

Life Issue A

Feeling God's Presence

Getting Ready

Core Understanding

God promises to be with us always.

Materials Needed

- several newspapers and magazines for each small group of three or four
- scissors, several for each small group of three or four
- soft background music
- four Bibles
- copies of the handout "Meeting Jesus: A Guided Meditation," pages 125–126, one for each participant
- art paper, one sheet for each participant
- markers, several for each participant
- index cards, one for each participant

Catechism Connection

- Paragraph 1
(To know and love God)
- Paragraph 220
(God's love is everlasting)
- Paragraph 2564
(Prayer is a covenant between God and man)

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Make** the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God." (*Pause.*)
2. **Tell** the participants that this session will begin with a prayer that expresses the abandonment by God that Jesus felt during his Crucifixion. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 22:1–2, 9–11 aloud. Pray:
 - Heavenly Father, as we look back on times when you seemed far away, help us see how they bring us ever closer to you. Be with us always. Amen.
3. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

Engage Activity (15 minutes)

1. **Arrange** the young people into small groups of three or four. Distribute the newspapers, magazines, and scissors to each group. Explain the task as follows:
 - Use the newspapers and magazines to find articles and pictures that illustrate times when God seems far away.
 - Cut out the pictures and articles and be ready to explain how God seems to be absent.
2. **Invite** each group to share its articles and pictures and to explain how God seems far away from the situation depicted in the picture or article. When all the groups have presented, ask everyone to take a moment of silence to think of a time in their own lives when God seemed far away. Lead a discussion with the following questions:
 - Why do you think Jesus seems far away sometimes?
 - If someone asked you for help in understanding how to encounter God's love, what advice might you give?

Optional Add-On: Invite a volunteer to read "Check This Out!" on page 114 in the *Connect!* book. Read aloud verses 1–9 and 15–20 of Psalm 22. Lead a discussion on the similarities between the words of the psalmist and the experience of Christ.

Core Learning Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Meeting Jesus

Objective: To explore our relationship with Jesus both through Scripture and by participating in a guided meditation.

1. **Arrange** the young people into four groups. Distribute the Bibles, and assign each group one of the following Scripture passages:
 - Isaiah 49:15–16
 - Matthew 11:28
 - Luke 11:9–10
 - John 6:37
2. **Explain** the task as follows:
 - Each group is to read its assigned Scripture passage.
 - On a sheet of paper, write answers to the following questions. (*Write these questions where all can see.*)
 - Does God seem far away in these passages? Why or why not?
 - Does God seem committed to being with us during hard times? Why or why not?
 - Do you think hard times could bring us closer to God? How?

3. **Invite** a volunteer from each group to share the group's responses. Comment as follows:
 - When we were baptized, we became children of God the Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus. Through Jesus, we come to know the Father and hear his promise to be with us forever, in good times and in bad.
4. **Distribute** the handout "Meeting Jesus: A Guided Meditation," and invite everyone to sit comfortably apart from one another. Dim the lights and play some soft background music. Read the handout slowly and prayerfully. After the meditation, give the participants time to reorient to the room.
5. **Explain** that it is helpful to journal or write down the experience for future reflection. Instruct the young people to record their thoughts, noting what the garden looked like, what Jesus' voice sounded like, how it felt to be hugged by Jesus, and what events from their life Jesus showed them.

Optional Add-On: Direct the participants to find "Encounters with Christ" and "God with Us" on pages 171–173 in the *Connect!* book. Review the content, and then lead a discussion on how God is with us in the Church and the sacraments. Consult the handout "Life Issue A Summary" on page 127 to add other ideas.

Core Learning Activity 2 (15 minutes)

Making Invisible Voices Visible

Objective: To help the young people understand how their Church family supports their faith and helps them to know God's presence.

1. **Distribute** a sheet of art paper and several markers to each participant.
2. **Explain** the task as follows:
 - During the meditation, you heard voices greeting you. Jesus said they belong to your Church family in Heaven and around the world.
 - Your task is to make those invisible voices visible by drawing as many of the people Jesus was referring to as possible, giving each person a name. Any form of art is okay.
3. **Invite** volunteers to take turns showing and describing their drawings.
4. **Ask** the following questions:
 - Were there individuals in your drawing that surprised you? Why?
 - How does your Church family—around the world and in your parish—help support your faith?
 - Can you think of anyone who would include you in their Church family drawing? Why or why not?
 - What are some ways to become more helpful to your Church family?

Session Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** volunteers to share key things they learned during the session. Ensure that the following point is made:
 - God promises to be with us always.
2. **Distribute** the index cards. Instruct the participants to write the following question on their cards:
 - Who helps to support me in my faith on a regular basis?
3. **Direct** the young people to take the cards home and refer to them a few times during the week. Ask them to answer the question for themselves or to share their cards with friends or family members and discuss their answers with them.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Ask** a volunteer to read Psalm 46:1–3, 7 aloud. Direct the participants to the Act of Hope on page 559 in the *Connect!* book. Lead them in praying the prayer together.
2. **Close** by making the Sign of the Cross.

Meeting Jesus: A Guided Meditation

Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

God made each of us, including our imaginations. Today, we will use our imaginations to experience a guided meditation. Remember, Jesus said, "Seek, and you will find." If we seek Jesus and offer him our imaginations, we can sometimes meet him and spend time with him in a way that helps us understand how he wants us to live. Let's try it and see!

Close your eyes and relax. . . . Listen to your breathing. . . . Don't change it, just listen to it. . . . As you inhale, breathe in all the love God has for you. . . . As you exhale, feel all your distractions leave . . . any aches and pains . . . any worries . . . any distractions at all. Try to feel your heart beating . . . the heart God created for you. . . .

Now picture, right before you, a large door, standing all alone. . . .

Go to the door, push it open, and walk through. . . . You find yourself in a beautiful garden. . . . Take a moment to look around . . . feel the grass beneath your feet . . . smell the flowers . . . listen to the birds. . . . Enjoy! . . .

In the distance, you see a stream winding through the garden. . . . There is a shade tree next to the stream, and a bench beneath the tree. . . . Jesus is there, waiting for you. . . . He smiles, and calls you by name. . . . Go to him. . . .

Jesus takes you into his arms with a warm hug. . . . "I'm so glad you came," he says. . . . "Come, let's sit down and be together for a while. . . ." So you sit on the bench and enjoy each other's company. . . . Think about what Jesus is like. . . .

Jesus takes you by the hand and says, "I have been with you always, through times of joy, and times of sadness." . . . Then Jesus shows you moments in your life, beginning when you were very young. . . . He shows you how he was there, sharing each moment with you. . . . What does Jesus show you? . . . How do you feel? . . .



Then Jesus says, "At your Baptism, you became a child of God the Father and a member of the Body of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, I will be with you forever, during the good times and the difficult times. . . .

Jesus points out the stream, and invites you to go into the water to renew yourself as you call to mind your Baptism. . . . Together you go, hand in hand. . . . To your surprise, the water is warm and life-giving. . . . With great joy, Jesus gently dips you into the water. . . . Think about what it feels like. . . .

As you stand in the stream with Jesus, you hear invisible voices cheering and clapping. Jesus laughs and says: "You hear our family, the Church, greeting you! They are the family and friends you meet every day and all those in Heaven and around the world who pray for you each time the Eucharist is celebrated." . . .

The sound fades, and you and Jesus return to the bench. . . . As you leave the water, you become completely dry, and your heart fills with God's peace. . . . As you sit beside Jesus . . . you realize you can tell him anything. . . . What do you tell Jesus? . . . How does he respond? . . .

Jesus then tells you it is time to go . . . but first he has something for you . . . something that will unite you closer with him and with all your brothers and sisters in the Church. . . . He takes from his cloak a small loaf of bread. . . . He blesses it, . . . breaks it, . . . and says, "This is my Body," . . . "take and eat." Together you share the meal. . . .

Now you both stand up to go. . . . He invites you to return anytime and says he will be waiting. . . . He tells you he will be with you throughout your journey. . . . You will sense his presence in the people and events of your daily life. . . . You will be able to hear his voice in the Bible and find his love in the sacraments. . . . Then Jesus says, "I look forward to being with you in the Eucharist." He takes you into his arms for a farewell hug. . . .

You turn to go, and you see the door is still standing open. . . . As you walk up to it, you take one last look at Jesus and remember that you can return at any time. . . . You go through the door, closing it behind you . . . and find yourself back here in this room. . . . Slowly, you wiggle your fingers and toes . . . stretch your arms and legs . . . and, when you are ready, open your eyes. . . .

Close with the Sign of the Cross.



Life Issue A Summary

Feeling God's Presence

1. Everyone goes through times when God seems far away. At these times, it is important to remember that God sent Jesus, his only Son, to us to be with us always.
2. Jesus is with us and communicates with us in these ways:
 - in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, his very Body and Blood
 - through the Holy Spirit, in the prayers of the liturgy (the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours), and in our private prayer and meditation
 - in and through the events of our lives
3. Jesus is with us in good times and in bad. When something bad happens, this does not mean God does not love us. God the Father sent Jesus to us to assure us of his love, even in the midst of tragedy and death.
4. The Passion and death of Christ remind us that God is with us at the worst of times.
5. The Resurrection of Christ reminds us that God is with us to take us through our suffering and death to new life with him, now and in eternity.
6. God helps us through the hard times of this life by working for good within them and despite them: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

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