



True Happiness

Setting the Stage

Module 2 introduces the concepts of true happiness and the centrality of the Great Commandment in our personal lives. This gathered session expands on those ideas and emphasizes that true happiness springs from loving self, others, and God. After this session, module 3 emphasizes the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and shows the young people that these gifts, strengthened in Confirmation, help us continue to build a Christian foundation that leads to happiness.

Outcomes

The young people will:

- become familiar with the Great Commandment as a path to true happiness
- distinguish between loving and nonloving thoughts and actions
- examine statistics around global and national poverty, and see the need for love and service on local, national, and global levels

Materials Needed

- a Bible
- a copy of the handout “Is This Love?” on page 32
- a pair of index cards for each young person, one with “Love” written in red and one with “Not Love” written in black
- a copy of the handout “National and Global Poverty Facts,” on pages 33–34, with the facts cut apart and hidden around the room in advance of the gathering (Some can be taped under chairs or behind doors, etc. Others can be slightly sticking out of bookshelves or stacks of books.)
- a pair of scissors
- a sheet of newsprint
- reflective music

Called to Gather (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer

1. **Begin** with the Sign of the Cross.
2. **Read** aloud Mark 12:28–31.
3. **Ask** the group to think silently for a minute about the core verses in this passage: “Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself.” Then invite several volunteers to share how these words from Scripture might be connected to happiness.
4. **Explain** that true happiness is the topic you will explore today.
5. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



Looking Back

1. **Invite** volunteers to share with the group some of Pope Francis’s ten steps to happiness presented in module 2. After a few people respond, fill in any missing steps.



Top Ten List

Below are all of Pope Francis’s “Top Ten Secrets to Happiness.” Select the one you’d like to practice more in your life.

- Stop clinging to past conflict; move on and let others do the same.
- Give yourself to others: give your time and money to those in need.
- Be kind, humble, and calm.
- Enjoy a healthy sense of play and relaxation.
- Make Sundays a day for family time.
- Do good work and create good work for others.
- Care for the earth and respect the environment.
- Let go of negative things quickly.
- Respect the faith of others, engage in dialogue, and witness to your faith.
- Promote peace.

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2. **Arrange** the young people into pairs. Direct each young person to pick their favorite Pope Francis step to happiness and discuss it with their partner.
3. **Reconvene** the large group, and ask volunteers to share their favorite steps.



For a fun introduction to the “Looking Back” activity, begin with the song “Pharrell Williams – Happy (Video)” (4:00), available on YouTube.

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Called to Engage (10 minutes)

Seeing Love

1. **Explain** to the young people that this activity will test their powers of observation and invite them to reflect on whether we really see what is right in front of us.
2. **Direct** half of the group (or the whole group if your group is small) to stand in two straight lines, facing each other, in the middle of the room. Explain that those who are standing across from each other are partners.
3. **Invite** the partners to share with each other three things that happened to them within the last week, two positive and one negative.
4. **Give** the partners several minutes to share, and then ask them to turn around so that they are no longer facing each other. Instruct each partner to change one thing about their appearance (remove a ring, untie a shoe, etc.).
5. **Invite** the partners to turn around and face each other again. Go down the lines and ask each person if they can detect the change their partner made.
6. **Ask** the partners to take a seat, and repeat the process with the other half of the group.
7. **Reconvene** the large group to facilitate a discussion of the following questions:
 - How many of you correctly identified the change in your partner?
 - Did your partner notice the change you made?
 - Why might this have been difficult?
 - Was there any difference in results from the first to the second group? Why?
8. **Conclude** with these or similar words:
 - Sometimes it is hard to notice what is right in front of us, even with people we know well. If we aren't focused, we might miss something.
 - We are happiness seekers, but do we really focus on what will truly make us happy?

Called to Explore (20 minutes)

It's Not Complicated

1. **Begin** the activity with these or similar words:
 - As Bishop Frank noted in module 2, Jesus gave us a commandment that will lead to true happiness in this life and full happiness in the next: Love God and love others. And he noted that it is not complicated. Let's explore this concept a little bit together.
2. **Distribute** the index cards to the group so that each young person receives a "Love" card and a "Not Love" card. Invite the young people to hold the "Love" card with their right hand and the "Not Love" card with their left hand.
3. **Explain** that you will read aloud several scenarios (from the handout "Is This Love?"). At the end of each scenario, you will ask a question related to it. Tell the young people that they will put their heads down or close their eyes as they vote whether the answer to the question is "Love" or "Not Love" by holding up the appropriate card. Once everyone has voted, invite the young people to open their eyes to see the results.
4. **Encourage** discussion, especially if the young people have differing opinions on the scenarios. For each scenario, invite a volunteer to share what a clearly loving response would be.



Choose as many scenarios as time allows or as are appropriate to your group. If a particular scenario fits the interests of your group, start with that one.

5. **Conclude** by asking the young people if they were surprised by any of the "Love" or "Not Love" responses. Also ask:
 - Is love tied to happiness? If so, how?
 - Do you agree with Bishop Frank's statement that love is not complicated?

Called to Serve (10 minutes)

People in the Shadows

1. **Explain** to the group that they will be learning more about "the people in the shadows" during this activity, and that they will find facts about these people (from the handout "National and Global Poverty Facts") hidden on slips of paper around the room. Remind the young people that while loving others brings happiness, the call to love is bigger than just our own families and friends.

2. **Give** the young people about 5 minutes to find the facts throughout the room. Begin the search by saying, “Ready, set, go!” (Encourage particular seekers by calling out their names and saying things like, “You’re getting warmer,” and “You are cold. Try looking on the desk.”)
3. **Reconvene** the group after 5 minutes, even if they haven’t found all the fact slips.
4. **Invite** volunteers to read aloud the facts they found.
5. **Ask** the young people, as the volunteers read each fact, to think of a comparable group of people in their own area who might need their help, or a service agency or group they might join for their day of service, which is coming up later in the Confirmation program. Write these ideas on a sheet of newsprint to save for future reference.

Called to Go Forth (10 minutes)

Looking Ahead

1. **Introduce** the theme of module 3 by asking the group if they like to receive and give gifts.
2. **Tell** them that the theme of the next module is gifts and how gifts can be tied to building a strong foundation for lasting happiness.

Closing Prayer

1. **Ask** a volunteer to read aloud the second sentence of 1 John 4:16.
2. **Play** reflective music after the reading, and invite the young people to reflect silently on the session, thinking about this question:
 - What insight have you gained into the meaning of happiness or the meaning of love?
3. **Continue** with the following prayer:
 - Let us pray. Come, Holy Spirit, teach us that true happiness is living in God’s love and sharing it with others in service.
 - Be with us as we learn more about God and ourselves, and as we each take our unique place among God’s people. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.
4. **Conclude** with the Sign of the Cross.

Optional Activities

2

Materials Needed

- copies of the handout “Love in Action: The Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching,” on pages 35–36, one for each young person

Love in Action (15 minutes)

1. **Distribute** the handout. Explain to the young people that Catholic social teaching is love in action, and that these principles are general themes that occur in Catholic teaching and that summarize our priorities in society. This handout gives a short explanation of each theme.
2. **Arrange** the young people into pairs or groups of three, making sure to have at least seven small groups. Assign each group one of the principles of Catholic social teaching, and allow them about 10 minutes to come up with two examples of this principle that they are practicing or that they need to practice in their own lives. Instruct each group to choose a spokesperson. That person will recap the group’s examples for the large group. Give the groups a warning when their time is almost up.
3. **Circulate** among the groups to clarify the material and answer any questions.
4. **Ask** the spokesperson, in order of the social teaching principles, to share their small group’s examples with the large group. (If there are duplicate groups, ask all the groups discussing the same principle to report in turn.)
5. **Emphasize** that no one person can do all of this alone. We do it together, as God’s people caring for God’s people.
6. **Remind** the group that just as in our personal relationships, loving others we live with in a local, national, or global community brings happiness.



In addition to step 1, you may want to show the video “Catholic Social Teaching in 3 Minutes” (2:56), available on YouTube. This video was produced by Trocaire, an educational and social-service group in Ireland. You could also show the video at the end of this activity as a quick summary.

Mercy Leads to Happiness (15 minutes)



1. **Introduce** the activity in these or similar words:
 - Sacred Scripture has much to say about what is true happiness, what is love, and what is not love. The Gospel of Matthew contains an important teaching on this topic, which the Church has named the Works of Mercy.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles, and direct the young people to open to Matthew 25:31–41. Prepare for the reading by noting that Jesus is painting a picture of the Last Judgment, when all the people of the world will be gathered together and judged. Jesus outlines the principles by which each person will be judged.
3. **Ask** a volunteer to read the passage aloud as the rest of the group follows along in their Bibles.
4. **Write** the following six categories where all can see: *hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, ill, in prison*. Then underneath, write “WHO?”
5. **Encourage** the young people to talk about who are the hungry, thirsty, strangers, etc. in their community and in the world today. Invite them to see beyond the literal examples of each.
6. **Write** “Jesus” where all can see, and have the volunteer reread verse 40 aloud: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”
7. **Explain** that in the teaching of the Church, this mandate from Jesus has evolved into what are now known as the seven principles of Catholic social teaching. Each of these principles encourages us to find happiness and to bring about a more just society by “loving our neighbor as ourselves” and practicing the Works of Mercy in our own time.

Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each young person
- a chalkboard or whiteboard

Is This Love?

Friday Night

Isabella promised her mom that she would spend this Friday evening with her grandma. Isabella and Gram usually spend the evening watching a movie and playing checkers. Isabella usually enjoys these evenings with her grandmother. However, this Friday evening, at the last minute, she got invited to a sleepover with her friends. “Oh, guess what?” Isabella said, “I promised I would spend the evening with my grandmother. I can’t come to the sleepover! I hope you all understand!”

Is Isabella showing “Love” or “Not Love”?

The Big Dance

Grant asked Tiffany to the prom, and Tiffany agreed to go with him. A few days later, Rafael asks Tiffany to the prom. Tiffany decides she would rather go with Rafael. She texts Grant: “Sorry, can’t do prom.”

Is Tiffany showing “Love” or “Not Love”?

The Car Ride

Jamar is concerned about the environment and also hates to see litter marring the streets and sidewalks of his town. His friends are aware of his concern and are not surprised when he collects their fast-food wrappers and takes them to his own home for disposal. However, one friend, Paige, teases Jamar by tossing candy wrappers and other small bits of paper out the window whenever she is in the car with Jamar. This makes him upset and causes an argument. Paige makes light of his behavior and says that everyone knows she is joking.

Is Paige showing “Love” or “Not Love”?

The Relationship

Kai and Nora have been dating since the start of the school year. Lately, Nora has been concerned about his almost constant texting, demanding to know where she is and what she is doing. At first, she was flattered by the attention, but after a few weeks, it got annoying and almost alarming. When Nora tried to talk to Kai about it, he blew up at her: “You are lucky you have someone who cares about you! Don’t you know that this is part of being in a relationship?”

Is Kai showing showing “Love” or “Not Love”?

The Audition

Talia is in her school orchestra. She had always hoped to become the first chair, but just this fall a new student arrived and won the audition for that spot. Talia was upset and jealous of this new student, Marco. She would spend part of each class just thinking of things she didn’t like about him (which was almost everything). She just fumed every time she saw or even thought about Marco.

Are Talia’s thoughts showing “Love” or “Not Love”?

The Confession

Jake and Sean have been best friends since kindergarten. Lately, Sean has been experiencing some difficult things in his life. After their weekly baseball game on Saturday morning, they sat together on a park bench. Sean said: “I don’t think I can go on anymore. My parents are getting a divorce. I can’t concentrate on homework, so I keep getting detentions. I may be moving out of state and going to a new school. I don’t see anything good coming in the future.” Jake responded: “Wow. That is a lot to think about. Let’s get your mind off things for just a bit and go play ball!”

Is Jake showing “Love” or “Not Love”?



National and Global Poverty Facts



Poverty does not strike all demographics equally. For example, in the United States, 11% of men live in poverty, compared to 13% of women.

The poverty rate in the United States for single-parent families with no wife present is 13%. For single-parent families with no husband present, it is 25%.

The National School Lunch Program provides low- or no-cost meals to impoverished children. In 2020 alone, the program provided about 3.2 billion meals.

In the United States, the poverty rate for people with a disability is 26%. That's more than 4 million people with a disability living in poverty.

In the United States, about 1 in every 6 children, or 16% (11.9 million kids), lives in poverty.

Nationwide, 2.5 million children experience homelessness in a year.

810 women die every day around the world from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

14% of senior citizens in the United States live in poverty.

In the United States, the highest poverty rate by race is found among Native Americans (25%), followed by Blacks (21%). Hispanics have a poverty rate of 18%, while whites have a poverty rate of 10%.

In the United States, 5% of the population, or 17 million people, live in deep poverty, with incomes below 50% of the poverty line.

The USDA estimates that 11% (or 14 million) of households in the United States had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources.

The poverty line for an individual in the United States is \$12,784, \$16,247 for two people, and \$25,701 for a family of four. Compare these dollar amounts to living the "American dream" (house, car, health insurance, and retirement and college savings), which is \$130,000 a year.





Around the world, more than 736 million people live below the poverty line.

One out of every 27 children worldwide are likely to be stunted by poor nutrition (not grow at a normal rate) and to die before their fifth birthday.

Approximately 84% of people experiencing extreme poverty live in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.

About 2.5 million newborns worldwide die within their first month of life.

Human trafficking is the third-largest international crime industry in the world after illegal drugs and arms trafficking.

Almost 149 million children under the age of 5 in developing regions are underweight for their age.

Poverty rose globally in 2020 and 2021 by 150 million people.

Approximately 264 million children and youth in the world do not attend school.

About 5.3 million children worldwide under the age of 5 die from preventable causes each year. Half of the world's poor are children.

About 10% of babies in the world are born underweight annually, the result of inadequate nutrition before and during pregnancy.

Roughly 2 billion people worldwide (or 25% of the world's total population) do not have basic sanitation like a toilet in their home.

Globally, almost 785 million people lack access to clean drinking water. In some parts of the world, clean water sources are 30 minutes or more away.



Love in Action: The Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching



1. The Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of Catholic social teaching.



2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.



3. Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic Tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to the things required for human decency, such as food and housing.



4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are doing. In a society marked by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31–46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.





5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people and not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.



6. Solidarity

We are one human family no matter our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.



7. Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

