

Faith Sharing

for Girls and Young Women

In the spirit of the Annunciation, we consider what it means for us and for our daughters, granddaughters, nieces, and all other girls and young women in our world to say “yes” to God in the twenty-first century. In reflection on the theme of the Annunciation, we encourage girls and young women to articulate their “yes;” we listen to what the challenge means to them, and we support them in their efforts to build God’s reign.

The following process will help your local faith community—parish, school, Scout troop, service club, and so forth—create an opportunity for girls and young women to explore their spirituality and articulate their ideas about saying “yes” to God, just as a young Mary did when she was visited by the angel Gabriel two thousand years ago.

1. Plan a date and a location so that it falls on or near the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March. Invite girls and young women in your community. Be sure to extend the invitation to as many people as possible, using all means possible. Use newspapers, parish bulletins, school announcements, newsletters, e-mail, and so forth. However, remember that the most effective means of getting young people to attend anything is a sincere personal invitation.
2. Recruit other adults to act as leaders and discussion facilitators. If the participants are primarily younger teens, older teens and young adults would be good candidates to serve in that leadership role.
3. Set up a prayer space in a prominent place in the room. You might include a candle, a plant, an icon or image, some colored cloth, and so forth. Include a Bible as part of the prayer space.
4. If the participants do not know each other, begin the session with a few fun activities to facilitate introductions and to build a sense of community. Four options for get-to-know-you activities follow:

Option 1: Write the letters Y, E, S, T, O, G, O, D on index cards, one letter to a card. Make as many sets as you need so that each participant gets one letter. Distribute the cards randomly. Tell the girls to form groups to spell the phrase “Yes to God.”

Option 2: Purchase a bag of multi-colored candies, such as Skittles or M and M’s. Pour the candies into cups so that you have a cup of candy for each small group. Instruct the first person in the group to pass the cup to the person on her right. That person should take one

candy without looking at the color. Based on the color of candy she picked, that person must provide an answer to a category. Create categories that suit the group and the age. For example

red: something about her family

yellow: something about school or work

brown: a pet peeve

orange: a favorite . . . (movie, book, candy bar, song)

blue: a least favorite . . . (same choices as above)

green: something she would like to do someday

Option 3: In small groups the girls must come up with ten things they all have in common (other than the obvious things, like we're all female, we were all born after 1980, and so forth). It might be something like we are all left handed, we all wear contacts, we were all born in a different state, and so forth.

Option 4: Give each girl a plastic badge with an insert, like the ones used for name tags. Provide a collection of magazines, catalogs, and newspapers, scissors, and glue. Tell them to create a mini-collage using words and pictures that describe them. When they finish the collage, they are to cut out letters that spell their name and paste them over the collage. Invite them to share their mini-collages with one another. They can wear the finished products as name tags.

If none of these activities fits your needs, Group Publishing, Youth Specialties, and Saint Mary's Press all publish a variety of resources contain hundreds of other ideas. Call the publishers directly or consult your parish or diocesan library.

5. Gather the girls in groups of six to ten. If the participants represent a variety of ages, it would be best to group them in with others who are close to their age. Assign a facilitator to each group, preferably someone who has experience leading young people and is comfortable with the topic of spirituality. Explain to young people the importance of exploring spirituality and of doing so from their unique perspective as a girl or a young woman.
6. If you have a candle in the prayer space, light it. Read Luke 1:26-38, the scriptural description of the Annunciation. Explain that Mary was a girl of about fourteen when she said "yes" to God. It was a "yes" that changed the world. Ask the girls to remain silent for a few moments and think about the meaning of Mary's action. After a short time, read the passage again.
7. Within the small groups, engage the participants in a discussion of the following sentence starters, adapting both the questions and the process

to fit the age and needs of the group. You may want to open the discussion yourself or provide an opportunity for the participants to write their answers before discussing them with others. Assure the girls that they do not have to share anything they do not want to share.

- I realize that God is near when . . .
- If I were Mary, I probably would have . . .
- I think I am most holy when I . . .
- God speaks to me or sends messages to me by . . .
- The gifts that girls and young women have and can bring to the church and to the world are . . .
- Right now, I think that God is asking me to . . .
- For me to say “yes” to God in this new millennium means . . .

8. Gather the participants in the prayer space. Again, read the passage from Luke’s Gospel. If your group is small and the space is conducive, conclude the listening session with a prayer of blessing over each individual participant. Invite each girl to come forward, extend your hands over her in a gesture of blessing, and say the words of Elizabeth when she greeted Mary: “*(name), blessed are you among women! May your life be a “yes” to God.*” The girls could also do this for one another. After all the participants have been blessed, join together in saying the *Hail Mary*.

You may want to provide a prayer card or some other memento of the day for the girls to take home as a reminder of the challenge to say “yes” to God and “no” to all things that are not of God.

9. Provide snacks and refreshments for the participants. Give them a chance to socialize and build community. You might want to survey the group about their interest in continuing to meet as a group of girls and young women to share insights, have fun, engage in service activities, and hear stories of faith.

(This session was developed by Mary Ellen Sheehan of Atlanta, Georgia, and Marilyn Kielbasa of Winona, Minnesota, as part of The Voices Project.)