas.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have your group break into fours to discuss and brainstorm responses to items 1 and 2. Have each small group report their ideas to the whole group. Try to come to some consensus about what your parish youth need to strengthen community among them.

- Item 3 suggests your teens extend their community building to young people of other religious faiths or Christian denominations. A joint youth group evening could be a first in some areas. Or, consider welcoming a speaker who can talk with your teens about Islam.

Concluding Prayer Gather in a prayer circle. Consider doing the "Keep It Going" icebreaker from *Icebreakers for Teen Groups*, page 36, which visualizes how ministries weave community among people. Recall that the circles that gather around Jesus or around Jesus' table at Eucharist welcome all. Let us commit ourselves to welcome others into our circles in school and in our social lives, and make one commitment to reach out beyond our circle this week. Pray the prayer on the cover together, and invite your teens to exchange a gesture of peace.

Unit 4

Sundays of Lent and Easter
February 18, 2024—April 21, 2024
Vol. 36, Nos. 19-28

Called to New Life

Lent is springtime in the Church. Catechumens make final preparations for receiving the new life of baptism at Easter. Lent is spring-cleaning time for all of us baptized Christians, a time to fast from food and slow our lives, a time to unlearn our compulsions and practice the habits we keep saying we want to have—to pray more, to play more, to walk more, to revive our slumbering spirits.

Each year during this season we reflect on the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection in our lives and our world. The Sunday Gospels of Lent focus first each year on Jesus' 40 days in the desert and then on his transfiguration. In this way the season of Lent invites us to identify what tempts us and to imagine who we can be as transfigured and transformed people.

In the gospel for the 3rd Sunday of Lent Jesus cleanses the temple and calls us to shine the windows of our own spirits. On the 4th Sunday of Lent we reflect on the bible quotation everybody knows—John 3.16, God so loved the world that God sent Jesus, God's only Son. On the 5th Sunday of Lent the gospel compares the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection to the mystery of a grain of wheat that must be planted and die to produce a hundredfold harvest.

SPIRIT explores in these Lenten issues practices that over our lifetimes transform us into Christ—

- celebrating the sacraments,
- recognizing God's presence in creation,
- keeping the ten commandments,
- praying the *Our Father*,

- celebrating Holy Week with the Church.

These issues for celebrating Lent and three Sundays of Easter form the concluding unit of *SPIRIT* for 2020-2021. The Easter gospels call young people into their work as cocreators with the risen Jesus of communities of love, healing, and forgiveness.

Plan to celebrate Earth Day in your parish as a call to new life and sustainable lifestyles. Plan also to celebrate the ending of your year together with a ritual. Give your teens a chance to say what Jesus in the gospels has said to them in this year of lectionary-based faith sharing.

Sundays/Seasons		Gospel/Theme	Teens' Lives	Our Catholic Faith
February 18, 2024 1st Sunday of Lent	Unit 4 Called to New Life	Mark 1.12-15 Temptation	Under pressure in a relationship	Israel's holy history
February 25, 2024 2nd Sunday of Lent		Mark 9.2-10 Transfiguration	Homeless teens	Sacraments
March 3, 2024 3rd Sunday of Lent		John 2.13-25 Cleansing the Temple	Human trafficking	Ten Commandments
March 10, 2024 4th Sunday of Lent		John 3.14-21 God So Loves the World	Experiencing divorce	Living the Our Father
March 17, 2024 5th Sunday of Lent		John 12.20-33 Grain of Wheat	A crop for college	Transformation in Christ
March 24, 2024 Palm/Passion Sunday		Mark 15.1-39 Passion	Accompanying others in suffering	Holy Week
March 31, 2024 Easter		John 20.1-18 Jesus Is Risen	Choosing baptism	Mary Magdalene: Witness that Jesus is risen
April 7, 2024 2nd Sunday Easter		John 20.19-31 Jesus Appears	Responding to disaster	Called to Reconcile
April 14, 2024 3rd Sunday Easter		Luke 24.35-48 The Disciples see Jesus	Friendship/developing gifts	Called to cultivate new life
April 21, 2024 4th Sunday of Easter		John 10.11-18 Good Shepherd	Intimacy	Mutual love

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Called to New Life is SPIRIT's theme for Lent 2012. Christian life is a process of transformation into Christ that begins at baptism and intensifies in the Church each year during Lent. As catechumens make final preparation for baptism, we already-baptized believers journey with Jesus to the desert, the mount of transfiguration, and to the cross, seeking as we go what the gospels ask of us this year in our lives.

Teens explode with growth. Their brains become capable of abstract thinking. Their bodies mature sexually. They can take a third-person perspective on themselves and change because of what friends think. Teens outgrow childhood faith if they use their brains to reflect on their experience, the gospels, and the Church's doctrine. Their spirituality needs to keep up with other areas of their human development.

The first two Sundays of Lent look at the beginning and end of Jesus' public ministry. The gospel for the first Sunday focuses on Jesus' 40 days in the desert, the transforming time that impels him into his public ministry. The gospel for the second Sunday focuses on Jesus' transfiguration, a vision that anticipates Jesus' resurrection for his disciples, who have not come to terms with a messiah who suffers.

Jesus' desert time recalls Israel's 40 years in the desert and launches his public mission. It gives him the good news he begins to proclaim, "God's reign is near," and the challenge he lays on us this Lent, "Change your attitude." In the SPIRIT story a sixteen year old tells her own true story of choosing to break up a relationship rather than lose herself and her values.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will choose a positive Lenten practice.

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

Lent 2012 (cover) Gather your teens together in a prayer circle to begin your Lenten sessions together and this unit—Called to New Life. Introduce the purpose of Lent by reading the text at top left. Pray the list of Lenten holy habits. Take turns reading the lines. Begin with "Let us...." Invite your teens to brainstorm additional practices and choose their own for Lent 2024.

Ash Wednesday option: If your group meets on Ash Wednesday, prepare burned palm and have your teens mark each other's foreheads with a cross in ash and say: *We are breath of Spirit and clay of Earth.* Invite teens to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world.

Objective: The young people will examine what tempts them in relationships.

Story: Under Pressure (pages 1-3) Have your teens use the title and illustrations to suggest what this true story is about. What feelings do the illustrations suggest? Ask what pressures teens experience in dating.

● Have your teens read the story aloud, taking turns at each paragraph. Tell the group individuals can pass if they don't want to read. Teens will probably want to comment on the story at the end. Let discussion on this major teen choice evolve.

- Use questions 1-4 if your group's responses haven't covered them. 1. *A super popular boy picks her for a girl friend. She likes having a boyfriend rather than being alone. The disagreements wear the author into silence.* 2. *Openended. A teen has no experience to help in making judgments in a first relationship, doesn't know one can lose oneself, one's friends, free time, mental energy, personal convictions. Invite teens to share their wisdom about healthy relationships.* 3 *She felt lonely, hurt, and dazed without the relationship and doesn't want to be alone.* 4. *Openended. Some teens relationships last, most don't. In this story I love you is the gateway to pressure for sex.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will appreciate the value of Jesus' 40 days in the desert.

The desert tests Jesus (page 3) Read aloud to your group the quotation at the top of page 3 that connects Jesus' time in the desert and our celebration of Lent as a time of renewal. Have three teens proclaim the gospel.

- Discuss questions 5 and 6. 5. *Being alone in natural, open spaces can give us a sense of our individual selves and a sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit speaking in our hearts, desires, and dreams. Nothing distracts us. Beauty, animals, and growing things surround us with possible signs of God's presence. In such a desert experience Jesus might feel one with all that is and with God. Jesus chooses his mission in this time and lives from all he thinks through. His ministry quickly becomes demanding.* 6. *Encourage teens to give back in some way as a regular Lenten practice.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will remember Israel's history is our holy history, too.

Our Catholic Faith: Israel's History Time Line (page 4) The Lenten Old Testament readings highlight great moments in Israel's history, providing candidates for baptism a short course in this story of God's love. Look with your group at the five events on the time line. The flood is prehistory. Abraham and Sarah begin Israel's history.

Lent: We remember our history (page 4) Have your teens divide into threes and fours and read these two columns aloud to each other.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have bibles available for your group to read Genesis 9.8-15 about the symbolism of the rainbow. To do item 2, direct small groups each to create a list of people and animals for whom they wish to pray at the close of the session. Encourage teens that are interested in item 3 to show leadership and create an olive branch display that shows what teens contribute to the parish.

Concluding Prayer Gather your teens in a circle. Invite them to pray for all on their lists.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The transfiguration gospel gives Jesus' three disciples and us a glimpse of his Easter glory to motivate our struggle toward greater wholeness and deeper appreciation of the mystery of Jesus' self-giving during Lent. Lent calls us to critique and transform who we are and who we think Jesus is.

The Church reads the same gospel stories each year on the 1st and 2nd Sundays of Lent—Jesus' temptation and his transfiguration. These two stories do not fall in chronological order in any of the three synoptic gospels. The temptation-transfiguration order is peculiar to Lent. By putting the two gospels back to back, the Church samples a passage from early in Jesus' life, then looks ahead to the last chapter to see how the story turns out.

The transfiguration gospel prefigures the climax of Jesus' life—his resurrection. In Mark's gospel the transfiguration follows Peter's confession that Jesus is the messiah (Mark 8.29) and Jesus' first prediction that he will suffer, die, and be raised up on the third day. Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction are in conflict. Peter can't imagine a suffering messiah. The transfiguration scene gives Peter, James, and John a vision of Jesus raised up in glory to sustain their struggle. The voice from heaven repeats the words the heavenly voice spoke at Jesus' Baptism, "This is my beloved Son," but adds in this instance, "Listen to him." Peter needs to listen to Jesus' predictions of his suffering being the path to his resurrection on the third day.

The gospel challenges us to listen to ways Jesus' example might transfigure our vision of ourselves. Visions shape the future. What one sees, dreams, believes can keep being corrected, extended, deepened. Lent is about correcting dreams and vision, deepening commitment to Jesus. *SPIRIT* interviews two young men transforming their lives through the services of Bridge Over Troubled Waters.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

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

Pray (cover) Pray together the prayer from St. Patrick's breastplate at upper left. It is a prayer that calls us to see Christ surrounding us in our lives and to see and hear each other as bringing Christ to friends and stranger.

Objective: The young people will explore what motivates transforming changes in one's life.

Interviews: Bridge Over Troubled Waters (pages 1-3) Have teens note the photo at left, the front windows of an organization that serves teens on the street. Have them look at the time line at the bottom of the page, which shows how Bridge evolved and the services they offer homeless teens. Have volunteers read the interview in four segments: 1. first four paragraphs tell where Bridge is and how it began; 2. the next three paragraphs and the text in red type on page 2, bottom left, in which director Robb Zarges describes the philosophy of the program; 3. interview with Calvin; 4. interview with Malcolm and text in red, page 3, bottom

● Discuss questions 1-4. 1. *Bridge has alternative services easy to access on the streets or downtown. It provides a chance for homeless teens to put together an education and livelihood.* 2. *Bridge developed in response to the needs of kids on the streets. It tailors services to kids' needs individually and staff stick with them as they take power over their lives.* 3. *Not just reacting to others such as distressed parents or school situations but deciding what one wants and doing what it takes to make that happen.* 4. *Openended. Your young people can reflect on their question individually or share their experiences if they wish.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize the transfigured Jesus calls us to deepen our relationship with him.

Jesus' friends see who he is (page 3) Have seven teens proclaim the gospel and discuss questions 5-6. 5. *The three disciples see Jesus as one in the line of Israel's greatest prophets. They see him suffused with divine glory. They glimpse Jesus as his whole mission reveals him after his resurrection.* 6. *This scene suggests the communion in love that is the life of God. The voice of God affirms Jesus as son and beloved. Jesus is not alone in his mission.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore the sacramentality of the created world.

Our Catholic Faith: Sacraments make God visible (page 4) Look with your teens at the photos on page 4. Ask volunteers to describe some of the most beautiful places or creatures they have seen. Read aloud the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on page 4, which summarizes the theme of this feature—the sacramentality of our world, the signs of God's presence in which we live.

● Read the first three paragraphs of this feature aloud to your teens, taking time for you and them to add comments. Have them finish reading alone silently. Ask what they understand by sacramentality. Ask what the seven sacraments make visible about Jesus for us.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have your youth read over the four *Live It* suggestions. The first two are personal. Discuss group interest in pursuing item 3 or a similar project—perhaps cleaning the church or school grounds or cemetery.

Concluding Prayer Have a teen read Psalm 19.1-5. Exchange a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

SPIRIT Unit 4 continues the Lenten theme—*Called to New Life*. This issue focuses on what rightly angers us. The moneychangers in the temple stir Jesus to anger in the gospel—making a marketplace of a holy place.

All four gospels tell the story of Jesus cleansing the temple. The three synoptic gospels place it near the end of Jesus' ministry as conflict with authorities intensifies. John's gospel makes Jesus' cleansing anger a prophetic act by placing the story in chapter two at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

The people in the temple courtyard sell oxen, sheep, and doves for making burnt offerings. Worshipers buy an animal, have a priest slaughter it, burn some parts as an offering, and eat the rest as food. The more money one has, the larger the animal one can sacrifice. Doves are the gifts of the poor.

The Church sees every baptized Christian as a temple of the Spirit. Sexual abuse and trafficking violates the sacredness of the human person and keeps victims from becoming all they can be. These are actions to be angry about. In this issue, *SPIRIT* explores the violence of the sexual trafficking and girls' power to restore their lives.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will recognize actions, stereotypes, and people that rightly anger them.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Pray the prayer on the cover together.

Story: Excerpt from Half the Sky (pages 1-3) Have your teens read the quotes and statistics with the photos of girls on these pages. Ask why some squares have silhouettes only. Read aloud the quotation in the middle of page 2. Prepare your group for the violence of sexual trafficking and for one of the most shocking parts of this story—Amartya Sen's estimate that 100 million girls are missing. *SPIRIT*'s teen board highly recommended this difficult story.

- Have your group read the story aloud taking turns paragraph by paragraph. Encourage teens to ask questions when they have them. Or have four strong readers read from one red capped letter to another.

- Discuss questions 1-4. 1. *Openended. Girls are so young and so traumatized, starved and kept naked. Often their own parents sell them.* 2. *Girls get discriminated against, don't get vaccinations, health care. Gendercide kills more girls than slavery did.* 3. *Rath's story shows the resilience of many girls and the power of education to open up life and livelihood for them.* 4. *Law enforcement and activists tell us trafficking is taking place in most U.S. major cities. Invite a speaker who knows your area or research online.*

Note: The authors of *Half the Sky* have a second book *A Path Appears, Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity* (2014).

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will identify what angers Jesus.

Temple sellers anger Jesus (page 3) Have six teens proclaim the gospel story.

- Discuss questions 5-7. 5. *Buying and selling are counter to the spiritual purpose of the temple. Buying animals for sacrifice may be too routine an act and not represent a gift of one's self.* 6. *Jesus means God will raise up his body. The officials think he is talking about the temple building.* 7. *The temple of God is the risen humanity of Jesus and the Body of Christ, the community of his followers who become the body of the risen Christ in the world.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will interpret what the ten commandments ask of them today.

Our Catholic Faith: God's covenant with Israel (page 3) Read this introduction to the ten commandments aloud to your group. These laws express Israel's covenant relationship with God.

Faith in Action: What do the ten commandments ask of us?

(page 4) Explain the photo on page 4 shows the ten commandments craved over the door of a synagogue in New York City. The sentences read from right to left. The word that appears seven times (its second letter looks like an x) is the word *no* in Hebrew.

- Have volunteers read the rest of the Faith in Action feature aloud. Then direct your teens to the questions and divide them into study groups. Divide the commandments equally among the groups. Have the study groups work for 10-15 minutes to write their commandments and then report to the whole group.

- 1. *Trusting things we buy will make us happy can be idolatry as is worshiping success, patriotism, competition, sports teams.*
- 2. *God is an anchor for truth, a trustworthy absolute. If we have no obligation to tell the truth when we swear, we will live in a very confusing world.*
- 3. *The six days are a literary vehicle for telling the creation story, not a scientific report of how creation happened. Taking a Sabbath or Sunday break is vital to enjoying life and remembering we have life as a gift from God. Teens work too much like everyone else. Joining with others to worship can inspire and revive our commitments, so can time appreciating nature and friends.*
- 4. *Families are the building blocks of community and church. Parents give us life and love us into being, so we should return their love.*
- 5. *This commandment generates many issues in our time. Just war theory insists the reason for war must be defense, that all alternatives must have failed, that defensive attacks must not kill civilians, and must be proportional to the original attack.*
- 6. *Stress the wisdom of delaying sexual intercourse; cite the SPIRIT pregnancy story and story about pressure to have sex.*
- 7. *SPIRIT has touched on many of these topics during the year.*
- 8. *Social media has created new ways to bully, gossip, and destroy others.*
- 9-10. *Coveting others' spouses and property are problems today. Both men and women covet—want what others have.*

Concluding Prayer Have teens gather in a prayer circle, and read their ten commitments. All say *Amen* after each commandment.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

As *SPIRIT* explores our call to new life, Sunday's gospel points to the influence of parent-child relationships. Sunday's gospel includes the citation people write on posters and hold up for TV cameras at sports events—John 3.16. It puts the whole gospel in a nutshell—"God so loved the world that God sent Jesus, God's only Son." God extends the relationship within the Trinity among Father, Son, and Spirit to the world, to us humans. God sends Jesus to be one of us; Jesus reveals God in his actions and teachings. He comes not to judge us but to make us whole.

Sunday's gospel concludes Jesus' conversation in John 3.1-21 with Nicodemus, the Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin who sneaks to see Jesus at night. Nicodemus believes Jesus must be from God because he cannot explain in any other way how Jesus can work the signs and wonders he does. Yet Nicodemus is not really ready to follow Jesus.

John the evangelist frequently uses misunderstanding as a way to develop ideas in his gospel. Early in their conversation Jesus confuses Nicodemus, telling him people cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again of water and Spirit. Nicodemus misunderstands; he takes Jesus literally and wonders how a grown person can reenter the womb. The night setting of Nicodemus's visit leads to a reflection on light and darkness in Sunday's passage. Jesus is the light who has come into the world. Jesus does not come to judge but to reveal. Those who love light believe in Jesus and do their actions in God; those who love darkness cloak evil deeds and do not believe in Jesus.

God's love for us is the inheritance of every human person. Every baptized Christian shares the parent-child relationship Jesus has with God. *SPIRIT* explores a teen's struggle to hold on to her most fundamental relationships after her mother and father divorce.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will appreciate that God loves all people.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Pray the prayer at upper left together.

Cover: What makes relationships work? Have the young people check their top five ingredients. Discuss the questions at the bottom of the checklist. *The ingredients may vary a bit for different relationships, but every relationship calls for mutual respect and commitment.*

Story: The Waiting (pages 1-3) Divorce inevitably affects children. Annie in this story feels pulled between parents who are still her parents even though they are divorced.

● Have your group or class read the story aloud. Let discussion grow out of their response to the story. It will prompt teens to reflect on their own experience.

● Discuss questions 1-3 if you need them. 1. *Annie's parents are her only parents. She wants to believe her dad will spend time with her and not hurt her as her mother insists he will. Encourage teens to talk about who is important for them to believe in.* 2. *For relationships to be trustworthy they must be certain and dependable. Being late makes Annie's mother certain her former husband won't come for Annie. She also insists that his having Lynette in his life threatens Annie's relationship with him. Annie wants to trust her dad but waiting makes it difficult. Trustworthy relationships are the foundation of every human's flourishing. Without them, children die or grow up hostile to the world.* 3. *Give your teens time to talk about the kind of family they want for themselves. Many may have experienced divorce in their families. Allow teens room not to talk.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will express their understanding of Jesus' mission to the world.

God so loves the world (page 3) Have three teens proclaim the gospel. Discuss questions 4-6. 4. *God loves the world wholly, giving the gift of the Son. God loves all people of every color and shade.* 5. *God sends Jesus to make us humans whole. Jesus' death destroys all death, just as lifting the snake up on the staff destroys the power of the snake's bite (John 3.14; Numbers 21.9). Faith in Jesus' resurrection promises us eternal life with God.* 6. *Jesus is light to our darkness. By becoming one of us, Jesus shows us the love we human beings are capable of giving each other. Those who seek to follow Jesus love the light.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will reflect on Jesus' prayer, the Our Father.

Prayer: How do we live the Our Father? (pages 3-4) Read, discuss the questions, and share ideas about each of the five sections of the *Our Father*. If time allows, do each section separately. Have teens take turns reading the paragraphs of each section aloud to the whole group. Have teens divide into threes or fours to discuss. Invite small groups to share one main point from their discussion with the whole group.

● If time is short, read the first section on God as Abba and discuss the questions with the whole group. Then assign small groups to read one of the other four sections, discuss the questions, and share ideas with the whole group. Remind teens they can pass on questions requiring personal responses.

Faith in Action (page 4) Consider doing one of the two items with your teens. Both suggest teaching younger children.

Foot of Justice Encourage your teens to get involved in work for justice if they haven't already.

Concluding Prayer Ask volunteers to say what they learned in reflecting on the parts of the *Our Father*. Form a circle, join hands, and pray the *Our Father* together. Exchange a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

In Sunday's gospel Jesus compares himself to a grain of wheat. His hour has come. He is about to give his life to serve his friends. The grain of wheat metaphor draws on the transforming process we call growth to help us understand all Jesus' death and resurrection promises us. In the growth process, warmth and moisture swell a seed poked down in the soil until the life secreted within it bursts its hull. Actually, the seed does not fall into the earth and die but rather germinates. It swells with more life than the seed can hold. The short life cycle of seeds dramatizes all that happens in the longer human life cycle.

The gospel writer John deliberately places the grain of wheat metaphor between two events—Jesus' raising of Lazarus (John 11) and Jesus' washing his disciples' feet at the last supper (John 13). The whole of chapter 12, including the grain of wheat passage, makes a bridge between the first part of John's gospel, in which Jesus works revealing signs, and the second part of the gospel, which tells of Jesus' last supper, passion, death, and resurrection.

In John 12, Jesus' hour comes. The hour coincides with the feast of Passover. For John, the hour of Jesus' death is the moment when God will glorify Jesus' name. A dynamic process begins, a passing over, a planting that will bear fruit a hundredfold. In being lifted up—on the cross and from the grave—Jesus will draw all people to himself. Jesus is about to entrust his life to God, the same God who hides the promise of new life in seeds.

John's gospel couples the grain of wheat metaphor with sayings about discipleship. These sayings call us to plant ourselves in the Christian community and follow Jesus by serving others. *SPIRIT* uses a story about planting soybeans to reflect on how we plant and nurture our gifts.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will identify gifts they have to plant in our world.

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

Pray (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Pray the prayer on the cover together.

Icebreaker: Gifts, what are mine? (cover) Invite your teens to notice the three photos and the list of gifts at left. Identify ways your parish, school, or neighborhood needs teens' gifts. Give them five minutes to work in pairs and choose a gift each wants to plant in service. Have them write it on a slip of paper to use in the concluding prayer service.

Story: A Crop for College (pages 1-3) Ask your teens what the college gate in the photo might symbolize. *Gates are thresholds, places where things begin.* Have your teens read this story aloud together or individually.

● The *SPIRIT* editor grew up working in the fields; this is her story about a crop of soybeans, which produced a harvest of words. The photo on page 2 shows a close-up of a bean sprouting. The husk of the seed is still visible. The other photo shows someone cultivating a field of soybeans.

● Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *New clothes, college tuition—all rest on the money the beans will produce.* 2. *The unexpected harvest lies in writing the story of a deeply-felt loss that allows the author to discover her writing ability.* 3. *Encourage teens to articulate their own personal dreams; speaking them and experiencing peers' responses are important to their taking root.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will interpret how Jesus is like a grain of wheat.

Jesus is like a grain of wheat (page 3) Have six teens proclaim the gospel. Discuss questions 4-6. 4. *Like a grain of wheat Jesus will appear to die. Like a seed that bursts its hull to sprout, the grave will not hold Jesus. God's life will burst forth in him and raise him up. His single life and death will multiply many million-fold in those who follow his way.* 5. *Jesus' death and resurrection give rise to the Christian community. We Christians are the hundredfold harvest of Jesus' death.* 6. *Jesus' hour is the time when he suffers and dies. In John's gospel, the last to be written, Jesus is the pre-existent Word who was with God from the beginning. Jesus' passion is not a journey into suffering and seeming failure, but the glorification of the Word. John sees Jesus' suffering from a post-resurrection vantage point.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will explore who and what Christians are to become.

Our Catholic Faith: We live in Christ (pages 3-4) This feature and activity take up the main theme of *SPIRIT*'s Lenten issues—*Called to New Life*. Read aloud the quotation on page 3, which describes the human vocation as Christians see it—*transformation into Christ*.

● Have four teens each read aloud one of the four paragraphs introducing the activity. Have teens read and choose their characteristics individually. Give them three to five minutes.

Faith in Action (page 4) Tally results as item 1 suggests. Give teens five minutes to journal and identify where they have planted their gifts this year and what gift each commits to planting in the prayer service. Encourage teens to do item 4 at home.

Keeping Sunday (page 4) Have teens divide into threes and fours, read the rest of the article, beginning at the second C, and discuss *Live It* item 3. *Realistically weekends bring games, jobs, dates, a chance to catch up on homework. Teens are often the ones bussing dishes for families that eat out Sunday brunch or clerking at the mall. Teens need breaks to restore their free and grateful selves and time out of virtual reality for real relationships with nature, our families, the Christian community. Sabbath can be an antidote to stress.*

Concluding Prayer Use *Faith in Action* item 5 to celebrate a grain of wheat prayer service.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Preplanning Alert: Holy Week Page through this *SPIRIT* issue. Notice the passion gospel appears under seven headings, Hosanna, Meal, Garden, Trial, Pilate, Cross, and Tomb. Read *Live It* on page 4, which suggests a Holy Week prayer experience in seven settings, one for each of the main parts of the passion story. You can plan fewer than seven settings; for example, three—one for each day of the Sacred Triduum. Consider preparing settings at different places in your parish facilities or in area social outreach sites such as a nursing home, a place where a teen whom your group knows died, a homeless shelter.

Holy Week begins with the Church's celebration of Jesus' triumphal, peaceful entry into Jerusalem. People then and Christians today welcome Jesus with palm branches and hosannas. This Sunday and Good Friday we hear the story of Jesus' passion—from Mark's gospel on Sunday and John's gospel on Friday.

In his passion Jesus journeys through suffering and death to new, risen life. The journey begins in the upper room where Jesus and his disciples celebrate a Passover meal that turns out to be their last supper together. The journey goes to a garden where Jesus prays, his friends sleep, and his betrayer points him out for arrest; to the high priest's house where the Sanhedrin tries Jesus; to the Praetorium where Pilate sentences him; and to Golgotha, where Roman soldiers crucify him. The tomb is the final scene.

As Jesus journeys to the cross, his disciples journey away from him. Judas takes up with Jesus' enemies. Peter, James, and John sleep while Jesus faces suffering and death alone. All the men disciples except Peter scatter when Jesus is arrested. As the Sanhedrin condemns Jesus for blasphemy inside the high priest's house, Peter outside in the courtyard denies him.

New characters enter the narrative during Jesus' passion. An African, Simon of Cyrene, carries Jesus' cross. A Roman centurion says sarcastically after Jesus is dead, "I'm so sure this is the Son of God." Women disciples who have followed Jesus from Galilee—among them Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James and Joses, and Salome—are present to witness Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

SPIRIT features a story about how a mother learns to identify suffering with her sick child with Jesus' suffering.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will reflect on who suffers Jesus' passion today.

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

Pray (cover) Bring several recent daily newspapers to your session. Have your group work in twos and threes and use the papers to recall victims of violence and war who suffer crucifixion today. The group can also use the photos to remember victims of violence. When teens are ready, begin a simple prayer, such as:

"Faithful God, you did not forsake Jesus when the Roman Empire sentenced him to death. You will not forsake people who suffer violence in

our world, nor will we. Keep in your love those we name." Have teens name people. Pray the cover prayer.

In the Waiting Room (pages 1-3) Ask your teens if any of them have lived through the serious illness of a sibling and what the waiting was like. This is a true story. Have your group divide into threes or fours, read the story aloud to each other, and reflect together on questions 1-2. Small groups will make sharing easier. *1. Most of us would rather suffer the pain ourselves that watch someone else suffer. We want to take it away. This is especially true of a helpless baby. 2. When a sick person gets well and our prayers are answered, we can feel God is close and there for us. But God is always with us as the author learns. The Jesus who suffers is near the author. Listen in to groups and encourage teens to talk about their experience.*

● Ask who wants to share their reflections.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will follow Jesus' journey from death to life through a Holy Week Prayer Service.

Jesus suffers and dies—Hosanna, Meal, Garden, Trial, Pilate, Cross, Tomb (pages 1, 3, 4) Assign teens parts in the seven gospel scenes. Read the passion narrative together as a group, or as *Live It* suggests on page 4, plan to create a more elaborate Holy Week prayer service in which you go to various places to read the seven parts of the narrative. Share responses to the narrative. Discuss questions 3-6. *3. Chief priests see Jesus guilty of blasphemy, claiming to be God. 4. The Pilate treats Jesus as an enemy of Caesar, a pretender king. 5. The inscription identifies Jesus as king of the Jews. 6. Invite teens to think globally and locally. "Crucifixion" is the suffering and violent deaths of innocent people. The families who lost loved ones in Iraq, and both Israeli and Palestinian families in Israel have suffered terrible violence.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize the Church celebrates Jesus' death and resurrection during Holy Week.

Our Catholic Faith: What does Holy Week celebrate? (page 4) Have teens read about the liturgies of the Sacred Triduum, and recall their past experiences of these celebrations. Incorporate simple, traditional song refrains. For the Hosanna section, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" (*Gather* #402); for the Meal section, "Ubi Caritas" (*Gather* #408); for the Cross, "Jesus, Remember Me" (*Gather* #404). Encourage your teens to attend Holy Week liturgies and keep a diary about each liturgy—songs, symbols, actions. They can share their reflections next week—*Live It*, item 3.

Faith in Action (page 4) Consider items 1 and 2, and invite your teens to plan and celebrate a passion prayer experience and/or a contemporary stations of the cross.

**For new weekly music updates, check
goodgroundpress.com**

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

The Church chooses to hear the Easter message each year from John 20, in which three of Jesus' closest disciples—Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple—go to Jesus' tomb. Each disciple finds the tomb empty and sees the wrappings from Jesus' body lying on the ground. The beloved disciple sees and believes, modeling an ideal response. Peter sees but can draw no conclusions and returns to be with Jesus' gathered disciples.

Mary Magdalene sees the empty tomb and stays to search for Jesus' body. She sees a man she supposes is the gardener until she hears him call her name and recognizes Jesus. She hears and believes, becoming the first disciple to encounter Jesus risen. *SPIRIT* includes Mary's story (John 20.10-18) in the Easter gospel, although the lectionary does not, in order to explore Mary Magdalene as a model of faith. In all four gospels she is the first to witness Jesus' resurrection.

The sacred Triduum are the holiest days of the Christian year. Holy Thursday celebrates Jesus' last supper with his friends when he makes bread and wine the signs of his body broken and lifeblood poured out. Good Friday solemnly remembers Jesus' passion and his seeming failure—crucifixion and death. Easter transforms this failure. Jesus' love proves stronger than even death. His passover from death to life is the promise of our own as his followers.

The Church welcomes its new believers at Easter, initiating them through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. Baptism is every Christian's plunge into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. The sign of dying and rising with Christ in baptism is clearest in baptism by immersion. Catechumens go down into the water, symbolizing Jesus' death, then rise, bathed and clean, to new life. *SPIRIT* features a young man's personal story about recognizing in a child's Easter baptism the value he places on his own belonging to the Church.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will appreciate baptismal signs and symbols—dawn, flowers, spring, eggs, water, new life.

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

(cover) Pray the prayer at top left as a group.

Icebreaker: Easter (cover) Read the Easter poem aloud together. Invite teens who attended Holy Week liturgies to talk about what they experienced on Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday—the many symbols, songs, and gestures they experienced and their meaning. Use the photos on pages 1 and 2 to help teens recall their experiences at the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil. The cover photos show two catechumens at various stages of initiation: being baptized, with sponsors, standing with other new Christians in white robes. Have teens identify Easter symbols in the photos and their meaning.

Objective: The young people will affirm their baptismal faith in Jesus' resurrection and promise of new life.

Article: Baptism (pages 1-2) Read aloud the first two paragraphs in Brett Johnson's reflection; then have teens take turns reading the article aloud for the group.

● Discuss questions 1-2. 1. *Encourage teens to remember any experiences of church, religion class, or family celebrations at church that have caught their attention* 2. *Brett is a college senior when he recognizes in the child's baptism that the Christian assembly had once welcomed him. He feels the mystery of connection with Jesus, Father, Spirit, and each other in which Christians participate.*

Easter (page 3) Read aloud the quotation on page 3, bottom. Have your teens read "Easter" aloud in pairs and then answer question 3. Have pairs share their responses with the whole group. 3. *Easter celebrates Jesus' resurrection from the dead, our redemption from death, and promise of life with God. Baptism initiates Christians into membership in the Christian community that believes God raised Jesus from the dead and promises to share the eternal life of God with us.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize the Easter gospel announces the core event of our Christian faith—Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Mary Magdalene meets Jesus risen (page 3) Have volunteers proclaim the Easter gospel. Discuss questions 4-6. 4. *The unnamed disciple sees the empty tomb and folded head covering and believes.* 5. *Encourage teens to share their experiences of recognizing Jesus. Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus' voice when he speaks her name and believes. She is the first to see the risen Jesus and proclaim his resurrection.* 6. *Teens may have had intense retreat, youth rally, or camping experiences. Some may have experienced God with them in the midst of loss or hurt. Openended.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will recognize Mary Magdalene as a model of Easter faith.

Our Catholic Faith: Who Is Mary Magdalene, Apostle or Prostitute? (page 4) Have your teens read this feature aloud as a large group. Look together how Mary Charles McGough paints Mary Magdalene in the icon on page 4, identifying her as the apostle to the apostles.

Faith in Action (page 4) Divide your teens in threes or fours to do 1 and 3. Encourage your teens to be creative about item 1, but to lose Mary Magdalene's stereotypical prostitute features. Item 3 asks for personal response.

● Encourage your teens to do item 2, which invites them to interact intergenerationally. Be ready to supply members of your group interested in making an Easter banner.

Foot: The work of thinking through a homily will help teens pull their reflections together.

Concluding Prayer (cover) Gather your teens in a prayer space. Invite each to say one thing he or she feels grateful for about the year. Break and share a loaf of sweet-tasting bread as a symbol of the nourishment teens have been to one another.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Easter Sunday celebrates Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This is the core belief of Christian faith: that God raises up Jesus, who was crucified, from the dead. Jesus' resurrection promises that all who believe in him will be raised up to new life with God as he has been. He is the firstborn of a new humanity. The act of raising Jesus from the dead reveals God as the one who gives life. By accepting death, Jesus reveals that God's power lies not in magic or military might but in self-giving, wholehearted love. Love is the ultimate life-giving energy that fuels the cosmos that God has created and the Spirit animates and urges toward communion.

Baptism is the Easter sacrament because in this sign of washing and bathing in water the new Christian dies and rises with Christ. Baptism by immersion most clearly expresses this sign of plunging down into Jesus' death and rising to his new life.

The gospels for Easter and the 2nd Sunday of Easter come from John 20, which tells the stories of four faith journeys. First, the beloved disciple sees the empty tomb and folded cloths and believes Jesus is risen. Second, Mary Magdalene weeps and looks for Jesus' body until a man she supposes to be the gardener says her name. Then she recognizes the risen Jesus and believes. Third, in this Sunday's gospel the whole, fearful community receives peace and the Spirit from the risen Jesus on Easter evening and believes. Fourth, Thomas doubts but believes when he puts his hands in Jesus' wounds.

In this issue *SPIRIT* tells the story of two high school students who experience people's losses and community spirit firsthand after an earthquake.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will recognize Jesus sends his followers to form communities of love and forgiveness.

Music: See *SPIRIT XTRA* or goodgroundpress.com for popular music on the gospel theme.

Pray: We live in the mystery of God who gives life (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or about events in the world. Have the young people look at the *SPIRIT* cover, which provides a litany of the Church's history. Explain that in a litany as a form of prayer an individual makes statements and the group responds; in this case, "We live in the mystery of God who gives life." This response is at top left. Explain also that this litany remembers some unjust and tragic events as well as great works of faith. Have your teens take turns reading aloud the statements between the star shapes. The group repeats the response at each star in the litany.

Article: Helping Firsthand (pages 2-3) Have your teens look closely at the top photo on page 2. At bottom left in this photo is a dining room set. Rubble still fills the backyard six months after the earthquake. Note the photo of the authors on page 3 and with children on page 2.

● Have volunteers read the article aloud for your group. Discuss questions 1-3. 1. *Jessica and Lana experience people's sadness and grief, their loss of their homes, their schools and other public buildings but also their smiles, laughter, gratitude, their pulling together, and their meals from a common pot.* 2. *The Opeongo High School community, the Interact club, the Sisters' community in Peru, the parish, the family relationship between Jessica and Sister Pauline.* 3. *This fundraising story starts out because of a family relationship. Many ministries help people in disasters or in poverty by such fund raising; for example, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Service. Rotary Clubs work world wide as do many other groups this question can help teens recognize.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will recognize the risen Jesus sends his friends forth to continue the mission the Father sent him to do.

Jesus sends his friends forth (page 3) Have four teens take parts and proclaim the gospel. Have the rest of the group take the *Other Disciples* part.

● Discuss questions 4-6. 4. *The community is locking out fear from Jesus' persecutors. Peter may be locking out shame from denying he knew Jesus. The community may not be believing, as Thomas doesn't, the amazing good news of Jesus' resurrection.* 5. *Jesus sends his followers forth to bring peace and forgive others, to form communities of peace, love, and forgiveness.* 6. *Thomas's question may be one we want to ask. Firsthand experience can change us.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will participate in God's power that raises Jesus to new life.

Our Catholic Church: Jesus calls us to new life (page 4) This session stresses the theme in this issue: we live in the power of Jesus' resurrection and witness to God's creative love. By using God's gifts to us, we witness that God lives. Read aloud the quotation from the Catechism.

● Have your teens take turns reading the feature aloud, paragraph by paragraph. Invite them to brainstorm ways they can witness to their faith in Jesus, his way and new life, in their parish and neighborhood this spring.

Faith in Action (page 4) Give your teens three minutes of quiet to reflect on item 1. They can practice items 2 and 3 on their own every day. Invite them to add statements for ending gossip about others.

Note: Look ahead to next week to plan any Earth Day activities you want to do.

Concluding prayer Gather in a circle on the floor and read the gospel in parts a second time. Invite your young people to speak aloud the word or phrase that touched them in Jesus' gospel message. Exchange a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

News of Jesus' resurrection is amazing and bewildering Jesus' followers who gather around the eleven in Jerusalem. The group dismisses the report of Mary Magdalene and other women that Jesus is risen. As Sunday's gospel begins, two disciples describe their confusion when they first meet the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Although he is walking and talking with them, the two do not at first recognize who he is. It is not until Jesus engages in the familiar action of breaking bread that their glimmers of recognition turn into certainty. Then the risen Jesus stands in the midst of the whole company of disciples, showing his hands and feet and asking for something to eat. Jesus' final words explain that Israel's promised messiah had to suffer. This is Luke's understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection. *SPIRIT* explores how to recognize the true value in those around us and how to cultivate new life.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Objective: The young people will identify ways people, including themselves, exclude and include others.

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

Pray (cover) Invite your group to join hands. Remind them that this is their final session together. Ask them to reflect on the year and the ways in which they have come to know one another. Pray together the prayer at the top of page 1.

Cover: Ask the young people to choose two adjectives from the list on the left, or they can use one of their own. Have them choose one adjective to describe themselves at the beginning of the year, one to describe themselves now. Invite the students to reflect on how they have changed over the last year, and to share stories of change if they wish.

Icebreaker: You're In, You're Out Have teens brainstorm familiar phrases which put people down and exclude them. Have one teen record the phrases on a blackboard. Then have your group brainstorm simple responses that could neutralize the effect of the putdowns. Ensure that the responses are respectful. Invite your teens to use the responses when disrespect is directed at them or another.

Story: Nice Guys Finish Last...Sort of

(pages 1-3) Have teens take turns reading the story out loud.

- Divide the group into fours to respond to questions 1-4.
- 1. "Beautiful" may describe an ingroup with superficial values, but the word also describes a healthy, wholesome person who can interact and be a friend.
- 2. Insecurity and having experienced rejection or watching others be rejected make it hard for us to let others know us.
- 3. Invite the teens to describe an incident when they or someone else have attempted to be other than themselves to impress another person. Ask: how did it end? Then distribute cards and pens to each teen. Have them write down one way in which each person in the group is beautiful. Have them keep their cards for the closing prayer. Invite teens to describe an incident when they or someone else has taken a risk to be known and been accepted.
- 4. Openended.

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will identify ways in which Jesus is present to them through the people around them.

The risen Jesus brings peace (page 3) Have three members of the group take the three parts to proclaim and dramatize the gospel. Divide the young people into two or three groups. Have each group retell the gospel as if it happened today. Where would the teens meet Jesus? What would they eat? How recognize him? What questions would they ask?

Have the young people discuss questions 5 and 6. 5. *The pace of teens' lives often leaves them little time to reflect. Stereotypes can get in the way of seeing the truth of Jesus' message.* 6. *Jesus is concerned that his followers understand the message he brings to the world. Repentance means to turn our lives around, to grow past the false messages we receive, to recognize our own value and that of people around us. Jesus also calls us to forgive ourselves and others when we fall short of his ideals.*

LIVING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Objective: The young people will participate in God's power to co-create new life on earth.

Our Catholic Faith: Easter calls us to cultivate new life (pages 3-4) Read aloud and talk with your group about the first five paragraphs of this feature. The first defines the word *Easter*. The second treats Easter as an eighth day of creation. The third and fourth remind teens of the story of Earth's evolution. The fifth connects Jesus' resurrection to new life and the new life of spring.

- Divide your group into fours to read the rest of the feature on care for the Earth and the Sustainable Development Goals. Find them at UN.org. Have the teens identify ways they can pay off their carbon debt.

Faith in Action (page 4) Have the groups share information in regard to item 1 and brainstorm ways to work for sustainability on Earth Day. Visit climatekids.nasa.gov.

- Encourage teens to visit the websites listed in items 3-6. Read the sidebar on page 4 about the students from Buffalo who reduced their carbon footprint by working out a way to get their high school to recycle plastic bottles and cans.

Concluding Prayer Invite young people to read their cards naming one beautiful quality in each of the people in the group. Remind them that Jesus is in their midst and recognizes those and other beautiful qualities about them. Give teens time to mention any special intentions.

- Then pray, *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 to do our part in giving hope to those who struggle, especially those we mention now.* Invite the teens to mention people. Invite the young people to say a prayer of thanks for one blessing that has happened during the past year. Then exchange a sign of peace.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

Israel pictures God as their shepherd in Psalm 23. The prophet Ezekiel speaks for God to the Israelites in exile as a shepherd. "I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As shepherds tend their flocks when they find themselves among scarred sheep, so will I tend my sheep. . . I will rescue them. . . I will bring them back to their own country and pasture" (34.11-16).

Chapter 10 in John's gospel describes Jesus as a good shepherd, who comes to give them abundant life and lays down his life for his sheep. The good shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him. The intimacy between shepherd and sheep becomes a metaphor for Jesus' intimacy with God. "I am the good shepherd; I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." Christians share in the union between Jesus and his Father.

In this issue *SPIRIT* explores the intimacy between persons in friendships and ways to test healthy teen relationships. *SPIRIT* also explore the mutual love to which marriage calls couples.

SPIRIT invites teens to look at the health of their own relationships and recognize the demands of following Jesus' way in service and mutual love.

SHARING LIFE STORIES

Pray: (cover) Gather your teens together and invite them to share any concerns they bring with them for people in their lives or events in the world. Then pray the prayer on the cover together.

Objective: The young people will examine how friendships can hinder or help a person's growth.

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

Icebreaker Facts (pages 2-3) Have your teens read the statistics in the arrows. Ask: Why do you think teens want to look a certain way? Do images of perfect bodies make teens feel humble?

Article: Growing Toward Intimacy (pages 2-3) Have your teens divide into threes or fours to read this article about healthy relationships and discuss questions 1-4. 1. *Openended. Have your teens make a list of all the friendships each has. Then ask them to identify which of these friendships they consider close. Invite them to define the word close and what responsibilities it entails.* 2, 3, 4. *Bob Bartlett establishes four criteria for healthy relationships—fun, inclusiveness of others, comfort with silence, and equality. These questions invite your teens to talk about their own experience of relationships and dialogue with the author.*

REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL

Objective: The young people will explore their friendship with Jesus.

Gospel: Jesus lays down his life for his friends (page 3) Have four young people take the parts of Jesus 1, 2, 3, 4. Invite the group to listen for words that express Jesus' intimacy with us. Discuss questions 5-6. 5. *Jesus contrasts hired shepherds who does the work and a good shepherd to whom the sheep belong who puts this life on the line for the sheep. Jesus makes all of us who follow him intimate friends, important enough to die for—the absolute greatest expression of friendship.* 6. *One for whom the others' well-being is as important as his or her own. One who gives himself or herself wholeheartedly in love.*

BUILDING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Objective: The young people will evaluate how they practice mutual love and equality in their relationships.

We are the Church: Mutual Love (page 4) Ask teens to give their definition of mutuality before reading this feature. Have them notice the photos which picture friends and a couple at their wedding. Have your teens take turns reading aloud the feature. Invite them to talk about why marriage is a sacrament of service. Ask them if the feature affects how they define mutuality. Mutuality is treating one another as equals, finding ourselves by loving others. Ask your teens to compare their definitions with the quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* at the top of the page.

Faith in Action (page 4) Once teens can define mutuality, ask them to respond to items 1-4 in their small groups. The questions challenge them to think beyond mutuality as an abstract concept and apply it to their lives—how they drive, how they pay on dates, how they treat friends. If as Christians they believe all people are equal, how should they act toward one another? Ask groups to share a main idea from their discussion with the whole group.

Concluding prayer Have your teens gather in a circle and think quietly for two minutes about *Faith in Action* questions 5 and 6. Invite each who wishes to name a way in which he or she serves or hopes to serve after high school. Then pray: *God of everlasting love, teach us how to serve others. Give our hands strength to serve and our hearts strength to love. Amen.*