

Teaching Guide for
Seeking Justice

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who was my mentor as I taught peacemaking for the first time and whose tried-and-true ideas are contained in session 1; to my unconventional and controversial friend Fr. Bruce Clanton, SDS, whose creativity and love for the Scriptures challenge me to new appreciation; and to my niece Andrea LeMere, whose early adolescence kept me in touch with those for whom this course is written.

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Introduction



THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

Since the Second Vatican Council, and because of it, the social consciousness of Catholics has been challenged to reach new levels. As the church has looked more closely at its scriptural heritage, it has seen strong connections between the life of faith and the work of justice. The church has recognized more clearly that to live as Christ lived means to live for others, to live in solidarity with those whom others might consider least among us. As theologian John Wright says,

“Believers cannot accept their brothers and sisters as children of God, those for whom Christ died, called to be members of His body and temples of the Holy Spirit, and casually observe them exploited, deprived of human dignity, ground to poverty and despair by economic and social institutions geared primarily to benefit the wealthy and the powerful.” (As quoted in Charles Shelton, *Adolescent Spirituality*, p. 294)

Faith and justice go hand in hand. This course calls young people to active concern as opposed to casual observance. It challenges them to live at the core of the Gospel.

Because of the challenging nature of some of the content of *Seeking Justice*, the course works best with eighth graders. The students may have an easier time entering into the activities and the prayer experiences of this course if they have already participated in the *Praying* and the *Exploring the Bible* courses in the Discovering Program. Also, because self-identity, peer relationships, and personal problems are pressing issues for young adolescents, it is advantageous to offer this course after the students have had ample time to get to know one another. Consider offering it after the course *Learning to Communicate*, which is also recommended for eighth graders. For further help and insight into the placement of this course, refer to the coordinator's manual.

This course can be effectively scheduled as six 1-hour sessions, or sessions can be combined in the following ways:

- Sessions 1 to 4 can be used as components of a retreat or a day of reflection. Sessions 5 and 6 can then be used individually as follow-up meetings.
- Session 1 can serve as a preparation to a day of reflection. On the day itself, sessions 2 to 4 can be adapted. Sessions 5 and 6 can be used as two follow-up gatherings.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

BACKGROUND

The Young Adolescent and This Course

“Do I look okay?” “Will they like me?” “How am I doing?” These are questions that run like a litany through the mind of most young adolescents. Concern about one's self and self-identity are preoccupations for this age-group. Research has documented that the “values that decrease in importance between fifth and ninth grade include God, church, and concern for people and the world” (Peter Benson, Dorothy Williams, and Arthur Johnson, *The Quicksilver Years*, p. 89).

However, though it is true that young adolescents are absorbed in concern for self, a major development in their cognitive ability makes it possible for them to begin thinking about thoughts. This advance marks the cognitive change from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, a change that is as dramatic as the physical change from childhood to puberty. “The sophistication of formal operations opens the door to new topics—and an *expansion* of thought. Horizons broaden, not the least of which include religion, justice, morality, and identity” (pp. 34–35). This development pro-

vides a major reason for offering a course on social justice to young adolescents.

Their emerging capacity for abstract thinking allows young people to make distinctions between the real and the ideal and to drive passionately toward realization of the ideal. In their quest for the ideal, adolescents often become highly critical of the way things are. Their criticism is often focused on the social institutions that sustain them—including family, church, school, and state. However, the capacity for abstract thinking and for idealism also allows young people to think more deeply about the concepts of justice, peace, and dignity.

Significantly, the ability of young adolescents to think abstractly does not come to all of them at one fell swoop. We must be keenly aware that young people develop at uneven rates. For example, while some young adolescents are quite able to think abstractly, others are still thinking concretely and cannot idealize or comprehend principles of justice. The variability of growth rates complicates the task of justice education, but it need not thwart it. The young adolescent's gradual and somewhat intermittent process of growth can lead to an integrated social-justice value system. Also, even though some young people are not able to enter fully into discussions about ideals such as peace and justice, they need to know that the church is committed to social justice and that they are called to participate in this commitment as they grow up. Until they comprehend their own call to justice, they should at least know that the church cherishes this vocation and takes it seriously.

Another reason for offering young adolescents a course on social justice is grounded in their growing sense of independence. The values of self-determination and self-expression momentarily eclipse the values of generosity and concern for global issues but do not obliterate them. The Search Institute study *The Quicksilver Years* suggests that

parents and youth agencies might try to help young adolescents meet their rising needs for responsibility and industry by engaging them in meaningful projects aimed at communal issues, oriented to the well-being of others (for example, hunger relief, environmental protection, or volunteer work in projects that would put the young adolescent in touch with the elderly, the very young, or those with handicapping conditions). (Benson, Williams, and Johnson, p. 102)

One more reason for offering such a course to young adolescents is that they are concerned with issues deeper than pimples, puberty, and peer pressure. The National Catholic Education Association's 1995 *National Assessment of Catholic Religious Education*, which tracked the religious knowledge and attitudes of 9,275 eighth graders from parish religious education programs, indicates that a significant percentage of these young people have a strong moral sense. The following statistics from that assessment document this reality:

- Seventy-eight percent are concerned about people who are hungry.
- Eighty-four percent do not believe it is okay to exclude others.

- Eighty-three percent think it is wrong to steal.
- Seventy-eight percent think rich countries should help poor ones.
- Eighty-two percent are concerned about violence.
- Eighty-nine percent agree that men and women should be treated equally in employment opportunities and work situations.

Still another reason for offering young adolescents a course on social justice lies in their familiarity with violence and injustice in their community, school, and nation and in the world. *They watch the news*. Recently the U.S. bishops reminded us that

around the globe, we are seeing the promises of a new world lost in deadly conflict and renewed war. In Bosnia, Rwanda, Haiti, Sudan, and so many other places, the world too often has watched as sisters and brothers were killed because of their religion, race, tribe, or political position. The post-Cold War world has become a tumult of savage attacks on the innocent. (United States Catholic Conference [USCC], *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, p. 7)

In summary, young adolescents' growing cognitive ability, growing sense of independence, strong moral sense, and awareness of societal problems provide ample justification for offering a course on justice. This course informs the students of the church's many faceted vocation and ministry to establish justice locally and globally. It presents the issues of individual dignity, community, compassion, social consciousness, peacemaking, and stewardship. This course invites the students to become participants in a church and world community that seeks these values. It calls the students to see and to appreciate, to understand and to act.

However, be aware that young people cannot be expected to manage problems over which they have no power; that is the work of responsible adults. Nor can young people be expected to assent to ideals they may not fully comprehend or even modestly understand. In this course they are asked to take notice, reach out, and take effective action within the realms of their awareness and daily life—the home, the school, the neighborhood, and the parish church. These are big enough worlds; they are the right size for young adolescents. If the young people deal with these worlds now, then, in the future, when the larger world asks for their awareness and work, they will stand a good chance of being alert and ready.

The Theology of This Course

The theological framework for justice education rests on two truths: Creation (we are made in God's image and likeness) and Incarnation (in Jesus, God became one with humankind).

These two truths carry profound and far-reaching implications. Because all human beings are made in God's image and likeness, all possess an undeniable dignity. They also possess the same rights, and each must respect others and afford others those rights. As equal persons before God, each

must see the common dignity of the other. There can be no room to oppress or take advantage of another; there is only room for the common good.

God's act of becoming one with us in Jesus enhances our dignity and provides us with a glimpse of the Reign of God and the effective love that is the earmark of that Reign. The love of Christ is a redeeming love, a love that paradoxically dies to live. The love of Christ calls all baptized Christians to a preferential love for the poor. It calls all Christians to fight for human rights and human dignity. It calls them to free people from oppression, to speak for those who are voiceless, to form a social conscience, to challenge injustice wherever they find it. In short the love of Christ calls Christians to transform the world and help bring about the Reign of God.

According to the U.S. bishops,

Our assets in this challenge include:

- the *example and teaching* of Jesus Christ;
- the *biblical values* of respect for life, peace, justice, and community;
- *our teaching* on human life and human dignity, on right and wrong, on family and work, on justice and peace, on rights and responsibilities;
- *our tradition* of prayer, sacraments, and contemplation which can lead to a disarmament of the heart;
- a *commitment to marriage and family life*, to support responsible parenthood and to help parents teach their children the values to live full lives;
- a *presence* in most neighborhoods—our parishes and schools, hospitals and social services are sources of life and hope in places of violence and fear;
- an *ethical framework* which calls us to practice and promote virtue, responsibility, forgiveness, generosity, concern for others, social justice, and economic fairness;
- a *capacity for advocacy* that cuts across the false choices in national debate—jails or jobs, personal or social responsibility, better values or better policies;
- a *consistent ethic of life* which remains the surest foundation for our life together.

(USCC, *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, pp. 9–10)

This Course and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that the church calls all institutions to ensure social justice by providing conditions in which God-given human dignity can grow and flourish. The requirements of a society that insists on equality and solidarity among peoples are outlined in numbers 1928 to 1948. Number 1929 specifically clarifies the concepts related to respect for the human person, equalities and differences, and human solidarity, quoting John Paul II's *On Social Concerns (Sollicitudo rei Socialis)* as follows:

“What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.”

A thorough exploration of the fifth commandment (nos. 2258–2330) provides a solid defense on the side of all human life and against wanton and casual destruction of individuals or whole cultures. This portion of the *Catechism* sets forth the church’s teachings on respect for life, including issues such as self-defense, murder, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, scandal, physical health, scientific research, organ transplants, terrorism, respect for the dead, and the avoidance of war. Such topics are in today’s headlines, and students can be expected to raise questions about some of them.

The principles that underlie Catholic social thought regarding human dignity and responsibility for stewardship of the goods of this earth are explored in numbers 2401 to 2463. The *Catechism* refers to the cardinal virtues that guide us. Number 2407 reminds us of temperance, which helps us moderate our attachment to this world’s goods. The practice of the virtue of justice renders to each what is his or her due.

Love for the poor, as well as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, which are discussed in session 3 of this course, is addressed in number 2447 of the *Catechism*.

Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives the students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.

- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet’s attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

Student Booklet Sidebars

The student booklet includes a number of quotes, brief stories, and bits of interesting information that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students’ interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Seeking Justice* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

Prayer Experiences

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during each session. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Prayer opportunities are part of each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

Guided meditative prayer is used once in this course. Experience has taught that guided meditation is a valuable form of prayer for young adolescents. At first the subdued lighting and reflective atmosphere for this prayer form may be unfamiliar and discomfiting to some students, but frequent opportunities for guided meditation can ease their discomfort. As a matter of fact, students who have participated in guided meditation often enter this type of prayer with enthusiasm. It offers a welcome alternative to the kind of

prayer they frequently experience, such as shared prayer that has been formulated for them or memorized prayer that they say in private or together.

If you are unfamiliar with guided meditation as a prayer form, acquaint yourself with it. When the session procedure calls for guided meditation, practice reading it aloud ahead of time so that you can feel the rhythm of the words and the pauses. Have the students relax; then they can readily follow if your presentation is calm, confident, and unhurried.

If you feel that your group cannot—or will not—take this meditation seriously, it is best to avoid it and adapt the prayer to a style with which the students are comfortable. Most teachers report success with guided prayer but sometimes run into difficulty using the technique with sixth graders, who commonly lack experience with this kind of prayer.

The Bible

The Bible is another key tool in the Discovering curriculum. The students in this course use Bibles in sessions 3 and 5. If possible, provide a Bible for each of your students in session 5. Ideally, everyone would get the same translation. If this is not possible, try to divide your group into smaller groups of people with the same translation. Comparing the various translations can add a further dimension to your discussions in sessions 3 and 5, though it may slightly complicate those discussions.

The following translations are among the best available for Catholic young people:

- The New American Bible (1991). This version is a modern translation of the Scriptures that is faithful to ancient sources. It is approved for use during the liturgy of the word and therefore will be somewhat familiar to the students.
- The New Jerusalem Bible (1990). This translation uses contemporary language, comes closest to using inclusive language, and provides theological insights through extensive notations that accompany the text. It is also an approved translation for use in the liturgy of the word.
- The New Revised Standard Version (1989). This translation uses gender-inclusive language when such use is consistent with rigorous biblical scholarship.
- The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version (1993). This translation attempts to capture and convey the meaning set forth in the original texts, in language that is accessible to a broad readership. It is truer to the original meanings than paraphrased versions, and it is presented in language that young people can more readily understand. Most students respond enthusiastically to this translation. It can be obtained from the Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson.

Some of the scriptural excerpts in this course are cited as adapted. Such passages generally have been adapted to make the language more accessible and to avoid exclusive language.

Optional Affirmation Exercises

At or near the beginning of each session in this course, time is allotted for a praise chair affirmation. Many in youth ministry have found this feature

on the dignity and worth of the individual to be valuable. If you choose not to use this feature, you can simply expand each of the remaining steps of each session by 2 or 3 minutes, or you may want to include one or more of the optional approaches found at the end of the session plans.

The Mutual Invitation Discussion Technique

Consider using a discussion technique called mutual invitation instead of the standard discussion methods that are suggested in the session plans. If you choose to employ this technique, begin by inviting one student to give her or his response to a particular question. Once that student responds, she or he must invite another specific student to respond. Any student can decline to comment by saying, “Pass,” but must then invite another student to respond. You may remind a student to invite someone else, if necessary, but you should not rush to do so. This discussion process allows the students to feel a sense of power and ownership. It allows them the opportunity to refrain from entering into the discussion, but it also gives them an opportunity to hear from students of their choice. If you find that students develop a “pass” mentality, be patient. However, if choosing to pass becomes excessive and continuous, return to the more traditional discussion techniques.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Seeking Justice*

Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students recognize Jesus as the model for justice
- that they see the church as a powerful resource and a personal support in achieving justice
- that they recognize their ability to live as people of justice

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Seeking Justice* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

Session 1: "We Are Special in God's Eyes"

The students will do the following:

- recognize the negative effects of stereotyping
- become familiar with the biblical view of human dignity
- artistically express what human dignity means to them

Session 2: "We Are Responsible for One Another"

The students will do the following:

- identify how the proper balance of rights and responsibilities ensures the dignity of all people
- examine the relation between God's will for humanity and the call to justice
- apply their concepts of rights and responsibilities to situations within their peer group

Session 3: "We Reach Out to One Another"

The students will do the following:

- distinguish between pity and compassion
- research the compassion of Jesus
- recognize the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy in today's society
- identify specific ways they can demonstrate compassion in their life

Session 4: "We Resist Social Sin"

The students will do the following:

- identify how social sin affects their daily life
- choose ways to respond personally to social sin
- understand the role of prayer in social consciousness

Session 5: "We Bring Peace to Our World"

The students will do the following:

- identify forms of violence
- identify Jesus as a model of nonviolence
- assume individual responsibility for nonviolence

Session 6: “We Are Caretakers of the Earth”

The students will do the following:

- recognize their responsibility to be good stewards of the earth’s gifts
- evaluate their ability to be agents of peace and justice

RESOURCES

Books

On Justice

The following resources provide additional background information:

- Calderone-Stewart, Lisa-Marie. *Faith Works for Junior High: Scripture- and Tradition-Based Sessions for Faith Formation*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1993.
- Deitterich, Paul, and Inagrace Deitterich. *In Trust: A Comprehensive Process for Cultivating Christian Stewardship*. Chicago: Center for Parish Development, 1984.
- Drolet, Francis K. *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, An Unofficial Summary Outline*. New York: Loyola Christian Life Community, n.d. (The address of Loyola Christian Life Community is 3721 Westminster Place, Saint Louis, MO 63108.)
- Kennedy, Eugene. *A Sense of Life, a Sense of Sin*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference (USCC), 1983.
- USCC. *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action*. Washington, DC: USCC, 1994.
- USCC, Department of Education, Commission on Marriage and Family Life. *The Challenge of Peace: A Challenge to Parents*. Washington, DC: USCC, 1985.
- Vogt, Susan. *Just Family Nights: Sixty Activities to Keep Your Family Together in a World Falling Apart*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1994.

On Adolescents

The following resources provide general background information on the developmental stage of young adolescence:

- Benson, Peter L., Dorothy L. Williams, and Arthur L. Johnson. *The Quicksilver Years: The Hopes and Fears of Early Adolescence*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.
- Shelton, Charles. *Adolescent Spirituality: Pastoral Ministry for High School and College Youth*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983.

Music

Music can be used within the various sessions to accompany quiet reflective activities. Contemporary albums such as the following can bring the spirit of the Mass in song to your sessions:

Anonymous Four. *An English Ladymass*. Harmonia Mundi USA, 1992, compact disc 907080.

Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos. *Chant*. Angel Records, 1994, compact disc CDC 5 5138 2 3.



SESSION 1

We Are Special in God's Eyes



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

Objectives

The students will do the following:

- recognize the negative effects of stereotyping
- become familiar with the biblical view of human dignity
- artistically express what human dignity means to them

Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 5 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. the student booklet activity “Welcome!” (5 minutes)
- B. the student booklet activity “Limiting Labels” (15 minutes)
- C. a get-acquainted exercise and an optional affirmation exercise (10 minutes)
- D. the student booklet activity “Created and Loved” and a guided meditation (10 minutes)
- E. an art exercise and the student booklet activity “Tell the World” (15 minutes)
- F. a closing prayer (5 minutes)

BACKGROUND

This session on human dignity provides the conceptual foundation on which the entire course is built. The opening learning activity invites the students to explore the concept of stereotyping, the classifying of persons on the basis of preconceived notions. This method of sizing people up actually whittles them down. Stereotyping is a shortcut for judging people that prevents us from reaching out, being open, and learning from and about others.

The person who is stereotyped has a right to cry out, “But I’m more than that!” For example, the person who is stereotyped as a jock may in fact be a good athlete, but she may also play the cello, read mysteries, and help a neighborhood child who has cystic fibrosis. Anyone who stereotypes that person as a jock misses her full dignity.

After the students explore stereotyping, they have a chance to meet one another. They create name tags that tell about themselves—their interests and skills and personality. They then circulate and get acquainted at a level perhaps deeper than the one that existed before this first session. Even if the students know one another well, this activity allows them to tell something about themselves that may not be known by their classmates.

Next, and in each subsequent session of the course, you may choose to engage the students in an optional affirmation exercise using a praise chair. The praise chair enables each student to experience the confirmation and validation of his or her God-given dignity as a human being. This strategy also provides the students with a chance to praise one another. (See the “Teaching This Course” section in the course introduction for more information on this optional feature.)

After the affirmation exercise, the session focuses on a mind-boggling reality that is grounded in faith and expressed in the Scriptures: Each human being, less than perfect and filled with shortcomings, is made in God’s image and is loved by God. Each person is more than meets the eye, even the careful and loving eye of a friend, and is to be held in highest esteem. A guided meditation aims to deepen the students’ awareness and appreciation of their own worth and of the worth of every person in the group and beyond. Through this meditation the young people may develop more vivid images of God as well as of their own potential as individuals whom God has created and loves.

Then the tempo of the session picks up with an art activity, which builds on the guided meditation. The students become creators as they identify what human dignity means to them and then design an enlarged postage stamp that expresses their understanding.

The session closes with a brief prayer in which the students’ creativity is harnessed and given direction. The young people are asked to take a moment to thank God for the dignity that is theirs. They are challenged to treat one another with the respect and dignity that are owed to creatures made in God’s own image and called by God to reach their own fullness, the wholeness and holiness that is God’s will for each of them.

PREPARATION

Materials Needed

- student booklets, one for each student
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- pens or pencils
- newsprint and a marker
- blank paper
- 9-by-12-inch sheets of light-colored construction paper
- a scissors
- colored markers
- straight pins, one for each person
- a praise chair (optional)
- a candle and matches for the guided meditation
- a Bible, a pillow or a Bible stand, a table and a cloth, a cross or a statue, a live plant or other item from nature, and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)

Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step C.* Make name tags as instructed in step C.
- For step C.* Decide whether to include the optional affirmation exercise in this course, and if you do, create a praise chair, as described in step C.
- For step D.* Practice leading the guided meditation in part 3 of step D. Adjust the meditation to fit your situation and personal style.
- For step E.* Make your own stamp so that you can show it to the students before they make theirs. Be prepared to tell why you chose your particular design and words.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

Teacher Prayer

The *Catechism*, when dealing with social justice, begins with a quote from Pope John Paul II's *On Social Concerns (Sollicitudo rei Socialis)*:

“What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment in history are strictly and responsibly in debt.” (No. 1929)

This session begins with precisely the same focus: each person’s dignity as a child of God, our creator. Before beginning this course and this session, spend a moment praying in the way that seems most comfortable for you. Focus on the innate dignity that you share with other persons. Call on God’s grace to help you awaken the young people to the fundamental truth of their own dignity. You may also find it helpful to read Psalm 8.

PROCEDURE

**A. Booklet Activity: “Welcome!”
(5 minutes)**



Booklet page 1

1. Briefly explain that personal introductions will be delayed for a little while, but that eventually the students will have time to meet one another. Distribute the student booklets, blank self-adhesive labels, and pens or pencils. Tell the students to write their name on the label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Then let the students satisfy their curiosity by paging through their booklet for a minute or so.

2. Direct the students to “Welcome!” on page 1 of the student booklet. Read the essay to the students. Invite their initial reactions to the description of the course. Did any points resonate with them or strike close to home for them? Did any seem off-putting or unappealing? If so, why?

Briefly note the themes they will discuss throughout this course, avoiding a lengthy discussion of any one of them. Keep in mind that the essay is meant simply to welcome the students and give them an idea about the course.



Booklet page 2

**B. Booklet Activity: “Limiting Labels”
(15 minutes)**

1. Explain to the students that a stereotype exists wherever we unfairly prejudge or characterize a person or group based on limited information. For example, we might stereotype persons with certain physical features as bright or dumb, athletic or clumsy, and so on. Ask the students to call out labels or stereotypes for persons or groups in their school or neighborhood. Write these on a sheet of newsprint as they are given. Invite the students’ current opinions about the possible dangers or limitations of stereotypes,

2. Have the students turn to “Limiting Labels” on pages 2 to 3 of their booklet. Read the directions there aloud. Direct the students to pair off. (If you have an odd number of students in your group, form one team of three.) Give each pair a blank sheet of paper and assign each pair at least two situations from the booklet. (It is all right to assign the same situation to more than one pair.) Ask one member of each pair to record the pair’s responses on their blank paper and to be ready to report them to the whole group. Tell the young people they have just 4 to 5 minutes to complete the activity.

3. Announce when time is up and ask the students to gather for a group discussion of their responses to the assigned situations. Invite the pairs to take turns reporting their situations and their responses to them. After each pair has reported, ask the following question to help the young people see the basis for the stereotype in each situation and the limiting effects stereotyping has on people:

- ▶ How is the person in each situation more than the stereotype?

Also invite the rest of the group to react to the pair's report.

4. When all the pairs have reported, elicit a group discussion of these questions:

- ▶ How does stereotyping make life difficult for the person who is stereotyped? [The students should conclude that it boxes the person in and closes off chances for her or him to be better known and appreciated.]
- ▶ Why do people stereotype others? [Responses might include fear of differences, laziness, unwillingness to take risks, ignorance, and prejudice.]
- ▶ Have you ever been stereotyped? If so, how did it make you feel? how did it limit or change how you acted? [Answers will depend on students' experiences.]

C. Exercise: Getting Acquainted, and Optional Affirmation Exercise (10 minutes)

Before the session. Cut 9-by-12-inch sheets of light-colored construction paper into 3-by-4-inch rectangles for name tags. Make enough name tags for all the students in your group and for yourself.

Decide whether to use the optional affirmation exercises for this course. If you choose to use this feature, set aside a chair to use as a praise chair, and make it look special by putting a colorful cushion on it. Consider adding bright sashes, bows, or streamers to the chair's back and armrests.

1. Explain to the students that you delayed a get-acquainted activity until now because you wanted them to be conscious of the importance of being open to one another and aware that each person is more than others usually see on the surface.

Distribute name tags cut from light-colored construction paper, and markers in dark colors. Have each student write in the center of the name tag the name he or she prefers to be called. Caution the young people to leave enough room to write other words around the edges of their name tag.

Now tell the students to write around their name words that end in *ing* and describe something their friends would be surprised to know about them. Tell them not to worry about grammar and to make up descriptive words such as *chess playing* and *hockey playing*. Emphasize that the purpose is to be honest and still surprise their fellow classmates, who may have unconsciously begun to label them in a certain way.

Announce a 2-minute limit for this task and tell the students to begin. While they are writing down their surprising facts, make a name tag yourself.

2. When time is up, pass out straight pins, and direct the students to put on their name tag and to mingle and meet one another. Urge them to discover as much as possible about one another's outside activities, interests, or surprising facts. Emphasize that this can be the beginning of new or renewed friendships. Put on your own name tag and mingle with the group.

3. If you have decided to use the optional affirmation exercise in this course, gather the students. When you have their attention, explain that you want to begin a practice designed to help boost their self-esteem and affirm each person's dignity—a praise chair affirmation. Tell the students the following in your own words:

- ▶ Each time the group meets, one or more of you will be asked to take a turn sitting in the praise chair.
- ▶ The rest of the group will have an opportunity to say encouraging things to the student sitting in the chair.
- ▶ Over the course of our time together, everyone will have one opportunity to hear the praise and encouragement of the other members of the group.

Call for a volunteer to be the first one to sit in the praise chair; if no one volunteers, choose a student to come forward. Lead by offering the first words of praise. Invite others to add their comments. Be willing to wait awhile for the students to think of something to say.



Booklet page 4

D. Booklet Activity: “Created and Loved,” and Guided Meditation (10 minutes)

1. Make the following observations in your own words:
 - ▶ The opening activity and the name tag exercise were intended to help you realize that each person has skills and interests and abilities that others can learn about if they are open and willing to discover them.
 - ▶ This course offers you opportunities to learn more about the value and dignity of every human being and the importance of respecting every person—including yourself.
 - ▶ This activity is designed to help you realize that every person is valuable because every person is created in God's image and likeness.

2. Have the students turn to “Created and Loved” on page 4 of their booklet and read the opening paragraph there. Tell the students that the passages on that page will be used as part of a way of praying called a guided meditation. Add that you will guide the prayer, and their task is to participate in it by being quiet, open, and aware of God's presence.

Ask the students to close their booklet and set it down, and to seat themselves comfortably on the floor or on chairs. Be sure they are spaced

far enough apart so that they do not distract one another. Encourage them to be very quiet so that everyone can enter into the meditation. Provide an environment conducive to meditation by dimming the lights and lighting a single candle.

3. Using your own style and words, lead a guided meditation something like the following. Speak in a calm, even reverent voice. Pause briefly whenever you see the ellipses (. . .). The students will likely respond to the tone you set and follow you into the meditation.

► Close your eyes and relax. Take a couple of quiet, deep breaths. Feel how good it is to breathe and to be alive. . . .

To prepare yourself to hear the word of God, concentrate on the sounds around you. Then gently let them go so that they do not disturb your prayer. Listen to the sounds outside this room and outside this building. . . . Now put those noises aside and listen to the sounds within this room. . . . Hear the sounds of the pipes, the creaking of the furniture, the slight movements of each of us. . . .

Put all these outside noises aside now. Listen just to the sounds within yourself. . . . Hear your own gentle breathing, in and out. . . . Hear your own heartbeat, the life force within you. . . .

Now let go of these inside sounds, too, and hear the word of God tell you how special you are. . . .

[At this point turn to page 4 of the student booklet and read aloud each passage slowly and reverently. After reading all the passages, say the following slowly and clearly, pausing where indicated:]

We are made in God's image. . . . We are God's creation. God created us a little less than angels. . . . God has entrusted us to care for all creation. . . . Jesus gave his own life for all creation. . . . Jesus gave his own life for us so that we might live. . . .

Take a moment now to talk to God about what you like best about yourself. . . . Tell God what talents you possess that you might share with others. . . . You may also want to talk to God about what is worrying you about yourself and your abilities. . . .

Allow just a minute or so for the students' private prayer. Then signal the end of the guided meditation by turning up the lights, blowing out the candle, and asking the students to open their eyes.



Booklet page 5

E. Art Exercise and Booklet Activity: “Tell the World” (15 minutes)

1. Ask the students to turn to “Tell the World” on page 5 of their booklet. Read aloud the instructions on that page. Note that the students should consult the passages from “Created and Loved” on page 4 of their booklet for ideas. Also point out that they may use their own ideas, and ideas from the words of others that tell them about personal dignity, such as Jesse Jackson’s familiar message to young people “I am somebody” or the popular slogan

“God made me, and God doesn’t make junk.” You might also list on newsprint synonyms for *dignity*, such as *worthiness*, *honor*, *excellence*, *distinction*, *importance*, *worth*, *self-respect*, and *pride*.

2. Provide a variety of colored markers and give the students time to design and draw their stamp in their booklet. When all are done, invite them to discuss their ideas and compare their work.

F. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. Gather the students in a circle near the enthroned Bible. Begin with a brief prayer like the following, preferably offered in your own words:

► O Lord, you are our creator. We have spent this time together reflecting on how we sometimes look only at first impressions that prevent us from glimpsing the whole person. Our refusal to be open to others also prevents us from seeing you, our loving God. Help us to remember that each of us is created in your image.

2. Invite the students to respond with, “Hear our words of thanks,” to each of the following prayers of thanks:

- We are grateful for the variety in the created world. . . .
- We are grateful that you have made each of us unique. . . .
- We are grateful for all your gifts to us, even the gifts that we have yet to discover in ourselves and in others. . . .

3. Then conclude with words like these:

► As we bring to a close our time together, we ask your help to see and respect others as you see and respect them. Teach us to love as you love—without limit. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

4. Collect the booklets as the students leave the room. Take this opportunity to thank each person for her or his attendance.

OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

For step A. Invite the group to create a set of guidelines that help establish a cooperative and peaceful meeting room. Ask the students to work in small teams to come up with a list of ideas. Then pool the ideas and create a group list. Write the students’ rules on poster board or newsprint and post them in the room.

Or have the students list the behaviors they would see if they walked past a respectful classroom, such as students helping one another, raising hands before speaking, using appropriate language, and disagreeing respectfully. Also ask the students to list the behaviors they might observe if they spent a week with a respectful group of people their age.

For step C. Instead of soliciting verbal praise in part 3 of step C, give everyone a brown paper lunch bag and have them write their name on it. Then give everyone an index card and ask them to write on it a word of praise and encouragement for the person in the praise chair and to place their card in that person's bag. Use the same procedure each time you use the praise chair in this course. This might be a more comfortable process for both the person being praised and the students wishing to offer praise.

For step E. Engage the students in a discussion of the holy days and holidays that have developed in various cultures and religions. Explain that the students live in a big world, and that people of different faiths in that world may have very different holy days and holidays. Give them examples from your own experience or study. Be sure the students understand that these celebrations may be as important to the people who participate in them as the students' own celebrations are to them. Encourage the students to learn about others' holy days and holidays. Urge them to respect these various celebrations and to treat them with honor, just as God does.

For step E. Continue the art exercise by asking the students to express their views about the value and dignity of every person. Together design a button or pennant that represents the views of the whole group. Be as elaborate in creating the item as time and resources allow. For example, you might be able to locate a button maker and produce a button for each group member, or purchase fabric for a pennant.