

PRAYER SERVICES

All scriptural quotations in the prayer services are from the *New American Bible, revised edition*, unless marked otherwise.

Prayer Service 1: "Let There Be Light!"

Genesis, chapter 1; John, chapters 1, 8, 12; 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5; James, chapter 1; 1 John, chapter 1

Focus: In this prayer service, the students examine how God brought light to the world and what it means for them to be light for the world.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout "Let There Be Light!" on page 29, one for each student
- ✿ a refrain from a familiar song about light (optional)
- ✿ seven candles and matches
- ✿ a tub of sand (or a mirror)
- ✿ lyrics for and a recording of a song that centers on light and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)

Preparation:

Create a prayer space in the center of the meeting room.

Choose seven students and assign each a reading. Give the readers each a candle and matches, and relay the following instructions to them in your own words:

- As we gather for the service, spread out to the far corners and edges of the room. Just before reading your assigned passage, light your candle. When you finish your reading, bring your candle to the center of the room and stick it in the tub of sand *[or on the mirror]*, and then return to your seat.

Opening Words



Handout

If possible, begin the prayer service in darkness or semidarkness. Distribute the handout, and then begin with the following invitation:

Leader: Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

Teach the students a refrain to sing or proclaim after each reading. You might choose a refrain from a familiar song about light, or use the words, "You are the Light of the World!"

Readings

Reader 1: In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters— / Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. (Genesis 1:1–4) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 2: In the beginning was the Word, / and the Word was with God, / and the Word was God. / He was in the beginning with God. / All things came to be through him, / and without him nothing came to be. / What came to be through him was life, / and this life was the light of the human race; / the light shines in the darkness, / and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1–5) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 3: For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. . . . / But you . . . are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5:2–5) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 4: Do not be deceived, my beloved . . . : all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. (James 1:16–17) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 5: The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light. (John 12:35–36) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 6: What we have seen and heard, / we proclaim now to you, / so that you too may have fellowship with us; / for our fellowship is with the Father / and with his Son, Jesus Christ. / We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. / Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:3–5) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 7: Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) . . . *[Refrain]*

Sharing and Closing Prayer

Leader: At this time, I invite each of you to identify someone who has served as a light in your life. You may give either a name or a description, such as “a teacher.” If you would like, you may briefly explain how this person has been a light for you.

After everyone has shared, lead them in this response:

All: Dear God, you are the source of all the real light in our lives. We thank you for all the people who have been light for us and who have revealed your love through their concern for us. Thank you for illuminating our lives and showing us the way. Let us learn to be light for one another. May each of us reflect the light of Christ to our weary world. We ask this through Christ, our light, our brother, and our Lord. Amen.

Lead the class in singing a song that centers on light, if you so desire.

(This prayer service is from Br. Larry Schatz, FSC.)

Prayer Service 2: Sin and Temptation

Genesis, chapter 3; Matthew, chapter 4

Focus: In this prayer service, the students explore the issues of sin and temptation, good and evil. They examine the historical origin of sin, possible responses to temptations in society today, and God’s presence and support in the face of temptation.

This prayer service is especially suited for use during Lent, but may easily be adapted for use during any liturgical season.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout “Sin and Temptation,” on pages 31–33, one for each student
- ✿ a recording of the song “My Life Is in Your Hands” and the appropriate equipment for playing it
- ✿ two signs, one labeled “Good” and the other labeled “Evil”
- ✿ a large rope, at least 15 feet long
- ✿ simple props (optional; see the directions following this list)
- ✿ lyrics for and a recording of the song “Were You There?” (a popular, traditional hymn that can be found in many Catholic songbooks) and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional for Lent)

Preparation:

Decide if you will use the suggested music for this prayer service. If you are not conducting the service during Lent, you may want to omit the closing song “Were You There?” or substitute another song.

Read the first three skits in this plan, and decide if they are all appropriate for your class and whether you want to present all three. Also determine if the students will present the skits, or if you will recruit other adults or teens from outside the class to assume some or all of the roles in the skits. You will need as many as twenty-four actors if everyone plays a separate role or as few as six if each actor plays a role in all four skits. You might want to assign roles

before the service, or you might wait and ask for volunteers during the prayer service itself, depending on how your class handles spontaneity and role-playing. Consider providing simple props, such as a North Face fleece or other popular jacket.



Handout

Gathering Song

Distribute the handout and play the song “My Life Is in Your Hands,” if you so desire.

Opening Words and Reading

Leader: God created Adam and Eve in God’s image, and God created the Garden of Eden to supply all their needs on earth. Adam and Eve were happy in the garden. They lived without clothes and were not ashamed to be naked. Then one day, a serpent approached Eve and tempted her to disobey one of God’s commands.

Reader: Now the snake . . . asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’” The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.” The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Genesis 3:1–7)

Leader: When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they broke their relationship of trust with God. Once that relationship was broken, sin became a part of the human story. Ever since that moment, human beings have faced temptations that pull them away from God’s love and grace.

Litany

Divide the class in half and assign each half to read one side of the following litany:

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that calls us to love . . .

Side 2: and the voice that calls us to hate.

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that calls us to do good . . .

Side 2: and the voice that calls us to do evil.

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that draws us to God . . .

Side 2: and the voice that wants to block God out of our lives.

Skit 1: Stealing

You will need six people to perform the following skit. Assign each person a part. Give the person playing the role of Good a sign labeled "Good," and the person playing the role of Evil a sign labeled "Evil." Position these two at opposite sides of the staging area. Tie a long rope around the waist of a third person, leaving at least 6 feet on each end, and position this person in the middle of the staging area. Give the fourth and fifth persons each an end of the rope. Position one rope holder near the person holding the "Good" sign, and the other near the person holding the "Evil" sign. Tell the rope holders to pull gently and firmly on their end each time the actor near them reads his or her part, so that the middle person is forced to move toward the "Good" sign when the "Good" parts are read, and vice versa. Position the narrator to one side, so that the class can see what is happening during the skit. If another brand of jacket is more popular than North Face with your class, suggest that the narrator use its brand name rather than North Face.

Narrator: Brian got a new North Face jacket and has been proudly showing it off to everyone. All his friends admire it—except for Jordan. Jordan wanted the jacket, and Brian bought it first. This makes Jordan mad. Now Jordan is contemplating the situation.

Good: It's such a cool jacket. I've had my eye on it forever. But Brian's got it, and it looks good on him.

Evil: But he stabbed me in the back. I wanted that jacket, and he knew that. It's not right. It's just not right.

Good: Brian had a right to buy it. He wanted it just as badly as I did.

Evil: Who cares? That jacket is hot. So hot that I'm going to steal it.

Good: No. I can't steal it. Brian is my friend. He paid for the jacket with his own money. Besides, who I am is much more important than what I wear. And I'm no thief.

Skit 2: Drugs

Assign roles and set the stage as you did for skit 1.

Narrator: Delia is at a party on a Saturday night. It is the party of the year, and she is having the time of her life, sitting around with a really cool crowd. In fact, she is sitting right next to Michael, a guy she really likes. Suddenly, Michael hands her a marijuana joint.

Good: Pot? You've got to be kidding! I can't smoke that. It'll mess me up.

Evil: One joint can't hurt. I can stop anytime I want, especially after just one.

Good: Or can I? What am I thinking? It's pot! What about its long-term effects? It destroys brain cells. It harms chromosomes. What about the children I want to have in the future? Will they be okay?

Evil: But it's Michael offering it to me. I like Michael. Maybe he will like me if I smoke. It can't be so bad. Everyone else is smoking. What'll they all think if I don't join them?

Good: Forget it. If Michael doesn't like me for who I am, he doesn't deserve me. And if the others laugh at me, they're not real friends. I can deal with that. This is my decision and my life. And my choice is to pass.

Skit 3: Sex

Assign parts and set the stage as you did for skits 1 and 2.

Narrator: Jorge and his girlfriend, Tiffany, are in his house alone. They are kissing, and their feelings for each other are becoming stronger and stronger.

Evil: I want to make love. We're both responsible. We have protection, so we don't have to worry about a baby. Neither of us has been with anyone else, so we don't have to worry about AIDS or STDs.

Good: Yes, we have both been responsible people so far. We don't have to worry about AIDS or STDs. But no method of protection is 100 percent effective. There's always a chance that if we have sex, we could bring a baby into the world. Neither of us is ready for that kind of responsibility.

Evil: Sure, there's always a chance we could have a baby. But the chance is slim. We have been going together for a while. Sharing sex will bring us closer.

Good: Sounds good, but let's not fool ourselves. Sex is no shortcut to real intimacy, to real, deep friendship. Communication, honesty, care for each other's well-being—those are the things that will bring us closer. Not sex.

Evil: We would not be just having sex. We love each other. Love makes it right.

Good: We do love each other. But how much? Are we ready and able to make a life together, to love each other always and forever? To be honest, neither of us is ready for that kind of love. We both have school to finish, careers to start, people to meet, and goals to achieve before we're ready for that kind of unconditional, always-and-forever love. Let's swear to each other never to make promises to each other that we can't keep. We will wait until we are ready and able to love each other always and forever.

Skit 4: Jesus in the Desert

Assign parts and set the stage as you did for skits 1, 2, and 3.

Narrator: Because Jesus was human, he too experienced temptation and sin. In the weeks before Jesus died, the Spirit led him out into the desert, and he remained there for forty days and forty nights. Afterward, he was hungry, and the tempter approached him.

Evil: If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread.

Good: People need more than bread to live; they need the word of God.

Narrator: The evil tempter took Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem.

Evil: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the top of this temple and let your angels minister to you.

Good: You should not put the Lord your God to the test.

Narrator: The devil took Jesus to the top of a mountain and pointed out all the nations below it.

Evil: All these countries I will give you if you throw yourself down at my feet and worship me.

Good: Get away from me, Satan, for it is written, “The Lord your God should you worship, and God alone shall you serve.”

(This skit is adapted from Matthew 4:1–10.)

Reflection

Regather the students and invite them to sit in a relaxed position, with their hands in their lap and their eyes closed, and to breathe slowly and deeply for a moment. Then ask them to open their eyes and reflect on some questions that you will ask. Pause briefly after each question, to allow time for the students to think.

- When is the last time you were tempted to do the wrong thing?
- How did you respond?
- Were you able to feel God’s presence during this experience? If so, was that a source of support for you? If not, why not?

Closing Prayer

Leader:

Give me the courage to do right
in the face of wrong.
Instill in my heart
a set of values that prompts me
to think of others
instead of just myself.
Give me the willingness to
stand up for what I believe in—
not following the crowd.
Give me the strength to
look evil in the eye
and withstand it.
Because I know
with you at my side
all things are possible.

(Theresa Vonderwell, in *More Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers*, edited by Carl Koch [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995], page 28. Copyright © 1995 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

Closing Song

Lead the group in singing the traditional spiritual “Were You There?” or another song, if you wish.

(This prayer service is adapted from one conceived and written by Helen Wolf and others, both adults and students, at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, Brooklyn, NY.)

Prayer Service 3: A Rainbow of Hope and Peace

Genesis, chapter 9

Focus: This prayer service leads the students to consider God's promise to bring the glory of heaven to earth, and their responsibility to reach out in peace, as Jesus did, to bring hope to the world.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ a communities-of-hope rainbow outline (see the directions following this list)
- ✿ copies of the handout "A Rainbow of Hope and Peace," on page 34, one for each student
- ✿ a candle and matches
- ✿ a sheet of newsprint and a marker
- ✿ strips of red, blue, yellow, and orange paper, one of each color for each student
- ✿ several rolls of tape
- ✿ lyrics for and a recording of the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth" (available in many hymnals) and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)

Preparation:

Create a communities-of-hope rainbow outline by painting a rainbow on several sheets of newsprint or butcher paper taped together, or by painting one on an old sheet, and post it on a wall in the prayer space. Or attach strips of colored fabric or paper directly to the wall in a rainbow shape. Place the candle near the rainbow.

Read through the list of group names for the reflection activity, and decide if you want to add, delete, or substitute terms to reflect the interests and activities of your particular students and community.

Opening Prayer and Reading



Handout

Gather in front of the communities-of-hope rainbow outline you have posted in the prayer space, and distribute the handout. Light the candle and call a volunteer to begin with the Scripture reading.

Reader: God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being. When the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature—every mortal being that is on the earth. God told Noah: This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and every mortal being that is on earth. (Genesis 9:12–17)

Leader: God sends the rainbow to remind us of his promise to grant the glory of heaven to all who believe in God. The rainbow is thus a symbol of hope. Despite all the violence in the world, God gives us hope through Jesus Christ, who is the source of all peace. When we believe in God, we love God and strive to do his will by reaching out to serve others in peace, as Jesus did, trusting in God's grace.

Reflection

Invite the students to think about the various groups of people that they belong to. Explain that you will read a list of groups, and that you would like them to stand for 2 seconds when you call out the name of a group they belong to. Then read the following list, or one you prepared specifically for your students, pausing for 2 seconds after each group name:

- soccer team
- youth group
- Bible study group
- family
- Air Force
- [your community]
- chess team
- cheerleading squad
- [schools in your area]
- [parishes in your area, if the students may come from more than one]
- people who live in the United States
- 4-H
- wrestling team
- people who live in Europe
- Girl Scouts of the USA
- Future Farmers of America
- volleyball team
- book club
- Boy Scouts of America
- people who live in the Milky Way Galaxy
- basketball team

Ask everyone to sit, and make the following comments in your own words:

- A community is defined as a group of people with a "common unity."
- Human life is basically communal. We are made in the image of God. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that this God is a communion of love. We are called to live out the communion of love that is God.
- Further, we are the Body of Christ, which means that we are members of the universal Church community—not just separate individuals. We belong to one another and therefore must strive for the common good.
- A community of hope is one based on our common unity in Christ. Our hope comes from trust in Christ's promises, and relies not on our own strength but on the grace of the Holy Spirit.

- Violence is any action or response that is destructive or disrespectful of human life.
- Violence is sometimes the product of a disagreement, sometimes the product of frustration, and sometimes the product of irrational behavior.
- A victim is a person whose quality of life is impinged by violence.
- Conflict resolution is a process that seeks to clear up a dispute through an alternative that does not include violence. As people of hope, we can make a difference in our communities by learning the skills of this process. *[If there is time, share the story of a saint or of someone who has made a difference in your community.]*

Mention that we may belong to four types of communities: family, school, parish, and civic. Brainstorm with the students definitions of those community types and write the definitions on a sheet of newsprint.

Divide the class into four groups and assign each group one of the four community types you have just defined. Direct the groups each to discuss their assigned community type by answering the following questions:

- ✿ How have I experienced the peace of Jesus in this community?
- ✿ How does this community give hope and produce solutions to violence?
- ✿ What people in this community of hope are part of the solution?
- ✿ What steps can I take to become an instrument of peace in this community of hope?

Closing Prayer

Give each student four different-colored slips of paper. Note that each color represents one of the communities of hope.

- ✿ red for home
- ✿ blue for school
- ✿ yellow for parish
- ✿ orange for civic

Direct the students to write on each slip one thing they can do in that community to share the peace of Jesus.

Lead the students in saying the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi together:

All:

Loving God, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 Where there is injury, pardon;
 Where there is doubt, faith;
 Where there is despair, hope;
 Where there is darkness, light;
 And where there is sadness, joy.
 O, Divine Teacher, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
 To be understood as to understand;
 To be loved as to love;
 For it is in giving that we receive;
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Invite the students to tape each of their colored slips in the corresponding section of the rainbow—for example, red strips go in the red section of the rainbow. Depending on the class and on the mood you desire, ask that this be done in silence, or call the young people to share what they have written.

Close by singing “Let There Be Peace on Earth” or sharing a sign of peace.

(This prayer service is from Clare vanBrandwijk, campus minister, Bishop O’Gorman High School, Sioux Falls, SD.)

Prayer Service 4: “Be Still and Know That I Am God!”

Psalm 46

Focus: In this prayer service, the students open themselves to God’s presence and reflect on the magnitude of God’s support and love.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout ““Be Still and Know That I Am God!”” on page 35, one for each student
- ✿ a recording of instrumental music and the appropriate equipment for playing it
- ✿ a candle and matches
- ✿ a recording of the song “You Are Mine,” by David Haas, from the album *You Are Mine: The Best of David Haas* (GIA Publications, 1995) and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)

Opening Words



Handout

Divide the class into two approximately equal sides and distribute the handout. Play soft instrumental music in the background. Light the candle, and invite the students to close their eyes and focus on their breathing. Tell them to imagine breathing in Christ's love and peace, and breathing out stress and negativity. Allow for several minutes of quiet.

Reading and Litany

Leader: A reading from Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and our strength,
 an ever-present help in distress.
 Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken
 and mountains quake to the depths of the sea;
 Though its waters rage and foam
 and mountains totter at its surging.

(Psalm 46:2-4)

"Be still and know that I am God!"

(Psalm 46:11)

Side 1: When the loud alarm goes off in the morning . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 2: In the routines of dressing and getting off to school . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 1: In the comings and goings throughout the school day . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 2: In the mundane tasks of going to the locker and walking in the halls . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 1: In the frenzied pace of the cafeteria . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 2: In the stacks of books and pages of homework . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Side 1: In the quiet of night and stillness of sleep . . .

All: "Be still and know that I am God!"

Reflection

If you wish, play the song "You Are Mine."

Closing Prayer

All: Loving God, you come to us in the silence and in the laughter, in the moments of joy and sorrow. The busyness of our lives sometimes keeps us from taking the time to be quiet, to be still, and to rest in your love. Let us open ourselves to the enfolding grace of your presence this day. Let us be still and know that you hold us in your heart and that we are your cherished children. Let us be still and know that you are our God, our loving creator and friend. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer Service 5: Being a Humble Servant

Ben Sira (Sirach), chapter 3; Micah, chapter 6; Matthew, chapter 18; John, chapter 13

Focus: This prayer service allows the students to consider the meaning of humility and the need to gather with other Christians and open themselves to God so that they may help bring about the Reign of God.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout "Being a Humble Servant," on page 36, one for each student
- ✿ a candle and matches
- ✿ a recording of a song about service and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)

Opening Words



Handout

Divide the class into two approximately equal sides and distribute the handout. Then light the candle and invite the students to prayer.

Leader: Jesus said to his disciples, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). As we gather today, in Jesus' name, let us come together quietly and reverently to be with our loving Creator, whose spirit fills us and makes us whole.

Allow a few minutes of quiet.

Litany and Reading

Leader: All wisdom is from God. We need to listen and learn.

Side 1: Open our hearts so that these words become branded on our hearts.

Side 2: Open our minds so that our intellect can be challenged.

Side 1: Open our eyes to the beauty of creation.

Side 2: Open our hands so that we can work to bring forth the Reign!

Leader: A reading from the Wisdom of Ben Sira:

My son, conduct your affairs with humility,
and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.
Humble yourself the more, the greater you are,
and you will find mercy in the sight of God.
For great is the power of the Lord;
by the humble he is glorified.

(Ben Sira 3:17–20)

Side 1: When I find myself bragging about all I can do . . .

All: Let me remember that all wisdom is from God, and I should be humble.

Side 2: When I find myself thinking I am better than someone else . . .

All: Let me remember that all wisdom is from God, and I should be humble.

Leader: Jesus gave us a powerful example—washing the feet of the Apostles. Listen to his explanation from the Gospel of John: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, Amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (John 13:15–17).

All: We know these things. We must live them out. We know what the Lord God asks of us—only this: that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God. (Adapted from Micah 6:8)

Reflection

Play a song about service, if you wish.

Prayers

Leader: As we strive to be merciful and true, let us bring our needs to our God.

Mention that the sides will now take turns offering prayers. Note that after each prayer, everyone is to respond, “Lord, hear our needs.”

Side 1: For peace in our world, and justice in our land, we pray . . .

Side 2: For courage in decisions, and compassion in our actions, we pray . . .

Side 1: For lonely hearts, and empty hands, we pray . . .

Side 2: For our individual needs, we pray . . . *[Encourage the students to share their own needs aloud or to ponder them in silence.]*

Leader: We thank you, God, for all you have given us, and we know that you hear our prayers. We ask that you bless us and remember us as we pray the words you taught us:

All: Our Father . . . *[Lead the class in saying the Lord's Prayer.]*

Prayer Service 6: Do Not Be Afraid—A Service for Advent

Isaiah, chapter 41

Focus: This prayer service encourages the students to focus on the presence and love of God as they prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ a fireplace or candles or an outdoor bonfire, and matches
- ✿ lyrics for and a recording of the hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (found in many traditional hymnals) and the appropriate equipment for playing it
- ✿ copies of the reading and the reflection, one of each for those who will present those pieces

Opening Words

Gather the students in a circle around a glowing fireplace, an arrangement of burning candles, or an outdoor bonfire. If you are inside and you can, dim all other lighting. Call for two readers, and give one a copy of the reading and the other a copy of the reflection.

Leader: The season of Advent invites us to huddle together against the cold and harsh realities of life and to face the darkness courageously. We light candles that suggest glimmers of hope, and tell the stories of faith that make us one. As church, we wait in joyful hope. As companions, we do not wait alone. When we were little, we were afraid of the dark. The reassuring presence of someone we trusted helped us know that morning would come. Jesus, the morning star, scattered the darkness of sin and division forever. Jesus, the prince of peace, comforts us in our fear. Jesus said: “Do not be afraid. I am with you always.” With confidence, we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!”

Song

Lead the class in singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Reading

Reader:

For I am the LORD, your God,
who grasps your right hand;
It is I who say to you, Do not fear,
I will help you.

(Isaiah 41:13)

Reflection

Read the following story yourself, or invite a student to do so:

- I was brought into this world a horse lover. . . . It was not until I turned thirteen, however, that my passion became my life.

I had saved up every penny that I had earned, and I was finally ready to purchase the horse of my dreams. Banjo was a four-year-old Appaloosa thoroughbred gelding. I can recall peering into his stall after I received the official bill of sale and, with tears in my eyes, I repeated, "You are mine, you are my very own horse!" . . .

When asked why I devoted so much of my time to horses, the only explanation that I could give was that I loved them, an answer that can be understood only by truly devoted horse lovers. Banjo was my responsibility, my hobby, my pet, my friend, my everything. He would always listen as I rambled on about my boyfriends, school, and family life. He was always willing to be hugged as I cried, and he never failed to lick my face or give a consoling nicker.

Then last December I felt as though my world was coming to an end. At an earlier horse show, Banjo had hurt his leg. . . . The vet informed me that the injury to his ligament was permanent, and that if I were to try to ride him at his previous level, he would eventually become completely crippled. The vet thought that I should think about having him put to sleep unless I could find him a home in which he would receive excellent care and only very light, gentle exercise.

Words could not describe the way that I felt inside; he was my horse, my world. I was torn because, confined to his stall, Banjo was miserable, yet he was too young and lively to be put down. The grim fate of my horse seemed inevitable.

I had just about given up hope when I received a call from Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Center. One of the instructors wanted to see if Banjo might work in their handicapped riders' program. Banjo was a hit! He obeyed their commands, and they determined him to be in good health. A few days later, I trailered Banjo to Little Bits, where he received training and was put into the program.

I work as a volunteer at Little Bits every weekend, where I am able to see Banjo and give him a week's worth of love. He continues to be a success in the program. I am reminded of the joy that he gave me for so many years when I see the children's faces light up as he whinnies to them. I am confident that Banjo will continue to reflect the beauty and grace of the equine species, as well as demonstrate a horse's ability to give love to those who need it most.

(Maureen McLaughlin in *I Know Things Now: Stories By Teenagers 1*, edited by Carl Koch [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996], pages 110–111. Copyright © 1996 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

Then comment as follows:

- Advent invites us to bring to God a range of emotions such as joy and disappointment or sorrow. God can bring light even in the darkness of loss.

Closing Prayers

Leader: With confidence in God, let us pray together the words Jesus gave us:

Our Father . . . *[Lead the class in the Lord's Prayer.]*

Leader: Let us pray, in this Advent time, for hearts that are steadfast and trusting:

God of day and God of darkness,
draw near to us this day.
May the fears that hold us bound
be dispelled in your holy light.
May you strengthen our hands for service
and bless our longing hearts
that we may be ready to welcome you anew
this Christmas once again. Amen.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

(This prayer service is adapted from one by Michelle France, Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, Villanova, PA.)

Prayer Service 7: We Are All Precious in God's Sight

Isaiah, chapters 43, 49

Focus: In this prayer service, the students explore cultural diversity, their own personal uniqueness, and how all people are precious to God.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ objects symbolic of Christian worship, such as a candle and a cross
- ✿ a recording of instrumental music and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)
- ✿ a copy of the reading
- ✿ a large basket or tray of leaves—more than one leaf for each student

Preparation:

Place objects symbolic of Christian worship, and a basket or tray of leaves, at the center of your prayer space.

Opening Prayer and Reading

Gather the students in a circle in the prayer space. Encourage silence, or play soft instrumental music. Call a volunteer to present the reading, and provide a copy of the words.

Leader: In the name of our glorious Creator God, whose imagination dreamed up the beauty of our trees, bushes, and plants, I welcome you to this time of worship. We turn to this wonderful, affectionate God to hear words of comfort and love.

Reader:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name: you are mine.

 Because you are precious in my eyes,
 and honored, and I love you,

 Fear not, for I am with you;

 I will say

 Bring back my sons from afar
 and my daughters from the ends of the earth:
 All who are called by my name,
 I created for my glory;
 I formed them, made them.

(Isaiah 43:1–7)

I will never forget you.
 See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you.

(Isaiah 49:15–16)

Leaf Ritual

Begin with this introduction:

- God knows each of us as a precious, unique, individual child who is loved, honored, and cherished.

There are billions of people in the world, and God knows each of us by name.

And the world includes many different people. There are Africans, Asians, Europeans, South Americans, and Native Americans. There are married people, single people, and divorced people. There are stepsisters, half brothers, godmothers, and grandfathers. There are heterosexuals and homosexuals. There are infants, schoolchildren, teenagers, twenty-somethings, thirty-forty-fifty-sixty-seventy-eighty-ninety-somethings. How does God keep track?

Each of us is a precious, unique, individual child of God who is loved, honored, and cherished.

This basket contains a lot of leaves. The world is full of different leaves—so much diversity. There are maples, oaks, elms, chestnuts, firs, pines, spruces, and palms. There are tropical, woodland, and mountain trees. There are coniferous and deciduous trees. How can we keep track?

Each leaf in this basket is a unique creation of God.

We will be passing the leaves around the circle. When the basket comes to you, select one leaf and hold on to it.

Pass the basket around. Be ready to encourage individuals to move more quickly if they are taking too long trying to find the “perfect leaf.” When the basket comes back to you, remove the remaining leaves. Continue leading the participants through the process with these or similar words:

- Examine your leaf; look for its unique traits. Look over its color, the shape of its edges, the length of its stem, the pattern of its veins. Get to know your leaf as an individual creation of God.

I will pass the basket around again. When it comes to you, put your leaf back. The basket will come around one more time after that, and you will be asked to find your own leaf again—the one you originally held in your hand and examined, the one whose uniqueness you discovered the first time the basket was passed.

Pass the empty basket around the circle so that everyone can put their leaf in it. When the basket returns to you, gently scramble the leaves so that their order is no longer the same. But be careful not to damage any of the leaves. Pass the basket in the same direction again, so that the first person to have placed his or her leaf into the basket is also the first person to remove his or her leaf from the basket. Continue the process with these or similar words:

- As you looked through the leaves, you might have discovered that no leaf is perfect. Every leaf is beautiful, but each one has imperfections. Some are torn, some are uneven, some have holes, some are bent, some are colored with blotches. But all of them are wonderful. I think God wants us to understand that we do not have to be perfect in order to be wonderful.

Together all the leaves on a tree can do what the tree needs to have done. Together all of us can do what our group needs to have done. Sometimes it helps the group if we all see the unique traits of each member. So we’re going to take the opportunity now to conduct a brief group sharing.

As we go around the circle, please tell us one thing you can offer the group—a gift or talent you have. Also tell us one thing you need from the group—an area in which you are not so strong. And as we hear about the gifts and needs of our group, let us remember that we do not need to be perfect in order to be wonderful.

Begin the sharing yourself, as an example for the group. Be brief. After everyone has shared, move on to the blessing.

Blessing

Read this story, which contains the blessing:

- A legend in the Sioux tradition explains why leaves turn color in the autumn.

Many, many moons ago, when the world was young, the grass and flower folk were enjoying the beautiful summer weather. But as the days went by, the weather became colder and colder.

The grass and flowers grew sad, for they had nothing to protect them from the sharp cold. Just when it seemed that there was no hope for living, the Holy One who created all things came to their aid. The leaves of the trees were told to fall to the ground and spread a soft, warm blanket over the tender roots that were about to freeze. To repay the leaves for their kindness, the Creator gave them one last bright array of beauty.

That is why the trees take on their pretty farewell colors of red, gold, and brown each year during Indian summer. Then the leaves turn to their task of covering the earth with a thick rug of warmth.

Most people want to be useful. Like the leaves in this old Sioux legend, they want to be of service.

May God bless our group as we follow the example of the leaves, looking for ways to be useful and to serve those created by the Holy One. Amen.

(The Blessing in this prayer service is adapted from *Inspiration and Indian Legends, Proverbs, and Psalms*, compiled and edited by R. L. Gowan [Rapid City, SD: American Ministries International, n.d.], page 59.)

Prayer Service 8: Fourteen Courageous Steps— The Stations of the Cross for Lent

Matthew, chapter 27; Mark, chapters 14–15; Luke, chapter 23

Focus: This prayer service leads the students through the fourteen Stations of the Cross and invites them to examine their personal responses to each station.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout, “Fourteen Courageous Steps—The Stations of the Cross for Lent,” on pages 37–40, one for each student or each reader
- ✿ music and lyrics for the song “Were You There?” (a popular, traditional hymn that can be found in many Catholic songbooks) and the appropriate equipment for playing it (optional)
- ✿ the stations of the cross

Preparation:

Arrange for the class to encounter the Stations of the Cross during this prayer service. Depending on your class, the time you have available, and the needs and desires of you and your students, you may choose to make this service very simple or quite elaborate. Here are some suggestions:

- ✿ Post images of the fourteen stations around the walls of the prayer space, and move just yourself or the entire class from one image to the next as you proceed through the stations.
- ✿ Project photos or pictures of the stations on a screen or wall, switching images as you progress through the stations. If you use this option, you might dim the lights and use candles to set a prayerful mood.
- ✿ Take the class to a church that displays the stations, and process through the stations as you conduct the service.
- ✿ Celebrate the service at an outdoor stations of the cross, either an existing facility or one that you create.

For background information, including student illustrations of the stations, refer to *Stations for Teens: Meditations on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, by Gary Egeberg (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000).



Opening Song

Distribute the handout and lead the class in singing a few verses of "Were You There?" if you so desire.

Station 1: Jesus Was Condemned to Death

Reader 1: Jesus was arrested and taken before the council, where many people testified against him.

The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus, saying, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?" But he was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said to him, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" Then Jesus answered, "I am;

and 'you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power
and coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

At that the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as deserving to die. Some began to spit on him. They blindfolded him and struck him and said to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards greeted him with blows. (Mark 14:60–65)

Leader: Jesus was condemned for something that the high priest did not even understand. Many times, we are criticized, ridiculed, or simply told we are nothing. Think of a time that happened to you. What did you feel like? What did you want to do?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 2: Jesus Took Up His Cross

Reader 2: The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:16–20)

Leader: Jesus endured great pain even though he was innocent. Have you ever been punished for something you did not do? Remember that time, experience the feelings again, and ask Jesus how he would handle it. We are asked to carry a very light burden compared with Jesus. We carry a sliver of the cross; he carries the remainder.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 3: Jesus Fell the First Time

Reader 3: The pressure was too much. Jesus was weak from being beaten, bruised, and whipped. He fell with the weight of the cross. The pain was excruciating, but he got back up and began the seemingly long journey to the Place of the Skull, Golgotha.

Leader: What drains you of energy and brings you to the ground? Is it a lack of patience, courage, or understanding? Like Jesus, we need to rise from our downtrodden state.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 4: Jesus Met His Mother

Reader 4: Mary said: "I look into his eyes. There is so much pain. My Son, if I could take away this agony, I would. You still have so much love in your eyes. You are incredible. I love you!"

Leader: How do your parents look at you? What do they see? How do you know they love you? How do you show your love for them?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 5: Simon Helped Jesus Carry His Cross

Reader 5: As [the soldiers] led [Jesus] away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)

Leader: Who is with you through the good times and the bad times? Who is there to help you carry your cross? How does this person help you? How do you help this person?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 6: Veronica Wiped the Face of Jesus

Reader 6: Veronica said: "I see him from a distance. As he comes closer, I see the sweat, blood, and tears. I wipe his face. It is the least I can do. He has done so much for me."

Leader: Compassion is a virtue. To help one another is a gift. How have you been kind to your family, friends, and even strangers? Veronica wiped the face of Jesus with love, compassion, and sorrow. How do we do this for others?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 7: Jesus Fell the Second Time

Reader 7: With each step, the cross became heavier. The pain was agonizing. Jesus fell again. The weight was constant, the pressure consistent.

Leader: All of us have continuous sources of stress. These become a heavy burden and may cause fatigue. What are ongoing sources of stress for you?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 8: Jesus Met the Women of Jerusalem

Reader 8: A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' At that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:27–31)

Leader: Even when he was wracked with pain, Jesus thought of others. Who believes in you and always thinks of you: friends, family members, teachers? What inspiration do they provide?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 9: Jesus Fell the Third Time

Reader 9: Once again, the weight was just too much. Jesus fell for the third time. Then he gathered the last bit of strength he had, got up, and carried his cross onward.

Leader: When do you feel exhausted but just keep going? What makes you continue?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 10: Jesus Was Stripped of His Garments

Reader 10: When they reached Golgotha, the soldiers stripped Jesus of his garments. They cast lots to split his clothes among themselves.

Leader: Being stripped is a shameful experience and can cause great doubt. When have you felt stripped of your defenses and naked in front of the world?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 11: Jesus Was Nailed to the Cross

Reader 11: The soldiers laid Jesus on the cross, spread his arms, and drove a stake through each of his wrists. The first stake sent waves of excruciating pain up and down his body. The second was worse. The soldiers raised his knees and crossed his feet and drove a stake through the arch of each foot.

Leader: When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he could no longer move. What holds you stationary? What keeps you from accomplishing your dreams?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 12: Jesus Died on the Cross

Reader 12: It was around midday, and the sky became dark. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). Jesus uttered a loud cry, and died.

Leader: At times, there seems to be no hope. What hopes, beliefs, ideals, and dreams have died or been lost for you?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 13: Jesus Was Taken Off the Cross

Reader 13: The soldiers came to break the legs of those who were not dead. When they saw that Jesus was dead, they pierced his side; blood and water poured out. They took Jesus off the cross. Joseph of Arimathea gathered his body to bury him.

Leader: Think about the people who have been there to pick you up, clean you off, and take care of your needs. How have you felt when they have done that?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 14: Jesus Was Laid in a Tomb

Reader 14: Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it [in] clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb. (Matthew 27:59–61)

Leader: Jesus was put to rest. Where do you go to get rest and to rejuvenate? What is your sacred space like?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Dear Jesus, thank you for taking us on this journey. Many times, we feel troubled, beaten up by life, and just ready to give up hope. Please help us to realize that we can always come to you because you will understand.

You suffered for us, and you brought us abundant life by your resurrection. You cried, you died, and you rose.

The class might conclude by singing the remaining verses of "Were You There?"

(This prayer service is from Debra Thorpe, Notre Dame Academy, Los Angeles.)

Prayer Service 9: Saying Yes to Jesus

Luke, chapter 6

Focus: In this prayer service, the students are invited to commit their life to God and to follow the light and example of Jesus.

Materials Needed:

- ✿ copies of the handout, "Saying Yes to Jesus" on page 41, one for each student
- ✿ a candle and matches
- ✿ sheets of black and white construction paper, one of each for each student
- ✿ pens or markers
- ✿ a recording of instrumental music and the appropriate equipment for playing it
- ✿ glue sticks



Handout

Opening Words and Readings

Choose four readers and distribute the handout. Then light the candle and invite the students to quiet and to prayer.

Leader: Jesus has told us that he is the light of the world and that he will dispel the darkness. Today, as we pray together, let us choose light. Let us commit ourselves to living an examined life, one in which we consciously and deliberately choose God.

Reader 1: Why should we choose God? Is there not pain, betrayal, temptation, and persecution when we follow the words of Jesus? That path is not easy, and it may cause rejection.

Reader 2:

Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man

(Luke 6:22)

Reader 3: But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27–28).

All: These words are not ones we hear often. Jesus Christ, be with us now. Open our hearts and give us the courage to say yes to you.

Reflection

Give each student a sheet of black construction paper and a pen or marker. Ask the students to think of all the messages and obstacles that keep them from saying yes to God, and to write those on the paper. Note that the writing will be hard to see, and that is fine. With instrumental music playing in the background, allow some time for quiet reflection and writing.

Reader 4: A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. . . . A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43–45)

All: Teach us to follow the good treasure of the heart and produce good. Let us tear the evil from our lives and choose God again. Let us again say yes to God.

Instruct the students to tear their black paper into pieces approximately 1-inch square. Distribute the white construction paper and glue sticks. Explain that the students should use their black pieces to form the word *YES* on the white paper and glue them down.

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: We bring our needs to you, God.

[Invite the students to share their needs as individual petitions. After each petition, lead the class in responding, "Lord, hear our prayer."]

Leader: It is a struggle to say yes, but with a firm resolve and the support of this Christian community, we can do it!

All: In all the good times, and all the bad times, we choose your ways, O God. We choose the cross, knowing that with the pain comes the glory of Christ. We choose the good, the light, the whole, the holy. We say yes to you this day. Amen.

“Let There Be Light!”

Opening Words

Leader: Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

Readings

Reader 1: In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind swept over the waters—

Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. (Genesis 1:1–4)
 . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 2:

In the beginning was the Word,
 and the Word was with God,
 and the Word was God.
 He was in the beginning with God.
 All things came to be through him,
 and without him nothing came to be.
 What came to be through him was life,
 and this life was the light of the human race;
 the light shines in the darkness,
 and the darkness has not overcome it.

(John 1:1–5)

[Refrain]

Reader 3:

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. . . .

But you . . . are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5:2–5) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 4: Do not be deceived, my beloved . . . : all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. (James 1:16–17) . . . *[Refrain]*

Reader 5: The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light. (John 12:35–36) . . . *[Refrain]*



Reader 6:

What we have seen and heard,
we proclaim now to you,
so that you too may have fellowship with us;
for our fellowship is with the Father
and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
We are writing this so that our joy may be complete.

Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:3–5)

[Refrain]

Reader 7: Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) . . . *[Refrain]*

Sharing and Closing Prayer

Leader: At this time, I invite each of you to identify someone who has served as a light in your life. You may give either a name or a description, such as "a teacher." If you would like, you may briefly explain how he or she has been a light for you.

[After everyone has shared, they respond:]

All: Dear God, you are the source of all the real light in our lives. We thank you for all the people who have been light for us, and have revealed your love through their concern for us. Thank you for illuminating our lives and showing us the way. Let us learn to be light for one another. May each of us reflect the light of Christ to our weary world. We ask this through Christ, our light, our brother, and our Lord. Amen.

[The class may sing a song that centers on light.]

(This prayer service is from Br. Larry Schatz, FSC.)

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Sin and Temptation

Gathering Song

The class may listen to the song “My Life Is in Your Hands.”

Opening Words

Leader: God created Adam and Eve in God’s image, and God created the Garden of Eden to supply all their needs on earth. Adam and Eve were happy in the garden. They lived without clothes and were not ashamed to be naked. Then one day a serpent approached Eve and tempted her to disobey one of God’s commands.

Reader: Now the snake . . . asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’” The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.” The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Genesis 3:1–7)

Leader: When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they broke their relationship of trust with God. Once that relationship was broken, sin became a part of the human story. Ever since that moment, human beings have faced temptations that pull them away from God’s love and grace.

Litany

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that calls us to love . . .

Side 2: and the voice that calls us to hate.

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that calls us to do good . . .

Side 2: and the voice that calls us to do evil.

Side 1: We are sometimes torn between the voice that draws us to God . . .

Side 2: and the voice that wants to block God out of our lives.

Skit 1: Stealing

The person reading the role of Good stands to one side of the staging area, holding a sign labeled “Good.” The person reading the role of Evil stands to the opposite side of the staging area, holding a sign labeled “Evil.” A person with a long rope tied around her or his waist stands between them. A fifth person holds one end of the rope and stands near the “Good” sign, and a sixth person holds the other end of the rope and stands near the “Evil” sign. The narrator stands off to the side so that the audience can see all the actors.

Narrator: Brian got a new North Face jacket and has been proudly showing it off to everyone. All his friends admire it—except for Jordan. Jordan wanted the jacket, and Brian bought it first. This makes Jordan mad. Now Jordan is contemplating the situation.

Good: It’s such a cool jacket. I’ve had my eye on it forever. But Brian’s got it, and it looks good on him.

Evil: But he stabbed me in the back. I wanted that jacket, and he knew that. It’s not right. It’s just not right.

Good: Brian had a right to buy it. He wanted it just as badly as I did.



Evil: Who cares? That North Face is hot. So hot that I'm going to steal it.

Good: No. I can't steal it. Brian is my friend. He paid for the jacket with his own money. Besides, who I am is much more important than what I wear. And I'm no thief.

Skit 2: Drugs

The scene is staged as for skit 1.

Narrator: Delia is at a party on a Saturday night. It is the party of the year, and she is having the time of her life, sitting around with a really cool crowd. In fact, she is sitting right next to Michael, a guy she really likes. Suddenly, Michael hands her a marijuana joint.

Good: Marijuana? You've got to be kidding! I can't smoke that. It'll mess me up.

Evil: One joint can't hurt. I can stop anytime I want, especially after just one.

Good: Or can I? What am I thinking? It's weed! What about its long-term effects? It destroys brain cells. It harms chromosomes. What about the children I want to have in the future? Will they be okay?

Evil: But it's Michael offering it to me. I like Michael. Maybe he will like me if I smoke. It can't be so bad. Everyone else is smoking. What'll they all think if I don't join them?

Good: Forget it. If Michael doesn't like me for who I am, he doesn't deserve me. And if the others laugh at me, they're not real friends. I can deal with that. This is my decision and my life. And my choice is to pass.

Skit 3: Sex

The scene is staged as for skits 1 and 2.

Narrator: Jorge and his girlfriend, Tiffany, are in his house alone. They are kissing, and their feelings for each other are becoming stronger and stronger.

Evil: I want to make love. We're both responsible. We have protection, so we don't have to worry about a baby. Neither of us has been with anyone else, so we don't have to worry about AIDS or STDs.

Good: Yes, we have both been responsible people so far. We don't have to worry about AIDS or STDs. But no method of protection is 100 percent effective. There's always a chance that if we share sex, we could bring a baby into the world. Neither of us is ready for that kind of responsibility.

Evil: Sure, there's always a chance we could have a baby. But the chance is slim. We have been going together for a while. Sharing sex will bring us closer.

Good: Sounds good, but let's not fool ourselves. Sharing sex is no shortcut to real intimacy, to real, deep friendship. Communication, honesty, care for each other's well-being—those are the things that will bring us closer. Not sex.

Evil: We would not be just having sex. We love each other. Love makes it right.

Good: We do love each other. But how much? Are we ready and able to make a life together, to love each other always and forever? To be honest, neither of us is ready for that kind of love. We both have school to finish, careers to start, people to meet, and goals to achieve before we're ready for that kind of unconditional, always-and-forever love. Let's swear to each other never to make promises to each other that we can't keep. We will wait until we are ready and able to love each other always and forever.

Skit 4: Jesus in the Desert

The scene is staged as for skits 1, 2, and 3.

Narrator: Because Jesus was human, he too experienced temptation and sin. In the weeks before Jesus died, the Spirit led him out into the desert, and he remained there for forty days and forty nights. Afterward, he was hungry, and the tempter approached him.

Evil: If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread.



Good: People need more than bread to live; they need the word of God.

Narrator: The evil tempter took Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem.

Evil: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the top of this temple and let your angels minister to you.

Good: You should not put the Lord your God to the test.

Narrator: The devil took Jesus to the top of a mountain and pointed out all the nations below it.

Evil: All these countries I will give you if you throw yourself down at my feet and worship me.

Good: Get away from me, Satan, for it is written, "The Lord your God should you worship, and God alone shall you serve."

(This skit is adapted from Matthew 4:1–10.)

Reflection

Everyone reflects on several questions posed by the leader.

Closing Prayer

Leader:

Give me the courage to do right
in the face of wrong.
Instill in my heart
a set of values that prompts me
to think of others
instead of just myself.

Give me the willingness to
stand up for what I believe in—
not following the crowd.

Give me the strength to
look evil in the eye
and withstand it.
Because I know
with you at my side
all things are possible.

(Theresa Vonderwell, in *More Dreams Alive: Prayers by Teenagers*, edited by Carl Koch [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995], page 28. Copyright © 1995 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

Closing Song

The group may sing the traditional spiritual "Were You There?"

(This prayer service is adapted from one conceived and written by Helen Wolf and others, both adults and students, at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, Brooklyn, NY.)

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A Rainbow of Hope and Peace

Opening Prayer and Reading

Reader: God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so that the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature—every mortal being that is on the earth. God told Noah: This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and every mortal being that is on the earth. (Genesis 9:12–17)

Leader: God sends the rainbow to remind us of God's promise to grant the glory of heaven to all who love God and do God's will. The rainbow is thus a symbol of hope. In spite of all the violence in the world, God gives us hope through Jesus Christ, who is the source of all peace. We love God and do God's will when we reach out to serve others in peace, as Jesus did, trusting in God's grace.

Reflection

Everyone identifies groups they belong to. The leader explains what it means to belong to a community of hope. Small groups discuss their personal experiences of peace in a community of hope.

Closing Prayer

Each person gets four colored strips of paper, representing four communities of hope, and writes on each strip one thing he or she can do in that community to share the peace of Jesus. Then everyone says the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi together:

All:

Loving God, make me an instrument of
your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O, Divine Teacher, grant that I may not so
much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal
life.

Each person tapes each of her or his colored strips in the corresponding section of the community-of-hope rainbow. Everyone sings "Let There Be Peace on Earth" or shares a sign of peace.

(This prayer service is from Clare vanBrandwijk, campus minister, Bishop O'Gorman High School, Sioux Falls, SD.)

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“Be Still and Know That I Am God!”

Opening Words

Reading and Litany

Leader: A reading from Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and our strength,
an ever-present help in distress.
Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken
and mountains quake to the depths of the sea;
Though its waters rage and foam
and mountains totter at its surging.

(Psalm 46:2-4)

“Be still and know that I am God!”

(Psalm 46:11)

Side 1: When the loud alarm goes off in the morning . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In the routines of dressing and getting off to school . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the comings and goings throughout the school day . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In the mundane tasks of going to the locker and walking in the halls . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the frenzied pace of the cafeteria . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In the stacks of books and pages of homework . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the quiet of night and stillness of sleep . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Reflection

The class may listen to the song “You Are Mine.”

Closing Prayer

All: Loving God, you come to us in the silence and in the laughter, in the moments of joy and sorrow. The busyness of our lives sometimes keeps us from taking the time to be quiet, to be still, and to rest in your love. Let us open ourselves to the enfolding grace of your presence this day. Let us be still and know that you hold us in your heart and that we are your cherished children. Let us be still and know that you are our God, our loving creator and friend. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Being a Humble Servant

Opening Words

Leader: Jesus said to his disciples, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). As we gather today, in Jesus’ name, let us come together quietly and reverently to be with our loving Creator, whose spirit fills us and makes us whole.

Litany and Reading

Leader: All wisdom is from God. We need to listen and learn.

Side 1: Open our hearts so that these words become branded on our hearts.

Side 2: Open our minds so that our intellect can be challenged.

Side 1: Open our eyes to the beauty of creation.

Side 2: Open our hands so that we can work to bring forth the Reign!

Leader: A reading from the Wisdom of Ben Sira:

My son, conduct your affairs with humility,
and you will be loved more than a giver
of gifts.
Humble yourself the more, the greater you are,
and you will find mercy in the sight of God.
For great is the power of the Lord;
by the humble he is glorified.

(Ben Sira 3:17–20)

Side 1: When I find myself bragging about all I can do . . .

All: Let me remember that all wisdom is from God, and I should be humble.

Side 2: When I find myself thinking I am better than someone else . . .

All: Let me remember that all wisdom is from God, and I should be humble.

Leader: Jesus gave us a powerful example—washing the feet of the Apostles. Listen to his explanation from the Gospel of John: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, Amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it” (John 13:15–17).

All: We know these things. We must live them out. We know what the Lord God asks of us—only this: that we act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God. (Adapted from Micah 6:8)

Reflection

The class may listen to a song about service.

Prayers

Leader: As we strive to be merciful and true, let us bring our needs to our God.

[The sides take turns offering prayers. After each prayer, everyone responds, “Lord, hear our needs.”]

Side 1: For peace in our world, and justice in our land, we pray . . .

Side 2: For courage in decisions, and compassion in our actions, we pray . . .

Side 1: For lonely hearts, and empty hands, we pray . . .

Side 2: For our individual needs, we pray . . .

[Everyone shares their own needs aloud or ponders them in silence.]

Leader: We thank you, God, for all you have given us, and we know that you hear our prayers. We ask that you bless us and remember us as we pray the words you taught us:

All: Our Father . . . *[Everyone says the Lord’s Prayer.]*

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Fourteen Courageous Steps— The Stations of the Cross for Lent

Opening Song

The class may sing a few verses of “Were You There?”

Station 1: Jesus Was Condemned to Death

Reader 1: Jesus was arrested and taken before the council, where many people testified against him.

The high priest rose before the assembly and questioned Jesus, saying, “Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?” But he was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said to him, “Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?” Then Jesus answered, “I am;

and ‘you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power
and coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

At that the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as deserving to die. Some began to spit on him. They blindfolded him and struck him and said to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards greeted him with blows. (Mark 14:60–65)

Leader: Jesus was condemned for something that the high priest did not even understand. Many times, we are criticized, ridiculed, or simply told we are nothing. Think of a time that happened to you. What did you feel like? What did you want to do?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 2: Jesus Took Up His Cross

Reader 2: The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:16–20)

Leader: Jesus endured great pain even though he was innocent. Have you ever been punished for something you did not do? Remember that time, experience the feelings again, and ask Jesus how he would handle it. We are asked to carry a very light burden compared with Jesus. We carry a sliver of the cross; he carries the remainder.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 3: Jesus Fell the First Time

Reader 3: The pressure was too much. Jesus was weak from being beaten, bruised, and whipped. He fell with the weight of the cross. The pain was excruciating, but he got back up and began the seemingly long journey to the Place of the Skull, Golgotha.

Leader: What drains you of energy and brings you to the ground? Is it a lack of patience, courage, or understanding? Like Jesus, we need to rise from our downtrodden state.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.



Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 4: Jesus Met His Mother

Reader 4: Mary said: "I look into his eyes. There is so much pain. My Son, if I could take away this agony, I would. You still have so much love in your eyes. You are incredible. I love you!"

Leader: How do your parents look at you? What do they see? How do you know they love you? How do you show your love for them?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 5: Simon Helped Jesus Carry His Cross

Reader 5: As [the soldiers] led [Jesus] away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)

Leader: Who is with you through the good times and the bad times? Who is there to help you carry your cross? How does this person help you? How do you help this person?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 6: Veronica Wiped the Face of Jesus

Reader 6: Veronica said: "I see him from a distance. As he comes closer, I see the sweat, blood, and tears. I wipe his face. It is the least I can do. He has done so much for me."

Leader: Compassion is a virtue. To help one another is a gift. How have you been kind to your family, friends, and even strangers? Veronica wiped the face of Jesus with love, compassion, and sorrow. How do we do this for others?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 7: Jesus Fell the Second Time

Reader 7: With each step, the cross became heavier. The pain was agonizing. Jesus fell again. The weight was constant, the pressure consistent.

Leader: All of us have continuous sources of stress. These become a heavy burden and may cause fatigue. What are ongoing sources of stress for you?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.



Station 8: Jesus Met the Women of Jerusalem

Reader 8: A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’ At that time people will say to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27–31)

Leader: Even when he was wracked with pain, Jesus thought of others. Who believes in you and always thinks of you: friends, family members, teachers? What inspiration do they provide?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 9: Jesus Fell the Third Time

Reader 9: Once again, the weight was just too much. Jesus fell for the third time. Then he gathered the last bit of strength he had, got up, and carried his cross onward.

Leader: When do you feel exhausted but just keep going? What makes you continue?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 10: Jesus Was Stripped of His Garments

Reader 10: When they reached Golgotha, the soldiers stripped Jesus of his garments. They cast lots to split his clothes among themselves.

Leader: Being stripped is a shameful experience and can cause great doubt. When have you felt stripped of your defenses and naked in front of the world?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 11: Jesus Was Nailed to the Cross

Reader 11: The soldiers laid Jesus on the cross, spread his arms, and drove a stake through each of his wrists. The first stake sent waves of excruciating pain up and down his body. The second was worse. The soldiers raised his knees and crossed his feet and drove a stake through the arch of each foot.

Leader: When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he could no longer move. What holds you stationary? What keeps you from accomplishing your dreams?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.



Station 12: Jesus Died on the Cross

Reader 12: It was around midday, and the sky became dark. Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). Jesus uttered a loud cry, and died.

Leader: At times, there seems to be no hope. What hopes, beliefs, ideals, and dreams have died or been lost for you?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 13: Jesus Was Taken Off the Cross

Reader 13: The soldiers came to break the legs of those who were not dead. When they saw that Jesus was dead, they pierced his side; blood and water poured out. They took Jesus off the cross. Joseph of Arimathea gathered his body to bury him.

Leader: Think about the people who have been there to pick you up, clean you off, and take care of your needs. How have you felt when they have done that?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Station 14: Jesus Was Laid in a Tomb

Reader 14: Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it [in] clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb. (Matthew 27:59–61)

Leader: Jesus was put to rest. Where do you go to get rest and to rejuvenate? What is your sacred space like?

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Dear Jesus, thank you for taking us on this journey. Many times, we feel troubled, beaten up by life, and just ready to give up hope. Please help us to realize that we can always come to you because you will understand.

You suffered for us, and you brought us abundant life by your resurrection. You cried, you died, and you rose.

The class might sing the remaining verses of “Were You There?”

(This prayer service is from Debra Thorpe, Notre Dame Academy, Los Angeles.)

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Saying Yes to Jesus

Opening Words and Readings

Leader: Jesus has told us that he is the light of the world and that he will dispel the darkness. Today, as we pray together, let us choose light. Let us commit ourselves to living an examined life, one in which we consciously and deliberately choose God.

Reader 1: Why should we choose God? Is there not pain, betrayal, temptation, and persecution when we follow the words of Jesus? That path is not easy, and it may cause rejection.

Reader 2:

Blessed are you when people hate you,
and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man

(Luke 6:22)

Reader 3: But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27–28).

All: These words are not ones we hear often. Jesus Christ, be with us now. Open our hearts and give us the courage to say yes to you.

Reflection Activity

The students think of all the messages and obstacles that keep them from saying yes to God, and write those on a piece of black paper.

Reader 4: A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. . . . A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43–45)

All: Teach us to follow the good treasure of the heart and produce good. Let us tear the evil from our lives and choose God again. Let us again say yes to God.

All tear their black paper into pieces and use the pieces to form the word “YES” on a piece of white paper.

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: We bring our needs to you, God.

Everyone shares their individual needs. After each petition, the class responds, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Leader: It is a struggle to say yes, but with a firm resolve and the support of this Christian community, we can do it!

All: In all the good times, and all the bad times, we choose your ways, O God. We choose the cross, knowing that with the pain comes the glory of Christ. We choose the good, the light, the whole, the holy. We say yes to you this day. Amen.

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