



# Everyday Icons

## OVERVIEW

This prayer technique encourages the young people to reflect on and share about how God is revealed in everything, even the mundane items of everyday life. Using a collection of ordinary and unremarkable objects, the participants reflect on how each one becomes an icon that reveals a specific quality of God.

### Suggested Time

20 to 25 minutes for a group of thirty (10 to 15 minutes if you divide that group in two and conduct simultaneous sharing groups)

### Group Size

This activity can be done with any size group, as long as you conduct the sharing time in groups of fifteen people or fewer.

### Materials Needed

- ☀ a cloth or a blanket
- ☀ a collection of everyday objects (e.g., a paper clip, an eraser, a crayon, a marker, a small battery, typewriter correction fluid, a ruler, a highlighter, a cap, headphones, matches, a jigsaw puzzle piece, seashells, sunglasses, a cup, a candle, and a rosary), at least one item for each person
- ☀ a candle and matches
- ☀ a cross, a crucifix, a religious statue, or other traditional and recognizable icons (optional)
- ☀ a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music (optional)
- ☀ a Bible

**PROCEDURE**

*Preparation.* Put a cloth or a blanket in the center of the room, on the floor or a table, and place on it a collection of everyday objects in a circle around a central candle. Because some younger adolescents may be intellectually stretched by this activity, it may be helpful to include in the collection a few traditional faith symbols and recognizable icons, such as a cross, a crucifix, or a religious statue.

Set a prayerful atmosphere by doing some or all of the following: dim the lights, light a candle, play reflective music, move to a different area or room.

1. Invite the young people to gather around the table of ordinary things that you prepared. Introduce the activity by explaining the concept of icons as images that reveal a quality or a face of God to us. Comment as follows:



Often we look for God's presence and message in great people, amazing things, and supernatural events. Many times we fail to notice that God can speak to us in simple and quiet ways through the things, events, and people we see or experience every day.

2. Read the story of Elijah's encounter with God in the cave from 1 Kings 19:11–13. Allow a minute or two for quiet reflection. You may wish to play some quiet or reflective music during this time. Invite the group members to look at each item on the altar and then let their eyes be drawn to one specific item that catches and holds their attention.

3. Invite the young people forward one by one to select an object from the table. After everyone has selected an item, tell them to hold it and examine it as they reflect on the following questions:



What attracted you to this object?

Is there one thing about it that you particularly like?

What is your object called, and what is its function?

How would you use this object?

Is there something about this object that reminds you of who God is or what God is like?

4. Ask the young people to share how their chosen object is an icon that reveals something about the mystery of God in our life. The adults or leaders in the group may need to model this prayer. A few possible reflections on icons follow:



*A paper clip.* Paper clips hold things together; often they are undervalued, cheap, and easily lost, but they hold important papers together. God holds things together for me and us.

*An eraser.* Erasers are commonplace items, but any student knows how important it is to make changes and corrections. Erasers can turn a mistake around. God erases failures and sins, and gives us the chance to start again.

*A crayon.* Children who love to play with colors most often use these. They remind us of how it is important to be colorful and playful in life. Jesus said we have to be like children to enter God's Reign. Children draw the best pictures and write their most important letters in crayon. Crayons can remind us we are God's children.

5. Conclude by inviting the young people to return their icon to the table. Read Jer. 29:11–14 and make the following comments in your own words:



Prayer is about seeking God with an open heart. When we look for God with open eyes and listen for God with open ears, we will be found by God and realize that God's presence is all around us.

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ Repeat this prayer at another time using icons that focus on God's presence in different parts of our life. For example, collect a set of household icons (a whisk, a can opener, a peeler, a filter, a measuring cup, a broom). Or use a collection of sports equipment, school supplies, articles from the church, articles from the bedroom, or whatever.
- ☉ Invite the young people to write some of their reflections. Compile their work on cards or in booklets that can be shared with families. Or place their work in the parish bulletin or newsletter to encourage others to be mindful of God in ordinary things and places.
- ☉ When the group has become familiar with this style of reflective prayer, start each session by choosing one item from everyday life and placing it in the prayer space. Pass it around and let each young person reflect on the various ways that the item reveals something about what God is like.

## SCRIPTURAL CONNECTIONS

- ☉ Ps. 92:1–5 (Thank God at all times.)
- ☉ Ps. 104:24 (The earth is filled with things made by God.)
- ☉ Psalm 148 (The whole universe praises God.)
- ☉ Luke 11:9–10 (Those who seek God will find God.)

