

SESSION 20: SPEAK

TOPIC: Witnesses of Faith

GOAL

The goal of this session is for the teens to see the communion of saints as their extended family, to understand what it means to be a witness of the faith, and to get to know a few modern saints.

KEY CONCEPTS

Confirmation calls us to be witnesses of faith and provides us with the graces to do so.

Being a witness means being a martyr; martyrdom does not necessarily mean dying for the faith, but requires a willingness to sacrifice and suffer for truth.

When learning how to become better witnesses, we should look to the examples of other members of the Church — particularly Mary and the saints.

KEY TERMS

Martyr: A witness to the truth of the faith, in which the martyr endures even death to be faithful to Christ.

Saint: The “holy one” who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life.

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 1:6-8

Acts 2:1-11

Matthew 16:24-27

CATECHISM

954-959

963-969

1302-1304

2471-2474

ABOUT THIS CONFIRMATION SESSION

The Gather is a fun game of Family Feud, which helps emphasize that this is a session about family, namely the communion of saints. The Proclaim teaches about the important role Mary and the communion of saints play in the teens’ lives. The Break gives the teens an opportunity to get to know a saint from our modern era more personally. The Send is a group prayer during which the teens ask the saints to pray for them through one of the Church’s oldest prayers, the Litany of Saints.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this session should emphasize that the saints are our extended family members. It should demonstrate that they are people to whom we can relate, have conversations with, and seek advice from. Think family reunion! Have framed pictures of saints around the room or in scrapbooks. Include pictures of modern-day saints, as well as pictures of saints skiing, hiking, being silly, etc. to demonstrate that they are more like us than we may think.

AS YOU GET STARTED

For a more dynamic environment, consider setting up a photo booth. Have pictures of saints around the edges so the teens can stand in the middle and take a picture with their “extended family.” Encourage the teens to post their photos on social media and include a creative hashtag such as #familyreunion, #extendedfamily, #communionofsaints, or #myfamilyisthebest.

For a more personal Send, consider Inviting each teen to invoke the intercession of a particular saint and then use the *Litany of Saints* handout to lead the group in the Litany of Saints. As the teens leave, offer them a prayer card for the saint who stood out to them the most.

SUMMIT

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

Summit (20 min)

Divide the teens into their Confirmation small groups. Use the modified *Summit* session to lead the teens through a *lectio divina* based reflection on the Sunday readings.

GATHER

Family Feud (15 min)

Prior to the session, poll your Core Team, parish staff, or a parish ministry group to come up with the answers for the Family Feud game. Gather the teens in the main meeting space and instruct them to remain with their Confirmation small groups. Read a Family Feud question aloud. After the question has been read, give the small groups 20 to 30 seconds to write an answer on a piece of paper. Read the correct answer after the time is up and tell the teens how many points they receive based on their answer. For example, if they had the number one answer, they receive five points; if they had the number two answer, they receive four points, etc. The small group with the most points at the end of the game wins. Consider giving the winning team a family-themed prize like grandma’s chocolate chip cookies.

Use the following sample questions to get started, but be sure to add your own:

- Name the most classic family vacation.
- Name something often associated with the youngest child in a family.
- Name something a five-year-old might pray for.
- Name something an eight-year-old might bring with them when they stay at grandma’s house.

- Name the least favorite household chore of every teen.
- Name an occasion when parents let their kids eat candy.
- Name something kids bring home from school.
- Name an excuse a teen gives for not having their homework completed.
- Name a famous sitcom family.
- Name the oldest thing in your parent's house.
- Name a children's TV show that teaches a valuable life lesson.
- Name something a parent might do if their child's pet goldfish dies.
- Name the best game to play with your family.
- Name something you would not want to leave in the house when you go on a family vacation.
- Name a take-out food a family might have for dinner.
- Name another term for "mother."
- Name an app every teen has on their phone.

PROCLAIM

"Speak" Teaching (15 min)

Be a Martyr

Confirmation is a brand new stage of our lives within the Church. As with any new chapter, it brings new challenges. One of these new challenges is being a better witness of faith.

CCC 1303-1304

Read Acts 2:1-11.

While Jesus was on Earth, the apostles were witnesses of faith. They brought people to Christ, learned from His teachings, and watched as He performed miracles. But at Pentecost, the apostles became witnesses of faith in a totally new way. Receiving the Holy Spirit turned the apostles into leaders in faith rather than followers. The Spirit's graces enabled them to boldly proclaim the Gospel themselves.

CCC 1302

Confirmation transforms us in the same way. Since our baptism, we have been witnesses of Christ. But in Confirmation, the Holy Spirit gives us many new graces, including new strength to share and defend the faith.

CCC 1303-1304

When someone is a "witness of faith," they share the faith in their words and actions. In writings from the earliest days of the Church, the words "witness" and "martyr" were used interchangeably. Martyrs are those who are faithful to Christ to the point of dying for their faith.

CCC 2471-2474

Read Matthew 16:24-27.

It is unlikely — though not impossible — that we will be asked to die for Christ. But fearlessly speaking about and living our faith will cause us to suffer at times. The graces from Confirmation enable us to endure that suffering and willingly lay down our lives for Christ, even if martyrdom is not asked of us.

For added discussion, play the video “Hero to Zero” to illustrate how we may want to be heroic; a witness of faith (or heroic action) requires the willingness to sacrifice, otherwise we simply are cowards or hypocrites.

Consider explaining the terms “red martyrdom” and “white martyrdom.” Discuss how both require death — white martyrdom in a spiritual sense and red martyrdom in a physical sense.

Sponsor Me

When you get confirmed, you will receive graces to make you a better witness of faith. But what does that practically mean? How do you live every day as a witness of faith? When learning anything new — like how to ride a bike, for example — it helps if someone teaches us that skill or provides an example we can follow. In learning how to be witnesses of faith, it makes sense to look to people who have lived and are living the faith.

Ask the teens to identify someone who is a good witness of faith.

Christ knew we could not live the faith on our own, so He established the Church to unite all of the faithful and enable us to support one another as we grow in holiness. For our faith to flourish, it is vital that we surround ourselves with people who live the Catholic faith well.

In Confirmation, we choose a sponsor who shows us how to be a witness of faith. Unlike other role models in our lives, we do not choose our Confirmation sponsors simply because we admire their personalities or talents. A confirmation sponsor must be committed to accompanying you as you both grow in faith together.

Christ and the Church have established the framework for living an authentic Catholic life. But even within that framework, being a witness of faith looks slightly different for each person. Confirmation sponsors should understand the challenges you face in your faith and call you to holiness through those struggles.

Tell the teens about whom you chose as your Confirmation sponsor, why you chose them, and how they have helped you.

When looking for witnesses of faith, it is easy to automatically think of those around us. It is drastically important for us to have people in our lives who are good examples of faith, but we should not forget that there are three stages of the Church — three groups who can help us as we follow Christ.

Friends In High Places

As Catholics, we know that death is not the end. When we die, we hope to be with Christ in heaven; so the Church is not just those on Earth, but also those who are in purgatory and in heaven.

CCC 954-955

Consider exploring the titles of the three stages of the Church: church triumphant, church suffering, and church militant.

Each of the three stages of the Church can help us in different ways. Members of the Church on Earth — like our Confirmation sponsors — are obviously with us here and now. It is easy to communicate with them and receive their help when we need support in our faith. They have special insights and advice on how to witness to the faith well amid the challenges of our modern society.

Use CCC 958 to explain our spiritual connection to those in purgatory.

Those in heaven — the saints — offer us something incredibly precious. The saints are the ultimate witnesses of faith. They have faced the challenges of this life and remained faithful to Christ and the Church through it all. But the saints offer us much more than just their example. Of all of the members of the Church, the saints are the most united to Christ, as they are joined with Him in heaven. They want to spend eternity praising God and helping the Church on Earth.
CCC 956-957

Constantly present before God in heaven, the saints continually intercede for us and share God's graces with us as we face our daily struggles. Just as the members of the Church on Earth can help us grow closer to Christ, the saints — who have an even deeper connection to God — want to help us grow in friendship with the Lord.
CCC 956-957

In Confirmation, we bring two witnesses of faith into our lives in new ways. We not only choose a Confirmation sponsor, but we also choose a new name — a saint whom we seek to imitate and whose intercession for us becomes that much more personal. As you look for a Confirmation saint, ask the Lord which saints He wants you to know better. Keep your eyes and ears open for saints who may be reaching out to you.

When looking for a sponsor, we mentioned the importance of someone who knows you well and can call you on to holiness in specific ways. The same is true of a confirmation saint! Look for a saint with whom you hold things in common. We have many saints in the Church, so you are bound to share similar hobbies and life circumstances with someone.

Among the saints is one particular saint who is the perfect witness of faith. Someone who, unlike the other saints, lived a perfect life while on Earth, giving us a perfect example of how to follow Christ. Someone whose intercession for us and friendship with us is totally unique.

CCC 967-968

Invite the teens to guess who in heaven is pre-eminent among the saints.

Mary is not only Jesus' mother, she is our mother, too. She followed Christ as He established the Church, remained with the apostles as they continued to share the Gospel, and continues to care for the Church even after her Assumption into heaven. Mary's perfection may seem intimidating, but she loves us perfectly, loves Christ perfectly, and wants nothing more than to bring us into her perfect love. As we learn to be better witnesses of faith, Mary is our greatest ally.

CCC 963-966, 969

As you prepare for and receive Confirmation, and begin living your role in the Church in a new way, always look to those who have gone before you in faith like the Blessed Mother and the saints in heaven. We need to continue to pray for those seeking heaven like the souls in purgatory and those on Earth. The Church is a family; we all exist to support one another. Everyone in the Church needs your witness of faith as much as you need theirs.
CCC 959

BREAK

Meet Your Extended Family (25 min)

Prior to the session, set up several saint/blessed stations. Include a picture, candle, and one of the *Saint Stations* handouts for the corresponding saint or blessed at each station. Divide the teens into their Confirmation small groups. Assign each small group a station, or combine multiple small groups for a given station. Instruct the groups to head to their assigned station and select one teen to light the candle. Invite a teen to read the summary of the saint or blessed and then have another teen read the quote and prayer. After about five minutes, instruct the teens to rotate to the next station. Continue until all of the small groups have visited every station.

SEND

Litany of Saints (10 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Introduce the prayer activity, using the following as an example:

The Litany of Saints is one of the oldest prayers of the Catholic faith, dating back to the fifth century. As the faithful, we pray it on the Feast of All Saints, during the Easter Vigil, and during the ordination masses of bishops, priests, and deacons. In this prayer, we ask God for His divine protection and implore numerous saints by name to pray for us. Just as we might ask our grandmother, or perhaps an aunt or uncle, to pray for us during a difficult time, we use this prayer to ask our extended family in heaven to intercede for us.

Prior to the session, print out copies of the *Litany of Saints* handout or project it on a screen. Lead the teens through the prayer to close the session.

Handout: Saint Stations

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Biography

In 1531, Mary appeared to a poor man, Juan Diego, on Tepeyac Hill and told him to ask the bishop to build a church there. This was during a time in Mexico when the majority of people were still worshipping false gods and sacrificing tens of thousands of people every year. Juan Diego did as Mary instructed, but the bishop did not believe him and asked him for a sign. Mary appeared to Juan Diego again and told him to go pick roses to take to the bishop as a sign, even though it was December, a time when roses did not normally grow. Juan Diego did as Mary asked and when he opened his tilma to show the bishop the roses, the image of the Lady of Guadalupe was on his tilma. The bishop had the church built and because of this miracle, millions of Mexicans converted to the Catholic faith. Our Lady of Guadalupe is patroness of the unborn and the Americas. The tilma, although made of a poor material and not properly preserved, has not deteriorated in over 450 years. There are numerous other amazing facts about the tilma: photo imaging has shown that the eyes of Mary reflect what she saw that day when she appeared to Juan Diego; in 1921, a bomb was hidden in a vase and placed at the foot of the tilma and although the bomb destroyed part of the church, the tilma was not harmed; the stars on the tilma show the constellations that would have been present in the sky on the exact day of the apparition.

Quote

“Am I not here, I, who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, the crossing of my arms? Am I not the source of all your joy? What more do you need? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego

Prayer

Dear Mother, we love you. We thank you for your promise to help us in our need. We trust in your love that dries our tears and comforts us. Teach us to find our peace in your Son, Jesus, and bless us every day of our lives. Help us build a shrine in our hearts. Make it as beautiful as the one built for you on the mount of Tepeyac, a shrine full of trust, hope, and love for Jesus that grows stronger each day. Holy Mary, you have chosen to remain with us by giving us your most wonderful and holy image on Juan Diego's cloak. May we feel your loving presence as we look upon your face. Like Juan Diego, give us the courage to bring your message of hope to everyone. You are our mother and inspiration. Hear our prayers and answer us. Amen.

Blessed Solanus Casey

Biography

Blessed Solanus Casey was born on a farm in Wisconsin in 1870. He was the sixth child in a family of ten boys and six girls. At the age of 21, after working a few jobs, Solanus entered the seminary in Milwaukee. His studies were very difficult, so he left and joined the Capuchins in

Detroit in 1896. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1904, but was not allowed to hear confessions or preach due to his lack of theological knowledge. Solanus served as porter and sacristan at different parishes in New York and was able to give spiritual talks. People were impressed by his spiritual fire. Every week, 150 to 200 people would come to the services he conducted for the sick. Many came for a blessing while others came for a consultation. Solanus was always willing to listen, no matter who the person was. He would always show love and concern for non-Catholics. One of the main attributes of his spirituality was that of gratitude. He would say “thanks be to God” many times throughout the day. During the Great Depression, his deep concern for the poor inspired the Capuchins to start a soup kitchen that is still open today.

Quote

"I'm offering my sufferings that all might be one. If only I could see the conversion of the whole world."

Blessed Solanus Casey

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the witness of Blessed Solanus Casey. Help us imitate his humility and love of neighbor, especially of the sick among us. Help us always have a spirit of gratitude and awareness that every good and perfect gift comes from you. Amen.

St. Jose Sanchez del Rio

Biography

Saint Jose Sanchez del Rio was born in Mexico in 1913. When he was 14 years old, a revolution broke out in his country. The Catholic Church was greatly persecuted — many bishops, priests, and members of the laity were tortured and killed. Jose begged his mother to allow him to join the Catholic group that was fighting for their religious freedom, known as the Cristeros. His mother reluctantly agreed. When Jose approached the general of the Cristeros, he was told he was too young to fight but after much insistence, the general agreed to let him carry the flag. One day, Jose gave his horse to the general when the general's horse was shot. Jose was captured and placed in a church sacristy that had been turned into a prison. The enemy soldiers were keeping prize-fighting roosters in the church for safekeeping. Jose, being deeply disturbed by the sacrilege, snapped all of the roosters' necks. He was found guilty of being an enemy of the state and was sentenced to execution. Jose was given the opportunity to deny his faith and be released, but he refused. He always replied, “I will never give in. Viva Cristo Rey, long live Christ the King.” He prayed the rosary and sang praises to God while imprisoned. Jose was tortured while walking to his execution. The soldiers told him that if he said, “death to Christ the King,” the painful walk would stop. Jose's faith did not falter and he continued to respond, “Viva Cristo Rey.” He even told the soldiers he forgave them. Jose's last words before he was shot were, “Viva Cristo Rey.”

Quote

"I am resigned to the will of God. I die happy because I die beside our Lord. Do not afflict yourselves because of my death, since to die for God gives me joy."

St. Jose Sanchez del Rio

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the witness of St. Jose Sanchez del Rio. Help us to have the same incredible courage that Jose had in the midst of persecution. Give us strength to stand up for the truth when we are tempted to deny you in little and big ways throughout the day, even though it may be difficult. May our battle cry be the same as Jose's: long live Christ the King! Amen.

St. Gianna Molla

Biography

Gianna was born in Italy on October 4, 1922. Throughout her life, she continually helped others and inspired them with her faith. She was part of Catholic Action, a lay movement that focuses on prayer, service, and sacrifice. In 1952, she completed her degree in pediatrics and committed to caring for the bodies and souls of her patients. In 1955, she married Pietro Molla and they had three children. After suffering two miscarriages, Gianna became pregnant again. During the second month of her pregnancy, Gianna developed a fibroma on her uterus. After examination, the doctors gave her three choices: have an abortion, which would save her life and allow her to continue to have children; have a complete hysterectomy, which would preserve her life, but take the unborn child's life and prevent future pregnancy; or remove only the fibroma with the potential of further complications. Roman Catholic teaching would have allowed her to obtain a hysterectomy, but forbid an abortion. Wanting to preserve her child's life, she opted for the removal of the fibroma. After the operation, she experienced many complications. Gianna was quite clear about her wishes, expressing to her family, "This time it will be a difficult delivery, and they may have to save one or the other — I want them to save my baby." Her practice of self-gift as a part of Catholic Action and as a wife and mother led to the ultimate self-gift: giving her life so her child might live.

Quote

"We cannot love without suffering and we cannot suffer without love."

St. Gianna Molla

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the witness of St. Gianna Molla. Help us have a radical love like hers. Show us how to lay down our lives for those around us, both in our homes and at our schools. Help us have the courage to sacrifice for the good of those we encounter every day and show us how to keep our gaze fixed on heaven. Amen.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

Biography

Edith Stein was born to Jewish parents in Germany in 1891. Even as a young child, Edith showed great intellectual ability. She received her doctorate in philosophy *summa cum laude*

from the University of Freiburg. In her pursuit of truth — particularly after reading the biography of St. Teresa of Avila — Edith was led to the Catholic Church. She devoted her time to teaching, lecturing, writing, and translating and quickly became a renowned philosopher and author. Edith had a strong devotion to St. John of the Cross and wrote a lot about the cross and suffering in humanity. She had a longing to join the Carmelite order and with the onset of World War II, her spiritual director gave her permission to enter. She took the name Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. As the Jewish persecution continued, Sr. Teresa secretly moved to Holland and it was there that she wrote her last work, "The Science of the Cross." Soon, however, the Nazis invaded Holland and Sr. Teresa was taken to the Auschwitz death camp. She died in the gas chambers in 1942. Saint Teresa's writings continue to influence many philosophers and theologians today.

Quote

"Things were in God's plan which I had not planned at all. I am coming to the living faith and conviction that — from God's point of view — there is no chance and that the whole of my life, down to every detail, has been mapped out in God's divine providence and makes complete and perfect sense in God's all-seeing eyes."

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for the witness of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Help us to never tire of seeking truth. Give us the courage to stand up for our convictions, even in the midst of persecution and suffering. Help us embrace our cross daily. Amen.

Handout: Litany of Saints

Lord, have mercy on us. *Lord, have mercy on us.*
Christ, have mercy on us. *Christ, have mercy on us.*
Lord, have mercy on us. *Lord, have mercy on us.*
Christ, hear us. *Christ, graciously hear us.*
God, the Father of heaven, *have mercy on us.*
God the Son, redeemer of the world, *have mercy on us.*
God the Holy Spirit, *have mercy on us.*
Holy Trinity, one God, *have mercy on us.*
Holy Mary, *pray for us.*
Holy Mother of God, *pray for us.*
Holy virgin of virgins, *pray for us.*
St. Michael, *pray for us.*
St. Gabriel, *pray for us.*
St. Raphael, *pray for us.*
All you holy angels and archangels, *pray for us.*
St. Blaise, *pray for us.*
St. Agatha, *pray for us.*
St. Lucy, *pray for us.*
St. Leo of Patara, *pray for us.*
St. Ignatius of Antioch, *pray for us.*
All you holy men and women, *pray for us.*
All you holy saints of God, *pray for us.*
Christ, hear us. *Christ, graciously hear us.*
Lord Jesus, hear our prayer. *Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.*
Lord, have mercy on us. *Lord, have mercy on us.*
Christ, have mercy on us. *Christ, have mercy on us.*
Lord, have mercy on us. *Lord, have mercy on us.*

Adapted from ewtn.com/devotionals/litanies/saints.htm.