

SPECIAL EDITION

INSPIRE!

Touching hearts. Igniting joy.

Ideas for Engaging Families

HOW TO HELP
FAMILIES PROCESS
THE YEAR

BRINGING FAMILIES
BACK TO
PARISH LIFE

SUPPORTING FAITH
AND FUN IN
THE FAMILY



SUMMER 2021

CONTENTS

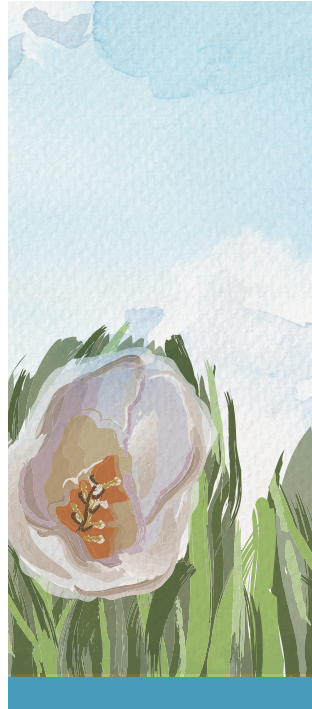
“Do not have any anxiety about the future. Leave everything in God’s hands for he will take care of you.”

smp.org
800.533.8095



4

Supporting
Faith and Fun
in the Family



8

Bringing
Families Back
to Parish Life



14

Bring Families
Back with
a Summer
Program



20

Bring Families Together and Process



30

Instruments of God's Grace

10

Gather Together

12

Serve Together

22

Breathe Easier

24

Four Ways to Create More Meaning with Children

28

Engaged Learning Activity: Gratitude Relay

32

Facing the Fall

38

How to Become a Trusted Adult

SUPPORTING *faith & fun* IN THE FAMILY

By Joanna Dailey

Spring is a time of renewal and a perfect time to renew efforts to support faith formation at home. Spring also signals the beginning of the end for the school year and faith formation programs. Providing tools to support faith formation at home now can begin to build bridges for the coming summer months.

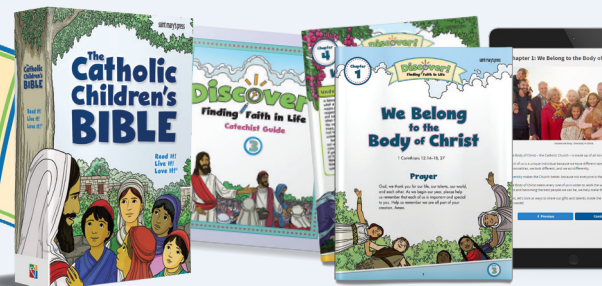
Keeping faith central to family life has been a source of strength and hope for many families. You can support and nurture faith in homes by sharing the “Faith and Fun in the Family” handout with families of the children with whom you minister. Consider hosting a gathering (virtual or in-person) of parents or entire families to facilitate a conversation, introduce the ideas found in the handout, and invite parents to share their own experiences and ideas.

Choose one or two of the suggestions to implement with your group as you gather with them for the remainder of the year. Communicate those practices to families, and invite them to begin the same practices at home to further support families in the living of faith.



Faith and Fun in the Family

1. **Stick to the basics.** Never underestimate the power of repetition in forming faith. Pray the Prayer before Meals (“Bless us, O Lord . . .”) before every meal, wherever you are (even in the car). And pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary as part of night prayers.
2. **Honor meals as family time.** Talk about things important to each family member. Share stories, memories, values, and upcoming plans or events. Make sure there are no electronics around that could cause distractions.
3. **Talk about Jesus.** Children should hear about Jesus at home as well as in church, school, or religious education. Include conversations about what Jesus would do in different circumstances, ask Jesus to be with various people you encounter together, and remind one another how Jesus might feel when you do something good for others.
4. **Pray aloud.** Children should hear their parents praying. Share happenings of everyday life by requesting prayers from one another. For example, “Mom has a big presentation at work today. Let’s pray now that the Holy Spirit will be with her.” Or “Josh’s spelling test is today. He really studied hard, so let’s pray that he will remember what he knows.” Also remember family members and others who are ill or in special need of prayer.
5. **Pray for safety and fair play in sports.** Emphasize that we pray for safety and fair play in our games, and that God does not favor one team over another. He loves the members of every team equally.
6. **Create a prayer space in your home.** A prayer space might be a small table placed in a corner of a room. Include a Bible, a candle (real or electric), a rosary, some favorite holy cards, and some Catholic children’s books. Gather here at various times for family or individual prayer.
7. **Keep a rosary in the car.** Keep a rosary in the car, and pray it on short and long trips. Brush up on the list of the mysteries or keep a guide with you in the car, and announce one for each decade. When your child is ready, invite them to lead.



8. **Plan vacations with Mass in mind.** Every parish in the world is unique. When you are vacationing on weekends, research nearby parish churches and plan to participate in the Eucharist on the Sundays you are vacationing. After Mass, introduce yourselves to the celebrating priest. Ask him for tips on local restaurants or other places to see in the area.
9. **Get out in the real world.** Enjoy God's gift of creation with your family. Visit a local park or nature preserve, and wonder aloud at the beauty of God's handiwork. At every site, pray a lityany: "Thank you, God, for . . ." with each family member naming one thing she or he sees in nature. Go around as many times as you like!
10. **Bless your child.** A parent's blessing is a powerful sign of God's love. With your hand on your child's head, make the sign of the cross with your thumb on your child's forehead, while saying, "God bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Any other appropriate words can be added. Blessings can be done before any occasion, special or routine, such as leaving for school, preparing for a test or sports competition, or going to bed.
11. **Talk about your values.** Use TV, social media, video games, or other influences as "teachable moments" to express your Christian values. Be sure to accentuate the positive if you see it illustrated in a particular character or situation.
12. **Prepare for Mass together.** Mass should be anticipated with preparation. Saturday night might be a good time to read the Sunday Gospel at the evening meal. Discuss as a family what Jesus might be telling or showing your family in the Gospel. After Mass, incorporate the Homily into your conversation on the way home.
13. **Celebrate feast days.** Keep track of annual feasts by using your parish calendar and bulletin reminders. Though the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter are key, various feasts during the year merit attention and offer an opportunity to celebrate faith and make the day special. You may want to add family name days to your feast-day calendar, as well as baptismal anniversaries. There are many sources, in books and online, for celebrating feast days on the Catholic calendar. Feast days give us a respite from everyday routine and root us more firmly in the life of Christ as mirrored in each individual feast or saint.

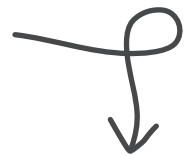
This activity is taken from *Discover! Finding Faith in Life!*

[Learn more about Discover! Parish](#) >

[Learn more about Discover! School](#) >

watch:

How do we bring our families
back to Mass and parish life?



The word is a seed planted
that **ROOTS** deeply into the ground
which grows in grace & beauty
and bends but does not break.

It stands tall with others,
to enable the work of righteousness & justice
like an everflowing stream of love
and will sow peace
blossom with joy
and cultivate kindness.

So let there be light
let us plant seeds
Let us nourish our children
And the world.

As it was in the beginning is now,
and ever shall be,
World without end.

 saint mary's press

800.533.8095 • smp.org

[Download this free poster here!](#)

Gather Together

The summer is such a great time to gather together, easily and casually! Each of these moments is a way to build trust and relationships with your families, and reconnect after a year of distance. Here are a few ideas to get you started!

- **Get families together on a weeknight**, and have them bring their own picnic. Offer popsicles or ice cream cones for a fun dessert option. Include a prayer experience, a catechetical moment (try using something from *The Catholic Children's Bible!*), a liturgical moment, and a way for families to take the ideas and unpack them at home.
- **Host an outdoor movie night!** Gather a projector, a screen (maybe one of your parish members has one to contribute.)
- **Host a "Make Your Own Sundae" on a Sunday afternoon.** Encourage your staff members to be the scoopers, and have a variety of toppings available for families. Give prizes for the most creative sundae!
- **Find your parish musicians and host a talent contest!** Encourage families and members to bring a picnic and listen to their friends make beautiful music! Offer a time for the members to join in a few favorite praise songs or hymns.

Praying Together

Closer to Jesus

Prayer Service

Choose readers in advance for the different parts. Explain to the children that during this prayer, they will process to the prayer space, step by step. Ask the children to form a line across the room, facing the prayer space. Tell them that they will take one small step closer to the prayer space each time they respond, "We come to you, Jesus!"

Leader: Let us begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross. *[All make Sign of the Cross.]* Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God. *[Allow about 10 seconds of silence.]*

Leader: Jesus, you came to Earth to teach us and show us the way to new life. We bring our prayers before you. We want to come closer to you each day.

Reader 1: Jesus, you love and welcome everyone, even the smallest, youngest ones. May we welcome others as you welcome us. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Reader 2: Jesus, may we always trust you as we trust those who care for us. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Reader 3: Jesus, may we learn more and more what it means to be your disciples. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Reader 4: Jesus, show us how to follow you along right paths. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Reader 5: Jesus, bless our teachers who help us know you and love you. May we all live our faith in you. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Reader 6: Jesus, thank you for the gifts of your Church and of Ordinary Time. May we learn to know you better, follow your teachings, and grow in your love. We pray:

All: We come to you, Jesus! *[Invite the children to take one step forward.]*

Invite the children to come the rest of the way into and around the prayer space if they haven't already done so. Lead the children in praying the Our Father. Close by playing an appropriate song.

Subscribe today! smp.org/inspire 43



The Narrow Door: A Guided Meditation

OVERVIEW

In their mind's eye, the young teens investigate the closets of their own bedroom, gather their possessions, and carry those belongings through a series of narrow doors. This guided meditation communicates the Gospel message of simple living in a way that engages the imagination and inspires the young people to actively simplify their lives.

Suggested Time

30 to 45 minutes

Group Size

Given adequate space and a proper environment, this strategy can be done with any size group.

Special Considerations

As a prayer technique, guided meditation requires specific attention to the environment. Above all, the participants need to be encouraged to relax and focus, avoiding any disturbance or distraction. Ideally, the young people should be able to lie on a carpeted floor with their head on a pillow or cushion. In a classroom setting, they may put their head on their desk. It also helps to light a candle, dim the lights, and use quiet background music.

64

"Closer to Jesus"

Discover! Finding Faith in Life

"The Narrow Door: A Guided Meditation"

Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry

Friendship and Forgiveness Prayer Space

Prepare the prayer space with a grouping of pillows or beanbag chairs around a central table. On the table, place a candle (either real or flameless) and *The Catholic Children's Bible*. Have the Bible open to page 1492, "Jesus Teaches Us to Forgive." Children may also bring their Bibles. If that is convenient, otherwise, read about the Featured Story and the Understand III and Live III sections (page 1493). For the Parent-Child Retreat, one or more parents may be chosen to read the Featured Story and the Understand III and Live III sections.

Materials Needed

- a sheet of drawing paper for each child
- crayons or markers

Opening and Reading

Light the candle, and begin with the following words:

- Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.
- Let us begin our prayer today with the Sign of the Cross. In the name of the Father, . . . Amen.
- Today's reading is about forgiveness. We know that God forgives us when we are sorry. So we need to forgive others if they hurt us. This is what Jesus said about forgiving others.

Read the title of the Featured Story and the story itself. (For the Parent-Child Retreat, you may want to choose a parent to read.)

Discussion

These remarks and questions are based on Understand III on page 1493. You may choose to have it read aloud, or immediately proceed with the following comments based on the reading:

- Let's think about our friends and family members for a moment. We love our friends and family, and they care about us too. But sometimes people we love hurt us. Maybe they say something mean or boss us around or stop playing with us for one reason or another. What can we do when that happens? (Solicit answers like, "We can talk things over." "We can ask why they are being mean's," etc.)
- Usually things get better when we talk things over. But we might still be left with a little hurt. Then what do we do? (Accept reasonable responses.) What does Jesus say we should do when someone hurts us? (Jesus says to forgive.) How many times should we forgive? (not just once or twice, not even seven times, but seventy times seven)

© 2014 by Saint Mary's Press
Permissions to reproduce in a general

Document # 12001071



The Catholic Youth Bible® © 2010 by Saint Mary's Press. 1

PRAYER SERVICES

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

Prayer Service 1: "Let There Be Light"

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

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

Materials Needed:

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

Preparation:

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

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

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

Opening Words

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

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

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

"Friendship and Forgiveness"

Go Seek Find

"Prayer Services"

The Catholic Youth Bible

Serve Together

Another way to build community is to serve together. And we're not talking about sending parents out alone with their kids. This is an opportunity to build strong, intergenerational community within your parish by living out your faith together! These service opportunities create great ways to bond with others.

Gather once or twice a month for service opportunities—plan to gather at church, split into groups, and serve together.

When the service is complete, **process the experience**. Think of some questions to discuss, and then connect to Catholic social teaching, and perhaps end with a prayer experience or a Mass.

Empower your teens to get involved by leading any portion of the experience—being a captain for the service group, reading Scripture or leading prayer as you break it open together.

These moments help people of all ages that faith isn't just learned, it's lived!



Service Resources

REFLECTION

Step Out in Love!

by Julie Mickler

Catholic social teaching makes it clear that acts of charity are crucial steps in alleviating immediate suffering for the world's poor. **The Corporal Works of Mercy challenge every person of faith to help provide desperately needed food, drink, and shelter to those in need.** For many who are poor and vulnerable, these resources are necessary for survival.

Catholic schools and parishes sponsor awesome programs that help meet these immediate needs. Food pantries, home-building efforts, clothing drives, donations to global hunger-relief organizations, disaster relief, and canned food drives are just a few examples of the Works of Mercy alive and well in our Catholic communities.



26 August 11, Volume 2, Issue 2

"Step Out in Love!"

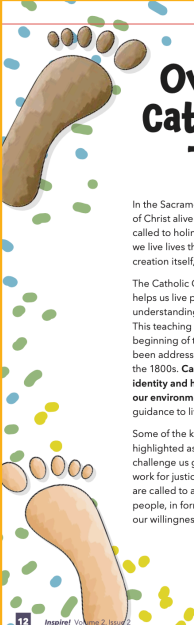
ARTICLE

Overview of Catholic Social Teaching

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we are urged to keep the light of Christ alive in our hearts for the rest of our lives. We are called to holiness. Though this may seem like a tall order, when we live lives that focus on loving God, ourselves, others, and creation itself, we move in the direction of lifelong holiness.

The Catholic Church has a rich history of social teaching that helps us live positive, meaningful, and holy lives through an understanding of our relationship and responsibility to others. This teaching has guided the lives of Christians since the beginning of the Church. Modern Catholic social teaching has been addressed and explained in Church documents since the 1800s. **Catholic social teaching promotes our Catholic identity and helps ensure that we treat those around us and our environment with dignity and respect.** It gives us the guidance to live our faith and navigate our modern world.

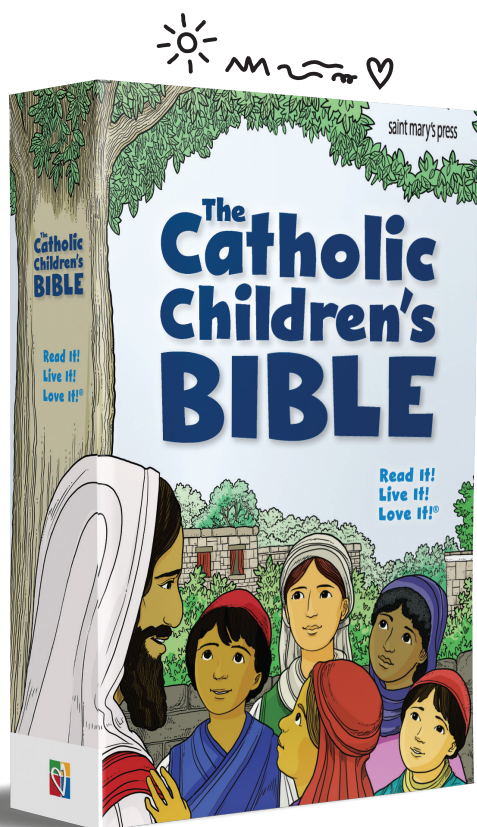
Some of the key themes of Catholic social teaching have been highlighted as general themes or principles. These principles challenge us globally—to view the world as one family and to work for justice and peace. They also challenge us locally. We are called to apply these principles daily in our encounters with people, in forming our opinions regarding current events, and in our willingness to give our time and money to those in need.



12 August 11, Volume 2, Issue 2

"Overview of Catholic Social Teaching"

BRING FAMILIES BACK WITH A SUMMER PROGRAM!

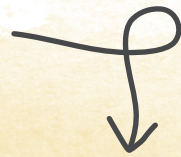


Summer programs are a tremendous experience for the entire parish community, engaging people of all ages as leaders, organizers, helpers, and participants. These experiences build community, develop leadership, and offer members an opportunity to live out their baptismal call.

A summer program can also be a powerful springboard to many more life-giving experiences within the parish throughout the year.

watch:

Maureen walks you through
creating a summer program.



Maureen Provencier



If you're wondering how to get started, ***Discover: Finding Faith in Life!*** and ***The Catholic Children's Bible*** offer many options.

Here is a suggestion on how you can create a week long summer program using *The Catholic Children's Bible*:

1. **Gather a team to develop your goals and your theme(s) for the week.** Consider all the elements you'd like to include: music, prayer, outdoor and indoor games, Bible lessons, guest presenters (i.e., a magician or a petting zoo, depending on your theme), snacks, or an ending celebration for families, such as a picnic and a Mass. Tweens and teens are excellent leaders and helpers in overseeing and leading many of these elements.
2. **Gather your leaders.**
 - A medical professional to keep all medical information/forms and medications, as well as a first-aid kit
 - Leaders to decorate and prepare the gathering space each day, according to the theme
 - Leaders to oversee the games, crafts, and snacks each day
 - Catechists for groups of no more than eight, to allow for effective engagement



3. For the Bible lessons, select a featured story from *The Catholic Children's Bible*, one for each day of the week. All of the featured stories are listed at the front of the Bible, and four different reading plans are listed on the back page. Each reading plan includes eight featured stories that follow a common theme. Selecting from here might be helpful.

2000
Reading Plans

Great People of Faith

- Book 1 (Genesis 1-11) page 164
- Book 2 (Genesis 12-50) page 165
- Book 3 (Exodus 1-12) page 166
- Book 4 (Exodus 13-40) page 167
- Book 5 (Leviticus 1-16) page 168
- Book 6 (Leviticus 17-24) page 169
- Book 7 (Leviticus 25-27) page 170
- Book 8 (Numbers 1-10) page 171
- Book 9 (Numbers 11-35) page 172
- Book 10 (Deuteronomy 1-11) page 173
- Book 11 (Deuteronomy 12-34) page 174

Miracles of Jesus

- Jesus Feeds a Little Girl (John 6:1-13) page 175
- Jesus Walks on Water (John 6:16-21) page 176
- Jesus Walks on a Narrow Road (John 8:1-12) page 177
- Jesus Heals Blind Men (John 9:1-41) page 178
- Jesus Heals a Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) page 179
- Jesus Heals a Boy (Mark 8:1-13) page 180
- Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute (Mark 7:31-37) page 181
- Jesus Heals a Blind Man (John 9:1-41) page 182
- Jesus Heals a Boy with Leprosy (John 11:1-44) page 183

Following Jesus

- How Can I Be Happy? (Matthew 5:1-12) page 184
- How Can I Be Holy? (Matthew 5:13-16) page 185
- How Can I Be a Good Friend? (Matthew 5:17-26) page 186
- How Can I Be a Good Neighbor? (Matthew 5:27-48) page 187
- How Can I Be a Good Servant? (Matthew 6:1-18) page 188
- How Can I Be a Good Worker? (Matthew 6:19-34) page 189
- How Can I Be a Good Leader? (Matthew 6:35-42) page 190
- How Can I Be a Good Friend? (Matthew 6:43-52) page 191
- How Can I Be a Good Neighbor? (Matthew 6:53-64) page 192
- How Can I Be a Good Servant? (Matthew 6:65-74) page 193
- How Can I Be a Good Worker? (Matthew 6:75-84) page 194
- How Can I Be a Good Leader? (Matthew 6:85-94) page 195

The Mass


- How Can I Be a Good Person? (Matthew 10:1-42) page 196
- How Can I Be a Good Friend? (Matthew 10:43-52) page 197
- How Can I Be a Good Neighbor? (Matthew 10:53-64) page 198
- How Can I Be a Good Servant? (Matthew 10:65-74) page 199
- How Can I Be a Good Worker? (Matthew 10:75-84) page 200
- How Can I Be a Good Leader? (Matthew 10:85-94) page 201
- How Can I Be a Good Friend? (Matthew 10:95-104) page 202
- How Can I Be a Good Neighbor? (Matthew 10:105-114) page 203
- How Can I Be a Good Servant? (Matthew 10:115-124) page 204
- How Can I Be a Good Worker? (Matthew 10:125-134) page 205
- How Can I Be a Good Leader? (Matthew 10:135-144) page 206

Each Featured Story includes three elements for teaching and engaging the children in discussion: *Understand It!*, *Live It!*, and *Tell It!* [More info on these elements can be found here.](#)

The *Leader's Guide* for *The Catholic Children's Bible* contains a beautiful section on teaching Scripture to children. This guide is an excellent resource and help! [It can be reviewed here.](#)

1560

The Last Supper



Mark 14:22-24 (For the full story, read Mark 14:12-26.)

22 While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his **disciples**. "Take it," he said, "this is my body."

23 Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. 24 Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's **covenant**."

disciple a close follower of Jesus
covenant a serious agreement between two people or between God and people

1561

Understand It!


Did you ever wish you could have been with Jesus when he walked the earth? Jesus wants to be with you so much that he did a fantastic thing. As we learn in this Bible story from Mark, Jesus gave us a farewell gift at the Last Supper: the Eucharist. Now, at every Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit, bread and wine become Jesus' Body and Blood. They are really, truly Jesus. He comes as food so that he can enter us and be one with us. Through the Eucharist, Jesus makes us more like himself.

When we receive Holy Communion, we receive Jesus into our heart. We grow closer to him and to one another. Jesus' Body and Blood give us strength to follow him more closely.

Live It!

After receiving Communion, you can talk to Jesus heart to heart. Write a short prayer you can say when you receive Communion. Your prayer might include these words: *love, thank, help, sorry, bless, or please*. Write your prayer on paper cut in the shape of a heart. You can bring it to Mass on Sunday, and after you receive Holy Communion, say your prayer to Jesus.

Tell It!



Using the pictures above, retell this story in your own words.



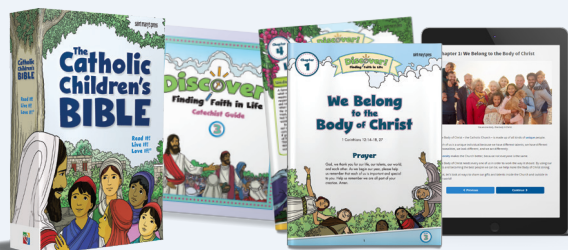
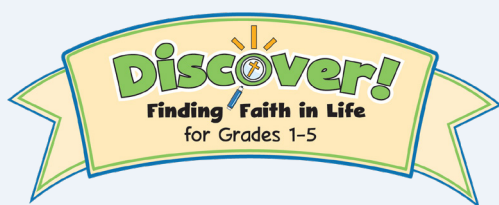
Sample Outline

Half-day schedule for a week long program:

8:30–9:00 a.m.	Drop-off activity based on the theme of the day. This activity should be fun and active and help to build community. Some ideas: A graffiti wall or a game of “Pull Up.”
9:00 a.m.	Welcome and Opening Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none">You might begin with a song of the week to gather the children for large-group times or as a cue to rotate the groups to their next session. You might also use hand motions and movement to make it fun!
9:20–9:50 a.m.	Session 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Arrange the children into small groups of no more than eight, and create a lesson rotation for the groups. For example: Group A will begin with outdoor/indoor games. Group B will begin with a Bible lesson. Group C will begin with a craft activity. Then, in the next session, the groups rotate to a different lesson.Allow for 10 minutes between the sessions so the children can get to their next session and settle in.This outline allows for three session times that are each 30 minutes in length.
9:50–10:00 a.m.	Rotate the groups.
10:00–10:30 a.m.	Session 2
10:30–10:50 a.m.	Snack time for everyone! (If you have a guest presenter, this is a great time to have them speak to the whole group.)
10:50–11:00 a.m.	Rotate the groups.
11:00–11:30 a.m.	Session 3
11:30–11:40 a.m.	Regather as a large group.
11:40–12:00 p.m.	Wrap-Up and Closing Prayer
On the final day, hold a family Mass and picnic. Include some games and a dunk tank or a few sprinklers on the lawn, especially if the weather is warm!	
Plan to send a note home with the children each day—both an email and a printed note—to build trust and relationships with your families!	



Because COVID restrictions vary from state to state,
refer to the CDC guidelines when planning your program.



***Discover! Finding Faith in Life* flexes to what you need, in whatever model you need it: liturgically based gatherings, family models, and more!**

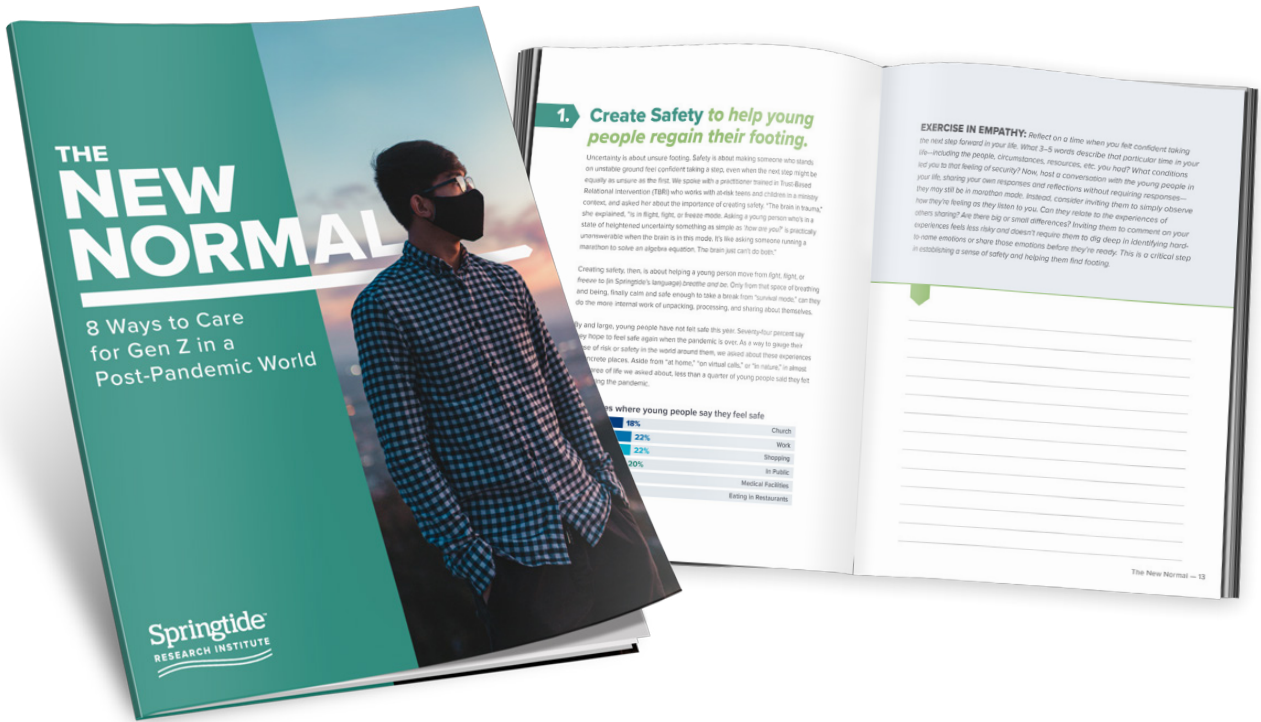
Learn more about Discover! Parish >

Learn more about Discover! School >

BRING FAMILIES TOGETHER... AND PROCESS

A free Workbook to share





This guide and workbook published by Springtide™ Research Institute, will help you and your families to process the events of the past year. With 8 tips and processing activities for ministry, outreach, and care in a post-pandemic world, rooted in the social sciences and backed by data.

This is a rich way for your staff, your students, and you to process, as a summer reflection, or even as a way to begin the new school or ministry year in the fall.

Get the free guide >

Breathe Easier

by Julie Mickler

Having grown up in a family that spent a lot of time outdoors, I always find that time in nature refreshes my soul. Whether at the beach, the mountains, or in my own backyard, I breathe easier outdoors.

Although I see and experience God everywhere, I find I'm especially drawn to trees. Their majesty, strength, and beauty are such perfect qualities to help me understand myself, the world, and God.

Looking at the branches of a tree, I notice that some grow straight, others grow unevenly, and still others bow and bend in unlikely ways. They don't fight for space; they just move and adjust, allowing for each branch to reach just enough sun. Each one is beautiful and unique on its own, but together they create a canopy that is breathtaking.

As I pray and ponder, I realize this tree is a lot like our human family. We are not all the same. You might bend one way; I might bend another. We both flourish when we allow for our differences. **We are stronger when our branches conjoin.** We live in harmony when all branches are seen as equal, beautiful, and, indeed, holy.

The wisdom of this tree inspires me to reach out to all the other different and uneven branches around me. I may not understand why their branches bend the way they do, but I'm anxious to learn.

Whenever I pause to reflect on the world as a part of God's creation, I am reminded that there is enough love and light for all. And I breathe a little easier.



Four Ways To Create More Meaning with Children Using

ENGAGED, ACTIVE LEARNING

By Steven Ellair

Have you ever been teaching, and you look out to see a room full of children just staring back at you with glazed eyes? Maybe you've experienced sessions where children start twitching, get easily distracted, or maybe even disruptive as you desperately try to cover the content and keep their attention.

In these situations, it's easy to come away wondering, what, if anything, the children took away from the lesson. So, is there a better way? Yes there is! It's called engaged learning, and it can completely change the experience of both the teacher and the children!

Simply defined, engaged learning occurs when methods are used to encourage children to actively participate in the process of learning. In this process, children interact with the lesson goals in creative ways, collaborate with each other, and demonstrate understanding through activities, discussions, and applied learning to everyday life. Let's dive in to discover four aspects of engaged learning and explore some tips for implementing this approach in our learning environments!

watch more on engaged learning! →

1

Engaged learning is best for kids—it addresses everyone’s learning styles!

It is said that people remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, yet 90% of what they do. While these exact numbers may be disputed, they developed out of an interpretation of Dale’s Cone of Experience (Edgar Dale, 1969). Dale showed that the more our five senses are involved in learning, the better the learning will be. There is a large body of research on the different learning styles of individual learners indicating that when multiple learning styles are employed, more individuals will walk away with increased learning.

Think of this in practical terms. If you categorized children as visual (learn best by seeing), auditory (learn best by hearing), or tactile-kinesthetic (learn best by moving/doing) and only use the skill of reading in your sessions, you are only addressing the visual learner and some auditory learners. **However, if you create a meaningful activity that gets children out of their seats and moving, you have suddenly created a learning experience that fully addresses all three learning styles.**



What is Active Learning?

2

Engaged learning increases trust and security!

Psychologists have long noted the link between feeling encouraged, supported, and safe, and effective learning. This is likely to come as no surprise. When everyone in a learning environment is engaged, feeling a part of the group, and enjoying themselves, learning can take place in deeper ways. Engaged learning addresses this important facet of psychology by creating active opportunities for children to collaborate, support each other, and work toward a common goal.

Through creative activities and group learning, children build trust with the teacher and with others and see the environment as safe and enjoyable. When this occurs, children begin to discover the joy of learning and recognize their own gifts and abilities to explore and discover the topics being introduced.

3

Engaged learning increases investment, motivation, and performance!

When children are engaged, they begin to invest more energy in their own learning. Engaging activities increase dopamine, endorphins, and oxygen levels, all of which have been shown to support learning. In learning spaces that use active and enjoyable means to introduce and reinforce lesson goals, children's motivation increases dramatically and performance soars.

If engaged learning is present, children stay interested and motivated and look forward to the next lessons and experiences. And teachers report that when they create learning environments that use engaging activities and a variety of learning methods, it is more exciting, interesting, and enjoyable for them as well. An engaged teacher creates the environment for an engaged learner!



4

Engaged learning addresses modern attention spans

Concerned about the influence of today's technology, sociologists and educational specialists are researching its effects on children's attention spans. They have discovered that the ability of a child to sit in a desk and stay focused on a single task or endure a "lecture-style" approach for a considerable length of time appears to be decreasing.

Therefore, lessons need to move with specific pacing and incorporate a range of learning experiences. Engaged learning to the rescue! Through meaningful, creative activities and multi-focused approaches to learning, attention spans are respected so that learning doesn't stall.

So, what can you do to implement some of the principles of engaged learning?

- **Assess where you are and where you'd like to be. The first step is to complete an honest assessment of your current learning environment.** Is it engaging? Do you and the children look forward to each lesson? Start by looking at your lessons and seeing where you could build in some opportunity to expand the engagement level of the children.
- **Incorporate engaging discussions or introductory activities. Don't jump into the content before tapping into the children's prior knowledge about some aspect of the topic.** For example, instead of immediately reading about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, have the children come to the board to write the first word they think of when they hear the word *forgiveness*, or invite them to share about times they have experienced forgiveness with others. Once they are invested because they have made a life connection, they will be ready to engage the topic further.
- **Reinforce core concepts with out-of-the-seat activities.** Break in-seat reading with practical, out-of-the-seat activities that can strengthen or support the main teaching. For example, have a relay race to emphasize teamwork (Church), encourage groups to create a role-play that shows a focused concept in action (forgiveness, kindness, etc.), or use common games, puzzles, and other worksheets to create group activities that relate to the lesson.



If you're looking to bring your learning environment to life and increase understanding while creating enthusiasm and enjoyment for all involved, engaged learning is the way. Start today and discover for yourself!

ENGAGED LEARNING ACTIVITY:

GRATITUDE RELAY



1. **Read Philippians 4:4-9** together in *The Catholic Children's Bible* (page 1857).



2. **Arrange the children in three or four small groups**, and invite each small group to form a line on one side of the room.



3. **Explain to them that they will be participating in a gratitude, or thanksgiving, relay.** Tell them that when you indicate, the first person in each line will walk quickly to the other end of the room. Point out that when they reach the other side of the room, they should shout out one thing they are grateful or thankful for.



4. **Tell them that after they have shouted out what they are thankful for, they should walk quickly back to their line and tag the next person.** Explain that each person in the line will take their turn walking to the other side of the room, shouting out something they are thankful for, and then returning to the line to tag the next person.



Process the Activity

Remind the children that in today's **Scripture passage** we are reminded that we should always rejoice and be thankful for all that God has done for us, especially for the gift of Jesus.

Tell the group that we can always be **thankful**. Explain that even when we are sad or upset, we can still find things to be thankful for. Point out that being mindful of all the good things in our life is a good way to show our gratitude to God.

This activity is taken from *Discover! Finding Faith in Life!*

[Learn more about Discover! Parish >](#)

[Learn more about Discover! School >](#)



INSTRUMENTS OF GOD'S GRACE

Brother Frederick C. Mueller, FSC
La Salle Academy, Providence, RI

It was sometime during the school year 2007–2008. It was a normal school day, and I was doing the usual thing—observing the class of a new teacher at La Salle Academy in Providence, Rhode Island. As I sat in the back of a United States history class, I noticed that the young man sitting next to me, a junior, did not have his textbook with him. During the 50-minute class he looked as if he were paying attention but seemed to do nothing but “look.” At the end of class I saw him in the hallway and said to him (I did not know his name) that I expected more of him. And that was the start of a relationship that exists till this day.

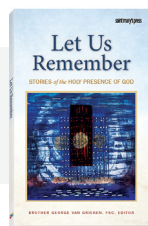
During that year he frequently stopped by my office to chat or just to sit. At the end of the year he sent me a copy of an essay he was preparing for college admissions. In that essay he wrote about our budding relationship: “Talking with Brother Fred got me thinking. If his presence in my life meant so much to me, then maybe I can make a difference in other people’s lives.” Later in that essay he wrote about his relationship with God: “I believe that God put me here for a reason, and I want to be an instrument of his peace. Being close to God affects everything I do.” I was moved by the actions of God in this young man’s life and the way in which God used me as an instrument of grace.

However, it was early in his senior year that God's presence was revealed even more deeply. This now-senior stopped by my office after I had offered morning prayer for the school on the public address system. He remarked that he liked the prayer very much. I thanked him and asked him if he prayed. He said that of course he did. In fact, the night before he had written a prayer.

I asked him if he would share the prayer with me. In typical teenage fashion he ripped a scrap of paper from his notebook, asked for a pencil, and wrote down his prayer. It read: "Let God's breeze pass through your

window and fill your home so that not only you breathe him in, but everyone who enters." I was deeply moved by the words—so simple and yet so profound. He succinctly captured what it means when we say, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."

To this day that scrap of paper is under the glass on my desk, to be seen each morning as I bow down to kiss my desk and to remember that God is present—in this office, in each person who enters, in the depths of my own being. Over these years, this young man and his words have been instruments of God's grace in my life.



Taken from *Let Us Remember: Stories of the Holy Presence of God*

FACING *the Fall*

by Laurie Ziliak





This fall, the return to school and parish programs will be like no other, just as the conclusion of the previous year was like no other. Our church has changed. Our educational system has changed. Our students have changed. We have changed. Nothing is the same as it was in February. Many have suffered personal loss, and our nation has suffered a huge collective loss. **The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue for years.**

As teachers and catechists, we have a unique place in the lives of our students. Facing our new reality can be daunting, and accepting the loss can be heart-wrenching, but if we approach the fall prayerfully and intentionally, we can be a force for good. The following strategies are some to consider as we begin this new academic year.

Prioritizing the Personal

The first few weeks of school and parish programs are typically about making sure everyone has the right school supplies and understands the parameters of class expectations. While those are and continue to be important tasks, we need to build in time for personal connections and check-ins, regardless of whether we are online or in person. **We need to provide time for students to talk about their experiences since March** (and share our own as well). We need to create space for students to talk about how they are feeling and what may be sources of anxiety.

Checking in with children and families individually, even for just a quick 10 minutes to gauge their emotional health and current challenges, will be important. Knowing the students and their families personally is always important, but it becomes the highest priority as we seek to move through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Naming the Loss

Every single person has experienced loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lost lives, lost jobs, lost stability—the numbers and ramifications are staggering. Some losses may not seem as big as others but are nonetheless significant. The loss of the end of a school year meant many students were unable to participate in events they looked forward to, such as the end-of-the-year choir concert or simply being with their friends each day. Some experienced loss during the summer through the closure of local playgrounds or anticipated summer camps that didn't happen. **We must allow children to name their losses and acknowledge each as significant.** We shouldn't attempt to play the role of mental health professionals but rather create space for students to articulate their disappointments and affirm their feelings of loss.



Identifying Resources

As children speak of their losses, significant needs may become apparent. Many local resources can provide assistance, including local food banks, mental health services, parish staff and spiritual resources, and many others. We've all spent the last few months in survival mode, attending to only the most basic necessities. As we move forward, other needs may become more apparent or more pronounced. We are not equipped to handle all of them, but we can provide support and direct people to the right resources.

Providing Stability and Structure

Establishing routines and expectations is essential now more than ever. We can help to ease anxieties by creating schedules within our classrooms and sharing them with our students. Posting daily or weekly schedules and sending them home can work well. Beginning each gathering with prayer—the same prayer—and allowing time to simply be together and check in can be comforting to our students.

Providing stability becomes even more important if we are not physically gathering with the children on a regular basis. Creating schedules by establishing online gathering times and due dates for material to be submitted and beginning each online gathering with the same routine, such as a short prayer and a quick, round-robin check-in focused on one question (such as “What is one good thing that has happened in the past week?”) can help to establish a sense of stability for students.



Providing Hope

As we move forward, our students are bound to carry their fears and anxiety from the past months with them. We need to be a voice of hope at every turn. This does not mean being overly optimistic or Polyanna-ish. Rather, we must provide the hope that is so central to our faith—hope that death and fear are conquered by love and that death is overcome in the Resurrection. Many Bible verses and stories speak of hope (a quick online search will provide many) and can be used in group prayer and shared with children and parents virtually. There are also many age-appropriate stories that speak of suffering and hope (such as the caterpillar becoming the butterfly) that we can incorporate into our educational materials.

This year has undoubtedly been a time of significant trauma for all of us. As we slowly return to our previous patterns and seek to establish new ones, we will quickly realize that we need to embrace a new normal. Children will likely struggle, but by being intentional, we can guide them to a new reality that is realistic and, ultimately, to a good place.



A Prayer for the New School Year

by Julie Mickler

Creator God,

We ask you to bless each of us as we continue to make sense of our experiences of being away from school, church, and one another. Please give us the wisdom to continue to grow from these experiences.

Let us give thanks for all those who sacrificed so much for the wellness of others.

Let us pray for those who suffered and died during this pandemic.

Let us lift up those in our communities, nation, and world who gave us hope.

Let us remember we are a global family, united in love.

Bless each of us with your gracious love. May we never take for granted the blessing of being together.

Amen.





How to Become a Trusted Adult

By Ellen B. Koneck

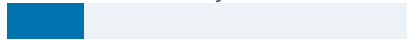
27% of young people have **one or fewer adults in their life that they can turn to if they need to talk.**



31% of 18-to-25-year-olds



19% of 13-to-17-year-olds



As we approach the end of the school year and faith formation programs (and a remarkable year at that!), it is helpful to pause and reflect on the importance of your role and presence in the lives of children. It has no doubt been a difficult year in many ways, and one that might leave you feeling like you didn't do enough, didn't teach enough, didn't connect with families enough, didn't celebrate enough. But this year, perhaps more than any other, the most

important marker of success in your ministry and work isn't programs attended or communications sent. The most important aspect of your work is becoming a trusted adult in the lives of children. Young people today are experiencing epidemic levels of loneliness—many report a sense of isolation, the feeling that no one really knows them, or the experience of always waiting for someone to call, text, or reach out.

These reports of loneliness were happening *before* COVID-19, which brought with it the requirement to social distance, shelter in place, or move to online work and learning, no doubt exacerbating an already difficult time for many young people.

Springtide™ Research Institute, a sociological research institute dedicated to listening to the inner and outer lives of young people, conducted research around this sense of loneliness. Our data is unique because it extends down to 13-year-olds; we are interested in finding out how they navigate questions of meaning, identity, and community as they move from adolescence into adulthood.

19% of 13-to-17-year-olds report they have one or fewer adults in their lives they can turn to if they need to talk.

In our landmark study of over 10,000 young people, *The State of Religion & Young People 2020: Relational Authority*, we identified alarming trends.

This is staggering. As a teacher or catechist of younger children, this statistic may register as important but irrelevant to your ministry. And yet **it underscores**

the importance of your role in the lives of the children entrusted to your care.

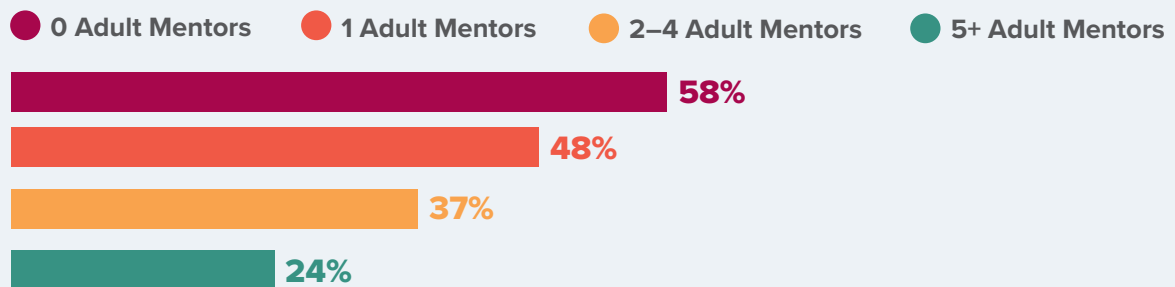
Relationships are not only important—they are essential. While children need to learn appropriate information and progress in their education, what they need most from you is a recognition that you care. The most important aspect of your ministry is to build relationships so that you become a trusted adult in the lives of children. In becoming a trusted adult, you are then able to be a model of faith and the voice of Jesus for young children.

How can you make sure young people know they can turn to you? How do you make yourself a trusted adult in their lives today?

We know that relationships make all the difference when it comes to combating loneliness and adding a sense of meaning and purpose to a young person's life.

Having adult mentors reduces loneliness

Percentages of young people who responded “sometimes” and “always” that feel they have no one to talk to



Simple practices can help build trusting relationships. These practices are rooted in data: they are the things we've learned young people respond to and respect when it comes to forging new relationships. One important practice of relationship building is simply listening.

84% of young people ages 13–15 say they will **trust someone who remembers what they shared.**


82% say they will **trust someone who takes the time to hear what they have to say.**



SPRINGTIDE™ NATIONAL RESEARCH RESULTS

© 2021 Springtide. Cite, share, and join the conversation at springtideresearch.org.

Here's an easy Springtide *Tide-Turning Tip* to show you're listening and to remember what they've shared:

 **Tide-Turning Tip:** Follow up by asking questions to clarify or repeating what you heard as ways to help your recollection. If your conversation is about actions, jot down notes as a way of showing your intention to follow through.

As a catechist or teacher of young children, the relationships you establish now are foundational for the development and support of the religious lives and human needs of the children in your care. In these days of COVID-19, take a moment to step back and assess your year in light of relationships and the ways you have become a trusted adult in the lives of children. While knowledge of the faith is important, know that it is also the relationships you have built that will have a long-term positive effect.

Ellen Koneck is the head writer and editor at Springtide Research Institute.



[Download the free report >](#)



Create deeper connections with middle and high schoolers using Catholicism 101 and 102.

[Learn more about Catholicism 101 >](#)

[Learn more about Catholicism 102 >](#)



saint mary's press

touching hearts. enlivening minds.

We're here to help!

We want to support you in your good work.

Our Ministry Care Team are experts in
accompanying you every step of the way!

Saint Mary's Press Ministry Care Team
smp.org • 800.533.8095