

## *Life-giving Relationships*



# *Life-giving Relationships*



**Carole Goodwin**

Brian Singer-Towns, Editor

Thomas Zanzig, General Editor

Marilyn Kielbasa, Consultant

I would like to thank the many high school seniors who have invited me to accompany them on their journeys.



# Contents



Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-consumer waste.  
Printed with soy-based ink.

Nihil Obstat: Brian B. Reynolds  
Censor Librorum  
1 August 1997

Imprimatur: †Most Rev. Thomas C. Kelly, O.P.  
Bishop of Louisville  
1 August 1997

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

The publishing team included Shirley Kelter, creative consultant; Mary Duerson, copy editor; Lynn Dahdal, production editor; Maurine R. Twait, design consultant; Holly Storkel, typesetter; Kent Linder, handout designer; Proof Positive/Farrowlyne Associates, Inc., cover designer; Kaz Mori, Image Bank, cover photographer; Sam Thiewes, illustrator; pre-press, printing, and binding by the graphics division of Saint Mary's Press.

The scriptural quotations in this book, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

The scriptural quotation noted as NJB on page 56 is from the New Jerusalem Bible. Copyright © 1985 by Darton Longman and Todd, London, and Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, New York. All rights reserved.

The quote describing evangelization on page 11 is from *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization: Called to Be Witnesses and Storytellers*, by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993), page 3. Copyright © 1993 by the NFCYM.

The extract on pages 19 and 26 are from *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, by Henri J. M. Nouwen (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1975), page 51. Copyright © 1975 by Henri J. M. Nouwen.

The activity on pages 33–34 is based on *Sharing IV*, by Thomas Zanzig (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1988), pages 94–95. Copyright © 1988 by Saint Mary's Press.

The first quotation on page 36 is from *The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman's Guide to Courageous Acts of Change in Key Relationships*, by Harriet Goldhor Lerner (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), page 202. Copyright © 1989 by Harriet Goldhor Lerner.

The second quotation on page 36 is from *Growing Toward Intimacy: Helping Catholic Teens Integrate Sexuality and Spirituality*, by Bob Bartlett (Saint Paul: Good Ground Press, 1997), page 69. Copyright © 1997 by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet.

The information on intimacy on page 38 is from *Making a Friend in Youth*, by Robert L. Selman and Lynn Hickey Schultz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Copyright © 1998 by Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1318, www.smp.org. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce only the materials intended for distribution to the program participants. No other part of this text may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 2006 05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98

ISBN 0-88489-420-7

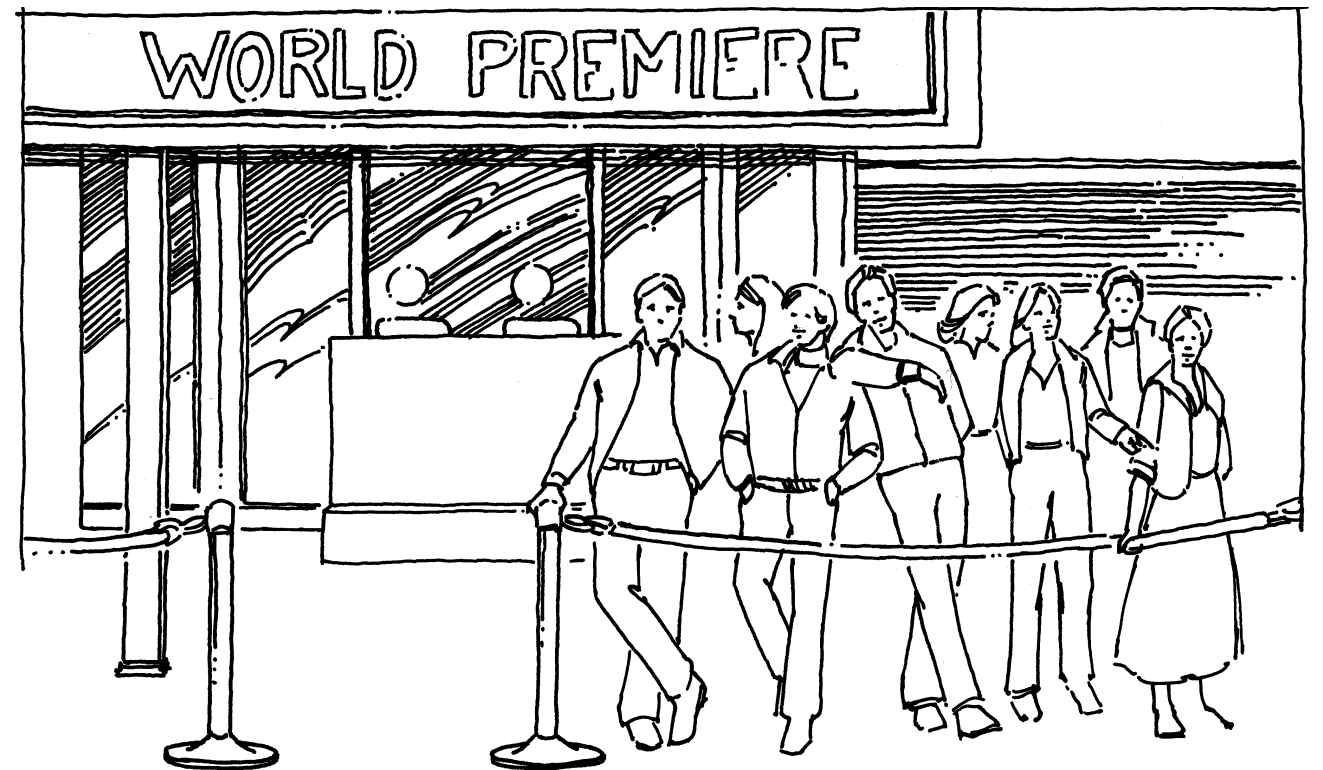
Introduction 7

Session 1  
Cycles of Friendships 17

Session 2  
Healthy Relationships and True Intimacy 30

Session 3  
My Heart Will Not Rest Until It Rests in Thee 49

## Introduction



### An Overview of This Course

Relationships with other people make up a vital part of our life. We could survive neither psychologically nor spiritually without them. In Gen. 2:18 God is quoted as saying that it is not good for the first human being to be alone. Why? Several reasons: We learn about our uniqueness and worth through our relationships. We learn to appreciate the giftedness and dignity of other people. Ultimately, relationships are a primary way that we can come to know and understand God. Every relationship has the potential to teach us something about ourselves, other people, and God.

Relating to others in positive, life-giving ways is a critical skill. It is often said that play is the work of childhood. Similarly, learning to relate is the work of adolescence. The skills for healthy relating are, at best, imitative in childhood. Adolescence is the time when these skills are refined, enhanced, and developed, to lay a foundation for healthy, life-giving relationships throughout adult life.

This course, *Life-giving Relationships*, will provide the young people with an opportunity to explore their relationships in order to identify those that are unhealthy and those that are life-giving. The course is designed for seniors in high school and addresses many of the key relationship issues that they face as they leave high school. It is intended to help them explore their current and past relationships, learn

skills for healthy relating, understand that intimacy refers to more than sex, and appreciate the spirituality of relationships.

*Life-giving Relationships* is made up of three 2-hour sessions that complement the level 4 core course *Moving On: Embracing the Future*. Each session expands on and enriches some of the themes covered in the core course. It is not necessary for the participants to take the core course before taking *Life-giving Relationships*; however, doing so will provide a richer context for the material that is covered.

As you teach, maintain a smooth flow to the course, presenting the sessions one a week for three consecutive weeks. The discussions and reflections are designed for a small group of no more than ten participants. If your group is considerably larger, you may have to make adjustments in the session plans. If you need assistance with this task, consult your program coordinator.

The first session calls the participants to reflect on their relational history with friends and family. It helps them to recognize that the patterns of their relationships are influenced by their past, but that they have the ability to change the ways they will relate in the future. Session 1 also introduces the concept that all friendships go through seasons and many come to a natural end.

As the first session continues, the participants consider the patterns of relating in their families of origin. The family is discussed as a “school of relationships” that influences us throughout our life. In this school we learn both positive and negative patterns of relating. If we are conscious of what we have learned from our families, we can strengthen positive patterns and avoid negative patterns.

The second session focuses on the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. It also addresses adolescents’ commonly held belief that intimacy equals sex. It challenges them to come to a fuller definition of intimacy, one based on the depth of a relationship rather than its degree of sexual contact.

The final session begins with an opportunity for the participants to ask any questions about relationships. The remainder of the session is devoted to helping the young people appreciate how God is experienced and revealed through our close relationships. The concluding prayer experience invites the participants to commit to seeking healthy relationships with God’s help.

## Background for This Course

### The Adolescent and This Course

Adolescents often identify being with friends as their favorite pastime. Seniors in high school are commonly interested in talking with others about their relationships with friends and family. The majority of them have probably been involved in at least one dating relationship, and all will have experienced important friendships. Standing on the threshold of a major life transition, they know that their relationships with important friends and family members will be changing. They may well feel anticipation and loss, excitement and anxiety as they look to the future.

*Life-giving Relationships* is premised on the following common life experiences faced by seniors in high school. As you look over these descriptions, reflect on your own experiences as a senior in high school.

**Letting go of close friendships.** Saying goodbye to close friends is hard for anyone of any age. Seniors are facing this, maybe for the first time in their life. It might help them to understand that few friendships are lifelong and that it is natural for friendships to go through cycles. Christians can appreciate this in the context of the paschal mystery—that such letting go is part of the mystery of dying and rising that we are all called to. The ritual in session 3 is designed to help the young people in this process. Be aware that the focus on saying good-bye may be difficult and possibly emotional for some of the young people.

**Dealing with unhealthy relationships.** In recent years much attention has been given to the dynamics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. A wealth of literature from the social sciences has helped us to become more aware of the affect of those dynamics on psychological development. References to dysfunctional families and dysfunctional relationships are common. We have learned as well that what affects people’s psyches also affects their faith journeys. Therefore, catechetical ministry must be sensitive to the pastoral care or counseling needed to enrich relationship skills that foster authentic Christian living.

Many young people come from living situations characterized by addiction, abuse, or neglect. They may carry these unhealthy patterns of relating into their other significant relationships. These young people may initially appear to be doing just fine because they have learned to hide their secrets and their pain from public view. Their participation in the course may give them an opportunity to confront these unhealthy relationships.

*Life-giving Relationships* is designed not to put the teacher or group members in the uncomfortable position of being counselors, but to allow the young people to identify privately for themselves any unhealthy relationships they need to change. If during the course you have reasonable suspicion or it is revealed that one of the participants is caught in an unhealthy relationship, make arrangements to speak to that young person privately and have references ready for counseling or support groups. Also check your parish and diocesan guidelines for the proper procedures if anyone reveals an abusive situation.

**Seeking intimacy.** Intimacy is a psychological need that all people have to a greater or lesser degree. It is the state of knowing another person deeply and being known deeply by another. Intimacy is not earned and is not automatic to all relationships. Intimacy is not a given. It is a product of hard work in a relationship and an outcome of the commitment that the people in the relationship have to each other. People experience different levels of intimacy as their ability to enter into deeper relationship grows.

Many young people equate significant relationships with dating, and intimacy with sex. They need help in redefining significant relationships to include nonromantic friendships with both sexes and in understanding intimacy more broadly as the richness that comes from knowing another person deeply. They also need to learn skills for developing deeper intimacy as they grow in their significant relationships with members of both sexes. *Life-giving Relationships* responds to such needs.

**Dealing with gender issues.** Gender affects how young people engage in discussions about relationships. Contrary to some stereotypes, young women sometimes express reluctance in sharing their true feelings when it comes to relationships. They may know what they feel, but they don’t want to risk ridicule for expressing their opinions on intimacy. They may place a higher value on intimacy than on sex, but they may not want to admit or discuss this.

In the book *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher says adolescent young women are cautious about sharing their authentic selves because they stop thinking, “Who am I? What do I want?” and start thinking, “What must I do to please others?” You may notice this happening when the course begins dealing with intimacy and healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Young men in our culture are often expected to be independent and autonomous. According to the stereotype, true manhood is not measured by the capacity to develop intimate relationships but by the ability to remain independent and in control. The ability to be sexually involved but emotionally unattached is prized. Young men may have difficulty expressing their feelings about relationships because they are simply unaware of the feelings they have. They have learned to suppress those feelings lest they be controlled by them. *Life-giving Relationships* challenges the cultural male stereotype by pointing out that true intimacy is a necessary part of healthy and life-giving relationships.

### Culture Connections

One of the challenges facing the church as it tries to form in people of all ages Christian values for life-giving relationships is the influence of the media. The media exert a strong influence in defining what is normative behavior between friends, dating partners, and families. Unfortunately, what the media define as normative is often misleading, and sometimes flatly contradicts the authentic values needed for life-giving relationships. For example, television sitcoms and dramas commonly portray scenarios like the following:

- Friends use and manipulate each other for selfish purposes. The results are often depicted as funny and easily dismissed, while the pain of being used or betrayed is easily passed over.
- Difficulties in a relationship are easily overcome whether in a family, dating, or friendship situation. Relating seems simple, and if complications arise they are easily resolved by severing the relationship.
- Parents and other adults have little wisdom to share about healthy relationships. A teenager is featured as the wisdom figure in the family. This young person knows how to solve family dilemmas, and if the parents were to disappear, as one series about five orphaned siblings suggests, the wise teenager would cope just fine.

- When the young people need to make serious, sometimes life-changing decisions, they often have the support of their parents and even teachers—whether the decision is a healthy one or not.
- The characters seem to move from one dating relationship to another with ease, and immediately jump to a level of intimacy that is unrealistic and not likely to occur in real life.
- Sexual involvement is almost always a given in dating relationships and is shown to enhance, rather than impede, the depth of intimacy experienced by the couple.

During discussions in this course, remind the young people that real relationships often do not resemble what we see in films or television. They are hard work, no two are alike, and they require more than simple solutions to resolve difficult problems. Stress that the media's limited and often distorted viewpoint should not shape our approach to important relationships.

## The Theology of This Course

*Life-giving Relationships* draws upon the following foundational theological concepts:

**God's revelation occurs through relationships.** Christians believe that God is revealed most completely in the person of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures and tradition both communicate that revelation to us today. But the foundation for both the Scriptures and tradition is the historical events in which Jesus related to family, friends, strangers, and enemies. The nature of those relationships helps us understand the meaning of Jesus' life and message.

The Scriptures and tradition provide other examples of God speaking and acting through human relationships. Perhaps most striking are the accounts in the Hebrew Scriptures in which human relationships are used as metaphors for God's relationship with Israel and Judah. The story of the faithful relationship between Ruth and Naomi symbolizes the best of Israel's covenantal relationship with God. On the negative side, the prophet Hosea's relationship with his adulterous wife, Gomer, is a metaphor for Israel's unfaithful relationship with God.

Similarly, God is revealed to us in a personal way through our relationships with other people. This can take many forms: a comforting hug, shared laughter, a moment of reconciliation, and faithful

love expressed within an intimate relationship. God's grace is always available to us in times of crisis, usually through persons with whom we share a close relationship. Indeed, most of our primary images of God are derived from our experience of human relationships: Parent, Judge, Guide, Lover, Teacher, Friend, Savior, Healer, Comforter, Protector, and Advocate. We might say that relationships are the vehicle through which God's love is revealed. Therefore a person's experiences of relationships with other people—positive or negative—can have a profound affect on her or his relationship with God. Human relationships are the arena in which we learn the skills to relate to God. When these relationships are unhealthy or abusive, a person's capacity for relationship with God can be diminished. This is, from a perspective of faith formation, what makes the task of guiding young people toward healthy relationships so essential.

**The human person possesses innate dignity.** The profound dignity belonging to every person is grounded in a central biblical truth: God created human beings in God's own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27). All our relationships should reflect this sense of mutual dignity—our own and others. To treat other people as objects—that is, to use or abuse them to achieve our own ends—is an offense not just against a creature but also against the Creator whose image we reflect. To put it more positively, in building life-giving relationships with other people, we are honoring God.

**Jesus teaches us about life-giving relationships.** The Christian Scriptures proclaim that God is fully revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. God is revealed in a flesh-and-blood person, and that person's life is totally relational and grounded in community. Jesus provides us with an example of healthy and life-giving relationships with God and others. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus leads us to a deeper relationship with God and assists us in discovering the ways to be engaged in deeper relationships with other humans.

In our relationships with others, we are called to reflect the qualities that Jesus models in his own relationships. Grace flowed through his interactions as he taught, comforted, healed, challenged, grieved over, and loved his friends, relatives, Apostles, and even enemies. In John 15:14, Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." To be Jesus' friends we must try to make our relationships as healthy and life-giving as Jesus made his.

## This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as "the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers" (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly "religious," explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be "good news," not just proclaim the Good News.

A large part of the adolescent world focuses on relationships. Every young person is defining and redefining what it means to be a friend, a member of a family, a student, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a world citizen, a member of a church community, and a child of God. To truly evangelize young people, we must help them recognize God's activity in the relational dimension of their life. This means helping them to identify the grace that is present in their day-to-day relationships. *Life-giving Relationships* does this both in its concrete activities and its moments of prayer.

## Teaching This Course

### A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Life-giving Relationships*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

### Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Life-giving Relationships* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

**Create a good physical atmosphere.** You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

**Clarify expectations.** At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

### Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This ranges from copying a simple list onto newsprint to gathering props. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

### Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it, you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you to share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This lets the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

### Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Life-giving Relationships* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the sessions; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions or after the last session.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Life-giving Relationships*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given for *not* using all the suggested journal activities. First, if *every* teacher of *every* course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of it. Second, journal keeping is a time- and energy-consuming process for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way?

What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

### Using Music

Some of the activities in *Life-giving Relationships* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music, but music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think it might be appropriate. Two songs that seem to be timeless with adolescents and that may be useful as preludes or as a part of closing prayers are "Lean on Me," by Bill Withers, and "Stand by Me," by Ben E. King. These songs both deal with friendships, and often young people know the words to them and will sing along. These recordings can be purchased at most contemporary music stores. Several of the young people might even have copies of them.

Other circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

**Popular music for prayer.** Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

**Background music for reflection.** Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have

trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

**Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer.** Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

### Using This Course as a Retreat

The content of this course lends itself easily to a two-day retreat. A retreat would be a wonderful way for parish seniors to end their time together as part of your parish youth ministry program. If you want to consider using *Life-giving Relationships* as a retreat, consult your program coordinator and together weigh the following advantages and disadvantages:

#### Advantages

- The topic of relationships will be of high interest to high school seniors and will be an incentive for them to clear their schedules to attend the retreat.
- Some of the common popular components of retreats are already present in the content of this course, such as community-building activities, prayer services, journaling, and faith-sharing discussions.

- A retreat allows more time than does the weekly format for extended discussions and informal sharing on the topics.
- Time may be available for a feature-length film that illustrates some of the course content.

### Disadvantages

- An overnight retreat is a big commitment for seniors. Carefully check school schedules and confer with the young people about activities at their schools.
- Providing a facility, transportation, and meals may require more time and energy from adults than is called for by the weekly format.
- Little time will be available to research and prepare answers to the participants' questions in session 3, especially if a relationship expert is not on the retreat team.

### Special Preparation Needs

As the teacher of this course, you are an important resource for the participants. You have your own experiences of relationships to share with the participants. Your memories of high school relationships can provide firsthand stories to illustrate the course content. The young people will be interested in hearing about good friendships you left behind as you moved into adulthood as well as those you have maintained over the years. Your sharing will also model appropriate sharing for them. As you read through the session plans, take time with the discussion and journal questions to remember your own stories and how you might share them with the young people.

You also need to decide before the course begins whether to recruit a relationship expert for the question period in session 3. Should you decide to do so, recruit this person in advance to assure his or her availability.

## This Course and Total Youth Ministry

### Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

### Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Life-giving Relationships* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Provide an opportunity for seniors to celebrate important relationships they have in the parish. This could happen at a youth meeting or a graduation breakfast. During this time invite seniors to share memories that are special to them. Invite other youth and adults to write personal messages on posters or journal books that will be given to the seniors.
- As part of a retreat or a youth meeting, invite several young adults to come and share how their relationships have changed since high school. Try to have both male and female representatives. You might talk about healthy and unhealthy relationships and true intimacy with these young adults beforehand so they could mention those ideas in their sharing.

- As part of a retreat or a youth meeting, have a session on relationships in media. Begin by showing short clips from popular television shows portraying healthy and unhealthy relationships and ask the participants to evaluate them. Continue by having the participants identify other examples of healthy and unhealthy relationships in songs, movies, and television shows. Finish by inviting them to create a viewer's guide highlighting artists and shows that generally depict healthy relationships.

### Family Connections

Before the start of the course, consider putting together a flyer or letter to send home to families that includes the following information:

- an outline of *Life-giving Relationships*, including session titles, the goals and objectives, and a brief description of the course
- a copy of handout 2-A, "Characteristics of Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships," with a brief explanation of its use
- a request to keep you and all the young people in prayer

## Goals and Objectives in This Course

### Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

**Goals.** Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

**Objectives.** Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

## The Goals and Objectives of *Life-giving Relationships*

### Goals

This course has five goals:

- That the young people reflect on their important relationships and the direction they would like their relationships to take in the future
- That the young people recognize the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- That the young people become familiar with the skills needed for growing healthy relationships
- That the young people identify their needs for intimacy and how to appropriately express intimacy in different relationships
- That the young people recognize the spiritual nature of the human quest for intimacy

### Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the five course goals. The objectives of *Life-giving Relationships* follow:

#### *Session 1: "Cycles of Friendships"*

- To help the young people create timelines of their personal histories of close relationships
- To give them time to reflect on how their relationships have changed as they have matured



- To explore with them the relationship styles in their families
- To provide them with a ritual for embracing their past relationships and for moving on to future relationships

*Session 2: "Healthy Relationships and True Intimacy"*

- To lead the young people to identify the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- To help them define true intimacy
- To explore with them the skills needed for developing healthy relationships

*Session 3: "My Heart Will Not Rest Until It Rests in Thee"*

- To provide an opportunity for the young people to ask questions regarding relationships
- To ritualize a "letting go" of a relationship
- To explore with the young people how God is experienced and revealed through our relationships
- To enable the young people to identify biblical principles for healthy relating

## Suggested Resources

The following resources may provide helpful background and teaching materials.

### For Adults

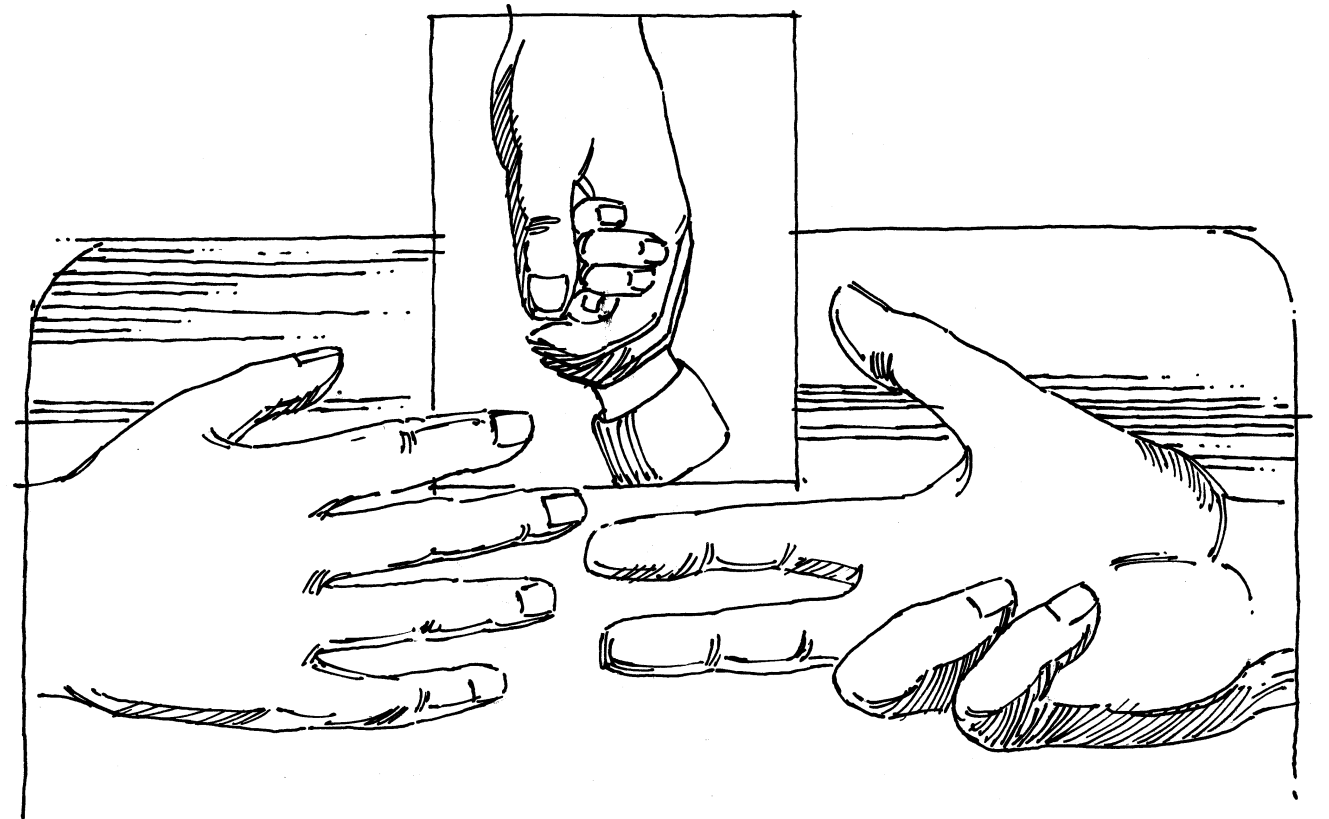
- Kimball, Don. *A Spirituality of Relationships*, New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1994.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975.
- Rubin, Lillian B. *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in Our Lives*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.
- Selman, Robert L., and Lynn Hickey Schultz. *Making a Friend in Youth: Developmental Theory and Pair Therapy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

### For Young People

- Bartlett, Bob. *Growing Toward Intimacy: Helping Catholic Teens Integrate Sexuality and Spirituality*. Saint Paul: Good Ground Press, 1997.
- Clark, Chap. *Next Time I Fall in Love: How to Handle Sex, Intimacy, and Feelings in Dating Relationships*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 1987.
- Davis, Ken. *I Don't Remember Dropping the Skunk, but I Do Remember Trying to Breathe: Survival Skills for Teenagers*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990.

## SESSION 1

# Cycles of Friendships



### Objectives

- To help the young people create timelines of their personal histories of close relationships
- To give them time to reflect on how their relationships have changed as they have matured
- To explore with them the relationship styles in their families
- To provide them with a ritual for embracing their past relationships and for moving on to future relationships

### Session Steps

- an introduction and opening prayer (10 minutes)
- a pinwheel icebreaker that focuses on relationships (10 minutes)
- an activity charting personal relationships (15 minutes)
- a discussion and presentation exploring relationship characteristics and changes (30 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a reflection and discussion on family relationships (30 minutes)
- a closing prayer (15 minutes)

## Background for the Teacher

We often fail to appreciate the affect our closest relationships have on us, particularly our relationships with parents and siblings, which greatly influence us in both positive and negative ways. So too our first intimate relationships with friends or dating partners influence us, but to a lesser extent. Yet we take these relationships for granted, not appreciating the patterns they create that will influence future relationships. The goal of this first session of *Life-giving Relationships* is to help young people understand the effect of these important relationships.

The session begins with an overview of the course followed by an opening prayer about the characteristics of friendship.

After an icebreaker on relationships, the session directs the young people to make a relationship timeline of their past and present relationships. This exercise helps illustrate the history of their relationships and creates a tool for reflecting on different aspects of the relationships. The timeline will be used throughout the course and will be added to in each of the following sessions.

The next activity leads the young people to respond to some common statements about relationships. It can challenge some of their preconceived notions and stereotypes about what constitutes quality relationships. A presentation provides information on styles of friendships and how relationships grow and change. The natural changes that occur in friendships are compared to the changes that occur in the cycle of seasons.

Following the break the young people are led in an activity that explores the way their family members relate to one another. The discussion that follows invites the young people to recognize that they have been learning how to relate ever since they were born. Their families have been the lab for that learning. The participants are introduced to both positive and negative styles of relating they may have learned in their family settings. A time of private reflection lets the participants think about how those patterns are present in other family members and in themselves.

The session closes with a prayer service that invites the young people to embrace the personal history that has shaped them and make a symbolic gesture that pledges to break any negative patterns of relating.

## Preparation

### ✓ Materials Needed

- a 2- to 3-foot-long tree branch with ten to twelve smaller branches coming off it
- a planter to hold the tree branch
- enough sand, dirt, or rocks to hold the branch firmly in the planter
- a Bible
- a candle and matches
- newsprint and markers
- two copies of resource 1–A, “Opening Prayer: Proverbial Friendship”
- pens or pencils
- a roll of 3- to 5-inch-wide adding machine tape, long enough to provide each participant with a 48-inch-long piece
- red pens or fine-tipped markers, one for each participant
- red and green paper
- a scissors
- journals, one for each participant (You can use pocket folders filled with several pieces of notebook paper.)
- a copy of resource 1–B, “Animal Friends”
- poster board
- ornament hangers, string, or yarn
- a shoe box (or something similar) with a lid, to serve as a question box
- index cards, one for each participant
- a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music (optional)

### ✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Create a relationship tree as directed in step A.
- For step A.* Set up the prayer space. Include the relationship tree, a Bible, a candle and matches, and any other religious symbols or art you choose to use.
- For step A.* Prepare a poster as directed in step A.
- For step B.* Arrange the room so the group can stand or sit in two concentric circles.

- For step C.* Make a sample timeline of your personal relationship history on a piece of adding machine tape as directed in step C.
- For step D.* Cut red and green paper into pieces about the size of playing cards. Make enough so that each participant gets one card of each color.
- For step D.* Prepare to lead the discussion and give the presentation as directed in step D.
- For step D.* Make a poster listing the journal questions as directed in step D.
- For step F.* Prepare to lead the discussion and give the presentation as directed in step F.
- For step G.* Prepare ornaments for the participants as directed in step G.
- For step G.* Mark the group Bible at Ruth 1:16–17.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.

### 🕯 Opening Teacher Prayer

After all the preparations for the session are completed, take a few moments to quietly read and reflect on the following:

Hospitality . . . means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. . . . It is . . . the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. (Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, p. 51)

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus gave us the defining example of hospitality. The good Samaritan reached out to the stranger in need. It is usually far easier to reach out to those we call friends than to reach out to those who are strangers. These young people—who may be strangers to you—need your hospitality not only to feel welcomed but also to learn how to reach out to the strangers in their life.

Reflect on the following questions:

- Who is your best friend? How do you experience or display hospitality with that person?
- How do you relate to your parents and siblings now? How have those relationships changed since you were in high school?
- How will you extend your hospitality to the young people during this session?

Close your reflection time with the following prayer:

O Most Holy One, help me to create an environment of hospitality for the young people I will soon meet. May I see your presence in their stories of friends and family. I pray that they learn from my story and that my words and actions reflect you and your love for us all. Help them to see that you are the Friend for whom we all search. In the name of the one who taught us all to love—who called us his friends—in Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Procedure

### A Introduction and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

*Before the session.* Create a relationship tree by placing a 2- to 3-foot-long branch in a planter with enough sand, dirt, or rocks to hold it upright. The tree needs to stand freely and be sturdy enough to hold small paper ornaments. Place it in your prayer space along with a Bible, a candle and matches, and any other religious art or symbols you choose to use.

Also label a newsprint poster with the course title, *Life-giving Relationships*, and copy the following information below it in side-by-side columns:

[Column 1]

What This Course Is About

- your past and current relationships
- how your family relates
- healthy ways of relating
- unhealthy ways of relating
- the true meaning of intimacy
- your relationship with God

[Column 2]

What This Course Is Not About

- dating
- how to know you are in love
- sex

1. Welcome the young people as they gather for this session, and if you do not know them, introduce yourself. Recruit two of the early arrivals as readers for the opening prayer and give each a copy of resource 1–A, “Opening Prayer: Proverbial Friendship,” assign them parts, and direct them to look over the prayer.

When everyone has arrived, invite them to sit in a circle in the prayer space. If the young people do not already know one another, let them introduce themselves and tell one thing they like to do with their close friends.

2. Hold up the poster you made before the session and review it for the participants. You may wish to make the following points:

- The patterns of relating that people experienced in their past relationships are probably the same patterns they use in their current ones. People first learn how to relate in their family, so it is important to take a close look at those relationships.
- People can relate in healthy and unhealthy ways, and you have probably had experience with both.
- Intimacy is often equated with sex, but true intimacy is more than sex. You can have intimate relationships without having sex.
- This course is not going to deal primarily with dating, love, or sex—topics that are often thought of when people talk about relationships. This course is going to explore all types of relationships, not just romantic ones.

Ask if the young people have any questions about what will be covered in the course. If you feel it is necessary, set some ground rules regarding confidentiality to remind the participants that this should be a safe place for sharing.

3. Ask the volunteer to whom you assigned the part of reader 2 on resource 1–A to light the candle as a signal to begin the prayer. Direct the person who is doing the part of reader 1 to retrieve the Bible, open it to the Book of Proverbs, and place it before the participants. Invite the readers to lead the prayer by reading their parts. When they have finished, direct reader 1 to put the Bible back in its place. Allow about 30 seconds for silent reflection.

### **B** Pinwheel Icebreaker: Focusing on Relationships (10 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to select partners, and include yourself in this process. If you have an odd number of young people, pair up with one of them; if you have an even number of young people, form a trio.

Direct the pairs to form two circles, with one circle inside the other and one partner in each circle. If you are part of a trio, join the partner in the outer circle, and when the game begins, move with that person as he or she is directed to move. The people in the inner circle should face their partner in the outer circle. It is easiest to do this standing, but you can use chairs if you wish.

2. Announce that you will read some comparison statements that the participants are to discuss with their partner. After 45 to 60 seconds of discussion, ask the people in the outer circle to move one person to the right and read another comparison statement for them to discuss with their new partner. Repeat this process, with a new statement for each round, until time is up. Use the following statements or create your own:

- In your relationship with your best friend, are you more like a pogo stick or in-line skates? Why?
- In your relationship with your parents, are you more like a volcano or a babbling brook? Why?
- In your relationship with your siblings, or the relative closest to your own age, are you more like a world championship boxing match or the Olympic ice-skating finals? Why?
- In your relationship with the teacher you like the least, are you more like a pit bull or a dalmatian? Why?
- In your relationship with the teacher you like the best, are you more like an adoring fan or a respectful apprentice? Why?
- In your relationship with your school, in general are you more like a cheerleader or a political analyst? Why?
- In your relationship with your boss, are you more like a vulture or a hummingbird? Why?
- In your relationship with your peers, are you more like a butterfly or an ant? Why?
- In your relationship with your neighbors, are you more like a squirrel or a groundhog? Why?
- In your relationship with God, are you more like a puppet or a musician in an orchestra? Why?
- In your relationship with strangers, are you more like a rosebush or a field of daisies? Why?
- In your relationship with people you date (or would like to date), are you more like a teddy bear or a grizzly bear? Why?

3. In your own words, explain to the young people that the analogies can help them understand how they relate to people. Did their responses indicate an open or closed pattern in their relating? a passive or assertive pattern? a protective or a risky pattern? Just as this exercise explored a wide variety of relationships, the rest of the course will do the same. Invite the young people to discuss with their last partner any patterns they may have noticed in their answers.

### **C** Reflection Exercise: Charting Personal Relationships (15 minutes)

1. Give each young person a 48-inch-long strip of adding machine tape and a pen or pencil. Direct the participants to unroll the tape and draw a line approximately 20 inches long down the left side of the tape, beginning about 5 inches from the top. Then have them write “Grades K–5” at the top of the line, “Grades 7–9” about one-third down the line, and “Grades 10–present” about two-thirds down the line. Have them draw a horizontal line across the tape a few inches below the end of the timeline.

2. Instruct them to create a personal relationship history according to the following directions. As you give these directions, refer to the sample timeline you prepared before the session.

- First, write your name and the heading “Relationship timeline” across the top of your tape. Below this title write the words “Friends,” “Family,” and “Other significant people.” These terms will serve as a reminder of the timeline categories.
- Second, in the blank space for each of the three age periods, write the names of your friends, family members, and other people who were significant in your life at that time. For example, in the section labeled “Grades K–5,” you might name four grade school friends, your parents, siblings, grandparents, and your favorite grade school teacher. Leave some space after each name.
- Third, beside the name of each friend write some things you did with that person, how the relationship began, what you talked about with that friend, and how or why the relationship ended, if it has.

3. Now that they have created the outline for their timeline, give them directions for filling in some of the relationship details. Distribute a red pen or fine-tipped marker to each person and give the following instructions:

- Put a small *x* by any relationships in which you experienced disappointment, hurt, conflict, or betrayal.
- Put a small star by the relationships in which you experienced joy.
- Put a checkmark by the relationships that have changed significantly. Write a few words about why they have changed.
- Circle any relationships in which you were your best self. Jot down a few thoughts about why this was so.
- Underline any relationships that challenged you to move beyond who you thought you could be. Indicate how you were challenged by that person.

As you read each direction, allow time for the participants to think and write. When all have finished with the last direction, invite the participants to share one thing from their timeline with the rest of the group.

4. Give the following summary points in your own words:

- The information you recorded on the chart gives you a quick glimpse of the history of your relationships. This history indicates how your relationships with friends began and how some of them ended. It indicates where your relationships have been good and where they have been painful.
- It is likely that hurt or disappointment will occur in any relationship. By learning how to handle those feelings in positive ways, we can avoid becoming bitter, distrustful, or revengeful.
- The relationships in which we experience our best self are probably our healthiest relationships.
- Relationships that challenge us positively can sometimes be uncomfortable, but they are often the best ones for learning about ourselves and for helping us make positive changes. All relationships can be opportunities for growth, and those that we can identify as the most growth-producing can help us to learn skills for future healthy relationships.

## **D Discussion and Presentation: Exploring Changes in Relationship (30 minutes)**

*Before the session.* Read this step carefully and prepare to lead the discussion and give the presentation using your own words and examples.

Cut red and green paper into playing-card-sized pieces. Make enough so that each participant gets one card of each color.

Make a list of the following journal questions on a piece of newsprint:

- What would you name as your most positive relationship? Why?
- What would you name as your most negative relationship? Why?
- How have your relationships grown as you have grown?
- Why do some friendships last, but others do not?

1. Give each participant two playing-card-sized slips of paper, one green and one red. Explain that you are going to read some statements about relationships and friendship. If the young people agree with the statement, they should hold up the green paper. If they disagree with the statement, they should hold up the red paper. Assure them that this exercise has no correct answers but is meant to stimulate reaction and discussion. Tell them to be prepared to explain why they agree or disagree with the statement.

2. Now read the following statements and allow time for discussion after each one. Suggest that it might be easier for the participants to decide if they agree or disagree if they think about a specific relationship with friends or family members. Moderate the discussion with affirming comments and a few insights of your own. The first two statements have some additional explanation in brackets if you find it necessary to elaborate.

- Easy relationships are good for you. [You do not have to work at easy relationships, they come naturally. Such relationships make no demands, and have no arguments or confrontations. You are accepted for who you are.]
- Difficult relationships are bad for you. [In difficult relationships you feel discounted, lonely, and in turmoil. You may constantly be in arguments. Sometimes they challenge you to change. Many difficult relationships do not last long.]

Now continue with the following statements. They are given without explanation, but feel free to add your own comments or invite the young people to do so if necessary.

- Males and females cannot be just friends.
- As you grow you will have fewer but deeper friendships.
- Males and females experience friendship in the same way.
- Close friendships last forever.
- Close friendships are best with someone close in age to you.

When you have finished, point out that these statements are stereotypes about relationships. Like all stereotypes, each one has some truth in it. If little discussion was sparked the first time through, read the statements again and allow the young people to discuss some reasons they might change their view.

3. Present the following points in your own words. Use examples from your own life or your relationship history to illustrate them.

- Friendships change as people grow. Most people have different friends in high school than they did in grade school. Most people will experience another change in friends after high school as people move and go their separate ways. Life-long friendships are a special gift to be treasured, but they are not the only kind of relationships that can give us life.
- The nature of our friendships changes as we grow older. This results from a more mature pattern of dealing with others. Use these characteristics as examples: grade school friends share things; junior high friends share activities and adventures; high school friends, while still sharing things and activities, share more of their dreams, hopes, and values. Friends experience a deepening in their relationships as they mature. It is typical for a person's circle of friends to grow smaller but more intimate as he or she grows older. This is part of the normal cycle of friendships.
- Some people say friendships have seasons. Like the cycles of spring, summer, fall, and winter, friendships also go through cyclic changes. Relationships usually begin with a sense of excitement. Birth, new friendships, dating relationships, courtship, and new work relationships begin with hopeful expectations. This can be compared to the same sense of expectation that springtime brings when new life erupts. As good relationships progress, they have a space of comfortable

time when everything is relaxed and fun. This is similar to the relaxed feelings that most people experience in summer. Relationships can also have an unstable time with storms and stress. While this can be uncomfortable and is a difficult stage to weather, it can lead to a deepening of relationships. It is reminiscent of the colorful and turbulent changes that occur in autumn. Often relationships die or go dormant like the world does in winter. This is an inevitable part of life, especially in our fast-moving and mobile society. Whether relationships are long-term or last just a short time, they all have seasonal changes, and it is helpful for people to be aware of this as they seek healthy relationships.

- Explain that part of maturing in relationships is to recognize when a relationship is not healthy. Unhealthy relationships can keep us from growing in healthful ways and can contribute to making sinful decisions. Invite the young people to reflect on the following questions:
  - Do you always give in to the requests of friends, especially your best friends, even when you do not really want to do what your friends suggest?
  - Do you always have to get your own way even when you know your friends don't really want to do what you want to do?
  - Have you ever been verbally or physically abusive in a relationship?
  - Have you stayed in a relationship where you have been verbally or physically abused?
  - Do you panic and feel unconnected if you do not have a lot of friends?
  - If you are in a dating relationship, do you spend most of your time exclusively with your dating partner?
  - Do you feel jealous or insecure if your dating partner spends time with other friends?
- Answering yes to any of these questions could reveal negative patterns of relating. It is not unusual for people to have at least one relationship with negative patterns. Most people are also in at least one relationship that is life-giving. When people find themselves in unhealthy relationships, they have two choices if they want to stay healthy: either work to make the relationship healthy, or get out of the relationship. More will be said about this in the next session.

4. Distribute journals to the participants. Display the newsprint with the journal questions, which you prepared before the session, and read the questions to the group. Invite them to take a few minutes to write in their journal any responses and any other thoughts they may have as a result of the discussion and information presented in this section.

## **E Break (10 minutes)**

## **F Reflection and Discussion: Family Relationships (30 minutes)**

*Before the session.* Prepare an answer to this reflection question, Which member of your family are you the most like and how? And prepare to give the presentation in this step in your own words.

1. Explain to the participants that you will now take a closer look at how families influence relationships outside the family. It is common for teenagers to say, "I will never be like my parents." Then ten or twenty years later, they discover they are very much like one or both of their parents. Share with the young people which parent or family member you are most like and why. Invite them to take a moment to think about the characteristics they share with a parent. Ask for one or two volunteers to share their thoughts. Remind them of your earlier comment that the family is the most important school, or lab, for learning how to relate. It is in our families that we first learn a style or styles of relating.

2. Distribute to each participant one or more of the descriptions from resource 1-B, "Animal Friends." Use all of them. Direct the young people to take turns reading aloud their descriptions without revealing the animal being described. Let the group guess the animal being described. As each animal is identified, write its name on a sheet of newsprint.

3. Tell the group members that we can think of the characteristics of these animals as describing human styles of relating. Ask them to unroll their adding machine tape to a point below the timeline and to write the names of their family members there. Direct them to write beside each name the animal or animals that most closely resemble that person's relationship style. They can use the animals that you listed on the newsprint or any others that

come to mind. Tell them that this information will remain private.

Now ask the group members to write their own name below where they have listed the names of family members. Direct them to write beside their name an animal or animals that resemble their relationship style. How is their style similar to the relationship styles of their parents or other family members? When they have finished, see if any group members want to volunteer to share some of the relationship characteristics they have learned or picked up from their family.

4. Finish this step by making the following points:

- Family members know one another better than anyone else. They are not hesitant to let their hair down with one another. It is easy to take family members for granted. It is also easy to take out frustrations on them, even when they are not the cause of those frustrations. In other words, family members cannot escape seeing one another at their worst.
- To make family relationships more difficult, seniors in high school may be getting ready to leave the home. Many parents find it hard to let go. Parents and their senior children begin to feel the separation in the senior year. They may not know how to deal with it positively, and it can lead to tension and arguments or to increasing distance.
- People often exhibit the same styles of relating as one or both of their parents or other family members. This is true even when those people have characteristics they really do not want to adopt. But if the styles of relating used in their families are the only ones that they are familiar with, they will use them until they learn and practice new ways.
- The joys and difficulties that people experience in family settings will most likely occur in their other relationships. Sometimes people think that when they leave home everything will be different—no more arguments, bickering, or conflicts. This is not so. Families shape the way people relate, and whether those ways are positive or negative, people usually relate the same way with close friends as they do with family members.
- People do not choose which family they are raised in, but they can choose to change how they have learned to relate. It is hard, but not impossible, to learn to relate in new ways. A per-

son can break the cycle of negative patterns by intentional, highly focused energy. Always remember, good, positive relationships enrich life. They are hard work, but they are certainly worth all the effort.

## **G** Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

*Before the session.* Cut 3-by-4-inch rectangles from poster board. Prepare these pieces for use as ornaments by punching a hole in the top and attaching an ornament hanger to it or threading a piece of yarn or string through it and tying the ends together.

Mark the group Bible at Ruth 1:16–17. If you desire, choose some reflective music to play during the prayer service.

1. Invite the young people to gather again in your prayer space. Pass out an index card to each group member. Explain that during the last session of this minicourse, there will be a time to talk about any unanswered questions they might have about relationships. If you have made arrangements for a relationship expert to be part of that discussion, share that with them. Ask them to write on their card any questions about relationships they have right now and to place the card in a question box. If you choose to, begin playing some reflective music.

2. Introduce the prayer time with comments along these lines:

- Embracing our personal history of relationships is an important step toward healthy relating. People need to admit that the past is part of who we are; that our history has helped shape us into the people we are today. What we keep in the dark, what we refuse to admit even to ourselves, has the power to exert an unhealthy control over our life.

When we embrace our personal history of relationships, God can work in our life to provide us with opportunities for learning healthy and alternative ways of relating. Some of the opportunities God provides are other people's stories of faith, forgiveness and reconciliation through the sacraments, the support of others to learn new ways of behaving, and the grace to change.

In light of all this, the closing prayer service will provide us with a symbolic way of embracing our personal history.

3. Distribute the markers and the blank ornaments that you prepared. Explain that everyone will create an ornament as a symbol of their relationship history. Direct them to write their name on one side of the ornament and one or more positive things they have inherited from their family or friends on the other. If they wish, they can also write a negative characteristic they have inherited from the influence of friends or family.

4. Light the prayer candle. Ask for a volunteer to read Ruth 1:16–17. Before the young person reads the passage, set the context:

- The Book of Ruth was set in the time of ancient Israel. Ruth was Naomi's daughter-in-law. When both their husbands died, they were left penniless and unprotected. Naomi knew that Ruth had a better chance of marrying again without her, so she told Ruth to leave her. Ruth refused, and her response is an excellent example of positive relating in a family or friendship setting.

5. After the reading invite the young people to come forward one at a time and hang their ornament on the tree as a symbol that they are willing to embrace their personal history, with both the good and bad relationships. As they come forward, invite them to say the following: "I am thankful for [name a family member or friend], who has helped to shape me into who I am." The tree will be a focus of prayer for the remaining sessions.

6. Conclude the prayer service with this prayer or something similar in your own words:

- O God, we conclude our time together by giving thanks for those relationships in our past that have been good. They support us in growing into the people you call us to be. They are a reminder of your love and care. We ask for your help in recognizing the negative relationships in our life. Give us the wisdom to know when to let go of them and to move on. Comfort us when the hurt they cause overwhelms us. May we experience your healing and love through our relationships with other people, and may we also be a source of your healing and love to them in return. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

**For step B.** Invite the young people to devise some different comparisons other than, or in addition to, the ones suggested in the icebreaker.

**For step C.** If you cannot get adding machine tape, cut 5-by-45-inch strips of paper out of a roll of wrapping paper. Make sure one side is blank.

**For step D.** Rather than using the red and green cards, have the young people stand up if they agree with the statements and remain seated if they disagree.

**For step F.** Invite the young people to consider one area in their family life that would be improved by a change in their behavior. Direct them to write in their journal a one-paragraph pledge that describes the change. They could also write a prayer asking God's guidance on this possible change.

**For step G.** Contact the participants before the session and ask them to bring a 3-by-5-inch snapshot of their family or friends (tell them the photo will be taped or glued). Tape or glue each of these to a separate 3-by-5-inch card to create the ornaments. When you come to step G, pass out these cards instead of the ornaments and skip the part about having the young people sign the ornament. The photos will serve as identifiers.

## Family Connections

Suggest that the young people invite an elder family member to lunch or coffee to talk about his or her family history. During this time the young person can ask the elder family member about patterns of relating he or she has observed in the family history. Has he or she seen patterns repeated in different generations? What has been the family's biggest strength in relationships? its greatest weakness?



## Journal Options

You may suggest the following journaling suggestions to the participants as ways to apply the session themes:

- Make a list of ways you can encourage a younger sibling or friend who is in a negative relationship.
- Write a prayer or letter to God requesting help and guidance for a troublesome relationship or giving praise and thanksgiving for a joy-filled relationship.
- Make a list of all your important relationships from family, friends, school, church, and work. Draw lines to show how these relationships are connected. Make breaks in the lines where the relationships are not doing well. Write your thoughts on how these relationships could be strengthened.

## Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



### Closing Teacher Prayer

Hospitality . . . means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. . . . It is . . . the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. (Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, p. 51)

Think of the young people who took part in this session. How did they respond to your hospitality? Did any of them seem lonely or troubled? If so, hold those young people in your prayers this week. Conclude by praying:

O God, most holy one, you cradle each of these young people in your loving hands. Keep [name each person in the group] in your care. May all their relationships be filled with goodness and be a constant reminder of your love. Watch over them and their families this coming week. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.



## Evaluation

After the session take a few moments to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions and, for future reference, write your thoughts in the spaces provided:

1. What went well during the session?

2. How effective were your efforts to establish an atmosphere of hospitality?

3. How well did the session help the young people reflect on their personal history of close relationships?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

4. How well did the session help the young people identify the relationship styles in their family?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

5. What would you change about this session for the future?

6. Did any of the participants seem unusually affected by any of the exercises? If so, how should you follow up on them?

OPENING PRAYER:  
*Proverbial  
 Friendship*

**Reader 1.** The Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Scriptures has many references about the characteristics of friendships. Close your eyes and think about your own friendships as we read these thoughts from the Bible.

**Reader 2.** “One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, / but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend” (Proverbs 17:9).

**Reader 1.** “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).

**Reader 2.** “Some friends play at friendship / but a true friend sticks closer than one’s nearest kin” (Proverbs 18:24).

**Reader 1.** “Everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts” (Proverbs 19:6).

**Reader 2.** “Make no friends with those given to anger, / and do not associate with hotheads, / or you may learn their ways” (Proverbs 22:24–25).

**Reader 1.** “Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts” (Proverbs 27:6).

**Reader 2.** Let us pray. O God, you have graced our lives with good friends. Be with us as we explore those relationships that are important to us. Help us to be open to new ways of relating. And may all our close relationships be but a glimpse of the love and care you have for us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

# Animal Friends

Photocopy this resource and cut it apart along the dotted lines.

These animals always have their defenses up, and those defenses are so nasty they always keep others away.

• Skunk •

These animals have tough protective shells. They pull their head deep into their shell whenever they are approached by others. They move slowly and look at everything carefully.

• Turtle •

These animals are considered the fiercest animals in the jungle. They live in tightknit community groups where all members work together for survival. They are extremely protective of the other members of the group and are strong and powerful. Their leader is called the king and is highly respected by others in the jungle.

• Lion •

These animals are quick, clever, and resourceful. When they are little, they are considered soft and cuddly. They should actually be approached with caution because they are explosive fighters who could tear things apart if agitated. Sometimes they withdraw to be alone and are known to hibernate when things get cold.

• Bear •

These animals live in the water, are highly intelligent, and are excellent communicators. They live in community, and everyone shares the responsibility of raising the young. Their children are very precious to them. They are also playful and even make friends with other species.

• Dolphins •

These animals are foul and dirty. They pick out one member of the group to pick on and are unrelenting in tormenting that member. Even though they live together in a group, they have little to do with others. They are born with a shell around them, and breaking through the shell is the way they gain independence.

• Chicken •

These animals do not like cities and usually live in wilderness areas, but are rarely found alone. They are protective of their own territory, but always work together with others. Everyone in their group watches out for everyone else. They are smart, have a keen sense of smell, and often can be heard howling at night.

• Wolf •

These animals are among the busiest of all creatures. They are clever and can make an opening in anything that is made from wood. They are extremely adaptable and are just as comfortable in water as they are on land, although they are better swimmers than runners. They build intricate homes that often interrupt and redirect the normal flow of things.

• Beaver •

These critters are not exactly warm and cuddly. When they are moving they are difficult to detect. They are swift and move low in the grass and often blend into the background. They are normally feared and take special handling. They are often used as a symbol for evil, but are useful in keeping a balance in nature. Some of them are known for their unique noisemakers.

• Snake •