



Finding Faith in Life

Gathered Family Sessions: A Dynamic New Dimension of Faith Formation

Enhance faith formation in your parish with **Gathered Family Sessions**—engaging, family-based experiences that complement existing catechesis. Rooted in the **liturgical seasons** and the seasons of the natural world, these ten dynamic sessions (September through June) explore key themes and celebrations, deepening families' connection to their faith.

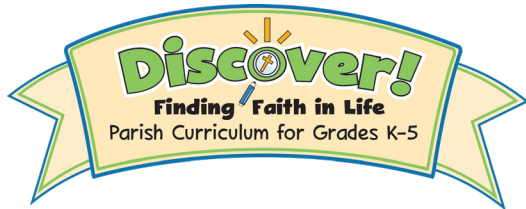
Designed for **families of all sizes and ages**, each adjustable 90-minute session provides a welcoming space for parents and their children to learn and grow together through **interactive activities, crafts, and accessible Bible stories**. Using the familiar *Discover!* learning structure, each session includes clear, easy-to-follow lesson plans, making implementation simple and seamless.

Whether offered monthly or adapted to fit your parish's needs, these sessions equip you with everything necessary to **inspire, engage, and strengthen family faith formation**.

We hope you enjoy this new, exciting offering!

The Publishing Team at Saint Mary's Press

P.S. These ten sessions mark the first of what will become a three-year offering, each year featuring unique Bible stories for every session. More to come in the future!



Discover! Gathered Family Sessions

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the Gathered Family Sessions?

The *Discover!* Gathered Family Sessions are a series of ten gatherings held from September through June, designed to unite families in reflection on both the liturgical calendar and the changing natural seasons. Over time, the program will expand to include three years of unique sessions, allowing for content rotation and fresh engagement across multiple years.

2. Is a parish required to use all of the sessions?

No, parishes have the flexibility to use as many or as few sessions as best suit their specific needs and circumstances.

3. Do these sessions follow and align with the core Discover! curriculum?

No, the Gathered Family Sessions are a standalone resource that complements the *Discover!* program but does not duplicate or replace its graded-level catechesis. However, since these sessions are primarily based on the liturgical seasons, a parish may choose to substitute its graded-level lessons on the liturgical seasons with the Gathered Family Sessions.

4. Are participants separated by age or grade level during these sessions?

No, families participate together as a unit. There are no age or family-size restrictions—any family members are welcome to join. Each participant contributes based on their age and ability, fostering collaboration and shared learning within the family group.

5. What role does Scripture play in these sessions?

Each session is centered on a Bible story from *The Catholic Children's Bible*. Guided by the session leader, families engage with Scripture through listening, reading, and reflection in a simple yet meaningful way that can be continued at home.

6. How do these sessions benefit families and the parish?

Many Catholic families are seeking ways to integrate faith into their daily lives beyond Sunday Mass. In today's fast-paced world, where family time is often scarce, these sessions provide a valuable opportunity for families to gather at the parish, supported by leaders, catechists, and fellow parishioners, to engage in faith-centered activities.

By fostering a welcoming and enriching environment, the Gathered Family Sessions help families experience their parish as a source of support and encouragement, empowering them to live their faith more meaningfully and joyfully.



Year 1
April

Christ Is Risen!



Preparing the Session

Scripture Focus

John 20:11–14, 16 ("The Risen Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene," p. 1702)

Session Goals

- to consider the meaning of the Resurrection of Christ
- to celebrate the season of Easter
- to encourage families to celebrate the joy of Easter throughout the season

Materials Needed

General

- *The Catholic Children's Bible* open to John 20:11–14, 16 ("The Risen Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene," p. 1702) and set on the prayer table (if not doing the Bible procession)
- a prayer table decorated with Easter decor (Easter lilies, jonquils, greenery, etc.)
- a copy of *The Catholic Children's Bible* for each family, distributed ahead of time
- two battery-operated candles for the Bible procession (*optional*)
- music for the Bible procession (*optional*)
- appropriate equipment for playing the Bible procession music (*optional*)
- copies of the year 1 April session handout, "Christ Is Risen!" on page 8, one for each family

Icebreaker

- construction paper of various colors cut into the shape of eggs (about 4 inches in size), one egg for each participant and even numbers of each color so that each egg can be matched with another of the same color
- an Easter basket to hold the paper eggs

Family Activity

- plastic eggs filled with treats, about three per family

Family Craft

- a sample of the craft for the families to view
- shoeboxes, one for each family
- scissors, rolls of clear tape, and bottles of glue, one of each for each family
- half-sheets of construction paper, one of each color for each family



Get Ready! (15 minutes)

April

Welcome and Icebreaker

- Greet families as they arrive, and invite them to find seats together at one of the tables.
- Welcome everyone to the gathered family session for April and the season of Easter.
- Introduce the icebreaker by explaining that this session focuses on the season of Easter.
- Circulate the Easter basket among the participants, asking each person to take one paper Easter egg.
- Explain that when you say, "Go!" each person will find someone else, preferably someone they do not know, who has the same color egg. The partners should then introduce themselves by sharing their names. Then they should ask each other, "What do you like best about Easter or spring?"
- Close by inviting the families to take their paper eggs home and place them in their prayer space. Suggest that they write their names on their eggs.

Bible Procession (optional)

- Choose a family to carry the Bible with John 20:11–14, 16 ("The Risen Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene," p. 1702) marked with a bookmark or ribbon, and two battery-operated candles, in procession from the back of the room to the prayer table.
- Ask one member of the family to carry the closed Bible with two hands at waist level with the front cover facing forward.
- Play accompanying music if desired.
- Ask the Bible-bearer to place the Bible on the prayer table, opening it to the marked Scripture passage.
- Continue with the opening prayer and Scripture reading as outlined below and on the next page.

Opening Prayer

Begin the prayer by leading the group in the Sign of the Cross. Then continue with the following:

- Dear God, thank you for bringing us together as we celebrate the meaning of Easter and the Easter season.
- Help us to support and encourage one another as we learn more about the Resurrection of Christ.
- And help us to remember that when we read and pray with the Scriptures, Jesus, the Word of God, is with us.



Dive In! (30 minutes)

Scripture Reading

- Invite everyone to stand. Then pick up the Bible from the prayer space and begin by saying, "A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John." Invite everyone to respond, "Glory to you, O Lord." (*The Roman Missal*)
- Read aloud John 20:11–14, 16 ("The Risen Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene," p. 1702).
- End by saying, "The Gospel of the Lord." Invite everyone to respond, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." (*The Roman Missal*)

Scripture Reflection

- Invite everyone to sit down and find the Scripture passage, John 20:11–14, 16 ("The Risen Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene" p. 1702), in their Bibles.
- Explain that they have just heard one of the Easter Gospels, the Gospel according to John. Continue with the following points:
 - In this Gospel, we follow Mary Magdalene as she hurries to the tomb but finds that the body of Jesus is not there. Where could it be?
 - She sees two angels, who ask her why she is crying. She explains that "they have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" Then she turns around, sees Jesus, and does not realize it is him until he says her name.
 - Try to put yourself into this story. Imagine that you are Mary Magdalene, so upset that Jesus has died. Then you go to the tomb, and his body is not there! So you cry some more!
 - How do you finally recognize Jesus? When he calls your name!
- Encourage the families to read the Scripture passage together. Ask them to pause and think about the passage for a minute or two. Have each family member share with one another a word or phrase they remember about the passage and why.
- Call the large group together, and ask volunteers to share a few things they or their family members noted from the Scripture passage. Unfold the meaning of the story, using the contributions from the group if possible. Emphasize the following points:
 - During Lent, we participate in the death of Jesus in our own small way. During Easter, we celebrate the life of Jesus, the life of Jesus with us, the Jesus who can never die, the Jesus who calls our name in the midst of our sadness and confusion.
 - It has been said that celebrating forty days of joy during the Easter season is sometimes harder than observing the forty days of Lent. But we can give it a good try this Easter season. If we remember that Christ is risen, we can live the joyful risen life with Jesus, in him and through him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen!



Discover! (30 minutes)

April

Family Activity: An Easter Egg Hunt

- Prepare by filling plastic Easter eggs with treats, three eggs per family. Hide the eggs around the room.
- Explain to the families that they will be having a family Easter egg hunt. Tell the group that you have hidden eggs around the room and that the families must each find three eggs together by linking arms and moving around the room as a family unit.
- Share that when you say, "Go!" the families may hunt for eggs. When a family finds three, they should return to their seats, open the eggs, and enjoy the contents.
- Ask the question, "Why do we have Easter egg hunts at Easter?" Explain the symbolism of the Easter egg as a symbol of the tomb. Continue with the following points:
 - Looking at an egg from the outside, it looks like some kind of rock. You might not think anything is inside. But what comes out of an egg if we let it develop normally? A chicken! Just as a chicken emerges from something that looks dead and empty, so Jesus rose from the tomb! So the symbol of the egg has become a symbol of Easter.
 - The egg as a symbol of Easter also emerged from the tradition of fasting from all animal products during Lent. This included not only meat but also fish, cheese, milk, and other dairy products. The idea was to give creation a rest, to not take sustenance from living beings during Lent. Fasting from one or more of these foods helps us to appreciate these gifts even more when we have them back again at Easter.

Family Craft: A 3D Easter Peep Box

- Prepare a sample of the peep box ahead of time.
- Distribute a shoebox, a pair of scissors, a roll of clear tape, a bottle of glue, and half-sheets of construction paper to each family.
- Instruct the families to cut a square peephole at one end of the shoebox.
- Explain to the families that they will construct an empty tomb scene on the inside end of their shoebox opposite the peephole. Direct them to cover the back inside of the box with blue paper, as the sky, and then to use the rest of their construction paper to create an empty tomb, flowers around the tomb, trees, and the stone that was rolled away.
- Show the families how they can add a tab to some of the individual pieces of their scene, which can then be glued or taped so that the piece stands up and creates a 3D image when viewed through the peephole.
- Explain that they may want to put Mary Magdalene in this scene, as on page 1702 in *The Catholic Children's Bible*.

- Continue the activity with these or similar comments:
 - Let's stop and look through the peephole at our empty tomb and garden. Take turns among family members so that everyone can see the final result. Imagine yourself there, coming to the empty tomb and then suddenly hearing Jesus call your name!
 - We all have times in our lives when we are looking for Jesus and all we find is an empty tomb. Where is Jesus? We need to realize that Jesus is risen, which means he is not confined to his human body. He can be wherever he wants to be. And, when you are in need, he wants to be with you. He will call your name, just as he did Mary Magdalene's, and gently guide you forward in life.
 - So, as we look at the empty tomb, let's say in our hearts: "Christ is risen! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"



Go! (15 minutes)

Blessing and Closing Prayer

- Invite the parents and caregivers to bless their children. Ask the adults to stand and place their hands on the heads of their children. Pray this prayer aloud, asking the adults to repeat each line after you:
 - Lord Jesus, bless my child(ren) as we celebrate the season of Easter.
 - Help them to remember that Christ is risen, and that Easter is a season of joy!
 - Help them to remember that they can share joy with others through their kindness and sharing.
 - We ask this in your name. Amen.
- Invite the children to bless their parents and caregivers. Explain that the adults may sit so that the children can easily place their hands on the adults' heads. Ask the children to pray each line after you as you pray this prayer aloud:
 - Lord Jesus, bless the ones who love and care for me.
 - Give them patience and understanding during the season of Easter.
 - Help them to remember that Christ is risen.
 - Help them to share their joy by helping others.
 - And help me do my part to love and help my family.
 - We ask this in your name. Amen.

- Invite each family or table group to hold hands in a circle. Pray the following prayer:
 - Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together in celebration, support, and encouragement as we celebrate the season of Easter. Thank you for the fun of sharing with Easter egg partners. Thank you for helping us to learn from your Word in the Scriptures. Thank you for family fun during our Easter egg hunt. Thank you for reminding us of the season of Easter and of Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb as we made our Easter peep boxes.
 - Be with us, Lord, as we show support and love to our families this month. Help us to celebrate the joy of the Risen Christ in our family during each day of the Easter season! *(Invite everyone to respond, "Amen.")*
- Distribute the handout. Explain that the families should take it home and place it where they can see it throughout the month.
- Explain that the Question of the Month is something the families should reflect on together at various times throughout the next few weeks.
- Point out the Catholic Practice Challenge, and invite the families to consider ways to complete it over the next month.
- Encourage the families to leave the plastic eggs on their tables to be collected, and remind them to take their paper Easter eggs and peep boxes home.



Question of the Month

How will your family participate in the season of Easter in a new, exciting, and meaningful way this year?

Catholic Practice Challenge

Easter Sunday ushers in forty days of joy! And every Sunday is a “little Easter.” Connect your family to the joyful season of Easter by planning something joyful to do together each weekend. Deliberately announce each event as your Easter joy activity.

