

Spiritual Resources (in the Time of COVID)

In the complete and utter weirdness that has been brought about by the pandemic, things are... well, different, to say the least. We were not able to attend Mass for months, and churches were completely closed for several weeks. Now most churches are reopened, but at limited capacity and with social distancing restrictions in place.

Our ordinary routines, including school and work, have been disrupted, and our entire lives have been flipped upside-down. It can be very easy to fall into despair and focus on wishing that things weren't "this way." But one thing that has not changed? Our God. Through it all, He has not changed, and He remains on His throne and in charge. He deeply desires a relationship with you. In these times, the ways we live out our faith look a little different, but the Lord is for sure calling us to allow ourselves to be stretched and to lean more on those closest to us, especially our families.

The following resources are some examples of prayers to pray, places to visit, apps to download, etc. – basically some resources for how to engage more deeply in your faith in preparation for Confirmation and in this weird time of COVID. Hopefully these resources are helpful both for teens and for parents/sponsors. This is a time to grow in faith with your family (and with your sponsor!) And hopefully these things will continue to serve you even after the pandemic has passed and things are more "normal" again. As always, do not hesitate to reach out to the Office of Youth Ministry – we are here to serve you. Enjoy!!

PLACES TO VISIT

- **Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
 - 409 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201
 - www.americasfirstcathedral.org
 - Here in Baltimore, we are extremely blessed to have America's very first Catholic cathedral! It is a stunning, historic work of architecture and a beautiful place to pray. During the pandemic, tours have to be requested in advance, but the church is open M-F from 7 AM to 7 PM, Saturday from 9 AM to 6:30 PM, and Sunday from 7 AM to 5 PM. Besides daily Mass (and incredibly reverent Sunday Masses), they also frequently offer confession and adoration – check their website for accurate information during the pandemic, since things are ever-changing!
- **The Shrine of St. Anthony**
 - 12290 Folly Quarter Road, Ellicott City, MD 21042
 - www.shrineofstanthony.org
 - The Conventual Franciscan Friars (the ones who teach at Curley!) have a monastery located on 310 acres. Their property is open to the public during daylight hours, and even though their chapel is currently closed, they have miles of hiking trails, a Marian grotto, and walking Stations of the Cross, among other outdoor things. It's a beautiful respite that makes you feel like you're in the middle of nowhere – when really you're just in Ellicott City! Their property is also home to a sustainable farm (www.littleportionfarm.org), and they are always accepting weekday volunteers (even during COVID!), if you ever have a day off and want to spend it connecting with God's Creation.
- **National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes**
 - 16300 Grotto Road, Emmitsburg, MD 21727
 - www.nsgrotto.org
 - This is a beautiful, historic shrine in the mountains that is modeled after the healing Grotto in Lourdes, France. Ever heard of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton? She spent a lot of time here in the 1800s.

It's a great place to take a mini-pilgrimage with your family and experience some of the Catholic history of Maryland. Most of it is outdoors, and you can definitely make a day trip out of it. You can even attain a plenary indulgence by visiting and praying at this shrine! Check out their website for their daily and weekend hours. While you're there, you can also check out the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, which is right down the road.

- **Our Lady's Center**

- 3301 Rogers Ave, Ellicott City, MD 21043
- <http://www.ourladyscenter.net/>
- We have our own little Marian shrine right in Ellicott City! This is my go-to place to support local business and buy Catholic goods (books, statues, medals, rosaries, etc.).

THINGS TO WATCH

- **The Chosen**

- Created outside of the Hollywood system, *The Chosen* is a crowd-funded TV series about the life of Jesus Christ, and you can access it online for free! Trust me when I say that this is nothing like any Christian movie or TV show you've ever seen. Nothing about it is cheesy or out-of-touch – it's incredibly well done and extremely moving. It's a great show to watch with friends or together as a family!
- Link to their website (where they are also currently raising money to fund season 2): <https://studios.vidangel.com/the-chosen>
- Link to watch it on YouTube (you're going to need an ad-blocker enabled to make sure you can enjoy it without being interrupted every five or so minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/c/TheChosenSeries/playlists> and click on "The Chosen Global Watch Party" playlist

- **Ascension Presents YouTube channel** (most prominently featuring the beloved Fr. Mike Schmitz)

- <https://www.youtube.com/ascensionpresents>

- **Formed**

- <https://ccasta.org/formedorg>
- CCASTA has purchased Formed to be accessed for free by every parishioner. There are so many great video series and even movies to watch to learn more about the faith! Here are a couple you could start with:
 - "The Search," asking the big questions about life, such as "Why am I here?" and "What happens after I die?" <https://watch.formed.org/the-search/videos/the-search-trailer>
 - "Forgiven," talking all about utilizing the sacrament of confession: <https://watch.formed.org/forgiven/videos/forgiven-trailer>

- **LifeTeen's YouTube channel**

- LifeTeen has a lot of really great content specifically geared towards teenagers, including weekly series where they break down the Sunday readings. Just search "LifeTeen" on YouTube and you'll find it!
 - This is a video of theirs about confession that makes me laugh but is also a great metaphor for sin in our lives: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cciCTFyls8M>

THINGS TO LISTEN TO

- **Worship music!**

- During the initial quarantine, the office of youth ministry made a worship music playlist using suggestions from teens in our youth group, the music from our virtual Life Nights, and some great songs we wanted to introduce teens to. It's called "Choose to Worship." Check it out on Spotify: <https://spoti.fi/2JfLhRX>
- Other great Christian artists to check out:
 - Women: Lauren Daigle, Audrey Assad, Sarah Kroger, Steffany Gretzinger
 - Men: Matt Maher, Pat Barrett, Cory Asbury, Will Reagan
 - Groups: Rend Collective, For King & Country, Hillsong (which includes Hillsong UNITED, Hillsong Young & Free, and Hillsong Worship), Jesus Culture, Bethel Music
- The band Needtobreathe, who refuse the Christian label but often have Christian themes bleed over into their music, recently released a fabulous album called *Out of Body*. Definitely check it out, especially the song "Who Am I."

- **Podcasts**

- There are *so* many great Catholic podcasts out there! I typically use Spotify to listen to free podcasts, but they can generally be found on any sort of music app. This list is not at all exhaustive, but here are a few places to start if you're looking for good Catholic content:
 - **"Ask Father Josh (Your Catholic Question and Answer Podcast)"**
 - **"The Fr. Mike Schmitz Catholic Podcast"** – this one is the audio from his YouTube videos, and so each episode is less than 10 minutes long! Perfect for a trip to school or the grocery store.
 - **"The Catholic Feminist"** – Claire Swinarski gives strong women a podcast that is also totally faithful to Church teaching
 - **"CNA Newsroom"** – the Catholic News Agency brings you the latest news in the Catholic world! It's super important to get Catholic news from actual Catholic sources, and this is one of the best!
 - **"Clerically Speaking"** – two young, hilarious priests talk about life, Twitter, and the Church

THINGS TO READ

- **The Bible**

- I know this sounds like a joke because of how "duh" it is, but I'm being serious! St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." If you don't know where to start in the Bible, start with the Gospels! Read them slowly, little by little, praying with them.
- Daily readings
 - If you were to go to Mass every day, over the course of three years you would hear nearly the entire Bible. Obviously it's not feasible for the average person to go to Mass every day, especially not during these times, but you *can* read the daily readings! You can find them at www.usccb.org/daily-readings, and you can also sign up to have them sent directly to your inbox every day!
- Blessed is She reflections
 - For our women: the international women's ministry Blessed is She has a dedicated team of Catholic women that write daily reflections on the day's readings, which you can also get sent to your inbox! <https://blessedishe.net/devotions/>

- **LifeTeen blogs**
 - LifeTeen has a dedicated team of writers that keep their blog updated, talking about relevant modern issues and the Church, all geared towards teenagers. Check it out here: <https://lifeteen.com/blog/>
- **Fratelli Tutti**
 - Did you know that Pope Francis just released a new encyclical (letter to the whole Church)? You can read it for free online: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html
- **100 Saints Every Catholic Teen Should Know** (a book from LifeTeen with the stories of 100 different saints!)
- **The YouCat** (a youth-friendly version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church)
- **Follow: Your Lifelong Adventure with Jesus** by Katie Prejean McGrady
- If you're looking to go deeper in your relationship with Christ and with Mary, I would recommend **33 Days to Morning Glory: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat in Preparation for Marian Consecration** by Fr. Michael Gaitley. Marian consecration will change your life!

APPS/WEBSITES

- Do you ever see news about the Catholic Church from secular media and wonder if it's... even accurate? How do non-Catholics even know what's going on in the Church anyway...? It's super important to get accurate information about what's happening in our Church. One of the best and non-biased sources is **EWTN** and their publication **Catholic News Agency** (<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/>).
- www.Ltparentlife.com – this one's for the grown-ups! This website, curated by LifeTeen, keeps Catholic parents up-to-date with teen culture so that they can understand what the heck a “pewdiepie” is and how it's affecting their kids.
- **Laudate**
 - A great Catholic app with the daily readings, an examination of conscience, an audio version of the Rosary, and more!
- **iBreviary**
 - If you've ever been interested in starting to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the universal prayer of the Church, but you didn't want to buy one of the expensive books, just download this app! It has all the daily prayers on it, which all priests and religious pray every day. The Liturgy of the Hours kept me grounded and feeling connected to the Church for the months that I couldn't go to Mass this year.
- **YouCat Daily**
 - A great app geared towards teens that gives you little snippets of the Bible every day.
- **Who to follow on Instagram** (because we all need some solid, wholesome accounts to break up some of the nonsense in our feeds):
 - **@CCASTA_ym** (shameless plug for our youth ministry Instagram)
 - **@mhunterkilmer** (a young woman who is a self-proclaimed “Catholic hobo” and travels around the country in her car)
 - **@theoodlesofdoodles** (a youth minister who draws religious doodles)
 - **@fightthenewdrug** (a non-religious nonprofit raising awareness about the harms of pornography)
 - **@lifeteen**

- @blessedishe (for our ladies!)
- @archbayley (this one's just for fun – Archbishop Lori has a dog, and he has his own Instagram!)
- @sourceofallhope (follow the Baltimore Basilica's street missionaries and the awesome work they're doing right here in our own archdiocese)
- @YouCat
- @the.living.person
- @katieprejean – a Catholic speaker and mom who mostly posts pictures of her kids, but she also has a lot of really important things to say about modern culture
- @churchpop
- @litcatholicmemes (because memes)

PRAYERS

- A good examination of conscience
 - This is *so* necessary to make sure that we are living our lives in accord with God's will! There are literally hundreds of different examinations of conscience out there, but here is a simple one that I found online for teens: <https://netusa.org/confession/>
- **The Rosary (how-to-pray included)**
 - An ancient prayer of the Church that involves both vocal prayer and meditative prayer. At nearly every approved Marian apparition, Mary begged the Church to pray the Rosary, both for the salvation of their own souls and of the whole world.
- **The Divine Mercy Chaplet (how-to-pray included)**
 - This prayer was given to us by Jesus through St. Faustina and focuses on the immense mercy of God for the whole world.
- Pope Francis' five-finger prayer
 - Picture of this included on the last page
- Lectio Divina
 - Latin for "Divine Reading" - an ancient form of praying with Scripture.
 - A basic how-to: <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide>
- Praying in Color
 - Do you like art (even if you're not good at it)? Do words sometimes fail you in prayer, or do you have a hard time staying focused? Praying in color could be just the thing for you and your family.
 - <https://prayingincolor.com/>

THINGS TO DO

- **Make twine rosaries!**
 - This is one of my favorite things to do when I have a bit of spare time – it's really easy to learn and super relaxing once you get the hang of it. I love making them as gifts for people and praying the Rosary slowly as I make them! Making these can be a fun group or family activity, too. You need to buy "number 36" twine, which is the perfect size for a classic rosary. It can be found in a lot of places online for pretty cheap.
 - Online instructions: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Cord-Rosary>
 - Video instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUoSFVULn64&t=33s>

- **Blessing bags for the homeless**
 - In this time of pandemic it's not necessarily an option to volunteer in homeless outreach ministries such as soup kitchens. Making a "blessing bag" to keep in your car for when you encounter our brothers and sisters who are experiencing homelessness is a wonderful way to show them love.
 - What you need (not an exhaustive list):
 - A gallon-size Ziploc baggie to put everything in
 - Non-perishable snacks, such as Pop-tarts or granola bars
 - Non-perishable sources of protein, such as peanut butter crackers, beef jerky, or foil tuna packets
 - Socks (these are the things that anyone experiencing homelessness will tell you they *always* need)
 - Floss
 - Band-aids
 - Chewing gum
 - Small bottle of water
 - A note or prayer card telling them how much they are loved and cherished
- **Get involved in youth ministry at the parish**
 - LifeTeen is our high school youth group and Midway is our middle school youth group. Both meet every other Sunday night. A calendar can be found at ccasta.org/vya. Contact Bob Sutliff at bob@ccasta.org for more information.

And of course, above all, it is extremely important to **stay close to the sacraments** of the Church. Although Mass looks a lot different right now, it is widely available throughout the archdiocese, and CCASTA is currently having all nine of its weekend Masses with safety protocols in place to protect against COVID. **The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith**, and Jesus desires so deeply for us to receive Him into our bodies and souls. If you do not feel comfortable yet returning to Mass, I highly encourage you to livestream it at home so as to "make holy the Sabbath" and to not fall out of the habit of attending Mass on Sundays. If you'd prefer a more professional livestream than the one at CCASTA, there are many online options available (Ascension Presents, for instance), and a quick Google search should yield plenty of results. Worshiping Jesus by attending **Adoration** is another awesome way to pray with the Eucharist – and there tend to be way fewer people there than at Mass, so it's safer, too! And in order to worthily receive the Eucharist and to make sure that we are always in God's good graces and are disposed to hear His voice in our hearts, **frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation!** Confession may seem scary if you don't go often, but there is no better feeling in the world than the freedom that comes with God's mercy. **The Church commands us to confess our sins at least once a year**, so make sure that you're at least doing that, especially before you are confirmed. If you aren't comfortable with indoor confession right now (or if you feel super awkward about going to a priest that you know, because trust me, I get it), OLPH is currently having drive-through confessions! Check out their website for more info on that: <https://olphparish.org/visit-schedule/>

Hope at least some pieces of this are useful! If anything, please know that **you are loved** and that **you are being prayed for**. I (Shannon) am moving on to a position in college campus ministry and so will no longer be your youth minister as of October 30th, but Bob Sutliff will be taking over as interim youth minister. Do not hesitate to reach out to him or to Fr. John if you ever need anything at all! We are here to support you.

Peace and all good,

Shannon O'Toole (& Bob Sutliff)

POPE FRANCIS FIVE FINGER PRAYER

3 The following finger is the tallest. It reminds us of our leaders, the governors and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.

4 The fourth finger is the ring finger. Even though it may surprise you, it is our weakest finger. It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.

5 And finally we have our smallest finger, the smallest of all. Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the other four groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and also you will be able to pray for own your needs in a better way.

2 The next finger is the index. Pray for those who teach you, instruct you and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.

1 The thumb is the closest finger to you. So start praying for those who are closest to you. They are the persons easiest to remember. To pray for our dear ones is a "Sweet Obligation."

