Instructions for Using "The Way" Program

RELATES TO JESUS:
Jesus is the ultimate example of what the existence of God is, Love itself. Therefore by knowing Jesus we can understand the existence of God even more.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
We are called to know, love, and serve God. Understanding the existence of God helps us to know Him. It is always good to explore more ways to know God exists and who He is.

Follow the simple instructions below:
1. Watch Video on the website: .
2. Review the "relates to..." section to the left. This is helpful to understand what to convey to your child is important about this lesson. It will help make the lesson both an intellectual and a lived lesson.
3. Read through and familiarize yourself with the sample script.
4. Teach your child the lesson, either using your own words or the sample script.
5. Either discuss the questions with your child (best option), or have your child write out answers to the questions.
6. Have your child do the activities and/or do the activities with them.
7. If working with a parish return the appropriate material in the way they have requested.
Sample Script:

God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, exists eternally as a communion of persons, meaning that the love that is shown to one is the same love that is shown to all. The nature of this relationship is such that it is not one of dominance or who can best the other, much like the pagan gods of old, but rather is a relationship of mutuality and unity that seeks eternally to simply love and love to the full.

The love expressed between the persons of the Trinity is not meant to reside simply within the Trinity. Rather, it is a love that goes out constantly to be freely shared, especially with the pinnacle of His creation, humanity. We can think of the love of God in this way, every single person that has been created is given a soul and is thus given a unique set of skills and talents to be used. Now, God doesn’t create junk and He doesn’t create because He is bored; He creates out of love and with the intent for each and every person to bring glory and praise to His name.

Each soul He intends for greatness by calling them to holiness and to carry out His Divine Plan so people may encounter God and fall in love with Him. So, God’s plan for us is to experience His love and to fall in love with Him. Relationship with God, the inner life of love in the Trinity, is what it is all about.

You have probably heard by now, through all your years in religious education, that all of Scripture and the Christian life can be summed up in the five words of “love God and love neighbor”. The love of God, a love that explains who He is and who He wants us to imitate in this life, is not a love that is kept strictly to ourselves. It is a love that is so intense and so alive within us that it calls us to go outside of ourselves and share with others.

Now, this might seem strange or perhaps even too much to ask, but consider this: when we get excited about something or something good happens to us that we have been anticipating for a really long time, what is usually one of the first things we do? We scream, we jump for joy, and we go and tell someone about it! The good news that we have received is often immediately shared. We can’t keep it in, so we tell our parents, our siblings, our friends, and now-a-days we put it on Instagram and share with our 1,000 followers this very exciting moment in our lives.

Bring this to love now. When we fall in love with another person, all the above reactions apply but times it by 10. Love infiltrates every aspect of our life and is the topic of all of our conversations for months and years. You talk about this person you are in love with at every moment you can. The world needs to know about this person who makes you feel alive in ways that you didn’t even know was possible!

Going a step further now, a big step further, take this to God. God loves you so much, that He created you. He loves you so much that even when we reject Him, He loves you. He loves you so much, that even when you turn your back on Him, He suffers and dies for you on the Cross. He loves you so much, that He rose from the dead for you. He loves you so much, that He opened the gates of Heaven for you and sent the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen you through the ministry of the Church.

What is your response? Are you willing to die to your selfish ways (give them up) and live a life for God that responds to the love He has shown you? Are you willing to get excited about God in your life like you get excited about your new PS4 game or that grade on your test? Are you willing to fall in love with God who loves you so and grow in relationship with Him through Mass and prayer and serving others? Are you willing to proclaim God with your life in words and deeds so that others will say “I want what she has” and allow the God of love to infiltrate their life? We are called to respond to Love with love. When we do, we live the mission of the Church as given us by God.

Questions:

- What does love within the Trinity look like?
- Consider the most exciting thing in your life right now. Why does this excite you?
- Is there anything in this excitement that reminds you of God? Ask God to show you how this speaks to you of God.
- What is the scariest thing about knowing that God loves you?
- How comfortable are you in sharing your relationship with God?

Activities:

Write out the various questions and thoughts that you have regarding God. After you have created a list, gather together with a friend or two, and discuss with them their ideas on the topic.

Together, with your family, discuss how comfortable you each are with living a life after the model of Jesus Christ. Discuss why it is important and what struggles and concerns that you each have.
There are a great many blessings that come from being a member of the Catholic Church. One of the greatest advantages is the fact that it is the original Christian Church that was set up by Jesus Christ. Further, the Church holds a seamless tradition that can be traced all the way back to the first Apostles who walked with and sat with Jesus during His earthly life. And still further yet, throughout the decades and centuries, the Church has grown in her understanding of all that has been revealed through the use of natural philosophic and scientific means that have assisted to unpack what is the fullness of Christian faith. The use of Sacred Scripture and all that has been revealed with the use of Sacred Tradition and all that has been prayed over and studied and put to the test and found true makes up the Catholic Church and our claim to having the fullness of the faith.

**RELATES TO JESUS:**

Jesus is the fullness of revelation and how we can understand and explain even those things which science and reason teaches us.

**RELATES TO MY FAITH:**

Relying not just on science and reason, but using faith as well, we can come to a full understanding of the world created by the Father.

**Sample Script:**

There are a great many blessings that come from being a member of the Catholic Church. One of the greatest advantages is the fact that it is the original Christian Church that was set up by Jesus Christ. Further, the Church holds a seamless tradition that can be traced all the way back to the first Apostles who walked with and sat with Jesus during His earthly life. And still further yet, throughout the decades and centuries, the Church has grown in her understanding of all that has been revealed through the use of natural philosophic and scientific means that have assisted to unpack what is the fullness of Christian faith. The use of Sacred Scripture and all that has been revealed with the use of Sacred Tradition and all that has been prayed over and studied and put to the test and found true makes up the Catholic Church and our claim to having the fullness of the faith.
Now, at a foundational level, moving all revelation aside for the moment, we can be certain of the existence of God through very natural means. One popular strand of thought is the reality that exists around the order of nature. So many examples exist here, from the intelligence of cells that “know” to make x part within our bodies to the rhythm of the sun and moon and the necessary axis of the earth, it seems quite easy to arrive at the point that these can be no chance product of chaotic life but rather that there is a Designer that has given all the rules and purposes that have ordered these things.

Another example exists in the arguments for things like beauty. What is beautiful? While there is for sure some truth in the “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” idea, there is an objective beauty that exists. Nature is a good source here, a piece of art, a work of music, etc.; there exists the idea of beauty and its ability to grab our attention and inspire. There must be some point at which all beauty flows allowing for the order and harmony to exist and be experienced within our daily lives.

While these and undoubtedly countless other examples can be reliable guides for determining the existence of God by using our natural reason alone (science is such a helpful witness in providing evidence for the existence of God!), we also need to see life with the eyes of faith and revelation to come to know deeper truths about God. Science is not able to explain everything that we hold to be true in our daily lives, and so the gift of revelation within our life of faith answers some of the questions that we cannot discover using strictly our own gift of reason. For example the fact that God is not just a watchmaker, or a rule maker, or a tyrant, but in fact a loving Father. This dual approach of science and revelation, faith and reason, shows the holistic approach that God calls us to embrace in our earthly lives so that we may experience life to the full.

Jesus Christ is the fullness of this revelation, He reveals through His earthly life the reality of the loving Father that God is. Jesus shows the love of the Father through His teachings and through His miracles, proclaiming the mercy God has for His people despite their sinfulness. Revelation calls us to participate in the life God the Father has prepared for us, to live holy lives and receive the Holy Spirit so that our faith might be enlivened to do the same incredible things that Jesus, the Apostles, and the Saints have done throughout the ages. Let us use the gifts of our reason and intellect to continue to ask questions that come up in this life and have the faith to measure these questions in light of the teaching of the Church. Together, using our faith and reason, and most importantly, praying to God and inviting Him into our quest for knowledge, may we come to a greater understanding of the Love that desires us each to be full and whole.

Questions:
- What does it mean that God is a loving Father?
- What can we know about God using natural reasoning?
- Why do we need to have faith with science (or reasoning)?
- How does Jesus show us who the Father is?
- How do the rules of the Church make more sense if we understand God as Father?

Activities:
With your parents permission, research a couple of “proofs” of God on the internet (or have them print a couple for you), or look at the proofs in the script. Then try to rewrite one of these proofs in your own words.

Come up with some topics that science cannot fully explain. Write out how Faith might be able to give answers that science does not.
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RELATES TO JESUS:
Life in Jesus affords us the roadmap necessary to carry out God’s plan for us. Following Jesus, we can be sure not to go astray if we stay close to Him.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
Our life of faith as Jesus’ disciple is one that will not necessarily be easy, but will find fulfillment as we operate under the care and concern of our Shepherd.
Sample Script:

One of Jesus’ many titles is that He is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. He shows us He is the way by role modeling for us a life lived with one’s entire self focused in on the ways of God the Father. He shows us He is the truth by saying the things men need to hear, saying the things that truly help them (cf. Ephesians 4:29); building people up with the truth of God. He shows us He is the life by His presence through the moments of our own life and accompanying us through prayer and the Sacramental life.

In following Jesus with our entire person, we offer ourselves to walk with the author of life. We invite and allow Jesus to be a part of everything; our morning routine before school, our friendships, our speech, our study habits, our free time, our brush of our teeth, etc. We offer the Son of God everything, our good times, our bad times, our bored times, our sinful times, our joyful times. We ask for His help and direction and when we do, making every effort to keep Him in our life, we will find peace, fulfillment, and happiness in a life well lived.

Further, if we are preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are preparing our hearts to receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts afford us a special grace to participate in the life of the Trinity that keeps us both connected more intimately with the Trinity and allows us to be a greater witness of the presence of God in our life. We become better suited to adhere to the will of God and live the life that He has planned for us.

Questions:
- How is Jesus “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”?
- Why do we need Jesus to walk with us during our life?
- Why do you think Jesus wants you to talk to Him about your sins?
- What do the Gifts of the Holy Spirit do to help us in our life of faith?
- Why is it so important to be a good role model of the faith for others?

Activities:

Brainstorm together as a family the various ways that you could practice the faith at home. Commit to an option, perhaps a new option, and routinely practice supporting each other in living out this particular aspect of the faith (i.e. praying together before meals).

As you get comfortable practicing the particular aspect of faith at home, consider practicing this aspect out in public.

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The Holy Spirit is alive and present in and throughout the Church, guiding souls to encounter God and to live a fulfilled life of cooperation with grace. While the Holy Spirit is alive and available to all in the Church in various ways, it is in the Sacrament of Confirmation that the Holy Spirit plays an explicit role in ordaining the soul with completion and gifts that fully initiate the recipient in the Catholic Church. Confirmation is necessary for the soul to live a rich spiritual life in the faith.

The Holy Spirit enriches the confirmation recipient with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, piety, fear of the Lord, fortitude, and counsel enliven the soul to live a life committed to the Church and to be a vessel of grace that encourages others to engage with God. The gifts of the Holy Spirit allow the recipient to live out the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy that not only serve our brothers and sisters in love but allows the individual to grow in holiness as he/she witnesses to the presence of Jesus. Further, the gifts reveal the face of the Trinity in great clarity for the betterment and well-being of the faithful.

Wisdom offers judgment about divine things while also affording direction in human affairs. Knowledge keeps one on the straight path of justice, correctly making decisions on matters of faith and right action. Understanding is the penetrating to the heart of things and the ability to see as God sees. Piety is the reverence shown to God and to the things that are of God. Fear of the Lord is revering God in
that we never want to be separated from Him; it is not a fear that wants to control and sub serve. Fortitude is firmness of mind to do good and avoid evil, especially when it is difficult, with eyes and heart always fixed on God. Counsel is allowing the direction of God to control his life, knowing that this is best for his salvation.

Operation within the gifts of the Holy Spirit with firm intention and a desire to bring glory to God will yield the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits are kindness, generosity, joy, charity, self-control, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, chastity, peace, patience, and modesty. These fruits are truly gifts that come forth from a life well lived that is focused on the things of God, sharing the love of God with others, and ordering oneself after the model set forth by His Son Jesus Christ. While all of these fruits are important, one stands out; namely self-control or perhaps another name that could be used is balance. Everything in life needs to have a balance or it will throw things off one way or the other. Too little and you’ll be lacking in your approach; too much and you’ll be weighed down, unable to adequately take on what else what be needed. Self-control tempers our approach on things and orders us to appropriately engage a situation.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of the Holy Spirit as received at Confirmation is the role it takes on in enhancing our spiritual lives. Here, the Holy Spirit affords the recipient with a special line of connection to the Trinity, as we stated earlier, reflects the image of God on the recipient that can also be available for the entire world to see. The Holy Spirit conveys the love and mercy of God, a message that is of desperate need in our world today. It is important to state that God’s love and mercy is for every single person and it is of special responsibility for the confirmed soul to communicate this important reality frequently in their words and deeds with others.

The Holy Spirit helps to root out sin by making the recipient aware of his short comings and prompts him to uproot this sin so the temple of his body can be a worthy dwelling place for Him. The Holy Spirit causes the desire to seek forgiveness for a wrong done or an omission left undone, reaching out to the other if necessary but certainly being able to forgive oneself and to seek forgiveness from the Almighty God. Humility is a grace given here, to humbly ask for mercy and to make a commitment not to fall into this sin again. Perhaps even more miraculous is the strength to live a life that actively and consistently forgives others and shows mercy towards them and their wrongs. Here, the face of God is revealed to the other and the grace of the Holy Spirit is passed along for the other to encounter.

**Questions:**
- Why is the Holy Spirit so important for the Confirmed soul?
- What are the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Explain a bit about each one.
- How do the Gifts of the Holy Spirit allow us to assist others?
- What are the Fruits of the Holy Spirit?
- Talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring forgiveness and mercy.

**Activities:**

As a family, discuss the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are some of your favorites? Which one, as a family, could you work on?

As a family, discuss the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. What are some of your favorites? Which one, as a family, could you pray for and work towards?
God exists. We hear people and television and social media and billboards say this all the time. Now, don’t get me wrong, they are right. But how do we know? How can we prove God exists?

A popular argument that I think is pretty helpful for us today is one from natural reason. So, just for a moment, let’s take everything we have with Catholicism and religion and move these aside. Now, consider something we experience every day, let’s say simply the world around us. We see the grass and the trees and all the created world and we could ask how did those get here? Well, we could say seeds were planted and grass grew or acorns fell and took root and eventually trees sprouted up. Ok, how did the dirt to nurture the seeds come about? Some formulaic combination of molecules to make dirt made the dirt but what about the molecules? You can continue in this fashion to look at the rock under the dirt, the earth, the sun, the universe and you would still have the question where did thing x come from? There has to be some initial, first, ultimate cause of things from which everything can trace its source… This is what we call God.

There are a number of arguments one could put forth from simply natural reason that can bring us to God. Science, more and more and as we become advanced, in fact points more clearly to the existence of God.
Questions:

- What are some things we can know about God from reason, and what are some things we need revelation for?
- Why did God give us the Scriptures?
- What does it mean for God to be revealed as a Father to us?
- How can the Bible help us to know God better?
- How often should we read the Bible?

Activities:

Read the Creation story in the first three chapters of Genesis, explain in a paragraph something it teaches us about God.

Choose one of the Gospels and read a couple paragraphs a day each day of this week.
God creates us each to have a life of love and fullness that is found in relationship with Him. God wants you and me to be fully alive in this life so that we can be the daughters and sons that He calls us to be for eternity right here and right now. The fullness that He desires for us to possess is just a participation of the true fullness that awaits us in Heave. A life lived in right relationship with God allows for a fullness in this life that is beyond anything else that we can experience in this life. Let’s talk a little bit about why this is so.

The fullness of Christian life, commonly referred to as living a life that is centered in Jesus Christ in faith and morals, allows us humans the opportunity to engage the maximum potential of our given gifts and talents and use these in the proper order during our lifetime. Aristotle, in the Greek philosopher's reflection on such things in life, spoke of the good life as one centered in on virtue. He called virtue that middle path which was neither deficient in a particular thing nor was it excessive; one’s particular possession of said thing was balanced or virtuous. A helpful example here might be one from the perspective of hunger. When you or I am hungry, and pizza is served, we eat the amount that fills us up, let’s say 3 pieces. If we eat 1 or 2 pieces, we are still hungry and thus deficient in satisfying our hunger. If we eat 4 or 5 pieces, we overate and have a stomach ache and thus excessive in satisfying our hunger. The 3 pieces of pizza satisfied the hunger and was thus the balanced or virtuous approach.

RELATES TO JESUS:
Jesus Christ gives us the gift of the divine life of grace so that you and I can live like Him and experience the love of the Trinity in our life.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
We must share the love we have received so that those that we encounter might also experience God and the life available to them within the Church.

Sample Script:
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Our moral life is similar. We need to seek the balance or the virtuous approach to living this life. When God created us, He created us with a capacity to be full. Original Sin threw this off-balance however, allowing for excessive and deficient behavior to be all too easy to fall into. So, our life of faith and morals needs to reach out for and accept the grace of God to order and balance our life around the virtuous life. The question becomes though, “How?”. We live in such a culture that is full of and glorifies excessive and deficient behavior, and to make matters worse, it is often more difficult to walk the path of virtue. We certainly need assistance in living the virtuous life, so the question of how is a very good one indeed.

We need the grace of God for sure and we seek His grace through prayer, attending weekly Sunday Mass, and being active in receiving the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Living the virtuous life can be difficult and so seeking the grace of the Eucharist (to let the Son of God intentionally abide with us) and Reconciliation (asking for forgiveness and the strength to overcome our struggles against deficient/excessive behavior) are important pieces that are common pillars for the person seeking to live a virtuous life. We each need to call upon and seek the help of our guardian angels who are given to us by God to assist us in following God’s voice throughout our life. These angels protect us and help to keep the temptations of the demons at bay, strengthening us to adhere to the will of God. We each need to stay close to the Saints, the holy men and women upheld by the Church for living exemplary lives. The Saints, whether they be saints our family grew up with or saints that we have researched for a project or even our chosen saint for Confirmation, are guides that often overcame many trials and tribulations to achieve holiness. Their example is one that we can look to in our quest to live a balanced life. We need to also look to our loved ones, the holy family and friends that we have in our life who are doing their best to form their relationship with God and live a life centered on faith and morals, seeking the virtuous balance of what is required for a happy life.

God, in His loving care for creation, desires that the height of His creation, humanity, be happy and live a life that is full. The assistance of the created order around us, our guardian angel, the Saints, our family and friends, and even nature itself can help us to stay close to God and to inspire us to lead a virtuous life. When we live with this order, with this attempt towards balance, we find peace in our life which brings us to a place of true, authentic joy. By living a virtuous life, we give glory to God but also continue the work of living His creation for others to encounter. When another person sees the order by which you are living, you show God’s presence through your life and point to His existence in and around creation. The evidence of God’s love in the created world, and having His creation respond to that love by living a life rooted in His love, allows all the created world to rejoice and sing praise to the One who gives life to all.

**Questions:**
- What sort of life does God create us to have?
- What does virtuous life mean?
- How can guardian angels help us to live the life God created us to have?
- What does it mean to have a life of balance?
- How can the created world help us to see God and live the life He wants us to have?

**Activities:**
Create a list of ways in which you live a virtuous life (one that is balanced not going too far or falling short of goodness).

Find a saint that you like and write a paragraph on how they lived a life God created them to live.
God is a loving God who creates us in His image and likeness so that you and I can experience His divine life of grace, be in relationship with Him, and find fullness and happiness in this relationship as He journeys with you and me to help become the holy saints that we are each called to be. Our relationship with God is thus the most important relationship that we will have in this life and requires us to play an important role in forming, developing, and sustaining this relationship.

It is kind of funny, but one of the most difficult things about life is relationship. We are hardwired to have relationships and we find ourselves in relationship with ourselves, others, God, our pets, our hobbies, nature; the list goes on and on. Relationship is a significant part of what it means to be human. And again, relationships are often one of the toughest things about being human as our idea of relationship becomes slanted and disordered due to sin and can tend to stray away, sometimes far away, from what God intends for us in our relationships.

As we mentioned earlier, God desires us to be in relationship with Him so that we can encounter and live
n the fullness of what love is. God is love and all He can do is love so that when we are united to Him in relationship and we receive Him openly to experience a love like no other that can be found on earth. This love of God is one that never goes dry and in fact as we experience the love of God, His love calls us to go deeper and encounter Him at an even deeper level than before. His inexhaustible love sustains us and seeks to bring us ultimately to the total love that is promised us in Heaven after we leave this earth.

So the question becomes, how do you and I grow in our relationship with God and experience this life of love? We need to, in a certain sense, reclaim what relationship is from our distortion that comes from sin and from a world that has molded relationship into something that is much more shallow than it really is. First, we can all agree that we want to be happy! Each of us is on a quest to find happiness for ourselves in this life, and that is good thing. Now this quest for happiness can be towards good ends (being a loving father), neutral ends (finding the best piece of pizza), or even bad ends (gambling away the last bit of the paycheck), but each of these folks is looking for happiness. In our relationship with God, Who wants you and I to be so happy, we need to seek out the things we know that make God happy and pursue these in our life. So love, peace, joy, kindness, and the list of good things that are available for you and I in this life, these are the things in which we find happiness.

Second, we have freedom, free will, to shape our life and relationships as we see fit. However, and certainly tied to the good-neutral-bad list of pursuits of happiness above, there is a way that leads directly to God and way that does not. By simply freely choosing to do whatever it is that we want, without any regard for God and the other and solely focusing in on the self, we freely choose the wrong path. God is love again, and love is meant to go out to others and to be shared in order to help bring others to happiness and fullness. Love, peace, joy, kindness; these are fruits to be shared with others that lead to their happiness as well as yours. God created us to be free and He desires us to freely choose Him so that we might choose the ultimate good in this life. When we pursue these goods of God, and pursue Him, we are truly free in this life to use our free will as it is geared toward the Good, and not anything else that is insufficient or not good at all. Here too it is important to say that when we have God as our center, freely focusing our life on Him, the lesser goods of this life have their proper place and we won’t underuse or overuse these (we can play video games, but for the right amount of time and once our responsibilities are finished). The bad and sinful things of this world will have little or no hold on us as we will recognize these as being apart from our relationship with God and we, being free from the chains of oppression that sinful things bind us in as being in relationship with God, will be properly detached to freely choose the good that leads to God.

Third and finally we realize our responsibility as children of God to use our desire for happiness and our free will in the proper order as given you and me by God as being created in His love. We are called to order our life towards God which means we need to keep Him central in and through our daily life. We need to order our free will towards the things of God and choose that which is good at each moment to keep us moving with and towards God. Our desire for happiness in this life needs to pursue the things that will fill us and bring us to the Source of all happiness. Our relationship with God needs to be a primary relationship, rooted in Mass, daily prayer, reading the Bible and learning about Saints, and performing Works of Mercy towards our brothers and sisters, as our relationship with God will order our other relationships and drive our desire to be happy toward the ultimate meaning of fulfillment; namely loving God and loving neighbor.
Questions:

- Why is it so important to work at our relationship with God?
- How do you and I grow in our relationship with God?
- Consider the things that make you happy. What about these things bring you closer to God?
- How do you freely choose God in your life right now? Do you think about Him first in all your decisions? Do you think about Him at all?
- Why do you think it is so important to love your neighbor? How does this affect your relationship with God?

Activities:

Look at your answers to question 4. Take some time in prayer and write some ideas on how you can more intentionally and deliberately consider God in your day to day life.

Together, with a friend or family member, consider two or three achievable ideas that you could do together to charitably serve others. Discuss how these particular Works of Mercy would help you see God and help you to grow in your relationship with Him.
SIN

Eighth Grade

Sample Script:
The story of humanity’s sin against God is a sad tale indeed. Ruining the graces and love that God freely gave us so as to experience life as God intended is the most tragic tale in our history. Furthermore, the effects of sin in the personal lives of every human that has ever existed has caused much pain and suffering for our lives that should have been filled with harmony, justice, and holiness.

Thanks be to God, we have hope! Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, who came to save us from our sin. His mission, while taking place at a certain place and time within history, was a mission that God the Father knew of from the beginning. When Jesus came to Israel some 2,000 plus years ago, His life and teachings and works and death and resurrection was intended for every single human soul, from Adam all that way to the last human at the end of time, whoever that will be. The same Word that spoke over the dark, formless void in Genesis 1 and the same Lamb that is adored and glorified in Revelation is the One who God intended and sent on His redemptive mission to conquer the holds of sin and death over humanity.
Jesus, being the eternal Son of God, always is. While He has a set time in history in which He takes on flesh at the Incarnation, there never was a time when Jesus wasn’t nor will there ever be a time that He isn’t. Jesus is the eternal Word of God that speaks to humanity presently in every time and every age. Jesus is active and speaks to us personally, speaking relevantly to you and me specifically about the situations and dealings we are facing in our life, especially in the worst moments and events in our lives if we are willing and open to his mercy and love when all seems darkest and firmly place our trust in him. Rather than blaming God in those moments blame sin, because it is sin, freely chosen by us or others that brings all misery into our lives, and it is often not even our own. This is why no sin is private. All sin has disastrous consequences on all of humanity, even what we think is the most private of our sins, has at least a spiritual effect on all of us. That is the first lesson of the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. They were in a garden. Alone.

So, we come to understand that Jesus walks with you and me specifically to help us remedy our sins. If we allow Him to, Jesus Himself will encounter you and me right where we are at, much like the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and the man possessed by the unclean spirit (Mark 5:1-20). He will engage you as you are, speaking to you with love and compassion, and if we listen and allow Him to, He will heal you from that with which you struggle, giving you the grace to convert and follow after Him. In these moments, as in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), God runs out to meet you and rejoices in the return of one of His precious children (cf. Luke 15:4-7). By openly and honestly offering ourselves to Jesus Christ, we avail ourselves to the graces of reconciliation to and restoration of our relationship with God.

However, the question that might still exist is how can I experience this encounter with Jesus when He isn’t physically with me like He is in the Scriptures? While it is difficult, especially if we are struggling with serious sin, we need to avail ourselves to Jesus in prayer and beg Him for His love and mercy. Turning from our sin with intention and submitting ourselves to God, opening our heart to Him and inviting Him in, will open us to the grace to soften our heart and seek Him in the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We should also remember that Jesus’ real presence is in me when I receive Holy Communion in a worthy manner (with proper disposition[1]), and when I visit Him in Adoration or in His silent presence in the tabernacle in the Blessed Sacrament.

The grace to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the voice of Jesus Christ calling your name and leading you to encounter Him in a very real way to receive the mercy of God in your life. Approaching Reconciliation, we recognize our need for forgiveness for our sins. We recognize the harm we have caused God, our desire to say sorry, and the need we have to seek conversion and to do penance to receive forgiveness for the wrong we have participated in against God. Reconciliation heals us from our sins, restores our relationship with God, and opens us up to receive His love and mercy. Jesus, through His saving mission on the Cross, washes our sins away so thoroughly that they no longer exist before His eyes. We will not even be judged on them if we remain in the state of grace. All He sees in the repentant sinner is the beloved son or daughter that was so lovingly created by God.

Reconciliation not only heals us from our sins, restores us in relationship to God, and re-opens the pathway to salvation, but strengthens against committing future sin, even those which are habitual, though this will still take effort on our part to defeat entirely. Grace builds upon nature, and our nature has strong psychological and somatic (bodily) elements to it by way of habit, and habit can enslave us to sin. Think of the addicted gambler or the alcoholic or the person addicted in some way to pornography or sexual sins against oneself or another. Will these sins go away with one confession and one firm resolution not to commit them again? While it is certainly possible (because all things are possible with God), it will not occur without a great deal of work and sacrifice on our part and full cooperation with God’s grace because of the psychological dependency we develop when we engage in physically and mentally addicting habits. Another important reason is that we can be sure the devil is well aware of our weak spots and spiritual wounds, and he will tempt us where he knows we are most vulnerable. We must not forget the spiritual forces that are actively working against us, even in people who we may consider our friends, and especially in the culture around us that has no belief in God or even cares whether he exists or not despite the fact they, too, owe their very existence to Him. Like a physical wound that takes time to heal and remains vulnerable for a long time, so it is with spiritual wounds. Just like a physical injury, if we don’t protect and nurse it, and rehabilitate them with full care, our spiritual wounds, too, will not heal and will remain vulnerable to permanent injury.

Because of this broken human nature of ours, sin has a nagging tendency to return, and while it is equally as likely that a particular sin you have struggled with can be completely eradicated from your life by going to Reconciliation, prayer, reading Scripture, and actively working with perseverance to defeat it, we can never expect to defeat sin on our own. However, through God’s grace, like the Saints, we, too can become perfected and attain heaven directly.

The Good News is that the grace of the Sacrament provides us the strength necessary to encounter temptation with greater courage and to choose the good in ways that would not have been done before. This is the grace of
God working in your life. Reconciliation also brings peace. There are many stories of people who have struggled with a particular sin for a while, years, and after having prayed and gone to confession, they have felt the grace of great peace, knowing that this sin and the burden that goes along with sin has been lifted from them and destroyed in the abyss of God’s love and mercy. Jesus’ salvation from sin and His desire to walk alongside us, brings us grace that keeps us in His loving relationship.

Questions:

• The bad choices that take us further from God are called _____.
• Does God stop loving us when we sin?
• When we practice every day to make good choices, what type of life are we living?
• How does saying I’m sorry make a difference?
• Who do we need to put first in our lives?

Activities:

Think about a bad choice you have made that you have not asked forgiveness from God or from someone else. Ask for that forgiveness.

Talk with your parents about why sometimes it can be difficult to make good choices. Pray with them to ask for God’s help.

[1] “Proper disposition” is a term that means we are spiritually prepared to receive a sacrament. Different sacraments have different elements needed for proper disposition. Obviously, for baptism, reconciliation and even anointing of the sick, the point of those sacraments is to be cleansed or healed of serious (mortal) and all sin, but in the case of the other sacraments we should not approach them if we have serious sin on our souls and must be in a “state of grace”, (i.e., sanctifying grace), to receive them worthily. Proper disposition in all sacraments also includes our having a contrite and humble heart for all of one’s past sins, and an attitude of joy in anticipation of Whom we are about to receive, Jesus. We must also “believe all that the Catholic Church believes and professes to be revealed by Christ” (from the RCIA rite of reception into full communion with the Catholic Church). It is possible to not fully understand or even to have some aspects of doubt about some the Church’s teachings, but we must accept them with faith, ask the Holy Spirit to help us better understand them, honestly and objectively seek answers with an attitude of openness to God, and trust that the Church knows what she is talking about even if we don’t. It is always OK to ask questions and encouraged to seek answers from those qualified to answer them. It is never OK to publicly denounce them, and except for baptism and matrimony, we must also be Catholic to receive them.
CALL TO HOLINESS

Eighth Grade

Sample Script:

Our lives are meant to be lived to the full. God creates us out of love to share this life with Him and with others that we experience. We are called to discover our life’s direction and purpose by discovering our gifts and talents and putting these to use to build-up the awareness of God and proclaim Him to all. Coming to realize that God is the giver of all these gifts and recognizing the peace and joy that accompanies us for using our gifts for the glory of God, we desire to offer more and more to God in order to be like Him. This desire for holiness calls us forward in life to experience and explore what else God might be offering us in this life.

The desire to be more and more like God draws us to consider a life where each moment becomes an opportunity to grow closer to Him. We seek here to live a life centered in the virtues. With virtues, we are given the explicit chance to practice and begin to form as habit our life around the
constant model of Jesus Christ. By practicing and living the cardinal and theological virtues, we grow deeper in modeling ourselves after our Lord, and in becoming more like Him, invite others whom we come around to be more like Him.

The more we look like Jesus Christ in how we act and live, the more we grow in holiness and live out our vocation to be holy. This vocation or calling to be holy is given to us to experience the life God desires for us. Fulfilling this vocation brings forth gifts that unite us to God and draws us to reach out more sincerely to those around us.

Here, we recognize the desire of God to reach out to every person so that they might encounter the love that flows forth in over abundance. Through the fullness of revelation seen in His Son Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, the love for the one lost soul or the one soul left behind shows that God is willing to go to totally irrational lengths to keep all of His children together as one. What a powerful message for each of us to hear! The all-powerful God desires that each precious soul, that every unrepeatable human person, be so loved and cared for that not a single one of them be lost. This is true for all of us, no exception!

You and I must be proclaimers of this great message of evangelization! We need to be the heralds that go forth to the world around us proclaiming that even though we fell from God’s grace due to our sin, God continued to call out to us through many which culminated in the sending of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus came to show us the face of the Father and to save us from our sins through His passion, death, and resurrection. Even though we rejected Jesus, and still reject Him through our sins, restorative grace exists in the Church through the Holy Spirit who continually calls us to love God and love neighbor. This Gospel message, the Kerygma, is the central story of our faith that connects personally to God and the Church.

This message of evangelization is always a message given in love, not with force or any other kind of negative intent. Jesus Christ always invites and you, by living a holy life modeled after the virtues, will proclaim the truth to the other through your loving witness. This witness could be the invitation that draws a person to relationship with you and with Jesus. Here, doors are open to proclaim the Kerygma message and in time, yield a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ that inspires a soul to unite with Him through the Sacraments of the Church. This is how we are to go about continuing the work of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Matthew 28:16-20).

Questions:

- Where does the desire for holiness ultimately come from?
- How are we to practice and grow in holiness?
- How does holiness help us to discover our vocation?
- Why is the Kerygma so important?
- How does the call to evangelize challenge you?

Activities:

Together, with your family, practice learning the Kerygma.

Together, as a family, discuss how the call to evangelize is a challenge for you? What is one thing you could do to have this feel like less of a challenge?
Our Catholic belief in Jesus Christ is not just a part of our life; it is the central belief at the center of our life that guides and directs every decision. Knowing that Jesus offers us the grace to live fully and to have happiness in our life beyond anything else necessitates that He has sole possession of our heart. His salvific work on the Cross that won our salvation came as His selfless love for the will of the Father to bring His children back into "good graces" so that you and I might be close to God. Jesus has to be our everything or we are not doing it right. Our discipleship here is still in need of growth and development, requiring and allowing grace to continue to lead our life so as to increase our faith.

Faith is certainly important and central in the life of the disciple, as this faith goes hand and hand with Jesus Christ, the one that we have faith in. There are many different characteristics about faith that play into the life of being a disciple. These help us to understand faith for the gift that it is and for the need that we each have for it in our life. It is important to note that our life as a disciple is one that takes a lifetime to...

**RELATES TO JESUS:**
Jesus’ faith in the will of God the Father modeled for all that obedient trust in the Love of loves is the foundation for living and participating in the life of grace.

**RELATES TO MY FAITH:**
Faith, a gift first received at baptism and nurtured through Sacraments and prayer, allows us to witness to the truth that our physical life is merely a first step in the eternal journey we are called to prepare and live for.

Sample Script:

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develop, and even when we stumble and fall, we can have confidence in the grace of Jesus Christ to bring us back into relationship with God if we are so willing. Again, Jesus' loving gift of Himself on the Cross that saves us yields the grace that we seek in faith to be His disciples. And as disciples, we should try to grow in faith a little more each day and do our best to guard and protect this gift by being centered in Jesus Christ and His Church.

We can speak of faith as both a divine act and a human act. Faith is first a gift from God, being one of the theological virtues, and serves the soul by allowing you and I to place our belief in Him that is unseen. You and I give our personal “yes” to God’s invitation of faith, saying with our own will that I agree with and believe in the truth that is God. The gift of faith is truly a gift in that it is something that we receive before we understand and calls to something, rather Someone, who is outside our reason in full, since He is the author of reason and we are blessed to participate in the gift of reason. Faith is necessary for salvation for faith reminds us that this life and certainly the life to come cannot be voyaged on by ourselves. Jesus is the one who won for us our salvation and opened our life to grace, so in faith we are called to assent to the God of love who orchestrated our salvation.

Faith also requires perseverance, sacrifice, and commitment to be loved wholeheartedly. Faith does not always yield knowledge or even feelings that God is present with you. It can sometimes feel like we are walking blindly or even staring into the darkness of our soul only to find that no one is there. Faith demands an unwavering trust in the God who loves us, for even though we might feel alone and experience darkness when we call God’s name, we know by faith, by the Church’s teachings, by the lives of the Saints, by our own interior or internal inkling that God is there in the quiet, in the hidden, in the peaceful loving and caring for us with a deep and profound intimacy that is far beyond anything we can think of.

For you and me, we need to stay close to Jesus and His Church. Mass, the Bible, prayer, the Sacraments, Adoration, Works of Service; these and much more keep us close in learning about Jesus and the Church and allow us to grow in faith as we God at work with and among His people. Our relationship with God grows our capacity and commitment in faith and helps us to witness more truthfully to the realities of faith. With courage, you and I can allow our foundation in faith to penetrate our very thoughts, words, and deeds so that we can take up Jesus’ mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God to all we meet, sometimes even without saying a word. This lived reality of faith in our life gives glory to God and affords us the life that we all seek; one filled with fulfillment and happiness.
Questions:
• What is the difference between making Jesus a part of one's life and putting Jesus at the center of our life?
• How does it change our thinking? How does it change our priorities? How does it affect our relationships with other people, like the friends we choose?
• Faith is a gift, but it is also a theological virtue and virtues can be strengthened. What are some ways we can strengthen our faith?
• What does faith give each of us?

Activities:
Set aside some intentional time (at least 30 minutes) to offer to Jesus and ask Him questions to come to know Him and your relationship with Him more deeply. Who are you Jesus? What does it mean that you are my Savior? Why is it hard to follow you some things? These and other questions that the Holy Spirit inspires you to ask should be asked, listened to, and make sure to write down anything that comes to mind.

As a family, discuss what faith means. What does it mean to have faith? What does faith look like? Why is it important to have faith? How do we deal when we feel weak in our faith or when we feel we have lost faith? Write down your answers and any insights that come forward.
Based on the written account from Sacred Scripture, we don’t have a whole lot on Mary. However, due to her closeness with God as Jesus’ mother and her whole unique participation in the grace from God throughout her life, not to mention her tireless love for the Church as we are children of God through baptism, God has allowed Mary through the ages to be made present to all people. God has given the Church great and many insights about the life and role of Mary through the Holy Spirit working in the world and the Church. The great number of Marian apparitions, or appearances throughout various times and locations, the many inspirations given to theologians and saints, and the numerous devotions that have developed through the Church has inspired a significant account of this humble servant of the Lord. Specifically, through Scripture and Tradition, the Magisterium (the teaching office of the Church) has recognized and defined four dogmas (definitive Church teaching revealed by God) of Mary: Mary as Theotokos, or God-bearer, (i.e., Mother of God), Mary’s perpetual virginity (before, during, and after the birth of Jesus), Mary as Immaculate Conception, and Mary’s Assumption (Dormition).

Sample Script:

RELATES TO JESUS:
Mary is the mother of Jesus. Jesus desires that we love and are devoted to his mother as he was. The closer we are Mary, the closer we are to Jesus because she will ensure that we are.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
One term used to describe the Catholic Church is that of being a Mystical Body, in which Jesus Christ is our head, Mary is our mother, and the people make up the body; all moving towards God the Father.
1. **Mother of God or Theotokos (God-bearer):** Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully man. She, therefore, gives birth to God, not in the created sense (as God is the uncreated), but as the instrument through whom divinity enters the world. **

2. **Perpetual Virginity:** The Church also teaches that Mary remained a virgin before giving birth to Jesus, during his birth, and ever after his birth. Mary being Ever-Virgin preserved her purity, both of body and of heart, so that the stain of any sin would never touch this chosen soul who brought forth the Son of God. Mary’s purity is also a gift to the Church, which allowed her to love us and intercede for us just as her Son Jesus does. Mary is a model for you and me in how to strive for purity in our thoughts, words, and deeds in seeking our relationship with God. The “brothers” of Jesus mentioned in Scripture can at best only be half-brothers as sons of Joseph from a marriage not mentioned in Scripture in which he would have had to become a widower, or close relatives. However, in Jewish culture and life at the time of Jesus, the word used for “brothers” was the same word used for other close relatives, which is the traditional interpretation of the Church Fathers. Furthermore, in the Letter of James, written by James, the apostle, in which he refers to himself as “the brother of the Lord”, it should be noted that there were only two James who were apostles, one was James, the brother of John, whose father was Zebedee, and the other was James, Son of Alphaeus. So, obviously, there is the use of the word Greek word for “brother” in the New Testament scriptures that goes beyond the meaning of sibling. **

3. **Immaculate Conception:** The teaching that, unlike every other human conceived, Mary was conceived without the stain of Original Sin through what the Church calls, “prevenient grace”, that is the pre-application of the grace of Christ’s saving passion in advance of Mary human conception in the womb of her mother, Anne. This teaching has been in the tradition of the Church since the beginning, and is scripturally based on the Angel’s greeting in Luke 1:28, “Hail, Full of Grace”. The Church finally defined this as dogma (specifically defined doctrine) in 1854. **

4. **Assumption or Dormition:** Like the Immaculate Conception, this is a teaching the Church has held since the end of Mary’s life in the home of St. John the Evangelist, but which was not defined as dogma until 1950 by Pope Pius XII. The assumption teaches that at the end of Mary’s earthly life, she was taken body and soul to Heaven. Church tradition has it that several apostles witnessed this event. Furthermore, no tomb of Mary has ever been marked or discovered. Given Mary’s importance in the early Church, such a tomb would very likely have been marked and venerated. In the Eastern Church, both Orthodox and Catholic, the teaching of this dogma is called the “dormition” or “falling asleep” of Mary in the sense of passage from this life at the end of one’s earthly journey. The specifics of whether Mary physically “died” as all other people die or whether she journeyed from this life in some other sense is left to faith to ponder and theologians to speculate. The takeaway for our purposes is that Mary was taken body and soul into Heaven. All four dogmas are “de fide”, meaning they must be held (i.e., given “religious assent”) by every Catholic. **

It is certainly clear that Mary, through her role in Sacred Scriptures, her many titles, and the Church’s teachings about her, and the Church’s approved apparitions which have given us greater "unofficial" insight about her role in the Kingdom of Heaven, is given great attention throughout Church history. Being the Mother of God, the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, allows you to have a special place of recognition without a doubt. What all the above titles and prayers and everything about Mary does, just as she did in her short but powerful presence in the Scriptures, is point everything to Jesus Christ and His active presence among His people, especially those with a prepared and willing heart. It seems too that Mary is given much attention in the Catholic Church because of all humans that ever existed, she, through the grace given her by God, is the only human to be free from sin and that which distorts this world. Mary is said to be the “Scourge of the Devil” as we find in this most strong woman, one that he was not able to get to. Mary is a most powerful protector and intercessor for each of us and we should seek her loving guidance often as she will bring us to her Divine Son, Jesus Christ, who conquers all things. Mary most holy, pray for us!
Questions:

- List the four dogmas of Mary.
- Pick one dogma, perhaps your favorite, and explain what it means and how it makes Mary special among mankind.
- What is the specific grace that God gave to Mary at the time of her birth that no other human has had?
- Why is the Hail Mary such a significant prayer?
- What does it mean that Mary is an intercessor for each of us?

Activities:

Pick one of the Marian dogmas and research why the dogma that you picked is important for the Catholic faith. What does this dogma say about Mary? About Jesus? About my personal faith life? Write a one page paper to this end.
The Catholic Church is the church that was established by Jesus Christ that He intended for all people to encounter Him by being in loving relationship with Him in Word and Sacrament. In forming His Church, Christ appointed twelve Apostles to serve as leaders and teachers, who would be the first bishops, and that would hand on the Church’s teachings on faith and morals to each man they ordained to succeed or follow them. These men within the Church are chosen by the Holy Spirit to protect and guide the teachings of Jesus Christ so that all might come to know, love, and serve Him. The Pope, an office first held by St. Peter, is the Bishop of Rome and head of all bishops, making up the Magisterium or teaching office of the Church who with, through, and guided by the Holy Spirit teach, govern, and sanctify the Church on earth.

Jesus gave Peter the “keys to the Kingdom” (cf. Matthew 16:19), installing him as the first Pope who serves as the Vicar of Christ, which is to say that Peter and the Popes that succeeded him stand in the place of Christ here on earth, not to be worshipped or deified (the Pope is human like you and me!) but through the
presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is able to represent Jesus in certain ways. When the Pope teaches and upholds faith and morals as the head of the Magisterium, he is the visible principle of unity in faith and communion as Jesus’s representative for the Church. The Pope can also exercise the special charism of infallibility, or to be free from error, when proclaiming doctrine on faith and morals. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit and has only been used twice in the Church’s history: First, in 1854 with the declaration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and, again, in 1950 with the declaration of the Assumption of Mary.

So you can see how the Catholic Church is made up of a hierarchical structure that is handed down from God to be given to the people so that the people might be built up in the faith and grow closer to God. Unfortunately, throughout the ages, sin and human frailty have brought darkness upon the Church in various ways, causing splintering and severing to occur which has created many, many branches or sects of Christianity throughout the world who are following many different teachings, many of which are in contradiction with what the Catholic Church teaches that Christ taught. We can be assured that the Catholic Church is the authentic interpreter of what Christ taught because it is the one Church Christ founded and because of what we stated in the above paragraph and previous lessons (you can also find much more material on this in the extra material in the tab after this lesson). While Christian communities maintain a baptism like ours (using the formula that Jesus gave us of “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”), they are apart from the fullness of truth that exists in the Catholic Church, living apart from God in the fullness of practice of faith and morals, most especially apart from the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity found in the Eucharist as celebrated in the Holy Mass. We need to continuously pray for our separated brothers and sisters in other Christian (and otherwise) denominations and hope for the day when one day we may all worship God together as one in fullness of love and truth.

The fullness of communion as found in the Catholic Church is seen best in what is called the four marks of the Church. We hear of these marks each Sunday at Mass when we pray the Nicene Creed. The four marks are the Church is One, which is to say that there is one Catholic Christian Church that Jesus Christ found and sent His Holy Spirit to guide until the end of time; the Church is Holy, in that the Church is the dwelling place of God holding the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and offering the direction of the Holy Spirit to all people. The people, from the lay faithful to the clergy, are all striving to be holy as they journey through life and seek to encounter the Divine Physician-Jesus Christ—through the Sacraments at the field hospital which is the Church; the Church is Catholic in that the Church is universal with the Pope and the bishops as the upholders of faith and morals that guide the entire Church in unity to Jesus Christ; and the Church is Apostolic, in that the Church is handed on down throughout the ages from bishop to bishop, showing the continuity that exists in Church teaching that points all to right relationship with the unchanging, loving God. Additionally, each Pope can traced from Pope Francis all the way back to Peter.
Because of the many different operations of the Church, teachers and theologians throughout the Church’s history have used a number of different images to help explain her reality. Some to consider: The Church is the Family of God that brings us God’s children into the loving embrace of the Trinity united with all the angels and saints. The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit that gives the Holy Spirit to her people through the Sacraments to guide and protect us throughout our life’s journey. The Church is the Refuge of Sinners that gives a home to each of us when we commit sin and turn our back on God and offers us the healing ointment of grace through the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council preferred the image of "The People of God", which hearkens back to God's Chosen People, the Israelites of the Old Testament. This reminds us that our time on earth is a long difficult pilgrimage through the desert (earth) to the Promised Land (Heaven) in which we must rely on God’s Providence and grace to see us through to the end. These and many other titles help us to understand the presence of God in the Church and how He calls us continually to be with Him through the chosen means He has prescribed to us.

**Questions:**
- What is Mary's most basic title and why is that the most important of her roles?
- What is the difference between Mary’s mediation and Jesus’ mediation?
- What is the example that Mary set for us in our relationship with Jesus?
- What does Theotokos mean?
- What does it mean that Mary is the Mother of the Church?

**Activities:**
Research and write a brief 1 page paper on the specific infallible statements from the Pope over the years.

Research and print out the list of Popes dating from Pope Francis to Peter. How many Popes have there been?

Bishop Paul Bradley is the bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, the nine counties that make up southwest Michigan. He is our local leader who upholds the Church's teachings on faith and morals, just as the Pope does for the entire Universal Church. Go to www.diokzoo.org/pastoral-letters and read at least one of the Bishop's letters he has written to the Diocese. What letter did you read and what are some of the things that he is saying?
In order to be a full, practicing member of the Catholic Church, there exists a foundation that needs to be attended to in one’s life. First, receiving the Sacraments of Initiation unites one to Christ by being marked as a son or daughter. Beginning with baptism, we each receive the first grace that opens us up to the rest of the Sacraments. Our reception of the Holy Eucharist keeps us in close relationship to God while Confirmation strengthens us to commit to the Catholic faith by gracing us with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. This foundation gives us the presence of God intentionally in our lives and thus the necessary spiritual tools to build our relationship with Christ and His Church.

The foundational grace found in the Sacraments of Initiation allows you and me to embrace and live the Precepts of the Church, which give us the basic requirements for living the faith and to be in relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. First, we need to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation to worship God and praise Him for the love He has shown us. Second, we need to confess our sins at least once a year to clean our soul and recommit ourselves to Jesus Christ. Third, we need to receive the
Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season, so as to commemorate the saving action of Jesus for us through His passion, death, and resurrection. Fourth, we are to observe days of fasting and abstinence, which deny us of certain comforts and in our emptiness turns towards God who can truly fill us up with what we need. Fifth, we need to provide for the needs of the Church and consider ways that we can give of our time, talent, and treasure to support the Church and her mission. Sixth, we are to obey the laws of the Church concerning marriage, and support the Divine Law of marriage being between one man and one woman for life for the building up of the spouses and the family aimed at eternal salvation. And finally, seventh, we need to participate in the Church’s mission of evangelization and souls, which spreads the Gospel message of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church so that all might come to know God’s love and presence.

This grace of the Sacraments, in which the gift of divine life is given to you and me so that we might grow together with God and be a loving witness to Him, allows us to worthily share our faith with others. The Sacraments allow us to give what we have been given by God in sharing His love with the world. The sharing of our faith comes through in many ways and effects for the good our thoughts, words, and deeds. Sacramental grace also allows us with more ease to persevere in faith when it is not easy to have faith and to love our neighbor as ourselves, even when that feels like the last thing we want to do. Knowing that the Sacraments afford such offerings, we need to do the best we can to safeguard this grace by not losing it through our sins and distractions.

The Sacraments are the way in which God chooses to give salvation and sanctify His people, and we have a part to play in conveying this message to others by our very lives. When we cooperate with God in assisting with His mission, He bestows on us the necessary grace to carry this out. Our relationship with God and His Church grows here and we deepen our connection with the divine, finding fullness and peace in this life. Further, the grace of a life well lived offers hope to our brothers and sisters who we encounter who are most in need of hope, letting them know that their life is valued and that they are loved. This is all to say that you and I need to be sacramental people who participate in the life of the Sacraments and live a life modeled after Jesus Christ so that you and I can be a sacrament to those that we meet. This is the mission of the Church and this is the life that we each are called to lead, for the praise and glory of God and the love and good of our neighbor.
Questions:

- What is the key element that makes a sacrament different from a sign or symbol?
- What three things are necessary to effect the reality of a sacrament?
- What is the gift the grace of the Sacraments give us?
- To be a full practicing Catholic what are the 3 foundations?
- What is it that we do that has us lose some grace?

Activities:

Together, as a family, look over and discuss the Precepts of the Church. Which ones do you think you do well as a family? Which ones are more of a challenge? Make a commitment to continue to do well the ones you do well and choose at least one that is a challenge to work on together as a family.

Have you ever thought about what it took for Jesus to give us salvation? Spend some time in prayer (at least 30 minutes) and meditate and think on Jesus suffering and dying on the Cross for you. What do you notice? What did you think about that you never thought about before? Write down all that comes to your mind and heart.
Baptism is the gateway sacrament, which means it opens the doors to receiving many gifts and sacraments which will give us everything we need to live courageously as Christians. One of these gifts is sanctifying grace, which is similar to a superpower—it can never be taken away and it allows us the capacity to act with the level of love like Jesus did. That is no small thing, especially when we look at the heroic actions of the saints! In Baptism God also frees us by forgiving us of our sins, and gives us an indelible mark on our soul—this is a seal on our soul that means we belong to Christ, and no sin that we commit can take it away. These gifts God gives us in Baptism, and we never want to forget that we have them!

Sometimes it can become easy for us to forget who we are and believe what others say about us, or even what we think they think about us. When we see someone as important or popular, it can be even easier to compare ourselves to them and be extremely hard on ourselves for not being more like them. Forget them for a minute and think: you never have nothing. You were created because God thought it better that you exist than if you didn’t, and you are here because He loves you. He
loves you into existence. When man became bound by sin, the Son of God became man so that human nature could be restored and made it possible for us to participate in divine life--that’s the graces we receive in the sacraments, and first and foremost in Baptism. By Baptism we become adopted sons and daughters of God. We were not born divine, but Jesus made it possible for us to share in that life. A simple way that the Early Church Fathers explained this reality is, “God became man so that man might become God.” That is who you are. Created out of love, and an adopted son or daughter of God.

Incredible people have incredible missions. By our Baptism we are given new life in Christ, so it would be strange to live and act as if we didn’t have it. With the gifts of Baptism we can begin living the Christian life, well equipped to imitate Christ and love others as he did.

Questions:

- Who is your favorite saint, and what is something they did that showed they were rooted in Baptism, filled with sanctifying grace?
- What did Jesus make possible for us, that we become by our Baptism?
- What do do we join at our Baptism?
- What is a gateway sacrament?
- What is one thing that you didn’t know before from this lesson?

Activities:

Take some time to reflect on God’s immense love for you, and write a response to Him, whatever may be on your mind.

Where in your life can you show more grace to someone you love?
Once we are given new life in Christ through Baptism, having become adopted sons and daughters of God through sanctifying grace and beginning our life as a Christian, we come to face some challenges. Has a friend of yours ever asked why you are Catholic? Has it ever been difficult to pray or talk about your faith with other people, or understand why you believe certain things? These are just a few challenges that we will face, and God knows that we face those challenges. We have a sacrament of strength available to us that we need in order to live as Christians and to face those challenges, the sacrament of Confirmation!

When we investigate the rite of the sacraments (when they are given to us in the church), each has ‘form’ and ‘matter’: the form is the words that are said which are most important, and for the sacrament of Confirmation they are, “ Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”. Those are the words the bishop or priest says in the rite. The matter is what is used to confer the sacrament—in Baptism it is water, in Confirmation the holy oil. The form and matter are external, physical things, but they confer the spiritual reality, which is the sacrament received. Together these make the rite of
Confirmation, when the anointing with chrism on the forehead which is done by the laying on of the hand, and the words are said, the person receives the sacrament.

When we receive Confirmation we receive an indelible mark. It is like the mark you received in Baptism, yet by this second mark Jesus seals us with the Spirit, “clothing you with power from on high” (CCC 1304). Have you ever thought about that? Confirmation literally confirms baptism and strengthens the graces you received in Baptism. This is what that power gives you: It roots you more deeply as an adopted son or daughter of Christ, meaning that familial bond between you and God is deeper. It unites you more firmly to Christ and increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in you (which are wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude/courage, piety, counsel, and awe of God), and gives you strength from the Holy Spirit himself to defend the faith, and share it with others. Knowing this power that either is or will be in you soon, let it inspire you to think of how you will choose to live a little differently than you do now!

Questions:

- For what purpose do we receive the sacrament of Confirmation?
- How is the sacrament of Confirmation conferred?
- What are the effects of Confirmation? In other words, what power does it give to us?
- What are the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit?
- What is the “matter used in Baptism? What is used in Confirmation?

Activities:

The Church gives us the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to exercise the power of the Holy Spirit in us. What are two that you can accomplish in the next week either alone or with your family? Plan it and do it.

Corporal works of mercy:
- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the Sick
- Visit the Imprisoned
- Bury the dead

Spiritual works of mercy:
- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Admonish the sinner
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive all injuries
- Pray for the living and the dead
The Holy Spirit has a larger role in our lives than we may realize. Through the sacraments Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the members of the Church. The same Spirit in Jesus is the Spirit that lives in us!

RELATES TO JESUS:
Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit as the Advocate constantly intercedes on our behalf to bring us away from sin and death and towards holiness and life. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit's mission is the exact same as that of God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
Jesus desires mercy over sacrifice and the Church is right in teaching us that we are called to reflect God's love and mercy in our own life and in our relationships with others. Love, mercy, and forgiveness are some of the greatest gifts that we can give to others and to ourselves.

Sample Script:
The Holy Spirit has a larger role in our lives than we may realize. Through the sacraments Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the members of the Church. The same Spirit in Jesus is the Spirit that lives in us!
During Jesus' public ministry, he forgave the sins of people he encountered by the power of the Holy Spirit. He established that priests would have the same power so that we may encounter his forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation! Through all the sacraments, Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the members of the Church, so the Holy Spirit lives in us! Saint Paul spoke about this when he said, "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit helps us in our daily lives, and especially in preparation for Reconciliation. Saint Paul also says that," the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes" (Rom. 8:26). The Holy Spirit meets us in our weakness and guides us to rooting out sin and seeking God's forgiveness and mercy. He gives us the strength to do so.

He helps us to express the love of God that has been poured into our hearts to others as well, in the powerful way of forgiving others and showing mercy to them. The Holy Spirit plays a big role in our lives and we can always pray for his aid when we are weak with the simple prayer, "Come Holy Spirit!"

Questions:
- By whose power did Jesus forgive sins in his public ministry?
- By whose power does the priest forgive sins in the sacrament of Reconciliation?
- Through which sacraments do we receive the Holy Spirit, poured into our hearts?
- How does the Holy Spirit come to our aid as we prepare for the sacrament of Reconciliation?
- How does the Holy Spirit aid us in forgiving others?

Activities:
The Holy Spirit can seem more difficult for us to get to know. Here is a 4 minute video that shows how the Holy Spirit has worked in people: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNNZO9I1Gjc

Knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in you, write down the times when you feel weakest; whether it is with your friends or encountering someone who is not kind to you, and write a prayer to the Holy Spirit that you can pray now, and in the next encounter you face.
The celebration of the Mass and the sacrament of the Eucharist are well rooted in history. It is not a new or invented liturgical celebration. In the 2nd Century, from 155 A.D., only about 100 years after Jesus’ lifetime on earth, St. Justin Martyr wrote down and recorded the basic elements of the celebration of the Eucharist. They can be found in the Catechism, paragraph 1345, read the elements closely:

- On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.
- The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
Mass and participation in the Eucharist weekly needs to be a priority in our life to receive the grace necessary to know, love, and serve God.
• When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.
• Then we all rise together and offer prayers* for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.
• When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.
• Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.
• He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.
• When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: 'Amen.'
• When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.

Does this order of celebration sound familiar? It is the same structure of the Mass and how we celebrate the Eucharist today. This structure has not changed since the 2nd Century, almost 2,000 years--because this is the structure of how Jesus instituted the Eucharist! He read Scripture with his disciples and taught them what they meant, then he “took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (Luke 22:19-20).

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, and what everything in our life points to: Jesus himself. The Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus, and he is who we receive at Mass. It is a memorial of all Jesus gave in his sacrifice on the Cross that is made present during the Eucharistic celebration, and how Jesus himself is fully present to us.

Questions:
• What elements of the Mass recorded by St. Justin sounded most familiar to you?
• Did any element seem unfamiliar or surprise you?
• How is the structure of Jesus’s teaching like that of our Eucharist celebration?
• What does that say about the Church?
• What does it mean that Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist?

Activities:
Explain to a member of your family the basic structure of the Eucharistic celebration, and how similar it is to the celebrations of our Early Church.

At Mass, begin to notice if you are engaged in the parts of the Mass or if you begin to zone out. Call yourself back to what is occurring and why.
The Catholic Church is full of a number of great traditions. Having a religion that is given to you and me from a loving God, who desires to be a part of every moment of our life, it is no surprise that if we lived by the Church calendar, we would find ourselves busy each and every day. I mean, look at Easter. Our secular world celebrates Easter on one Sunday, they have an egg hunt, eat some dinner, and back to work on Monday. From the Catholic Church perspective, Easter Sunday is the Sunday of Sundays, as we celebrate our salvation from sin and death and eternal damnation. The gates of Heaven are thrown open for us by Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, so we celebrate! We receive Jesus Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity at the Holy Eucharist during THE High Mass of the Year, we have an Easter egg hunt with gifts inside to remind us of the gift of Jesus coming forth from the tomb, we have a huge dinner to feast and rejoice in the fact that we who once were dead in sin our now alive with the grace of Christ. And it doesn’t stop there, as the Easter season continues, with the next eight days after Easter (called the Octave of Easter) being treated with the same pomp and celebration as Easter Sunday. The Easter season continues further, stretching a total of

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50 days (all the way to Pentecost) in which we rejoice at our salvation and receive the grace of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to enliven and deepen our faith. To add, Christmas and the season of Christmas receives a similar celebration as we rejoice in the birth of our Savior.

Further, the traditions of the Church include other, daily, offerings that are cause for our attention as well. Our daily prayer life, which can look a thousand different ways, is our connection to our relationship with God, and His to us. The importance of prayer extends well before the advent of Christianity as prayer is a principle means by which the loving God communicates with you and me. When we pray, we hear God’s voice talking to us and we have a chance to let our voice be heard by God. Again, there are so many ways that this can come about and we should explore different prayers and different ways to pray in our life, but one way the Church has set forth for us to pray is through the use of the Liturgy of the Hours. Here, we sing praise and encounter God’s presence with His people, mostly through the Psalms. Perhaps most importantly, the Liturgy of the Hours allows us to approach God as we approach a trusted and close friend; with whatever we have at that moment. Love, fear, anger, sadness, joy... Any human emotion at any time of day, God wants to be a part of and we see that as we pray over and reflect on the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours. These books of prayer (4 total that cover the entire Church year of Ordinary Time, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter) are called “Hours” because the religious and clergy of the Church pray these at different hours throughout each day. Our Pope, our Bishop and our Diocesan priests, including your parish priest, pray the Liturgy of the Hours five times a day.

The Sacraments of the Church are another important part of Church tradition. These are personal and intimate encounters with God that reveal the presence of God in our life and accompany us throughout our spiritual journey. All of the Sacraments are graced with the presence of God, with the Eucharist being the source and summit of our faith, being the real presence of Jesus Christ. Adoration holds a special part in our tradition as this type of intimate prayer, adoring the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, opens for us a face-to-face encounter with Jesus that is like none other on earth. Here, Jesus speaks to you and me and we speak to Jesus, just as two friends speak and spend time together. With this understanding of the reality of the Eucharist, we come to recognize why Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation to attend Mass are so important. God is a God of love and He desires to be with you and me to assist us with life. He wants to be in such a relationship with you and me that we encounter life together with Him so we can experience the fullness of life. We must attend Mass each week and do our best to offer the hour to God fully; being attentive, singing the songs, listening to the readings and homily, intentionally offering our prayers. This is our duty to offer full, active, conscience participation at Mass; giving God His due worship and praise which graces us with His presence to carry with us throughout our week. We cannot take our responsibility to worship God at Mass lightly as this is critical to maintaining our physical and spiritual relationship with Him who creates us, sustains us, and loves us. Going to Mass is the most important thing that we will do all week! Let’s make every effort not to miss this great opportunity of grace.
Questions:

- Name some of the highlights of Easter and the Easter season.
- Why is prayer so important, particularly during the Advent and Lenten season?
- What about the Sacraments make them so important?
- With the Eucharist being of the utmost importance, how is it that Sunday Mass is so important?
- List some of the ways that we can maintain and strengthen our relationship with God?

Activities:

The Church is right to remind us of the necessity of keeping God central to each moment of our life. Looking at your life, outside of Sunday Mass and other prayer that you practice, how do you keep God focused in each moment of your life? Consider the ways that you do, and the ways that you don’t. Write down some ideas to continue and to strengthen ways to keep God in each moment.

Talk to your family members about ways that they show “full, active, conscience” participation in Mass. Discuss that this doesn’t necessarily mean that you are “doing” something at Mass (i.e. lectoring) but that this is a process of giving oneself entirely before, during, and after Mass to encounter Jesus Christ and to invite Him to take residence in your heart.
In the liturgical life of the Church, how we celebrate the Sacraments and participate in the life of the Church is important. There is a saying in the Church that goes, “the law of prayer is the law of belief” or “lex orandi; lex credendi” in Latin! What this means is that the way we pray is meant to reflect what we believe, and it also fuels what we believe. The Catholic Church has strongly believed and taught that human beings are not just spirits or just bodies. We are both body and in spirit in one person. We have both spiritual needs and physical needs. The two of these are able to help one another so that the whole person can grow. That’s why we don’t just sit the entire time at Mass to pray. We are physical beings and our physicality and posture help to inform our spirits when we pray, so we also stand, kneel, speak, sing, in order to involve our whole person in the Mass.

Sample Script:

In the liturgical life of the Church, how we celebrate the Sacraments and participate in the life of the Church is important. There is a saying in the Church that goes, “the law of prayer is the law of belief” or “lex orandi; lex credendi” in Latin! What this means is that the way we pray is meant to reflect what we believe, and it also fuels what we believe. The Catholic Church has strongly believed and taught that human beings are not just spirits or just bodies. We are both body and in spirit in one person. We have both spiritual needs and physical needs. The two of these are able to help one another so that the whole person can grow. That’s why we don’t just sit the entire time at Mass to pray. We are physical beings and our physicality and posture help to inform our spirits when we pray, so we also stand, kneel, speak, sing, in order to involve our whole person in the Mass.

The way we pray is meant to reflect what we believe and fuel what we believe. This principle is why we strive to make our Churches beautiful with stained glass windows, statues, candles, and golden vessels that hold the King of Kings in the Eucharist. These physical
elements are meant to reflect the invisible spiritual reality of what is happening when we pray and also fuel our devotion to prayer by conveying that reality. By bowing our heads, we convey our humility and submit our entire selves to God. By placing works of art in the Church, we seek to express the beauty of God.

The way we pray is meant to reflect what we believe and fuel what we believe. This phrase also informs the great tradition of the Church of venerating holy images of Christ and the Saints. We do not worship these images, because we recognize them for what they are. They are not God, Himself and are not worthy of praise. They do, however, serve to direct our hearts and minds to God. They help us to reflect on Him by giving us striking images that move us to contemplation.

A good example of this that we use in everyday life is the photos we keep of our loved ones! Maybe you have special pictures of someone you care about or photos of fond memories of your friends. These images aren’t the people, themselves. You wouldn’t start talking to a picture as if it were your friend, but the picture would help you to think back on your memories and the people you care about. It might prompt you to call them up or strike up a conversation with them to talk about the times you’ve shared together. The image guides you to strengthen your relationship with the person. The statues and holy images we keep in our Churches and in our homes are meant to do the same thing. They help to guide the God-given gifts of our sight and minds, so that we can better spiritually connect with God and the Saints.

The Church offers many different ways of worship and prayer because we as individuals and as a community have many different needs. There are times when we need to retreat to a place of silence to let our thoughts sit and just listen to what God has to say or to just be with Him without any words at all. For these times, the Church offers Eucharistic adoration, when we adore the Blessed Sacrament that we partake of at Mass, giving Him thanks and praise, ultimately, just spending time with Him. Sometimes we need to speak with God, to move our entire selves in reverence and worship of Him, offering Him our entire selves, receiving Him entirely in return. The Church directs us to the Mass, frequently, because these needs are most urgent and most frequent. Our entire self needs to be renewed and strengthened by God. The Church offers us forgiveness for any and every time that we fall through the Sacrament of Confession. There we encounter the merciful and loving God who wants to welcome us home and give us the grace we need to reject our sins, turning us into the amazing people He made us to be. There are many other great gifts of prayer and worship the Church offers to help sanctify us. The most needed are the Sacraments, but our other devotional practices help to strengthen our love for our Lord and helps us to enter into the Sacraments better. Since the Church knows that our way of prayer reflects and fuels our belief, it offers us beautiful and life-giving prayers so that our belief can shine beautifully and be life giving to ourselves and everyone around us.
Questions:

- What does the phrase “lex orandi; lex credendi” mean? Why is it important?
- How do some aspects of our prayer convey what we believe? (i.e. kneeling, singing, stained glass windows, etc.).
- Why don’t Catholics worship images? What purpose do they serve?
- What are some ways the Church directs our prayer to help our belief?
- What is liturgical season is more than half than the liturgical year?

Activities:

Make note of how we pray the next time you attend the Mass. Ask yourself why certain elements are there and what they help to convey. Write about the elements that stand out to you and that you find particularly helpful to you.

Think about what needs you may have that the Church can help to supply. Do you not have enough silence in your life? Have you been carrying around guilt about something? Do you feel a lack of community? See what small practices you can take on to help you.
The St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians in the bible, he exhorts them to avoid the ways of the “flesh” which involve giving into our desires and temptations, letting them control us to do things even though we know they are wrong and aren’t good for. In contrast to this, St. Paul talks about the “fruits of the Holy Spirit.” These include love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These fruits act as signs to the world that God truly live and acts in the life of the Christian. These characteristics separate him from the people around him. To love, to live joyfully, to be at peace even under stress, to be patient when people seek to aggravate you, to be kind to everyone around you, to seek goodness, to be faithful to God and our promises, to be gentleness to lowly, and to exhibit control over ourselves when faced with temptation are not traits that the world teaches. They come from God’s work in our lives and when we notice them in ourselves and others, we should treat them as a precious gift, encouraging, fostering, and protecting them so that they can continue to grow.

RELATES TO JESUS:
Jesus provides us with many tools in the fight against personal sin: Himself in the Eucharist, the grace of the Holy Spirit present in the Sacraments, Scripture and prayer, and loving souls found around us to name a few.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
The role of the Holy Spirit in the virtuous life is not to be underestimated. Following the Fruits of the Holy Spirit in our life brings us to be the children of God that we are called to be.

Members of the Church are meant to be ambassadors of Christ in the world. We are meant to model ourselves after the way Jesus lived, so that we can show our
neighbors the love that God has for them through our own lives. When we fail at this, the whole Church suffers. God knows how difficult this can be. It’s easy to not want to stand out. It’s much easier to want to blend in with the crowd, to even be supportive of people who intend to do the wrong thing, because we care about them and we don’t want to hurt them by contradicting them. However, when we support or allow evil, we become responsible. If someone knows that their friend is going to do something that will hurt them, but doesn’t do anything to stop them when they have the power to, that person becomes responsible for the hurt that his friend inflicts on himself. We have a responsibility to care for one another and to help each other to do the right thing.

The Catholic Church teaches us morality that is based on truth. It teaches us that what is true is not always what we think or what we want, but that we can learn the truth and learn to make the right choices. What you might hear from the modern world is that truth is subjective. Subjective truth means that you get to decide what is true. The Church teaches that truth is objective meaning that what is true is true no matter what you and I think it is. Even though I might think my pen is a banana and I really want it to be a banana, because I’m hungry, that won’t change the fact that my pen is a pen. The world teaches that all truth comes from us. The Church teaches that all truth comes from God.

The world often teaches us that we should make our decisions because “it feels right” or it teaches us to do things simply because we want to. Our emotions are not bad! They can help us to make good choices, especially if we have a well-formed conscience that naturally wants to do the right thing. However, our emotions can also be unreliable and deceptive. Just because I want something or feel that it’s right, doesn’t mean that it’s true or that it’s good for me. I may want to steal a million dollars from the bank to be rich or I may want to eat a lot of junk food because it feels good, but I know that these things would be wrong. They would be harmful to me and to others. I need to also think rationally about what is right. I need to base my decision off of what is true objectively regardless of how I may be feeling at the time. Ultimately, when we accustom ourselves to making the right choices by forming good habits, our emotions follow suit. We end up feeling happier, more satisfied, and fulfilled in the long term than by following our emotions and being happy for only a little while.

Our personal moral education is the responsibility of every human being. We have the capacity to learn right from wrong and if we neglect to do so, we are choosing to live up to the amazing purpose God created us with. We stop ourselves from being able to truly make the world a better place, because we are not educated on what the right thing to do is. There are times when we act in ignorance which can excuse us from the moral responsibility of our action. If I throw a ball, not knowing somebody is about to turn the corner and walk right in the path of what I am throwing, it doesn’t make sense to condemn me for hitting that person with a ball. I truly did not know that I would hurt somebody. This is called invincible ignorance, where you are not at fault. However, if you choose not to check and see if people are in the way of where you are throwing, you are neglecting to do something that you can and should be doing in order to make the right decision of whether or not to throw the ball. In that case, I would be at fault, because I could have prevented anyone from being hurt by looking first. This is called vincible ignorance, when you can and should know something important to a moral act, but you choose to neglect to know it.

We should never be afraid to do the right thing. God promises to take care of us and offers eternal life in Heaven to those who are willing to do the right thing even at the cost of personal suffering. While the pains in this life are temporary, the joy that we can gain will last forever and will never
diminish. When we risk standing out against the crowd out of love for God and neighbor, we can find a real freedom in knowing we are doing the right thing and in knowing no matter what happens, God will take care of us. When we do the right thing and seek to care for the people around us by sharing the truth out of love, they may not accept it, but you will have shown that you are a true friend who cares for their well being and who wants what's best for them. When we radiate the fruits of the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves filled with a joy and peace that spreads to the people around us, inspiring them to grow and seek out holiness too.

Questions:

- What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit and why are they important?
- Why is it so important not to cooperate with evil even when we aren’t doing the evil ourselves?
- What is the moral teaching of the Church based on?
- What is vincible and invincible ignorance?
- Why is it important to continuously educate ourselves on moral matters?
- Why should we never be afraid to do the right thing?

Activities:

Spend some time reflecting on the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Which of these do you find are present in your life most often? Which do you find are lacking? Pray to ask for the grace to receive all the fruits of the Holy Spirit and to know how to live that way.

Talk to a trusted adult about a time they shared the truth with someone. Did it go well? Would he or she have done anything differently?
In order to live an authentic Christian life, we need to do our best to live a life rooted in prayer and service focused on loving God and loving our neighbor. And even with this knowledge and as well intentioned as our practice might be, left to our own best efforts, we will ultimately fall short. In order to get to living the fullness of the Christian life, we need to have the presence of the Holy Spirit. As you prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, you are preparing in a special way to receive the Holy Spirit and the seven gifts of that same Spirit.

The Gifts include wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts strengthen the individual and provide a supernatural boost that allows the presence of God to be active throughout the individual’s life. Wisdom affords the soul an enhanced knowledge and judgment about the things of God and sees with greater clarity the truth of things in human interactions and situations. Understanding allows for a depth of things to be reached and to be able see things with a Divine vision. Counsel gives us the grace to be directed not by our own guidance but by the holy direction of God. Fortitude has one’s heart focused on God and thus provides the firmness necessary to always choose good and avoid evil no matter the situation. Knowledge is...
correct judgment in matters of faith and morals and helps to keep one on the straight path of life. Piety is holding God in loving reverence through worship and a life lived for Him. Finally, fear of the Lord is loving fear and respect for God that inspires us to not want to damage our relationship with Him.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit also allow us to more intensely embrace a life lived with the focus on carrying out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. One can see wisdom helping the individual recognize the need of another person and with greater clarity, assist with greater clarity in helping the other have their need met. You can see how knowledge affords the individual a greater ability to admonish the sinner or instruct the ignorant so that the other can grow in both faith and morals. The witness of the individual living a life of piety can serve to inspire others in their own pursuit of God and lead them to revere Him with greater intention and respect.

It is important to talk about the role of being a witness. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy are both important aspects of what is needed to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. These graces are not to be kept in a bubble, for you to use for your own or to just use these whenever you feel like it. These graces are meant to be shared and dispersed for the entire world to experience the presence of the Lord active, calling others to encounter the Gifts and the Works of Mercy so their lives can be enhanced.

As witnesses, which is to say as disciples, we reflect Jesus Christ in our words and actions. We proclaim Him confidently in our speech and share Him in our daily interactions. We allow the traits of Jesus, which include love, joy, peace, kindness, to shine forth in what we say and how we say them. We speak of the hope that belongs to Him when encouraging others to overcome difficulties and struggles.

Our actions tell of the presence of Jesus in our life in the attention we show the other that is before us. We show Jesus’ presence in how we recognize and reach out to others in need, not just family and friends, but with strangers who are in need of assistance. We show that Jesus is alive by choosing to put the things of God ahead of the things of the world, choosing to go to Mass or to say our prayers when it is not convenient or conflicts with something else in our schedule. Witnessing to the truth of God in our daily lives shows the presence of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us, proclaiming the glory of God.
Questions:

- How does the Sacrament of Confirmation assist you in living a Christian life?
- What are the Gifts of Holy Spirit?
- Briefly explain what each Gift of the Holy Spirit does?
- How can you use your Christian faith to be a witness of Jesus Christ's love and truth to your family and friends?
- Name some ways that you can practice daily to know and love God and allow yourself to serve others in sharing God's love and mercy to those that you meet.

Activities:

Take time looking over the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. With your family, talk about ways that you can intentionally practice and live these while at home with each other.

Talk about the Fruits of the Holy Spirit and how these speak to the presence of God within a given situation. Have your parents/guardians and other family members share their stories of how they have experienced God in their lives. What Fruits of the Holy Spirit did they experience? Be attentive to the present of these Fruits within your own life.
Vocation can be a scary word for a lot of people growing up. Vocation simply means “calling” or what God has called us to in life. The Church recognizes three main vocational paths: the religious life, the married life, or the single life. When many people hear that God has a calling for their life and it is one of these three things, they get scared and want to know what their vocation is as soon as possible. The reality is that most of us aren’t ready to know our “big” vocation just yet. It takes a lot of time, maturity, and experience listening to God in prayer before He can reveal to us what we are meant to do. That is perfectly normal and okay! Jesus did not start His public ministry until He was 30 years old. Some people don’t find their vocation in life until they are much older.

It’s really good to be thinking about your vocation, but the most important thing is not to worry about it. You won’t regret spending time worrying. God will make sure you know when it is time, and it will be better than anything you can possibly imagine for yourself. He isn’t going to try and trick you into doing something you won’t be happy doing. God wants you to be happy more than even you want to be happy. He knows the desires of your heart better than you do. In the meantime, there are two very important things you can be doing.

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RELATES TO JESUS:
Jesus, before His Ascension, spoke of the power of the promised Holy Spirit, who is present and active within the Church, within the baptized, and is with us to come to know, love, and serve the Trinity.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:
Life is a journey to worship God and grow in deep relationship with Him. The faithful do well to open their hearts to hear the Master’s call. It is in prayer, lifelong consistent prayer, that we stay close and endure in our relationship.
The first thing you can be doing is spend time in prayer asking God to guide you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to hear His voice clearly and give you the strength to say yes to the things He asks you to do. God might not tell us right away what our vocation is, but when we start to pray and make God the center of our hearts, our lives start to make more sense. They start to form a certain pattern that tells us important things about ourselves. The more we learn about God and about ourselves, the easier it is for us to discern God’s plan for us. Simply asking for God’s help, then paying attention to how He responds in prayer and in your life, will guide you straight to where you are supposed to be.

The second thing you can be doing is focus on the vocation you are called to right now! Vocation doesn’t have to just be what you do later in life. God has a calling for each day of our lives. Each day is a new gift where God wants us to do good work. If you are a student right now, that is probably God’s vocation for you at this time. If you’re on break and spending time with friends and family, He wants you to enter into that time and strengthen your relationships! Doing your best to be fully present to your life right now will help make you even better prepared to live out your vocation when it comes.

Our vocation is a beautiful gift! We should never feel scared of what it may be! When you do receive your vocation, it probably won’t be from a spectacular vision or a lightning bolt from the heavens. Rather, it will probably be from a quiet moment in prayer, a gentle smile, or the way a cause tugs at your heart. Our prayer life and our actions are meant to work together to bring us peace and clarity, so live both your prayer and your life to the fullest and trust in God to guide you towards a beautiful life when it is time!

Questions:
- Why are many people scared of the word vocation? Why shouldn’t we be scared?
- How does prayer help us discern our vocation?
- How does answering our daily vocation help us?
- What prayer did Jesus give us?
- Who does God call to a vocation?

Activities:
Spend some time reflecting on your feelings towards your vocation. Does it scare you? Are you excited? Just take some time to write a paragraph about these feelings. Talk to God about them and listen to what He wants to say to you in response. This week try and just focus on your daily vocation without worrying about what the next day holds. Do then best you can for that day and let tomorrow take care of itself.

Take some time to talk to a trusted adult about how they came to find their vocation! How long did it take them? How did God reveal it to them? Did they worry about it when they were your age?
Of the seven sacraments Christ instituted for the good of Church two are classified as the sacraments of service (or vocation). These are the sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders. They are called “service” because they exist to be of service to the Church and to society.

Just as God has created each person unique with specific gifts and talents, God calls each person to a specific state in life, a vocation, to which their gifts and talents are ordered toward. We can choose our state in life, but God calls us to the state where he knows we will be happiest and fulfilled. Each vocation serves our number one calling in life to holiness, in that our vocation helps us to become who we are created to be.

The most common calling is to a vocation of married life, and when lived well beautifully represents the love of Trinity. Marriage is a covenant, a binding promise between man and woman where they become each other’s family. This covenant is lifelong – permanent until death – where in the man and woman help each other through life and grow in holiness. Marriage exists for the good of the spouses and the procreation of children who they raise and teach. The love between the Mom, Dad and child mirrors the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
By definition, marriage includes permanence until the death of one or the other spouse and can only be ontologically contracted when it is between a man and a woman. Other forms of marriage might be “legal” in contemporary society, but they do not and cannot ontologically constitute marriage. “Ontological” means a change in your being – marriage is an ontological change in which the man and woman become one flesh, and this change can only take place between a man and a woman. Together with their children they form the “domestic Church,” a miniature version of the Church. A father’s role should resemble the selfless sacrifice of Christ, even to the giving of his life. This will normally occur in a symbolic way as he sets aside his needs for the family’s sake. The mother will naturally make many sacrifices for her husband and for the family. The husband must take pains to thank her, assist her, and acknowledge her sacrifices in ways that are meaningful to her.

A heroic vocation that God calls some men to is the priesthood. This role is vital for the Church – without priests, we would not have access to the Sacraments! A priest’s main role is giving the Sacraments acting “in persona Christi” which means “in the person of Christ” by the Sacrament of Holy Orders he truly represents Christ so Christ is present and acting – he possesses the power and place of Christ himself. This doesn’t mean he pretends to be Christ like actors in a play. Rather, when the priest takes action it is Christ’s action. Only a priest or Bishop can do this, and it is because they receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Like a wedding cake, there are 3 tiers of Holy Orders:

1. Bishop
2. Priest
3. Deacon.

Only the Bishop holds the fullness of the priesthood. A priest who is not a bishop receives the invisible character (or imprint) of “priest” on his soul, but his powers to function as a priest rest with his Bishop who grants his priests “faculties” or permissions to publicly celebrate Mass, hear confessions, preach, serve as an exorcist or in some additional capacity. While the Deacon assists the priest in the liturgy and preaches. Each of these roles is necessary and a blessing for the Church and the person who receives this Sacrament. Women have many important roles in the Church, and serve in many important capacities, but their ontological makeup reflects that of the Church, which receives and loves, while men serve as Christ who gives to the Church his lifeblood.

Those men and women who wish to put a special focus on God in their lives (without becoming a priest) may be called to religious life. Another state of life that God calls some too is religious life. This is open to both men and women, and it allows a person to put greater focus on their relationship with God on earth. Instead of making vows to another person (as in marriage) the religious makes vows to God directly and uses their gifts and talents to build God’s kingdom in whatever unique way they are called. It is a severe life of service, often free of many worldly distractions.

The vocation to priesthood or religious life, though less common, also serves as a means to holiness for those called to them and often a very joyful life as well.
Questions:

- What ontological change takes place between a man and a woman in marriage?
- Who can act “in persona Christi”? What does this mean?
- What kind of vow does a religious take?
- Who holds the fullness of priesthood?
- What is the “domestic church”?

Activities:

Speak with a priest, or a religious about their vocation. Many have a vocation story about their journey towards realizing the state of life that God has called them to. These can also be found on YouTube.

Think of a holy married couple that you know. What makes them stand out to you? Make a point to tell them, and ask them about the blessings of married life.
What kind of life do you envision for yourself? What are your hopes and dreams? And, what kind of life do you think God envisions for you? What are his hopes for you? We hear the answer from Jesus himself, “I came so that they may have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). God wants nothing short of an abundant life for you. The whole reason he became man is because there was no hope of getting into heaven for us, no way that we could have freed ourselves from the sin we got ourselves into. He forgave our sins and made heaven possible for us—he wants new life for us, in heaven and even now.

Jesus made it possible that all people could reach heaven. The gifts and graces of the salvific work of Jesus comes to us in the sacraments, especially Baptism. Christ established the Church so that all people could receive the sacraments when he appointed Peter, “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock (rock refers to Peter himself, as his name Petras means ‘rock’) I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18). Thus, salvation comes from Christ and through the Church.

This creates a sense of urgency. God wants an abundant life for all people, but not all know this truth that salvation comes from him, and through the Church.

Sample Script:

RELATES TO JESUS:

Jesus proclaims the truth so that those who live in the truth may be free and so that the deception of the enemy may be revealed and avoided.

RELATES TO MY FAITH:

The Church supports us in our journey to live lives as a disciple by offering God’s gift of grace to strengthen and empower us.
This means that we on earth, as members of the Church who know the truth, have a mission. We must evangelize! We have the duty to proclaim the person that Christ is, and the Gospel message, through our words and our actions. This means that we need to take time to reflect on how we have encountered God in our own life, to find the fire in us and be ready to spread it.

The life of a Christian should bear resemblance to the life of Christ. This doesn’t mean that we wear sandals and travel around the country on foot like he did. It means praying so that we can have a real relationship with the Father, that we do works of mercy for others, and that we study Scripture and share what we hear at Mass with others. Being a living witness of the Christian life is the best way to share who Christ is with others.

Questions:
- What kind of life does God want for you?
- How do you know?
- Where does salvation come from?
- Why does this create a sense of urgency?
- What does it mean to imitate Christ in ways that really matter?

Activities:
Put yourself in a situation where you have the opportunity to talk to someone about Christ. Make sure you have on your mind a story from your own life where you have encountered Christ.

If social media floats your boat, consider posting something you heard at Mass from this past weekend on your media page.

Ask your parents or older family members how they witness to Christ on a daily basis.
I want to share with you a very important message about following the Saints and becoming a Saint. You have been growing in maturity, learning so much, preparing for confirmation, preparing to go to the next stage of your life. Many people may be asking you, “what do you want to do with your life?” Maybe you’ve heard that question a lot already in the past few years. Maybe you feel really sure about what you want to do with your life or perhaps you’re still figuring things out. It’s entirely possible that you’ll change your mind a few times before you know what you are called to do. Maybe you’ve been learning about the lives of the Saints and the life of Jesus and you say to yourself “I don’t know if I can do that.” It’s very important to set goals for yourself. To have dreams and ideas of where you want to direct your life. In order to do this in the best possible way, I want to invite you to slow down your heart and your mind.

When was the last time you woke up one day and did everything perfectly? When is the last time you learned a skill in an hour and never had to work on it ever again? The best things in life take time. The longer you work at a sport or a skill, the better it gets. Nobody wakes up one day with a six-pack. None of the Saints woke up ready to take on the world. We hear a lot about the amazing things the Saints have done, but we

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**RELATES TO JESUS:**

Jesus tells us to be perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect. The Saints did this, well, perfectly; we are perfect not by our own efforts but when we faithfully unite our self to Jesus, live by His love and mercy love and mercy, and show this love and mercy freely to others.

**RELATES TO MY FAITH:**

Life in the Church gives us the roadmap to be a saint while also providing us the witnesses and tools to achieve this goal in our life.
hear very little about the long time it took them to get there. Even Jesus chose to wait until He was 30 years old to begin His ministry. He spent His time praying, learning, and loving His family. He did all the “little things” like you have already been doing.

Some people don’t really know what they want to do with their life until they get to college, others don’t even know after they graduate, while still others have known what they have wanted to do since they were little. You have time to figure things out.

Even when you find your calling and are doing the amazing work God has called you to do, you’ll still have tough choices to make and a lot to discover about yourself. God wants you to take the time to do those things. He wants you to give Him the space to come into your heart and help you make the right choices and become the best version of yourself.

Of course, this doesn’t mean you don’t need to think about the future at all. God wants you to really look into yourself and at the world to see what you want to do and what the world needs. This also doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be making time to pray and ask God to help you know His will for you and then listen to how He responds in prayer, at Mass, in life, and in the people around you. It’s important to take the time to do these things, so I am saying in this message is just that: take your time to figure it out. You don’t have to figure everything out right now.

There’s no need to rush your life away worrying. The Saints were able to change the world, because they entrusted their whole lives to God. They were able to do amazing things, because they had no fear, and they had no fear, because they lived a life centered around Christ, trusting in His promises. That is the kind of life God wants for you. One where you know that you don’t have to be afraid, that you can trust in Him to guide you and care for you. Make sure your relationship with Him comes first before anything else. That is the most important thing that the Saints did that we forget more than anything else. We make other things more important. Once we put God first in our lives, He can help us to figure everything else out. One step at a time. One day, you might find yourselves taking on the world like the Saints you’ve grown up admiring and wonder how you got there. One step at a time is how. God knows the way and He wants to start walking it with you, so let’s take His hand and the hands of the Saints and take His time on our journey to heaven. Be not afraid.
**Questions:**

- What is the best possible way to figure out our goals and dreams?
- How do the best things in life come about?
- What kind of life does God want for you?
- What kind of life did the Saints have?
- How old was Jesus when he started his ministry?

**Activities:**

Take some time to make a comprehensive list of your hopes and dreams for your future. It can be big goals a long way away like graduating college or small dreams for tomorrow like playing your favorite game. Think about little steps you can take towards making those hopes and dreams happen. Ask God to help you know His dream for your life and what He wants you to do to make it happen.

Write down the things that may be causing you stress and worry in your life. Think about why these things bother you so much. Are they really worth the trouble? Are there little things you can be doing to ease your mind? Surrender these worries to God, knowing He cares more about your happiness than you do, that He has a plan for your life, and that He has promised to take care of you.

Be on the lookout this week for a friend or relative that is undergoing stress or worry. Ask him or her to tell you more, spend time listening intently, making sure you understand where they are coming from, then offer the message of this lesson to them without presumption, simply as sharing an idea that might console them.

Spend some time talking with an adult you admire. Ask them about their story, whether it’s their vocation, how they found their career, or generally how they’ve ended up where they are today. Take notice of how much time it took them to reach their goals, how many steps they’ve had to take, and how God has taken care of them.