

Let Your Light Shine

An Overnight Retreat on Self-Esteem

OVERVIEW

This overnight retreat on self-esteem invites the young people to explore their own personal gifts and encourages them to share those abilities with others. The retreat emphasizes the light of Christ in our life, the special people who bring us closer to Christ, and the ways we can be the light of Christ for others.

Suggested Time

This retreat covers about 13 hours, including recreation and nutrition breaks. It runs for about 4½ hours on the first day, beginning in the evening. The remainder of the retreat takes place on the second day, ending in the late afternoon. If your schedule is different, you may need to adapt the retreat to fit that schedule and maintain the proper flow.

Group Size

This retreat is most effective with groups of twenty or fewer. However, it can be done with any number of young people, divided into small groups, each led by an older teen or adult.

Special Preparations

Well before the retreat, contact the parents of the participants. Ask them to write a letter of love and affirmation to their child, telling their child why and how he or she is the light of Christ for the family. Stress that the letter should be more than just a short note and should truly come from the heart. The teens should not know about the letters until they receive them on the retreat.

Provide clear delivery instructions. Emphasize that every participant must have a letter from a parent. The activity will have to be canceled if even one letter is missing.

Materials Needed

- ☀️ colored construction paper
- ☀️ double-stick tape, straight pins, or safety pins
- ☀️ a large pillar candle and matches
- ☀️ 3-by-5-inch index cards, two for each person
- ☀️ inexpensive notebooks, one for each person
- ☀️ used magazines
- ☀️ scissors, one for each person
- ☀️ glue sticks, at least one for every three people
- ☀️ pens or pencils
- ☀️ colored markers
- ☀️ masking tape
- ☀️ copies of handout 1, "Let Your Light Shine," one for each person
- ☀️ a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music (optional)
- ☀️ empty baby food jars, one for each person
- ☀️ a variety of brightly colored tissue paper
- ☀️ household white glue
- ☀️ paper plates, one for each person
- ☀️ clear shellac or decoupage covering, such as Mod Podge
- ☀️ paintbrushes, no larger than one inch, one for every two or three people
- ☀️ votive candles, one for each person
- ☀️ one or more strings of Christmas lights with screw-in bulbs
- ☀️ a basket or box
- ☀️ a Bible
- ☀️ one copy of resource 1, "Christmas Island: A Parable of Light"
- ☀️ copies of handout 2, "The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation," one for each person
- ☀️ parish songbooks, one for each person (optional)
- ☀️ newsprint
- ☀️ small prizes (optional)
- ☀️ balloons, one for each person

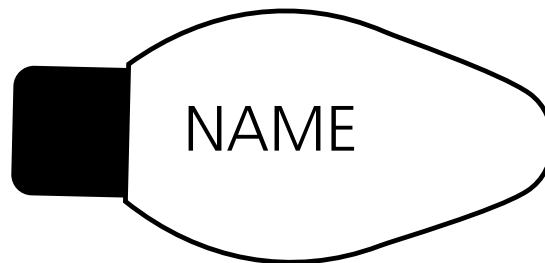
- ☀ small pieces of paper, about 3-by-3-inches, one for each person
- ☀ permanent markers
- ☀ letters from parents
- ☀ blindfolds, one for each person
- ☀ copies of handout 3, "Dimming the Light of Christ," one for each person
- ☀ a flashlight (optional)
- ☀ a large solid-colored bowl (optional)
- ☀ poster board, one sheet for each small group
- ☀ rulers, one for each small group
- ☀ plain paper or notebook paper
- ☀ envelopes, one for each person
- ☀ a wick or taper candle

PROCEDURE

Part 1: Getting Started (90 to 110 minutes)

Welcome, Introductions, and Prayer

Preparation. Using as many different colors of construction paper as you want small groups, cut out name tags in the shape of bulbs from a string of holiday lights, like this:



You will need as many bulbs as young people on the retreat. Cut an equal number of bulbs from each color of paper so that the small groups will be roughly equal in size. Write one participant's name on each bulb.

Set up tables (preferably round ones) and chairs. Have as many chairs around each table as you want people in a small group.

Set up a prayer space in front of the group with a large pillar candle.

1. As the participants arrive, give each of them a lightbulb-shaped name tag and a safety pin, double-stick tape, or a straight pin to attach the tag to their clothing.

2. Enthusiastically welcome the young teens to the retreat and introduce the team members. Since for some participants this is likely to be their first retreat, you may want to discuss the idea of a retreat with them by asking the following questions:



What is the purpose of a retreat?

What do you think will happen on this retreat?

What do you hope will happen?

What do you hope will *not* happen?

You might also go over some of the basic ground rules for the event and your expectations of them. Keep this presentation upbeat and positive to set the proper mood.

3. Introduce the theme of the retreat by making the following points in your own words:



The theme for this retreat is “Let Your Light Shine.” The retreat focuses on the light of Christ in our life and how that light shines in our relationship with ourselves, others, and God.

The topics include these:

What do you have to share?

How do you let your light shine?

Who are the people who light your way to Christ?

Who are the people and things that put out the light of Christ?

How do you spread the light of Christ at home, in school, and with friends?

It is important that everyone participate for us to enjoy this retreat as a group and as individuals. Everyone’s input is important.

Tell the young people to think about the Christmas lights that their family uses to decorate during the holiday season. Then ask them what happens when one bulb burns out. The answer is that with many brands of lights, all the lights go out when one burns out. Continue with your presentation, making the following points in your own words:



Imagine that we—as a group—are a string of lights. Our faith joins our string of lights together.

Jesus asks us to be a light for all people. Try not to let your light go out. Try not to put another person’s light out. We need to encourage one another and challenge one another on this retreat and in our life.

4. Light the pillar candle in the prayer space. As you are doing so, make the point that the candle reminds us that Christ is the light of the world and that he is always with us. Note that the candle will burn through all the retreat activities to keep the light of Christ shining among us.

Say a spontaneous prayer asking God's blessings on the retreat, on the team, and on the young people, so that everyone will be able to see Jesus in themselves and in others. Invite the young people to pause and silently ask Jesus to answer any special prayers of petition they bring to this retreat. After a pause, end the prayer by saying the following:



We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who is the light of our world. Amen.

Icebreaker: Let Your Light Shine

Preparation. Write each of the following words on six index cards. You will need one card for each young person. If you have more than forty-eight participants, add different kinds of lights. If you have fewer than forty-two, eliminate the appropriate number of lights. Mix up the cards before distributing them.

- ⊙ candle
- ⊙ flashlight
- ⊙ lightbulb
- ⊙ streetlight
- ⊙ night-light
- ⊙ refrigerator light
- ⊙ laser light
- ⊙ fluorescent light

1. Provide each young person with a chair. Ask the participants to arrange the chairs in a circle. Remove one chair from the circle and ask that person to stand in the middle.

Explain that the person in the middle can call out one type of light, two or more types of light, or say, "Let your light shine." Whoever is holding a card matching the light that was called out must get up and find a new chair, as must the person in the middle. Give the following examples:



If the person in the middle calls out, "lightbulb," everyone holding lightbulb cards must find another chair.

If "candles" and "flashlights" are called, everyone holding those cards must find a new chair.

If the person in the middle says, "Let your light shine," everyone must find a new chair.

The person left without a chair is the new person in the center.

No one is permitted to push another person out of a chair. If the teens play too rough, stop the game and ask them to take it easy before resuming play. Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

Small-Group Formation: String of Lights

1. Ask the young people to find those who have the same color name tag as they do. Once the groups have assembled, direct them each to sit down at a table.

2. Allow a few minutes for each person to introduce himself or herself to the small group. You might ask the participants to share something in addition to their name, such as, the farthest place they have ever visited or their favorite toy when they were five years old.

Tell the young teens that they will be working in small groups for many of the activities and discussions during the retreat. The small groups offer a great place to share ideas, make new friends, and encourage one another to “let your light shine.”

Part 2: Seeing the Light in Yourself (90 minutes)

Notebook Activity: Spotlight on You

1. Give each person a notebook. Place used magazines, scissors, glue sticks, pens or pencils, and other craft supplies on each table. Tell the teens that they are to search through the magazines for words and photographs that describe their abilities and positive qualities, and then cut these out and glue them onto the cover of their notebook. For example, if someone is a serious student and a good friend, she or he should find words and pictures that relate to those qualities. Remind the young people that this activity is not about likes and dislikes. Just because a person likes a particular music group does not mean that it belongs on the cover. A person’s collage is about who she or he is as a person.

Allow 30 minutes for the young people to complete this part of the project.

2. Ask the young people to share with their small group why they chose some of the words and photographs. They should share at least five examples, but they are welcome to share everything on their cover if they choose to.

3. Tell the participants to put their name and the date of the retreat on the first page of their journal notebook. On the next page, ask them to write down five items from their collage that they want to try and remember. For example,

if someone put the word *super* on the cover, they may need to remember that they have a lot of good inside them. If someone pasted a heart on their journal, they may want to remember that the love they have needs to be shared with more people.

4. Close the activity by reminding the young people that sometimes we have to put ourselves in the spotlight and take a close look at all the good we have to share and how much we have to offer. Encourage everyone to “let their light shine” throughout the retreat and beyond.

Small-Group Activity: Shed Light on the Matter

Preparation. Identify Scripture passages that include the word *light* as part of the phrase. You will need as many phrases as you have small groups. Here are some examples:

- ☉ You are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14)
- ☉ The Lord is my light and my salvation. (Ps. 27:1)
- ☉ Your light must shine before all people. (Matt. 5:16)
- ☉ You must live like people who belong in the light. (Eph. 5:8)
- ☉ The light of Christ has come into the world. (John 1:9)

Assign one phrase to each group, and divide the words in the phrase among members of each group. For example, if a group has six members, you might divide the phrase in the following way:

- ☉ The—Lord—is my—light—and my—salvation.

Use a different color of index card or a different color marker for each passage. On each card, write the person’s name on one side and her or his assigned part of the Scripture passage on the other. Scramble all the cards and place them name-side up on a large table.

1. Announce that each person should find the card with his or her name on it. When the participants have found their card, they are to find the other people with cards of the same color or same color of ink in which their names are written. Then they are to unscramble the scriptural verse and stand in order, holding their word(s) in front of them.

2. When all the groups have figured out their scriptural verse, ask them to spend 5 minutes discussing what meaning the passage might hold for them.

After the discussion ask a spokesperson from each group to share some of its responses with the large group. When all the responses have been shared, direct the small groups to tape their scriptural verse together and post it in the meeting room.

Presentation and Reflection: We Are the Light of Christ

Preparation. If possible, recruit an older teenager to prepare and deliver the following witness talk.

1. The purpose of this presentation is to encourage the young people to recognize the light of Christ within themselves. Ask the teen volunteer to make the following points in her or his own words, expanding the points by sharing personal stories and feelings about her or his struggle for self-worth. Direct the presenter to offer strategies for building confidence in everyday life. (If no teen presenter is available, the leader will need to make this presentation.)



God has given us all special gifts and talents. We are each unique and valuable. Each one of us has the light of Christ within us. We need to recognize that light within ourselves.

Think about the following questions:

What are some of your gifts and talents?

How has God made you different from others?

How do you feel about yourself?

Many people put themselves down all the time. For some reason it is often difficult to see the good in oneself. But it is important to feel good about oneself and to believe in oneself.

We also hurt the self-image of others by some of the things we say and do. Give concrete examples of how we can build up the self-image of others.

Jesus built up the self-esteem of others. For example, he ate with tax collectors, made time for little children, and washed the disciples' feet.

We also need to recognize the light of Christ in ourselves and in others and to do whatever we can to let it shine.

2. Distribute handout 1. Invite the participants to take their journal notebook and the handout questions to a place in the room where they can be alone with their thoughts. Encourage them to move away from other people so that they are not distracted. Allow about 10 minutes of quiet time for the teens to write their answers in their notebook. If you have reflective music available, begin playing it at this time.

3. After everyone is finished, call the participants back to their small groups. Encourage them to share their answers to the questions with their small group. However, assure them that they do not have to share everything. Allow about 10 minutes for small-group sharing.

If time permits, invite volunteers to share their answers to the last two questions with the large group. Close the activity by encouraging the young people to put into practice their ideas for building up themselves and one another.

Nutrition and Recreation Break

Part 3: We Hold the Light (50 to 60 minutes)

Candleholder Project

Preparation. Soak baby food jars in water to remove the labels. Make a sample candleholder, following the directions given in step 2 below.

During the break put the jars, scissors, tissue paper, glue, paper plates, shellac or Mod Podge, paintbrushes, and votive candles on each small-group table.

1. Introduce the activity by displaying the sample candleholder that you created before the retreat. Explain that the baby food jars represent each one of us. The candles represent Jesus and his light shining through each one of us.
2. Explain in your own words the following directions for making the candleholder:



Cut the tissue paper into $\frac{1}{2}$ -half-inch squares.

Glue the squares onto the baby food jars, overlapping the edges to create a stained-glass effect. Cover the bottom, sides, and top edges of the jar.

Wipe excess glue from the outside of the jar. Place the jar upside down on a paper plate and use a paintbrush to cover the jar with one coat of clear shellac or decoupage. (Note: Avoid placing jars on newspaper since the ink often adheres to the jar.)

When the jar is dry, place a votive candle inside.

As the young people are finishing their candleholder, set up for the prayer service in the prayer area.

Prayer Service: The People in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light

Preparation. Obtain one or more strings of Christmas lights with screw-in bulbs. Be sure to have one bulb available for each participant. Check the lights to make sure that all the bulbs work.

Remove all the bulbs from the sockets and place them in a box or basket. Arrange the cord of empty sockets on the floor in the shape of a cross. Leave it unplugged, but be sure you can access an outlet without disturbing the cross formation.

Place the unlit pillar candle and a Bible in the prayer space. Dim the lights in the room so that there is barely enough light to see.

Recruit a volunteer to read John 1:5–9. Practice reading the story in resource 1.

1. Gather the participants in the prayer space. Pass the basket or box of bulbs around the group and direct the teens to each take one.

2. When everyone has a bulb, call the group to a moment of silence in the presence of God. After a short pause, ask the volunteer to share the reading from John 1:5–9 and then light the pillar candle. Invite the teens to reflect silently on Jesus' great love for us.

3. After a few moments, read aloud the story from resource 1. Then ask the young people to think about the many people and other gifts from God that light up their lives. Invite them to take turns sharing a brief prayer of thanksgiving for those gifts. After doing so, have them screw their lightbulb into a socket near them.

4. When everyone has shared a prayer and screwed in a lightbulb, plug in the string(s) of lights. Allow a few seconds of silence so that the impact of the suddenly lit room registers with the teens. You may want to comment on the effect that being lights for one another can have in the world. Pray the following prayer or improvise one on the same theme:



Loving God, we thank you for giving us an abundance of gifts, including the people who love us. You also came to be with us in human form as Jesus, the light in our world.

Invite the teens to join hands as a symbol of unity, just as the string of lights is a symbol of the community of believers being light for one another. Lead them in praying the Lord's Prayer together.

5. Announce that the first part of the retreat is finished and that they will have a chance to explore further what it means to be a light for other people. Thank the young people for their participation and willingness to share their thoughts with others. Encourage them to leave the prayer area quietly and proceed to the sleeping areas. When the prayer space is empty, be sure to extinguish the candle and unplug the lights.

Part 4: The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation (120 minutes)

Morning Prayer

Preparation. Recruit two volunteers, one to read John 1:1–9 and the other, John 12:35–36.

Set up a prayer space with a Bible and the pillar candle that you used during the closing prayer in part 3.

If you have parish songbooks available, choose a song of praise that is familiar to the young people. You may want to practice the song before the prayer.

1. Gather the young people in the prayer space. Distribute handout 2 and copies of the parish songbook if they are available. Divide the group into two parts and designate one as group 1 and the other as group 2. Explain that when it is time to read the psalm, each group is to read its designated part, joining together for those sections that are preceded by the word *all*.

2. The order of the prayer follows:

- ⊙ If you are using a song of praise, begin the prayer service by singing one verse of it together.
- ⊙ Ask the first volunteer to read John 1:1–9.
- ⊙ Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.
- ⊙ Lead the young people in reciting Psalm 27 from handout 2.
- ⊙ Light the pillar candle and invite the young people to offer prayers of petition, aloud or silently.
- ⊙ Ask the second volunteer to read John 12:35–36.
- ⊙ Lead the group in reciting the Lord's Prayer and the closing prayer on handout 2.
- ⊙ If you used a song of praise to open the prayer, sing another verse to close it.

Focusing Exercise: Light and Sun Search

1. Ask the participants to gather with the small group that they were part of on the previous day. Give each small group a sheet of newsprint and some markers. Tell them to list all the songs they can think of that include the words *light* or *sun* in the lyrics. The songs can be contemporary, oldies, folk songs, children's songs, or whatever else they can think of. The participants should be able to recite the line that includes the word.

Allow about 3 minutes for the groups to complete the task, then compare results. Count only the songs for which someone in the group can recite the

lyrics. If you have prizes available, award them to the group that came up with the longest list.

2. Close the exercise by sharing your observations. Include the following points:



The light of Christ is not always easy to find. We need to search for that light inside ourselves and in our world. Sometimes it is hard to remember the places and times when we have seen the light.

It is important to work together to find the light of Christ and to share it with one another. When one person shares his or her light, other people will recognize it and may share their own light.

Discussion and Presentation: Spotlight on Heroes

Preparation. Write the following questions on newsprint:

- ⊙ Why would someone look up to the person on your balloon?
- ⊙ From what you know about this person, what positive contribution does he or she make to the world?
- ⊙ In what ways is this person a negative influence on popular culture?

Recruit someone, preferably an older teen or young adult, to give a 5- to 7-minute presentation on what it means to be a hero. Give that person adequate time to prepare her or his talk, based on the points in step 5.

1. Give each person a balloon, a small piece of paper, and a pen or pencil. Invite the young people to a moment of silence, and ask them to think of someone in their life whom they consider to be a real hero. These are people whom they look up to and who light the way to Christ for them. Direct them to write the name of the person on the piece of paper.

When everyone has written a name, tell the teens to roll the paper tightly and put it in the balloon. They should then blow up the balloon and tie it off.

2. Make permanent markers available to the participants. Tell them to write on the outside of their balloon in large letters the name of a person whom popular culture holds up as a hero. You might need to give some suggestions, such as celebrities in the fields of athletics, movies, television, or music. Give the young people a minute or so to write a name on their balloon.

3. Explain that they all are to simultaneously throw their balloon in the air and shout the name of the person that is printed on the outside. The task of the group is to keep all the balloons from hitting the ground. Each time they hit a balloon, they are to shout the name written on it.

After 2 minutes or so, stop the activity and tell the young people to pick up any balloon that is near them and sit with their small group. The balloon they choose does not have to be their own.

4. Display the questions you wrote on newsprint before the retreat. Explain that the participants are to share with their group the name written on the balloon that they claimed and answer the questions listed on the newsprint with respect to that person. Note that all members of the small group can contribute their ideas about each celebrity.

5. Gather the young people in a circle and ask them to put their balloon aside. Invite the person that you recruited before the session to give his or her presentation on what it really means to be a hero. The talk should focus primarily on the ways other people help light our way to Christ and support and encourage us along the way. Advise the presenter to tell his or her personal story. The presenter might want to bring in pictures, posters, or other props.

Listed below are some questions and topics to consider in developing the talk.



Who are some of the cultural heroes you admire? Who did you admire when you were the age of the young teens in the group? Why do you or did you look up to these people?

What makes a true hero? What does being a hero have to do with being a light for others? Who are some of these heroes in your life? How do they light your way to Christ? How do you let these people know that they are your heroes?

How does Jesus light the way to the creator God? What are some ways that Jesus was a hero to others?

Close the talk by referring to the first reading during the morning prayer, taken from the Gospel of John, about the Word being made flesh. Emphasize the comparison between the word of God and a light shining in the darkness.

6. Direct the young people to reclaim the anonymous balloon that they had during the small-group discussion. Tell them to pop the balloon and take out the paper that is rolled up inside.

When everyone has popped their balloon and settled down, announce that you will pass the basket around the group. They are to share with the group the name on the paper by saying, "[Name] is a true hero." Then they are to put the paper in the basket and pass it along to the next person.

When the basket gets back to you, hold it up in offering. Say a spontaneous prayer thanking God for the true heroes in our life, that is, the people who light the way to God and encourage and support us along the way.

Place the basket near the candle and Bible in the prayer space, and encourage the young people to let their heroes know at some point what an effect they have.

Reflection: Letters from Parents

Preparation. Contact the parents of the young people about writing a letter of love and affirmation for their child. Collect the letters well before the retreat, taking care not to let the teens know about them.

If you do not have a letter from a parent for every participant, you may want to skip this section. Instead, give the letters to the participants at the end of the retreat to take home and read.

1. Explain that everyone will have a chance for some quiet time. Talk about the importance of being alone with one's thoughts periodically so that we have a chance to think about life and listen for God's voice.

Introduce the letters by making the following comments in your own words:



Throughout the retreat we have been talking about how other people are the light in our life. We often fail to realize that we, too, can be the light for others. Some special people at home are thinking about you and praying for you right now. They are the light in your life, but you are light for them, too.

2. Distribute the letters and ask the young people to go to a place where they can be alone. Emphasize that the letters are to remain private. When they finish reading their letter, they are to put it away for safekeeping.

3. Close the activity by saying a short, spontaneous prayer thanking God for the people who love us. Encourage the teens to take their letter home, keep it in a safe place, and read it again and again, especially the next time they have a conflict with their parents or simply when they are feeling down.

Recreation and Nutrition Break

Part 5: Dimming the Light of Christ (60 to 75 minutes)

Presentation: Dimming Christ's Light

Preparation. Recruit someone to give a 5- to 7-minute talk about the things and people that dim the light of Christ in our life and what we can do to make

the light of Christ shine brightly again. Give him or her the outline of talking points below.

If it is possible to do so, prepare the room by dimming the lights and closing the curtains or blinds.

1. Gather the young teens in the meeting space. Tell them that they will need their journal notebook. As they enter, give each one a blindfold. Explain that they are to find a comfortable place to sit. When they do, assist them with putting on their blindfold.

2. Ask the teens to name times when darkness is good. They might mention movie theaters, a bedroom when someone is trying to sleep, or outside when someone is looking at the stars.

Introduce the presentation with a comment that some people and things in our life dim the light of Christ. Invite the presenter to share his or her thoughts on the topic and include the following points:



Darkness is part of life. It always has been. Each day has a night. Even on sunny days, shadows are cast. Human beings generally do not like the darkness. We have lights, candles, flashlights, and many other ways to light up our world so that we don't have to stay in the dark. We believe that we have control over the light. If a room is dark, we simply turn on the light.

The light of Christ shines in our life, but sometimes his light grows dim. This dimming can be caused by people or things. For example, when someone puts us down or deliberately gets us in trouble, the light of Christ is dimmed. When we are obsessed with acquiring more and more things, when we put possessions before people, when making money becomes more important than God, the light of Christ is dimmed.

We sometimes dim the light of Christ by hurting others, by hurting ourselves, or by forgetting God in our life. Sin is a broken part of our relationship with God. It dims or even extinguishes the light of Christ that shines through us.

Some things we can do to rekindle that light include apologizing to and forgiving others, learning how to say no, and compromising. We can start believing in ourselves and using our gifts and talents the way God intended. We can pray more often and learn more about the Catholic faith.

The sacrament of Reconciliation, or Penance, plays an important role in restoring the light in our relationships with ourself, others, and God.

3. Allow a few moments of silence after the speaker is finished. Thank the presenter, then ask the young people what it was like to be blindfolded while

the speaker was presenting. After they share their ideas, ask them to take off their blindfold.

Reflection and Discussion: Dimming the Light of Christ

1. Distribute copies of handout 3, and pens or pencils. Ask the young people to spend a few minutes answering the handout questions in their journal notebook. Allow at least 7 minutes for writing, though some young people may require or benefit from more time.

2. Gather the young people in their small groups and ask them to share their answers to the questions. Assure them that they do not have to share their answers to personal questions.

Recreation and Nutrition Break

Part 6: We Light the Way for Others (120 minutes)

Presentation: Sharing the Light of Christ

Preparation. Recruit someone to give a 5- to 7-minute talk about sharing the light by using one's gifts in the service of God and other people. Use Matt. 5:14–16 as a basis for the talk. The speaker may want to use a flashlight and a large solid-colored bowl to illustrate the scriptural passage. Give him or her the outline of talking points below, but encourage the speaker to use as many personal stories as time allows.

1. Gather the young people. Introduce the speaker and announce that he or she will be sharing what it means to be a light for others. The presenter should add personal stories and thoughts to make the following points:



Once we have received the light of Christ, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We must share it with others. [Give concrete examples of sharing the light at home, in school, and with friends.]

It is sometimes hard to keep the light from going out, particularly when we are up against peer pressure. Think about what Jesus gave the disciples that then gave them the courage to spread his light. The Holy Spirit helps us to share the light of Christ and to do his work on earth.

[Give examples of how one can share the light in the parish, family, and community. Identify people in the community—particularly young people—who make a difference.]

Sharing the light of Christ is a commitment. It is not a service project. It is not an occasional occurrence. It is a way of life.

2. Allow a few moments for the young people to ask questions of the speaker. You might also ask other leaders to share about some of the ways they have chosen to share Christ's light.

Poster Project

1. Gather the young people in small groups. Give each group a sheet of poster board, a ruler, pencils, and markers and explain the following process for creating a group poster:



Choose one symbol of light, such as the sun, a candle, or a flashlight. (Later you will have to explain why you chose one symbol over another.) Draw the symbol in the middle of the poster board.

In the center of the symbol, write five ways that you, as a group, can help spread the light of Christ. For example, you might invite new teens to join the youth group, volunteer as a group for a parish project, bake cookies together and take them to homebound parishioners, and so forth.

Around the outside of the symbol, draw three rays of light for each member of the small group. Ask each person to write three ways she or he can spread the light of Christ as an individual. Some examples include doing things the first time one is told, reaching out to someone at school who is alone a lot of the time, or taking time to talk to an elderly relative or neighbor.

2. After the groups have finished their poster, ask a spokesperson from each group to explain the symbol that they chose and some of the ideas that the group listed in the middle of the symbol. You might ask the rest of the group members to share at least one way that they plan to share the light.

3. Close the activity by encouraging the young people to put their strategies into action as soon as they can. By doing so they can really light up the world.

Letters to Parents

Note: This affirmation activity can be done even if the participants did not do the "Letters from Parents" activity.



Introduce this activity by making the following points in your own words:

Earlier in the retreat, everyone received a letter from some special people in their life. Now they have an opportunity to respond to those letters. Some people may find it difficult to talk to their parents. Putting feelings down on paper makes it easier to share them.

Write a love letter to your parents, describing ways they are the light of Christ in your family. If you have trouble getting started, you can think of some of the things your parents do or say that you are thankful for. You can say anything else you want to say to your parents, as long as it is honest and from the heart.

Distribute paper, envelopes, and pens or pencils, and ask the participants to go off to a place where they can be alone with their thoughts. Emphasize the need to respect other people's privacy. Encourage them to put some thought into their letter and to make it longer than a few sentences or a short paragraph.

Tell the teens to place their letter in the envelope when they are finished and address the envelope. Give them the option of taking their letter home and giving it to their parents, or giving the letters to you to mail.

Closing Prayer

Preparation. While the young people are writing their letters, set up for the closing prayer service. If possible, have the closing prayer in the church or a chapel, and include the Christmas lights that you used on the first day of the retreat. Be sure to include a Bible in the prayer space. Have available the candleholders and posters that the teens made earlier in the retreat and a wick or taper candle. If you have parish songbooks available, choose an opening and closing song.

Recruit a volunteer to read Jer. 1:4–10. Practice reading Matt. 5:14–16 so that you can proclaim it enthusiastically as good news. Memorize it if possible.

1. Distribute the candleholders to their owners. Using the lit pillar candle, lead the young people in a procession to the prayer space. Tell them to walk with their small group, and have someone from the group carry the poster that they created together. When you arrive in the prayer space, put the lit candle near the Bible. Tell the teens to sit with their group. Follow this order of service:

- ⊗ If you chose music for the prayer, lead the group in the opening song.
- ⊗ Invite the first reader to proclaim Jer. 1:4–10. Ask the young people to explain what the reading means to them in light of the retreat. Be sure to include a comment that age is not a factor in being a light of Christ in the world.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ One at a time, call each group forward with their poster and their candles. Have them read together the five ideas for group service that they listed in the middle of their symbol. When they have read the list, the other groups answer, "You are the light of the world." The small group responds with, "Lord, help us to share your light." Then each person lights her or his candle from the pillar candle and proceeds back to her or his seat, leaving the poster in the prayer space. Follow the same procedure with each small group.
- ⊙ Proclaim Matt. 5:14–16. Pause at the end of each sentence and invite the teens to respond enthusiastically, "We are the light of the world!"
- ⊙ If you chose music, close the prayer by leading the participants in song.

End the retreat by thanking the young people for their cooperation and encouraging them always to believe that they are indeed the light of Christ to the world and to live that truth.

(This retreat was developed by Maryann Hakowski, Yorktown, Virginia, a youth minister with more than eighteen years of experience.)

For part 3: We hold the light

- ⊙ Depending on the time you have available on the first day, you may want to give the teens an extended break between the candleholder project and the closing prayer service. Provide board games, thought games, puzzles, and so forth.

For part 4: The Lord is my light and my salvation

- ⊙ If the weather is good, consider doing the morning prayer outdoors. Begin the prayer by allowing the young people to lay in the grass, take in the beauty, and listen to the sounds around them.
- ⊙ If you have an extended time period for the "Light and Sun Search," allow the participants to follow the same procedure with TV shows, movies, and books. Also, instead of sharing your own observations, ask the young people what they think the exercise had to do with letting one's light shine.
- ⊙ In addition to a letter from each teen's parents, encourage parents to invite other family members to write letters: siblings, grandparents, godparents, and so forth. You might want to set a limit so that some people do not get a dozen letters while others get only two.

For part 5: Dimming the light of Christ

- ⊙ If you have a priest available, plan a sacramental Reconciliation service on the theme of dimming the light of Christ in ourselves and others.

For part 6: We light the way for others

- ⊙ Begin this section with a game that involves light, such as flashlight or laser tag, group shadow sculptures, or the old favorite, red light–green light.
- ⊙ Instead of a prayer service, conclude the retreat with a eucharistic celebration using the same themes and readings.

After the retreat

- ⊙ Follow the retreat with a surprise potluck dinner sponsored and attended by the families.
- ⊙ Follow up on the posters the small groups created. Help them plan and execute at least one of their ideas for a group service project.
- ⊙ Encourage the young people to let their light shine through prayer. During a follow-up session, ask them to write their own prayers. Publish them all together in a small booklet for the participants and other members of the parish.
- ⊙ Plan a parent-teen night with social, educational, and spiritual activities for teens and parents to do together. Get the young people involved in the planning of the event. Consult the volume in the HELP series *Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens* for program suggestions.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this retreat.



Let Your Light Shine

Write the answers to the following questions in your journal notebook.

③ When and why have you wanted to be someone other than who you are?

③ What are some of the things that you do really well?

③ Name three specific ways that you can let your light shine. That is, how can you share your unique gifts and talents with others?

③ Name three ways you can encourage other people—your family and friends—to let their light shine. That is, what gifts and talents do you see in other people that you would like them to share?

Christmas Island: A Parable of Light

Joseph and Mary Carpenter live in a comfortable home with their son on an island off the coast of Maine. They are surrounded by friends and loved by all their neighbors. But things were very different for them when they first moved to Christmas Island.

Joseph had become ill and could no longer do the work he had been doing for most of his adult life. He had to sell his business at the same time that Mary was expecting their baby. They decided to use most of their savings to move to Christmas Island and purchase a lighthouse on the coast of the island. But the people on the island hated the outsiders and treated them badly every time they came into town for supplies.

Joseph wanted to leave the lighthouse and get away from the town that was making him so miserable. He would have left, but Mary hesitated, insisting that their baby be born there—in the lighthouse. After that, she agreed that they could leave.

Joseph's illness grew worse. His body weakened and so did his spirit. He began to hate the people who treated him unfairly and the town around him. Then, on Christmas Eve, around midnight, his son was born, and Joseph was filled with such love and happiness that there was no longer any room in his heart for hatred. He wanted to tell the world of his happiness. So Joseph lit every lamp in every window of the lighthouse.

The next morning the news broadcast told of a near tragedy on that little island at midnight on Christmas Eve. A pilot, lost in the fog, was heading for a crash landing in the middle of the town, when the heavens lit up with a bright light in every direction. The pilot was able to get back on course and land his plane and his passengers safely.

Joseph's lights in the lighthouse windows had saved many people that night. But it was Joseph's light within himself—the light of God's love and forgiveness—that really saved the town. Because Joseph was able to let his light shine, he touched the lives of many people.

("Christmas Island" is adapted from a story by Mary Ellen Holmes that appeared in *The War Cry* [Christmas 1989].)

The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation

Adapted from Psalm 27

All. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Group 1. The Lord is my light and my salvation;
I will fear no one.
The Lord protects me from all danger;
I will never be afraid.

All. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Group 2. I have asked the Lord for one thing;
one thing only do I want:
to live in the Lord's house all my life,
to marvel there at God's goodness.

All. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Group 1. Hear me, Lord, when I call to you!
Be merciful and answer me!
When you said, "Come worship me,"
I answered, "I will come, Lord."

All. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Group 2. I know that I will live to see God's goodness in this present life.
Trust in the Lord.
Have faith; do not despair.
Trust in the Lord.

All. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Closing Prayer

All. Dear Lord, thank you for being light in our darkness and for showing us the way to God. Help us to live in your light, to see your light in others, and to share your light with everyone we meet. Amen.

Dimming the Light of Christ

Spend some quiet time alone writing the answers to these questions in your journal notebook.

🕒 What are some of the things that dim the light of Christ in people's life?

🕒 Some of the ways the light of Christ is getting dimmer in my life are . . .
in my relationship with myself:
in my relationship with other people:
in my relationship with God:

🕒 How can people keep the light of Christ from going out?

🕒 Some ways that I can keep the light of Christ from going out in my life are . . .

🕒 How can the sacrament of Reconciliation keep the light of Christ shining in people's life?

🕒 When I think about the sacrament of Reconciliation,
I wonder about . . .
I remember that . . .
I plan to . . .