

Teaching Guide for  
**Understanding Myself**

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# Introduction



## THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

The Discovering Program consists of fourteen six-session courses for use with middle school or junior high students. *Understanding Myself* is designed to enable young people to become more aware of their personal identity, their strengths, and some of the forces that influence the way they handle their life. Though the course incorporates insights gained from psychological studies of young adolescents, it goes beyond such studies.

*Understanding Myself* addresses the early adolescent's need for self-definition, creative expression, and religious experience. This course strives to maintain a balance between helping young people understand themselves as individuals *and* as members of their family and the larger world they are just beginning to explore. The church is presented as a community of disciples that supports them and challenges them to live the values worthy of a child of God and a follower of Jesus. This course also focuses on their growth as persons who can use their abilities to cope with and contribute to their world.

All the courses in the Discovering Program begin with the students' experience. However, some courses, such as this one, make the pressing concerns of young adolescents their central content. (Other courses that directly address young-adolescent growth and development are *Growing Up Sexually*, *Learning to Communicate*, *Becoming Friends*, *Dealing with Tough Times*, *Making Decisions*, and, to a lesser extent, *Seeking Justice*). Because of its treatment of issues that are both fundamental and of high personal interest to young people, many users of the Discovering Program offer *Understanding Myself* early in their curriculum. However, teachers may find that some of the activities in this course are more effective with seventh and eighth graders than with sixth graders.

Because this course offers the students nonthreatening experiences that help them learn about themselves, it can be effectively used to begin the year. The course lends itself to a variety of schedules, such as six 1-hour sessions, three 2-hour sessions, or a more intensive day of reflection or overnight retreat. The sessions can be extended with the optional approaches suggested at the end of each session plan. Also consult these approaches as alternative strategies if your teaching style or the students' learning style calls for changes. Refer to the program coordinator's manual for more specific insights on curriculum design and other helpful information.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

## BACKGROUND

### The Young Adolescent and This Course

Young adolescents often see themselves going through life before an imaginary audience. They are convinced that everyone will notice that new pimple, the outdated belt, the notebook that looks like the ones used by fourth graders, last year's style of basketball shoes—the list goes on and on. Young adolescents live in a state of heightened self-awareness. With this kind of imagined, and sometimes relentless, observation, it is no wonder that some adolescents' self-esteem declines, and others experience a lethargic apathy that borders on withdrawal.

Young adolescents' self-awareness is also accompanied by dramatic physical changes. Hormonal changes trigger new emotions that are sometimes irrational, exaggerated, and hard to control. In addition, media images of what they should be dominate young adolescents' consciousness.

Young adolescents also often engage in inappropriate and even dangerous activities in an effort to recover or discover a strong sense of themselves and their place. Drug use, which is rising faster among twelve- to fifteen-year-olds than any other group, reflects their susceptibility to the media and other social pressures.

Though young people are tender at their core and deeply vulnerable to the pains of everyday adolescent life and broader social realities, most are still wide-eyed at times. Though they remain childlike in the face of many unspoken questions and beliefs, they often demonstrate a vigorous determination to mature and gain independence.

Early adolescents long for self-definition. This course helps them answer the typical questions that so concern this age-group: Do I belong? How am I doing? Does anyone really care about me? and How can I become what I am called to be? *Understanding Myself* further attempts to attend to the adolescent need for self-definition by giving young people structured ways to experience positive interactions with their peers, to express themselves creatively, and to participate meaningfully in shaping their own personal development.

By helping early adolescents understand not only their emotional, interpersonal, and familial dimensions but also their spiritual dimensions, *Understanding Myself* differs from many self-esteem and human development programs offered by other educational agencies. The students are afforded opportunities to know themselves more clearly as individuals and as members of their family and other communities; to become more aware of the elements that shape their self-concept; to explore their relationship with God; and to focus on their strengths. These understandings affirm young adolescents as persons and empower them to help others.

In this course the students have an opportunity to do the following:

- identify the characteristics that make them similar and unique
- evaluate their abilities and skills
- name the values held most dear by their family
- learn effective ways to nurture their spirituality
- reflect on how to integrate their religious values into everyday situations
- affirm their membership in the Catholic church
- give and receive compliments with their peers
- consider their personal dream and God's role in it
- set a goal and determine the steps toward realizing it

## The Theology of This Course

*Understanding Myself* is grounded in the Christian perspective that self-understanding involves recognizing not only one's uniqueness as a human being but also one's relationship with God and with all other human beings in light of the Gospel. The course helps early adolescents understand themselves in light of the following theological concepts:

- They are children of God, who knew them before they were born and who loved them into existence.
- They are brothers and sisters to all God's children.
- They are called to be disciples of Jesus.
- They are members of a community of disciples—the Catholic church.
- They are at their best when they integrate faith into their daily life.

This course seeks to help the participants embrace their inherent dignity as human beings who have been created in God's image and likeness. Further, the course invites the students to focus on their relationship with Jesus, "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15, NRSV). The students are given multiple opportunities to take personal responsibility for their own growth in understanding themselves as individuals, as sons and daughters of God, as persons called to discipleship, as members of the church, and as members of their family and community.

### **This Course and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***

All Discovering courses rely on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a primary resource and a guide to theological accuracy. The *Catechism* can also serve as a valuable source of both information and inspiration for the teacher. We encourage you to review and reflect on certain sections of the *Catechism* as you prepare to teach. The following are references from the *Catechism* keyed to each session:

- *Session 1: "One Among Others."* A discussion of the person as an individual and as a social being provides a point of departure for this session as well as for the whole course (nos. 1878–1885).
- *Session 2: "A Family Member."* The family is presented as a privileged community of persons, a domestic church, and a sign of the Trinity (nos. 2201–2220).
- *Session 3: "A Child of God."* This reference identifies the human person as one made in the image of God and destined to enjoy eternal happiness (nos. 1701–1706).
- *Session 4: "A Disciple of Jesus."* This exploration of the Sermon on the Mount sets out Jesus' challenge to his followers that they must love others as they love themselves (nos. 1965–1986).
- *Session 5: "A Capable Person."* This reference offers a reflection on our human response to God's abundant grace (nos. 1996–2005).
- *Session 6: "A Person with Dreams."* This reference builds on the passage in the Epistle to the Romans (8:28), which assures us that for those who love God, all things work for the good (nos. 312–314).

### **Teaching This Course**

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:



- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives the students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet’s attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

### **Student Booklet Sidebars**

The student booklet includes a number of quotes, brief stories, and bits of interesting information that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students’ interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

### **Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide**

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Understanding Myself* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

### **Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans**

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

### **Prayer Experiences**

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during each session. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Prayer opportunities are part of each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

Guided meditative prayer is used twice in this course. If you find that your group cannot—or will not—take these meditations seriously, it is best to avoid them and adapt the prayer to a style with which the students are comfortable. Most teachers report success with guided prayer experiences but sometimes experience difficulty using the technique with sixth graders, who commonly lack experience with this kind of prayer.

### **Student Journals**

Consider including a journal component for the course. If you decide to do so, supply or ask the students to bring something to use as a journal, such as a blank notebook or blank sheets of paper stapled together. At each session give the students something specific to write about; you will find suggested assignments in the Options section at the end of each session plan in this teaching guide. Between the sessions take the journals home with you or invite the young people to keep them in a secure place in the meeting room. Assure the students of privacy, and solicit their permission for you to read their journal entries occasionally.

### **Teaching Strategies**

Diversity of technique is a major key to the learning process in *Understanding Myself*. The course includes varied activities such as discussions, games, case studies, storytelling, prayer, guided meditation, and goal setting, as well as the presentation of basic, practical information about adolescent development.

To effectively teach this and all Discovering courses, you must have a safe and enjoyable meeting place where the young people can talk about their joys, troubles, and interests; enjoy the company of peers; and deal with life from a faith perspective. To help you achieve that end, session 1 seeks to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect. The students suggest guidelines for behavior, and these are posted in the room as an aid to maintaining discipline and enhancing active participation. Early adolescents need structure and limits in order to be successful. You can help them by giving clear instructions, providing concrete examples of what you are looking for, and maintaining high expectations regarding student compliance with the established guidelines.

At the same time, you must balance this demand for acceptable behavior by intentionally building rapport with each young person. Warmly greet individuals as they arrive. Inquire about school, sports, or family. Seek their opinion about a current event. Invite them to tell you about a good movie they have seen or a book they have read. Become acquainted with their consuming passions and interests.

To further enhance the young people's comfort level, avoid conducting a discussion with the group in a way that forces everyone to share—unless

the session plan ensures that all have had adequate time and assistance to prepare and answer. Questions in this course avoid requesting inappropriate self-disclosure by the young people. However, if a young person begins sharing something very personal, say something like this: “That sounds like a lot to deal with. Why don’t you and I talk about it some more after this session?” Then, as unobtrusively as possible, redirect the discussion. In this way participants are protected from revealing information that they may later regret.

Regarding the more overtly religious discussions of *Understanding Myself*, specific activities throughout the course help the students explore their relationship with God, use their religious imagination, articulate their understanding of Jesus, discuss the Scriptures, and identify the gifts they bring to the Catholic community.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

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

**Objectives.** Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

### The Goals and Objectives of *Understanding Myself*

#### Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students identify the forces that influence their growth
- that they identify their talents and limits

- that they recognize the importance of developing a personal relationship with God
- that they develop increased confidence in their ability to cope with and contribute to their world

### Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Understanding Myself* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

#### *Session 1: "One Among Others"*

The students will do the following:

- recognize their similarity to others their age
- identify the ways they are unique

#### *Session 2: "A Family Member"*

The students will do the following:

- recognize that their family's values influence them
- identify the values they have received from their family
- state the values of their family that are most important to them

#### *Session 3: "A Child of God"*

The students will do the following:

- identify how they think about and relate to God
- identify images of God found in the Scriptures
- choose an image of God that helps stimulate their prayer
- participate in a guided meditation

#### *Session 4: "A Disciple of Jesus"*

The students will do the following:

- identify actions characteristic of young followers of Jesus
- evaluate the level of influence Jesus has on their self-understanding
- identify the church as a community of disciples
- affirm their membership in the church

#### *Session 5: "A Capable Person"*

The students will do the following:

- discover that they share similar fears and problems with their peers
- identify sources that support and nurture their self-worth and competency

#### *Session 6: "A Person with Dreams"*

The students will do the following:

- identify how they have changed since the beginning of the course
- assume responsibility for deciding how they will grow and change
- identify dreams that might inspire them



## SESSION 1

# One Among Others



## AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

### Objectives

The students will do the following:

- recognize their similarity to others their age
- identify the ways they are unique

### Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 4 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. an introduction (10 minutes)
- B. the student booklet activities “Welcome” and “Desiderata,” and an opening prayer (10 minutes)
- C. the student booklet activity “Many and One” (15 minutes)
- D. a self-identity art project (20 minutes)
- E. a closing prayer (5 minutes)

## BACKGROUND

Young adolescents live in a state of heightened self-awareness. They catalog their mistakes, fuss over their appearance, and are acutely aware of their peers' opinions of them. To balance their harsh self-judgments, young people need to be assured that they are acceptable and likable and that their concerns are normal. However, they also need to recognize and accept their uniqueness, which they are often too shy to personally acknowledge, much less publicly admit.

The task of this initial session is to help the students begin to recognize their similarities and acknowledge the qualities that make each of them unique. After the students are welcomed and receive a name tag, they focus on an introductory reading in the student booklet that celebrates their place in the world. They then engage in an activity that invites their response to a series of questions that help them assess their sense of their own dignity. The reading and activity lead into a prayer.

The student booklet activity that follows the prayer invites the students to compare themselves individually with general statements about young adolescents. This activity helps the students analyze how they are similar to others and how they are unique.

Next, the students focus more closely on their uniqueness. They create simple masks that focus on a little-known, unembarrassing, interesting truth about themselves. This activity seeks to affirm and celebrate the students' unique qualities.

The session activities taken together help the students recognize themselves as members of a larger community as well as valued individuals within that community.

Encourage openness and an atmosphere of welcome throughout this session and the course. Expect laughter as the students explore and express interesting similarities and equally interesting individual differences. A relaxed atmosphere provides an environment in which self-acceptance, self-confidence, and deeper learning can flourish.

## PREPARATION

### Materials Needed

- name tags and markers, one of each for each student
- newsprint and markers
- masking tape
- student booklets, one for each student
- pencils or pens
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- small slips of green, yellow, and red construction paper (about 2-by-3 inches), one of each color for each student
- a Bible, a pillow or Bible stand, a table and a cloth, a cross or statue, a live plant, and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)
- white drawing paper, one sheet for yourself and for each student
- scissors, one for each student
- colored markers, three to six for each student

## Other Necessary Preparations

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

- For step A.* Write the student guidelines on newsprint and post them, as directed in step A. Purchase or make name tags.
- For step D.* Create a simple paper mask depicting something about yourself as directed in step D.
- For step D.* Prepare sheets of drawing paper for the young people as directed in step D.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

## Teacher Prayer

Prayerfully read the following passage:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
 a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
 a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
 a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
 a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
 a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
 a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
 a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
 a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
 a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
 a time to love, and a time to hate;  
 a time for war, and a time for peace.

(Eccles. 3:1–8, NRSV)

As you help these early adolescents understand themselves, remember that this is a critical time in their lives. Prayerfully ask yourself the following questions:

- What kind of time is it now for the early adolescents I am about to work with?
- What kind of time is it now for me as I prepare to teach this course?

Close your prayer time with words similar to these:

God of life, God of time, help me to be present to these young people at this formative time in their life. Help me to remember my place in their journey. Help me to be sensitive to your Spirit in them and in me. Amen.

## PROCEDURE

## A. Introduction (10 minutes)

*Before the session.* On newsprint, list the following three student guidelines, leaving room for additions, and post them in plain sight in the room:

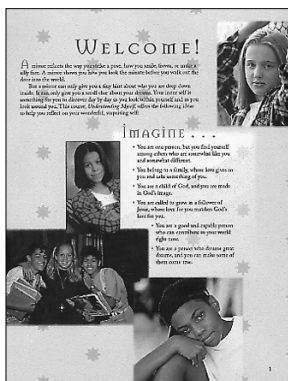
- Respect one another; no put-downs are allowed.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Make an effort to contribute positively to each activity.

1. Welcome everyone individually and thank them for coming. Give them each a name tag and a felt-tipped marker as they enter the door. Ask them to write their name on the name tag. If they resist explain that you need them to wear the tag so that you can get to know them and so that they can get to know one another more quickly if they are not already acquainted.

2. When everyone is ready, introduce the posted guidelines by making the following observations in your own words:

- ▶ This course provides opportunities for you to better understand yourselves as individuals and as members of your family and the wider world; to reflect on your gifts, worries, relationships, limitations, and possibilities; and to consider your life as Catholic Christians and as people of God.
- ▶ In each session you are invited to participate in a variety of interesting activities. To ensure that you have a good experience, you must follow at least three basic guidelines.

At this point read the three guidelines and comment on each as you wish. Then solicit the students' ideas for other guidelines they think are necessary. Try to express these suggestions in brief, positive statements, and add them to the posted list. Keep the guidelines on display for this and subsequent sessions.



Booklet page 1

## B. Booklet Activities: “Welcome,” “Desiderata,” and an Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the student booklets, pencils or pens, and blank self-adhesive labels. Tell the students to write their name on the label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Give the students a few minutes to page through their booklet. Have them turn to “Welcome” on page 1 and read it silently. Explain that they will use these booklets during each session and that you will collect them at the end of each session.

2. Have the students turn to the reading “Desiderata” on page 2. Read the introduction aloud. Before reading the “Desiderata” itself, alert the students to look for the numerous ways the writer tells us that we are good and worthy people, and for the writer’s advice on how to live a good, happy life.



Then read the “Desiderata” aloud slowly and clearly.

3. Help the students reflect on this reading as if it were addressed directly to their age-group. Give each student three small pieces of construction paper: one green, one yellow, and one red. Offer these directions in your own words:

- ▶ I will read a selected sentence and ask a question about it.
- ▶ You are to respond by holding up a green slip of paper if you agree with the statement, a yellow slip if you are not sure, and a red slip if you disagree.
- ▶ You may pass if you do not want to offer your opinion publicly.

Add that you will move along quickly, and they are to respond quickly. Tell them you will pause long enough after each question to allow them to see how everyone voted.

When everyone understands the procedure and seems ready, select quotations from “Desiderata” and ask questions that help the students interpret the quotations for themselves. For example, you might use the following quotations and accompanying questions:

For the quotation “As far as possible without surrender, be on good terms with all persons,” ask:

- ▶ Do you think most people your age try hard to hold on to their own beliefs while also respecting the beliefs of others? Why or why not?

For “If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself,” ask:

- ▶ Do you think most people your age compare themselves with others? Why or why not?
- ▶ Do you think most people your age think they are greater than others? lesser than others?

For “Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans,” ask:

- ▶ Do you think most people your age are proud of what they accomplish? Why or why not?

4. Ask the students to consider themselves personally as they respond to questions like the following:

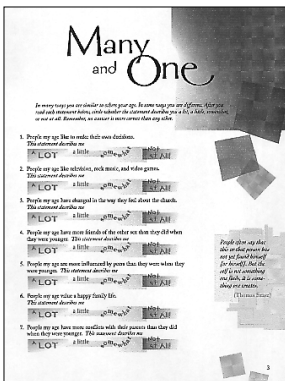
- ▶ Do you try to be strong in spirit? Why or why not?
- ▶ Are you gentle with yourself? Why or why not?
- ▶ Do you attempt to be at peace with God? Why or why not?
- ▶ Do you realize that you belong in this world as a whole and good person? Why or why not?

Conclude by noting that this course seeks to help the students grow in self-understanding and to affirm and accept the self they are now and the self they are becoming.

5. Invite the students to join you in the prayer area. Light the candle on the prayer table and ask everyone to pause for a moment of silence. Then offer a prayer such as the following:

- God, our creator, thank you for making us who we are. Thank you for gathering us together in this place and at this time. We ask your blessing as we begin this course. Help us to understand that we are children of the universe, and we have a right to be here. Teach us to be at peace with you and with one another. Help us to become participants in the beautiful world you have given us as our home. Amen.

After the prayer, extinguish the candle and lead the students back to the meeting area.



Booklet page 3

### C. Booklet Activity: “Many and One” (15 minutes)

1. Direct the students to turn to “Many and One” on pages 3 to 4 of their booklet. Mention that the students’ responses to selected sentences from “Desiderata” likely gave them some idea of their views about others and about themselves. Add that they can now decide to what extent the statements in “Many and One” are true for them.

Read the directions aloud and announce that they will have 5 minutes to complete the activity. Alert the students when 1 minute remains.

2. After the students have completed the activity, explore together some of the less self-disclosing or threatening statements (e.g., statements 2, 7, 13, and 15) and invite volunteers to share their response. Keep in mind that some students will be reticent to offer their opinion (especially if it differs from others’); simply respect this decision.

After exploring several statements, the students will see how their interests, views, and opinions are alike and how they are different. For example, the majority might have a high interest in video games, whereas some might not be interested in that kind of entertainment.

### D. Self-Identity Art Project (20 minutes)

*Before the session.* Fold sheets of white drawing paper in half the long way for the students. Have an ample supply of colored felt-tipped markers and scissors at hand.

Create a mask for yourself from white drawing paper to use as a sample for the students. Fold the paper in half the long way and cut a hole through both layers to create two eyes an equal distance in from the fold. Use colored felt-tipped markers to draw a little-known, unembarrassing truth about yourself. For example, if you make homemade wine, you might use purple and green markers to draw grapes and vines, and so on.

1. Give each student one folded sheet of white drawing paper, a pair of scissors, and three to six colored markers. Tell the young people that to help their peers learn more about them, they are to create a mask that discloses, rather than hides, an interesting, unembarrassing, little-known fact about themselves. Emphasize that this activity can help them celebrate their uniqueness.

Show them the mask you made and invite them to guess what it tells about you. Offer any needed explanation of your mask and then give the students a minute to think about the personal quality or fact they want to depict. Circulate and help anyone who seems unable to come up with a unique quality or fact they want to share. You might suggest areas like a recent important event in their life; a famous or infamous historical figure who belonged to their family; an uncommon interest; the city, state, or nation in which they were born; their travels; or even clothes they like, such as purple socks.

If necessary, take a minute to show them how to cut out the eyeholes so that they are an equal distance from the fold and the same in size and appearance.

Announce a 7-minute time limit for this project. Alert the students when time is almost expired.

2. When everyone has finished their work, have the students gather in a circle and hold their mask in front of their face. Invite the students randomly to guess what unique characteristic or fact each person has depicted on his or her mask. Or, if time is at a premium, go around the circle and invite everyone to take turns telling what their mask shows about them.

3. After everyone has been identified as unique in some way, thank the students for their cooperation. Ask them to put their name on their mask and to place it in the prayer area.

Note: Keep the masks for use as part of the review in session 2.

## **E. Closing Prayer** (5 minutes)

1. Gather the students in the prayer area. Light the candle and wait a moment for everyone to quiet down. Then, in your own words, offer a closing prayer such as the following:

► O God, our creator, thank you for helping us to better understand ourselves today. Thank you for making us similar in so many ways. This helps us feel comfortable with one another. Thank you, too, for making each of us unique. Our differences are surprising; they make our life interesting.

Help each of us individually and all of us together become the persons you created us to be. We put ourselves in your loving care until we come together again. Amen.

2. Thank the young people for their cooperation and participation. Collect their booklets and name tags as they leave. The name tags can be reused in the next session.

## OPTIONS

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

**For step A.** Present an overview of this course. List each of these specific session themes on a separate piece of poster board:

- Understanding myself as one among others
- Understanding myself as a member of a family
- Understanding myself as a child of God
- Understanding myself as a disciple
- Understanding myself as a capable person
- Understanding myself as a person with dreams

Display these six posters on a wall in one of two ways: Mount all the posters so that the titles are visible. Or mount all the posters with the blank side up, and then turn them over one at a time at the beginning of each session so that the students can see the progression of the sessions and the connection between them.

**For step A.** Use the ball-toss icebreaker described below as a way for everyone to introduce themselves. Even if your students know one another fairly well, this activity allows them to reveal something fun and different about themselves, and helps establish a tone of comfortable interaction that you want to maintain throughout this course. Give the following directions in your own words:

- We will take turns tossing a ball to one another. When you catch the ball, you are to (1) give your name, (2) name an animal or an object that suggests something about you, and (3) name your favorite food. For example: “I’m Rachel Hayes. I’m like a Jeep because I like hiking on rugged terrain. My favorite food is my grandmother’s cornbread.”
- Each of you should catch the ball only once, introduce yourself, and then throw the ball to another person who has not yet introduced himself or herself.

Be sure the students understand the directions before you begin. Give them a minute to think about how they want to introduce themselves. After pausing, begin by introducing yourself and then throwing the ball to one of the students.

**For step A.** Photocopy and distribute copies of handout 1–A, “Understanding Myself,” and pens or pencils. Explain that the survey is meant to help everyone get a personal sense of who they are *before* beginning the course. Stress that this is not a test, and they need not worry about unanswered questions. Also emphasize that only you will see their responses.

Allow enough time so that no one feels rushed. When all are done, collect the surveys and put them in a large envelope.

Take time after class to reflect on the completed surveys. The results can give you some valuable insights into the students' self-understanding and their level of sophistication. You may wish to adapt some of your work with the course in light of those insights.

If you wish to have the students complete the same survey at the end of the course, save these copies to return to them at that time.

**For step B.** Pass out 3-by-12-inch sheets of white drawing paper and felt-tipped markers. Direct the students to make "bumper stickers" using their favorite line from "Desiderata." Post the bumper stickers in the prayer area and leave them up for the rest of the course.

**For step D.** Use an instant-print camera (such as a Polaroid) and take a photo of each student and her or his mask. Staple a 10-inch strip of ribbon to each person's photo and hang all the photos around the room or display them in the prayer area.

**For step D.** If you are concerned about the group's response to the mask activity, consider this option. Give the students a small slip of paper and a pencil, and have them write a unique quality about themselves and then fold the paper in half. Pass around a basket to collect the slips. As you draw out and read each slip, have volunteers guess who is being described. After all volunteers have guessed, ask the person who wrote on that particular slip to stand and keep standing until all the slips have been read and everyone is standing.