

**LIVING FAITH
NEW BEGINNINGS**
Family Gathering Session Guide



ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S



Materials:	Candy (Gummie Bears, etc, watch for peanut allergies) Bible Sheets of poster paper with the lines of the Gospel Holy Water for Blessing Snacks Pencils, crayons, markers, etc. Tape The “Background for Leaders” sheet can also be given to parents as a handout
In advance:	Ask each person to bring some item that they will be using this year at school or at work (these items will be blessed at the close of the session)
Who:	Parish Priest Parish Catechetical Coordinator and Team Families
Time:	1 hour
Families will bring:	Food to share
Cost:	None

SESSION OUTLINE

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any song that people in the Parish know and like, that contains the idea of Remembering. For example:

- “Canticle of the Sun”
- “God is Alive”
- “You are the Voice”

OPENING PRAYER:

O God, we long to know you and to love you, but the busyness of life often gets in the way. Help us to recognize the ordinary, daily ways that our family can learn

about you and grow closer to you. We know that you are with us, leading us and guiding us on our way. Amen.

ACTIVITY:

- Organize the participants into groups of three families each. Have them sit in a circle.
- Each circle receives a bowl of candy.
- Instruct each person to take as much candy as they'd like.
- Tell them that this is a game, and that each person in the circle has to tell something about themselves for each candy they have taken.
- When all circles have finished, call them to listen to a story from Luke's Gospel.

LISTEN:

Sing the "Celtic Alleluia" or another Gospel Acclamation to quiet, gather and centre the participants. Tell them that, just as we are facing a new beginning with this new school year, Jesus faced new beginnings in his life, too. This is what happened on the first day that Jesus ever stood up in the synagogue to speak:

Luke 4:16-20

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Leader: Have the following lines from the Gospel written on large sheets of poster paper and ready to post up on the wall. Tell the group that this Gospel tells us all that Jesus plans to do as he sets out on his "first day at work." He wants to:

- bring good news to the poor
- proclaim release to the captives
- give sight to the blind
- let the oppressed go free
- and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

DO:

The leader asks each family to have a conversation around these questions:

- Every day, we meet people who are poor. They can have lots of money, but there are other ways to be poor. What kinds of poverty can you name that we see around us every day? How do the people in your family reach out to help the poor?
- All of the captives are not in prisons. Think of people who are captives because of addictions. There are people who are captives in refugee camps; we see them every night on the news. How can we reach out to captives every day? What can we do, here and now, to make a difference?
- Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Can people “see” in other ways than with their eyes? How can we help one another “see” better?
- Who are the oppressed people in our communities, in our schools, in our world? How can we help to free them?
- Are there ways, just by being the people we are, that we can let people know that they are loved, wanted, precious and valued? How can we do this in our family first? This is how we “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

GO:

Blessing of Items for Use During the Year

The Pastor asks each person to hold the item that they brought to be blessed and then used during the coming year. He introduces the prayer by saying:

Today, we have before us backpacks, school books, toys and work tools that will be carried to and from school and work this year by the children, youth, parents and grandparents gathered here.

These items represent work to be done, books to be studied, tools to complete homework, studies to be undertaken. As in every aspect of our life, we bring these before God for blessing at this time.

Let us pray together:

Gracious God, we lift to you today, these students and parents, families, friends and co-workers. They stand here ready to receive your blessings and they commit themselves to study and learning in the year ahead. We ask your blessing on each of them. *(Bless the People present)*

Further, we ask your blessing on these items that they have brought. They represent their hopes for this year, their dreams, their work, the joys that they will share and the disappointments they will face. As these people carry these items out from here, and use them in their daily lives, may they be reminded of the love and care of this congregation that surrounds them each day. *(Bless the Items the people have brought)*

We pray as well for the teachers and administrators in our schools, and the co-workers in our workplaces. May they also be sustained by your blessing. May they be reminded that this congregation embraces their call to teaching and learning, growing and striving, and surrounds them with love and care as well.

We pray in the name of Jesus who we seek to follow day by day. Amen.

CELEBRATE:

Share a snack together before all head home.

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS—BAPTISM AND NEW BEGINNINGS

We use Holy Water in this first Family Gathering of the Year. Holy Water recalls and reminds us of our Baptism.

Baptism is the sign of a New Beginning as a disciple of Christ. Through Baptism we all become children of God, members of Christ's Church (Family) on earth, and heirs to God's Kingdom in Heaven. When parents decide to have our children baptised we make a life-shaping decision to raise our children in the faith and lead them on those first few steps along the path that will eventually lead home to God's Heavenly Kingdom.

It has been said that "Baptism is God's smile upon us". What a beautiful expression. When someone smiles at us it is a sign of love and understanding. In the Sacrament of Baptism, God is telling us how precious each of us are to Him. We are God's own children. As we commit our lives to Him so he commits Himself to us as our guide and protector along the journey of life and faith. Just as we can call upon any loving parent for the help and assistance at any time, so we can call upon the help and assistance of God.

Baptism is really our beginning on the path of being a Christian. Throughout our lives we will learn the skills and the capacities that we will need to walk that path well. Our first guides are parents and caregivers. Other guides may include grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours, teachers, friends and colleagues.

The ritual of Baptism is designed as a journey, which represents our journey in life. It begins at the Church door, where we are welcomed to God's House just like any guest would be invited into our home. This welcome is just as if God is saying to us "Welcome to my Home, please consider yourself part of my family." The journey continues through the symbols that are so much part of the ritual of Baptism.

The Giving of a Name is the first symbolic Act of Baptism. We carry a name throughout our entire life. Parents put a lot of thought, love and care into choosing a name. Sometimes, children are given the names of loved ones, mentors, or friends who have gone before. Sometimes, children receive a name that speaks of a cherished hope that the parents have for their child. Sometimes, children are given names that parents find beautiful. All of this symbolizes the love that the child will carry through life, learn in their family, and grow to share with the world.

The Signing with the Sign of the Cross is another important symbol used in Baptism. We are Baptized into Jesus Christ. As he carried his cross, we will all share it and also help others to share theirs. We will also, of course, share his joys and share the joys of others. Many parents make the Sign of the Cross over their children before they go to bed at night. Parents have other ways of blessing their children, too. How do you bless your children, or the children in your care?

Other important symbols are the sacred oils (i.e. The Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of Chrism.) The oils are a symbol of strengthening. When the oils are poured over us and rubbed into our skin, they symbolize the overflowing love of God and God's desire to get inside of us and let us know that, no matter what, our Loving God will never

leave us. Just like the oil, God only goes further and further in, and can never be rubbed off.

The Holy Oil of Catechumens is placed over our hearts. The Holy Oil of Chrism is placed upon the crown of our heads. It is special because it is the oil with which Kings and Queens through the centuries have been consecrated during their coronations. It prepares us for service in God's name.

Water is poured over us at Baptism, or we are immersed in it. With Baptism, we are welcomed into God's family, immersed in a great sea of love and faith. Baptism is a fresh start, a new beginning with pure hearts.

Water also symbolizes both death and life, dying and rising with Christ. Three steps remind us of Jesus' three days in the earth. In the early Church, candidates were immersed in water three times and each time following submersion, they experienced the sensation of rising from the choking waters of death. Symbolically, they shared in the death of Jesus and his Resurrection to new life.

The Clothing in a White Robe symbolizes that we are putting on a new life in Christ. It is a sign that the person has entered a new life; the pure and simple life of Christ and the hope of eternal life with God. White, of course, is the colour which symbolizes purity, innocence, renewal and hope to all of us.

Finally there is the lighted Candle. The passing of the lighted candle symbolizes the passing on of the faith.

Just as the Baptism of the Lord signified the start of Jesus' ministry, so our baptism signifies the start of our ministry, of our beginning to do the Lord's work and to grow in our ability to learn about that and do, first by watching, then by doing it with someone else, and then by doing more and more on our own. . It is our call to learn as much as we can about our faith and to put it into practice throughout our lives as an example of Christ to others. It is a commitment to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and play our role in building up the family of God.

LIVING FAITH THANKSGIVING

Family Gathering Session Guide



ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S



Materials	Post-its or sticky paper, pens or pencils, worksheet: "How to Write a Thanksgiving Prayer"
Who:	Parish Priest Parish Catechetical Coordinator and Team Families
Goal:	Each family will write a Grace Before the Meal to take home and pray around Thanksgiving.
Time:	1 hour
Families will bring:	Food to share
Cost:	None

SESSION OUTLINE

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

Everything begins with God. Whenever Christians gather to celebrate, we celebrate God, and what God is doing. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says it well:

Blessing is a divine and life-giving action, the source of which is the Father; his blessing is both word and gift. When applied to man, the word "blessing" means adoration and surrender to his Creator in thanksgiving. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1078)

And later, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says

From the beginning until the end of time the whole of God's work is a *blessing*. From the liturgical poem of the first creation to the canticles of the heavenly Jerusalem, the inspired authors proclaim the plan of salvation as one vast divine blessing. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1079)

The word “Eucharist” actually comes from a Greek word meaning “Thanksgiving.” The Mass is the Sacrifice of Jesus for us, and is also a meal given for our nourishment so that, as we receive Jesus and are fed by His Body and Blood, we grow to become more and more like Him. The Mass ends with a commissioning; we are sent out into the world to share the love and compassion of Jesus with the people we meet.

The Mass is one great prayer of thanks to God for all God’s gifts. All throughout the Mass, we celebrate God’s constant, faithful love and give thanks for the blessings God gives us every day.

We can think of the Mass as one great dialogue or conversation between God and us. God expresses God’s generosity, unconditional and overflowing love, care, compassion and mercy and fidelity to us, and we answer with the only suitable word: “THANKS.”

In the liturgy, we as a community express thanks at many levels. For example, in the *Gloria* we offer a song of praise that not only thanks God for taking away sin, but also adores God’s own being. After each reading, after we have been fed by the Word of God, we respond with “Thanks be to God.”

In the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass, we thank God for the gifts that we are able to offer to be consecrated. Without God’s gift of “the fruit of the earth” we could not offer back to God “the work of human hands,” the elements of bread and wine that will become the Body and Blood of Christ.

When the presider lifts up the gifts, we lift up our hearts as gifts to God, too. We remember that to give thanks is both “right and just”. After the consecration, we are thankful for the presence of Christ in the consecrated host—Christ who is gift. But that gift of the Body and Blood of Christ also makes us more and more Christ’s body, strengthened to carry on His presence and His work in our world today.

This back-and-forth exchange of gift from God to God, and back again, is the pattern of our whole lives and our ordinary days as well. Our lives are a conversation back and forth between us and God. Everything that we have is a gift. Fresh air, clean water, and healthy food are gifts from God. We do not earn them. We cannot make them ourselves. They come from God. The gifts of family and friends are the gifts of our loving God. Our talents and abilities are also gifts from God that pour through us out to others.

Why is God so generous? The answer is very simple—God pours out these gifts on us because God loves us. We are God’s own people, loved deeply by God. St. Alphonsus Liguori was fond of saying that God was “crazy in love” with us. For this, we give thanks.

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any song that people in the Parish know and like, that contains the idea of Thanksgiving. For example:

- “Thank you Lord,”
- “For the Beauty of the Earth”
- “Let all Things Now Living”
- “We Give You Thanks”
- “God is so Good”

LISTEN: A STORY OF GOD’S CARE FOR US (LUKE 12:22-31)

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

LEADER:

1. Ask the families to talk together by simply asking “What did you hear?”
2. Give the families five minutes to talk.
3. Then ask if any people would like to share what they heard with the whole group.
4. Tell the group that today/tonight, each family will create a blessing to pray before the family meal on Thanksgiving.

DO: WRITE A FAMILY BLESSING OF A MEAL

1. Give each family a number of Post-it notes or sticky-backed paper.
2. Make sure that each family has a pen or pencil.
3. Give the group ten minutes to brainstorm all the things that they are grateful for. Give examples to get them started—we can be grateful for food and drink, for family gatherings, for specific people, for the presence of friends, for recovery from illness, for fun times, for talents and abilities...
4. Write each gift on a piece of Post-it paper. How wonderful and generous God is!
5. Give each family a sheet of paper with the formula for prayer on it: YOU... WHO... DO... THROUGH.

6. Walk them through the formula:

- a. YOU... is your favourite name for God—for example, Loving God, Compassionate God, Faithful God, etc.
- b. WHO... is the gifts you've named. Write as many as you can in this section.
- c. DO... is what you want God to do. Write a sentence asking God to bless your family at this meal or at Thanksgiving.
- d. THROUGH... is always "Through Jesus", but you can say, "Through Jesus Christ, our Lord," "Through Jesus, our Brother," or any other way you would like to say that.
- e. There now... you have a special Grace for your Family at Thanksgiving!

GO: Share a Blessing for the families, and have a snack together.

Example:

God of Love and Abundance,
We praise You for giving us Your Son
And making us your family, one with Jesus, who is our Brother.
Bless us all as we gather here today, (tonight)
And let us live happily in Your love.
Hear our prayer, loving Father,
For we ask this in Jesus' Name.

Amen.

SOME SAMPLE PRAYERS

Loving God,
You give us the gifts of family who love us
and friends who bring us laughter.
Bless everyone who visits our home,
and watch over our loved ones
who are far away.
Keep them in Your loving care.
We ask this through Jesus, our Brother.
Amen

God of Compassion,
You have a special place in your heart
For those who are lonely or hurting.
Take care of those who have nobody,
And help us to see them with eyes like
Yours, and reach out to them in practical
ways that make their days a little brighter.
We ask this through Jesus,
who once said,
"So long as you do this to one of the least
of these, my sisters and brothers, you do
it to me." Amen.

HOW TO WRITE A SIMPLE PRAYER:

YOU

... is your favourite name for God—for example, *Loving God, Compassionate God, Faithful God, etc.*

WHO

... is the gifts you've named. Write as many as you can in this section.

DO

... is what you want God to do. Write a sentence asking God to bless your family at this meal or at Thanksgiving.

THROUGH

... is always "Through Jesus", but you can say, "Through Jesus Christ, our Lord," "Through Jesus, our Brother," or any other way you would like to say that.

LIVING FAITH
REMEMBERING IN NOVEMBER
Family Gathering Session Guide



ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S



Materials	Cardboard Leaf shapes, a bare alder or a large cardboard tree trunk, tape, pens or pencils.
Who:	Parish Priest Parish Catechetical Coordinator and Team Families
Goal:	Each family will name their loved ones who have gone before them. Together, we will make a parish “family Tree” of remembrance.
Time:	1 hour
Families will bring:	Food to share
Cost:	None

SESSION OUTLINE

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

We often hear Catholic Christians talk about the “Communion of Saints.”

The **communion of saints** (in Latin, *communio sanctorum*), is the community of all God’s holy people, living and dead, on earth and in Heaven.

Every time we pray the Apostles’ Creed, which we do every Sunday at Mass and whenever we celebrate a Baptism, we affirm our belief in the Communion of Saints...
“I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints..”

Many Catholics would have learned in the past that the Communion of Saints is made up of:

- the church militant (those alive on earth),
- the church penitent (those undergoing purification in purgatory in preparation for heaven),
- and the church triumphant (those already in heaven).

Because we believe that we have sisters and brothers in Heaven, we believe that they, dwelling in God's presence, can intercede for us, pray for us and support us, and speak to God on our behalf.

The Church has "canonized" many saints. We also believe that there are many holy people, known to us and to our families, who will never be known to the worldwide Church. Every family has good and holy people who have gone before us—parents, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends and neighbours. We believe that they have gone no further away than God, who is very, very close. We can talk to and pray to those people, as well as to the canonized saints.

November is often celebrated as a month of remembrance. On November 1st, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of All Saints. On November 2nd we mark the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls). On November 11th, our country and many countries mark Armistice Day, the anniversary of the end of the hostilities of World War I.

Why November? November is the depths of Autumn, the season of Fall. The dying of nature, which will be reborn again in Spring, reminds us of the death of Jesus, who rose again, never to die, at Easter. We, like Jesus and with Jesus, will die, but we will also rise to live forever with God. Like the leaves that die in the Fall, God offers us new life.

November is the month when we remember and pray for the dead. It is also the month when we look forward in hope to new life and Resurrection.

The Communion of Saints in the <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
946 After confessing "the holy catholic Church," the Apostles' Creed adds "the communion of saints." In a certain sense this article is a further explanation of the preceding: "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?" The communion of saints is the Church.
947 "Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others. . . . We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head. . . . Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments." "As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund."
948 The term "communion of saints" therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion in holy things (<i>sancta</i>)" and "among holy persons (<i>sancti</i>)."

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any song that people in the Parish know and like, that contains the idea of Remembering. For example:

- "A Living Faith"
- "Faith of Our Fathers"
- "You are the Voice"
- "For All Your Saints, Still Striving"
- "We Give You Thanks"

LISTEN: SHARING A STORY OF PEOPLE IN OUR FAMILY WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Leader: Give each family a small pile of paper leaves. Ask each person to pause and write on a leaf the name of one person who has gone before us into Heaven. Think of the difference that person made in your life. Write that person's name on a leaf.

Ask family members to tell one another the story of that person, and why they believe that this person made such an impact on their lives. Each person can tell a story about a family member or friend who made a difference.

When each person has told a story, invite one person in each family to take all the leaves and hold onto them.

DO: MAKE A PARISH "FAMILY TREE" OF REMEMBRANCE

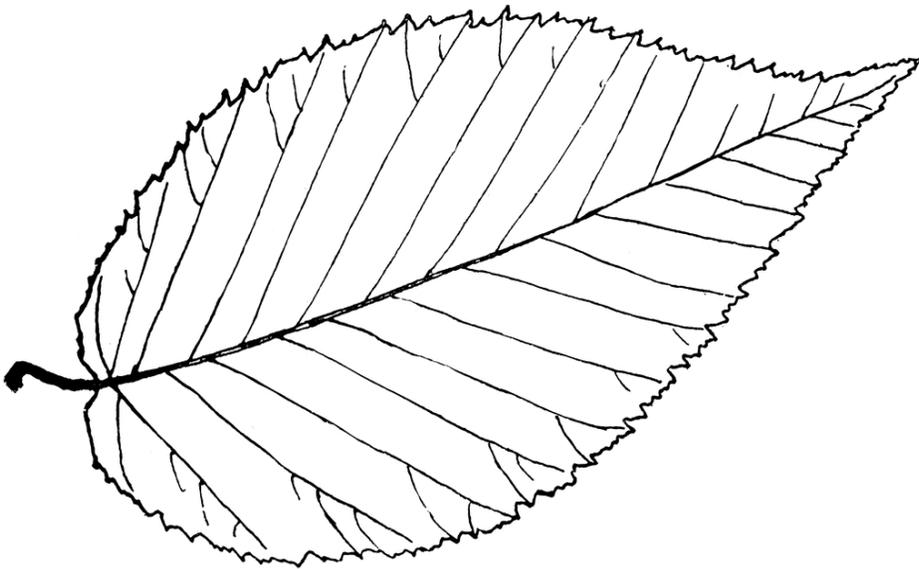
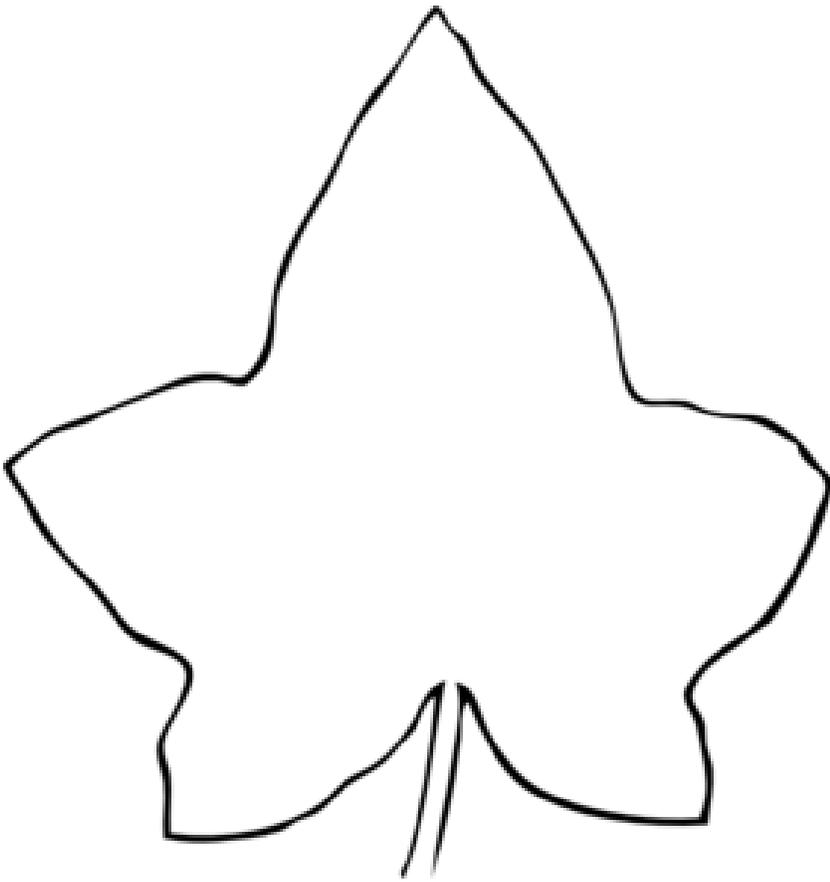
- The leader asks one person from each family to come forward and hang the leaves from that family on the tree, if it is a bare alder tree, or tape the leaves on the tree, if it is on the wall.
- When the tree is full, the leader invites everyone to look at it.
- Ask: What do you see? How does this make you feel?
- Tell the group that this is our group or parish Family Tree, containing our "saints," the people we knew and loved who have gone before us and now live in the presence of God.
- Tell the group that we will leave this tree up throughout the month of November in order that we may remember our friends in the Communion of Saints.
- Leave a basket of blank leaves and some pencils beneath the tree, so that others can be invited to put their names on the tree as well, throughout the month of November.

GO: Share a Prayer of Thanksgiving for those who have gone before us, and have a snack together.

PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

Loving and Merciful God,
we thank you for our loved ones who have blessed our lives.
Bring them to the place you have prepared for them in your kingdom.
Help all of us who remain behind and grieve their loss.
Inspire us by Jesus' resurrection so that we may have the hope in your life forever.
We also pray, as so many generations have prayed before us...
Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon them.
May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.

PATTERNS FOR THE LEAVES FOR THE TREE



MORE ON SAINTS AND THE QUESTIONS CHILDREN MIGHT ASK

✦ What is a saint?

A saint is a person just like you and me that God gave special graces to in order for them to do special things. God knew these people, as He knows us, and gave them these abilities because God knew these people would do His Will. How often do we pray to do God's Will? The saints asked all the time.

✦ How do we make a saint?

The process used by the church to name a saint is called *canonization*. This process has been used since the 10th century. There were certainly saints before then, but in the 10th century, the Church agreed on a way of naming saints for the entire Church, not just for one local area.

Here's how it works:

The bishop waits for a long time after the death of a person. Then an investigation is started. His or her life is looked at and any books or papers that are found are read by the bishop to be sure that person really is someone we can all look up to, or *venerate*.

Then a group of people called *Theologians* and *cardinals* in a group called "Congregation for the Causes of Saints" at the Vatican look into it and they decide if they should be approved. If they are approved then the pope makes them Venerable.

The next step is that after death it has to be proved that one miracle can be attributed to this person's *intercession*. A person like you or me has to ask them for a special thing such as a healing. If we are healed, then the pope can Beatify them.

The third and final step is that one more miracle can be attributed to this person's *intercession*. After that miracle then the pope can canonize them. That tells us that the person has led a holy life, is in heaven, and is to be honored by the Church.

✦ Do we worship the saints?

No, we don't. We only worship God. The saints only assist us in our prayers to God. We only ask for the saint's intercession for us to God. The saints can talk to God for us. You can have a picture or a statue of a saint. Having a statue of St. Francis of Assisi might remind you of the beauty of our earth. You can also have a patron saints—a saint who bears the same name as you or who has the same occupation as you, or suffers from the same sickness as you. Look up your patron saint. What inspires you about the way they lived their lives?

LIVING FAITH
Advent
Family Gathering Session Guide



ROMAN CATHOLIC
 ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S



Materials	I set of 4 candles for each family (3 purple/1 pink, or all white with ribbons to differentiate the Sundays of Advent) Evergreen Boughs String or wire Scissors Holy Water
Who:	Parish Priest Parish Catechetical Coordinator and Team Families
Goal:	Each family will make an Advent Wreath to take home that day.
Time:	1 hour
Families will bring:	A round frame (Styrofoam or oasis, or a ready-made wire frame with the candleholders already in place) for the Advent Wreath to be built around
Cost:	Approximately \$5.00 for supplies

SESSION OUTLINE

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

The Advent wreath is an old German tradition that has gained a great deal of popularity in the last few years. Many Christian homes and communities practice this custom during the Advent season. This sacramental is rich in meaning, is easy to use and can either be simple, costing little, or very elaborate, costing more, handmade or storebought, with fresh greenery, or permanent greens.

The Advent wreath is a wreath, or circle, of evergreens, made in various sizes. It is either suspended from the ceiling by ribbons (preferably purple) or placed on a table. The devotion is usually incorporated during the family meal, or during family night prayers.

Fastened to the wreath are four candles standing upright, at equal distances. These candles represent the four weeks of Advent. Three of the candles are purple, reminding us of the nature of the season, waiting in joyful hope. The

colour is meant to be like the dark sky just before dawn. A rose or pink candle is lit for the Third Sunday of Advent, also known as Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday. The name is taken from the entrance antiphon or Introit "Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." It is reminding us that the end of Advent is almost here, and we can hardly contain our joy.

The wreath should be in a circle, a symbol of eternity, and a reminder that God has no beginning nor end. The evergreen is a symbol of eternal life and a reminder that God is immutable or unchangeable.

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any Advent song that the families know. Many children know and like "Stay Awake" (Christopher Walker).

LISTEN: THE STORY OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Luke 1:26-38)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God

to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

to a woman engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

The woman's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said,

'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.'

But she was much perplexed by his words

and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary,

for you have found favour with God.

And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,

and you will name him Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High,

and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,

and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

The angel said to her,

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son;

and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord;

let it be with me according to your word.'

Then the angel departed from her.

The Word of the Lord.

LEADER:

1. Ask the families to talk together by simply asking "What did you hear?"
2. Give the families five minutes to talk.
3. Then ask if any people would like to share what they heard with the whole group.
4. Tell the group that today/tonight, each family will make an Advent wreath to take home to use during Advent. Using the Background provided on the first page, tell a little bit about the tradition and history of the Advent Wreath,

DO: MAKE AN ADVENT WREATH

DIRECTIONS

There are four elements to the wreath:

- 1) Base,
- 2) candleholders,
- 3) greens,
- 4) candles

Below are several different ideas for each element, so you can create a wreath of your own.

1. The Base:



a) Oasis or some type of wet florist's foam shaped into a wreath form This foam usually comes in blocks, and you must find some round waterproof container to cut and shape your form in. If you do some searching, there are Oasis wreath forms available.

b) Styrofoam, straw, or some other type of wreath form At any craft store you can find a variety of wreath forms available in different materials. Styrofoam is the most readily available and the least expensive. There are also straw forms, either wrapped in plastic or wire bound to keep the straw from falling out. Any of these forms do not provide any moisture for the live evergreens. Unless you are using permanent greens, expect to either change the greens every so often, or have a very dead wreath by Christmas!

c) Wire frame There are several types of ready-made wreath wire-forms you can purchase, or you could form your own out of strong wire, or even coat hangers. You could also purchase an actual Advent wreath form, consisting of a simple ring and candleholders.

d) Ready-made Christmas Wreath You can purchase a ready-made Christmas wreath, either artificial or live. Usually the purpose of these wreaths is to hang on doors, so if you are suspending your wreath, make sure the underside is as attractive as the top.

2. Candleholders



a) Florist Candleholders

These are usually inexpensive plastic green holders, available at any craft or garden store or florist shop. If using foam or moss type form, these can be inserted directly into the form. Otherwise, these need to be securely fastened to the wreath with florist wire or hot glue.

b) Spikes For the moss or foam forms, large nails or spikes can be inserted on the underside of the wreath so that the pointed side comes through the top, high enough to put your candles. The spike cannot be too wide, otherwise it will split and break your candle. If you use a large pillar candle, this option would be ideal.

c) Wire Use heavy florist wire and twist around the bottom of the candles (about 2 inches), then fasten the ends to the form. This has to be very tight, with no movement for the candle.

d) Other ideas There are such a large variety of candles and candle holders available in almost every store. There might be different types of attractive holders that could be attached to a wreath form. Just make sure you get something that will hold the candle and prevent the flame from coming too close to the evergreens.

3. Greens



a) Live Evergreens For live evergreens, the choice is endless: yew, any type of pine, cedar, fir, laurel, holly, boxwood, spruce, hemlock, balsam twigs, even magnolia leaves can give an interesting look. Use what is available in your area, what is easy to manage, and what appeals to you.

The way your greens are cut depends on what type of form. If you just have a wire frame, you need to have branches that you can wire together and attach by florist wire onto the frame. If using forms, like foam, you can have small twigs or leaves and attach them to florist pics and insert throughout, or if the branches or leaves are sturdy enough, insert them without pics.

b) Permanent or Artificial Greens There are a variety of types of artificial greens. You can buy prepared florist "pics" and insert them into your form. Or with smaller branches, attach each piece to the form with strong florist wire.

Another option to consider, especially with smaller frames, like wire, is to purchase an artificial garland. Measure the garland around the form, and cut the garland just a little longer than the ring. Attach the garland around the wreath form with florist wire. Shape the branches around to hide the form.

4. Candles



With the surging popularity of candles, this by far is the easiest item to find. Usually the candles are tall taper candles, 3 purple or violet and 1 pink. These can be found almost anywhere. If you plan on burning the candles everyday, it helps to have a few extra to replace the first and second weeks of Advent candles as they burn down. If you absolutely can't find these colors, use white or ivory candles and attach ribbons (don't let the flames come to close) to the candles—three with purple bows, one with a pink bow.

Most candles are paraffin, which burn quickly and drip. If you can find them, beeswax candles burn cleanly and smell wonderful. As you continue this tradition through the years, just keep an eye out for bargains and sales on purple and pink candles.

If you are incorporating a different type of candleholder that can accommodate other sizes of candles, look for pillar candles, or other shapes to use in the wreath.

GO: BLESSING OF THE FAMILY ADVENT WREATHS

Pastor or Leader: SIGN OF THE CROSS and INTRODUCTION

Reader 1: Christ came to bring us salvation and has promised to come again. Let us pray that we may be always ready to welcome him. **R.** Come, Lord Jesus.

Reader 2: That the keeping of Advent may open our hearts to God's love, we pray to the Lord. **R.** Come, Lord Jesus.

Reader 3: That the light of Christ may penetrate the darkness of sin, we pray to the Lord. **R.** Come, Lord Jesus.

Reader 4: That this wreath may constantly remind us to prepare for the coming of Christ, we pray to the Lord. **R.** Come, Lord Jesus.

Reader 5: That the Christmas season may fill us with peace and joy as we strive to follow the example of Jesus, we pray to the Lord. **R.** Come, Lord Jesus.

After the intercessions the Pastor or Leader, in the following or similar words, invites all present to sing or say the Lord's Prayer. With longing for the coming of God's kingdom, let us offer our prayer to the Father:

All: Our Father . . .

Pastor or Leader: Lord God, your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Saviour, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.

Pour forth your blessings upon us, and upon these Advent Wreaths. Over the coming four weeks, as we light the candles of this wreath; may their light reflect the splendour of Christ, who is Lord, for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

CONCLUDING RITE

Pastor or Leader: And may almighty God bless you all, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. R. Amen.

LIVING FAITH
EPIPHANY
Family Gathering Session Guide



ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S

SESSION OUTLINE

MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper star shapes (template attached)
Pencils, pens, markers or crayons
Christmas gift boxes, wrapped for Christmas,
but open so that things can be placed inside
Christmas Crib Scene

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

What is Epiphany?

On January 6th, or the closest Sunday to that date, the Church remembers and celebrates the visit of the Magi, the Wise Men, to the infant Jesus. The story is told in the Gospel of Matthew.

The Gospel does not tell us how many wise men there were. Traditionally, we say that there were three magi because three gifts are named—gold, frankincense and myrrh. But there could have been more visitors. What is important is that people from far-off, foreign lands followed a star that guided them to Jesus, and they travelled a very long distance to find him.

It is also important to remember that these foreign visitors brought their gifts to Jesus, to offer him the finest that they could offer. The Gospel does not say that they were kings, but calls them “wise men.”

What does this story mean for us today?

The Wise Men are our role models. How?

- The Wise Men came from far away. They travelled a long distance to see Jesus. We, too, travel a long way to find him, not always in miles or kilometres, but in our hearts and minds. Each of us is called to find Jesus in every person and every situation in our lives and our world—or, if we cannot find Him there, to bring Him into these situations or to those people.
- The Wise Men brought gifts. Each of us has a gift to bring. We offer our gifts to Jesus when we offer them to our sisters and brothers, especially those in need. We don't offer gold, frankincense and myrrh, but we offer our gifts of love, of listening, of compassion, of friendship, of music, or art, or laughter or food or clothing.
- The Wise Men followed a star to find Jesus. We may not follow a star, but we follow other people whose lights shine brightly—the saints of our Church,

people in our families or our communities who teach us the way, role models in our world who show us how to live in love and peace, joy and charity.

The eve of the Feast of the Epiphany was sometimes known as “Twelfth Night” or, in Newfoundland, “Old Christmas Day.”

It is a time for remembering and re-committing ourselves to being missionaries in our world today. Each of us is one of the Magi. When we find Jesus, we are sent out from there to spread that Good News in the world. The Magi didn’t stay with Jesus; they went home. They went home to share the Good News. They did not return the same they were when they came. The Gospel tells us that the Magi went home by a different road. We, too, travel a different road because we have met Jesus and encountered His love. We are sent out to share that love with everyone we meet.

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any Christmas Carol that the families know.

LISTEN:

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they left for their own country by another road.
The Word of the Lord...
Thanks be to God.

Leader: Ask people what they heard in this short reading. What did they hear God calling them to do?

You could ask people what they know about the Wise Men or about Epiphany. Then, you could share some of the information in the “Background for Leaders” section.

Ask them: What gift do you have, that you could offer to others today? Ask the families to talk about this as a family group, and then share some of the answers out loud in the larger group. You could add to the discussion by asking:

- How do you offer your gift of _____ to others?
- How does your gift brighten somebody else’s life?

DO:

Give each person a paper star and a pencil, pen, marker or crayon.

Ask each person to write on the star a gift (or gifts) that they possess which they would like to offer to Jesus. (*examples might be kindness, enthusiasm, compassion, the gift of teaching, music, art, time, etc.*)

Gather around the Christmas Crib in the Church or the hall where you have gathered. Ask each person to place their gifts before Jesus by placing them in the gift boxes that are placed in or near the manger scene. .

Ask each person to say out loud, as they place their gift in the box, “Jesus, today I offer my gift of _____. Help me to use it with love for others.”

EVERY DAY THAT YOU OFFER YOUR GIFT TO JESUS
AND HIS FRIENDS IS EPIPHANY.
EVERY TIME YOU DO THIS, YOU ARE A WISE PERSON.

GO:

Ask people to make a Cross on their foreheads. Pray, “May God be in your thoughts, and in your understanding.”

Ask people to make a Cross on their lips. Pray, “May God be on your lips and in every word you speak.”

Ask people to make a Cross over their hearts. Pray, “May God dwell in your hearts and fill you with love.”

Ask the pastor or an older person present to give a blessing to send people home.

STAR TEMPLATE (ONE PERSON)



LIVING FAITH
PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
Family Gathering Session Guide

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ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S

SESSION OUTLINE

MATERIALS NEEDED

Some candles that will be used in churches or homes Candle wax
If there is a priest present, he might bless some of these candles as part of this Family Gathering. He might also bless candles brought by the families that they will use in their homes throughout the year to come.

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

In many places in Newfoundland, it was a custom on Candlemas Day (which is also known as the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord) to bless candles that would be used in the Church and in the homes throughout the coming year. When the families brought those candles home, one candle would be lit, and a mother, father or grandparent might drip a little of the wax in three places:

- Into the brim of the cap of each person
- Onto the shoulders of each person
- Into the shoes of each person

The following prayer might be prayed as this is done.

As the wax is being dripped into the brim of the cap:
“May Christ be in your thinking.”

As the wax is dripped onto the shoulder:
“May Christ help you to carry your burdens.”

As the wax is dripped into the shoes:
“May Christ walk with you on your path.”

In this Family Gathering, we will adapt this traditional Newfoundland practice for celebration by the families.

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any Hymn (a hymn that focused on belonging would be good!) that the families know.

LISTEN: THE STORY OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (Luke 2:22-40)

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus,

to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,
'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

LEADER:

1. Ask the families to talk together by simply asking "What did you hear?"
2. Give the families five minutes to talk.
3. Then ask if any people would like to share what they heard with the whole group.

DO:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that God has only one work—to bless (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1079).

Families are always about the work of blessing. Sometimes, a blessing looks like a cup of cold water given, or a hug shared. Sometimes it looks like a visit to an elderly person.

In many places in Newfoundland, it was a custom on Candlemas Day (which is also known as the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord) to bless candles that would be used in the Church and in the homes throughout the coming year. When the families brought those candles home, one candle would be lit, and a mother, father or grandparent might drip a little of the wax in three places:

- Into the brim of the cap of each person
- Onto the shoulders of each person
- Into the shoes of each person

The following prayer might be prayed as this is done.

As the wax is being dripped into the brim of the cap:
 “May Christ be in your thinking.”

As the wax is dripped onto the shoulder:
 “May Christ help you to carry your burdens.”

As the wax is dripped into the shoes:
 “May Christ walk with you on your path.”

You could try this simple family blessing, with parents blessing the thoughts, burdens and footsteps of their children.

Ask the families to talk together about how people in their family bless each other.

- How do parents bless their children?
- Is it always by saying a prayer of blessing?
- What are some other ways that we show how much we care for one another and share the blessing of God.

GO: BLESSING OF THE SENSES

Adapted from the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

Leader: When you were baptized, you were received into the Church, the People of God. Today, we give thanks and praise to the God who has led you by various paths to oneness in faith. You are welcomed in the name of Christ.

I ask you all now to turn and parents, guardians and grandparents face the children, and children face your parents, guardians or grandparents. If you are here as a couple or as friends, simply turn and face each other. At no point in this little prayer service will you have to touch each other, unless you wish to, of course.

Leader: What is your name?

Each person speaks his or her name.

Leader: What do you ask of God's Church?

All: Faith.

Leader: What does faith offer you?

All: Eternal life.

Leader: Father of mercy, we thank you for these your servants. You have sought and summoned them in many ways and they have turned to seek you. You have called them today and they have answered in our presence: we praise you, Lord, and we bless you.

All (*sing or say*): We praise you, Lord, and we bless you.

Signing of the forehead

Leader: Receive the cross over your forehead as a reminder of your baptism into Christ's saving death and resurrection.

All sing an Alleluia!

Signing of the ears

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross over your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.

Signing of the eyes

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross over your eyes, that you may see the glory of God.

Signing of the lips

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.

Signing of the heart

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.

Signing of the shoulders

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.

Signing of the hands

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do.

Signing of the feet

Leader: Receive the sign of the cross on your feet, that you may walk in the way of Christ.

Leader: I sign you with the sign of eternal life in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us pray. Almighty God, by the cross and resurrection of your Son you have given life to your people. Your servants have received the sign of the cross: make them living proof of its saving power and help them to persevere in the footsteps of Christ. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

CONCLUDING RITE

Pastor or Leader: And may almighty God bless you all, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. R. Amen.

<p>LIVING FAITH ASH WEDNESDAY Family Gathering Session Guide</p>	 <p>ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S</p>
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ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S

SESSION OUTLINE

MATERIALS NEEDED
Palms from last year to be burned for ashes A pan or drum for the burning (big enough to hold all the palms, and fireproof— even an aluminum foil roasting pan will do)

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADERS:

Lent is a season of the Christian Year where Christians focus on simple living, prayer, and fasting in order to grow closer to God.

When is Lent?

Lent is basically the forty days before Easter. Lent excludes Sundays because every Sunday is like a little Easter.

When does Lent begin?

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. Catholics usually go to Mass on that day, and receive ashes on our foreheads. Ashes are a sign that we recognize our mortality, repent of our sins, and return to our loving God. We commit ourselves to conversion, which is a re-turn of our lives towards Jesus Christ. Some people give up things for Lent, as a sign of their desire to turn to Jesus. Other people take something up—like serving the poor, doing good deeds, or some other good practice, which also is a sign of a desire to turn to Jesus.

Why ashes?

In Jewish and Christian history and faith, ashes are a sign of mortality and repentance. In Lent, our mortality is always before us. When we die, our bodies become dust, as we return to the earth. Long ago, when people wanted to show remorse or sorrow for their sins, they would put ashes on their head and wear "sackcloth" (scratchy clothing, made, literally from sacks) to remind them that sin makes us all uncomfortable and leads to a sort of death of the spirit. They also confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness from one another and from God.

Where do the ashes come from?

We get ashes for Ash Wednesday by saving the palms from last Palm Sunday. We burn them, and mix them with a little water (like tears) or oil.

What do Christians do with ashes?

At an Ash Wednesday prayer service or Mass, people receive the ashes. The priest makes a cross on their foreheads with the ashes. While the ashes remind us of our mortality and sin, the cross reminds us of Jesus' resurrection (life after death) and forgiveness.

What might I do in Lent?

Lent is a time to "repent" -- to return to God, to re-focus our lives, and to be more in line with Jesus. In

FASTING: Some go without food for a period of time. But that's not the only way to fast. You can fast by cutting out some of the things in your life that distract you from God. Some Christians use the whole 40 days to fast from candy, chips, soft drinks, cigarettes or meat. Others give up some *activity* like worry, or playing video games, and instead choose to spend time doing good for others, or enjoying God's creation.

ALMSGIVING OR SERVICE: Some Christians take something on *for* Christ. Some people collect food for the needy, volunteer as a tutor or at a soup kitchen, or work for justice for those who are disadvantaged. Serving others is a great way to serve God.

PRAYER: Christians also use Lent as a time of prayer. You can pray with words or just sit in quiet and listen for signs of God's presence or God's voice.

GATHER: GATHERING SONG

Any Lenten Hymn that the families know. (But “Ashes” is a really appropriate selection.)

LISTEN: Jeremiah 24:7

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.
I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD;
and they shall be my people and I will be their God,
for they shall return to me with their whole heart.
The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God

Leader: Ask people what they heard in this short reading. What did they hear God calling them to do?

DO:

Ask the families if anybody knows where we get the ashes that we put on peoples' foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Explain this, using the material presented in the “Background for Leaders” at the beginning of the outline for this gathering.

Tell the families that they are now going to see where the ashes come from, and together, we are going to make the ashes that you are going to use for the Ash Wednesday services or Masses.

Go outside and place the palms to be burned in a drum or container that can fit all the palms and is fireproof. Talk as the palms are being burned. It does not take long. Reflect with the people who are there about how this burning and reducing of the dry palms to ashes is like God offering us a fresh start. Ask people to think about, and talk, as families and friends, about the areas of their lives or the situations in which they would like to have a fresh start. Tell them that our God is a God of second chances, and third chances, and fourth and fifth chances! And more! God is infinitely merciful. And we are asked to become like this God. God calls us to be merciful to one another, forgiving, kind and compassionate. Sometimes, it is through us that others come to know what God is like.

When the palms have been completely turned to ash, let people touch them, run their fingers through them. The ashes are not like a lot of other ashes—they are very soft, and easily blown away by the wind. That's how God treats our sins. God forgives us, smiles on us, and then it is as if our sins are blown away by the wind.

Ask each family to think of things that they will take up or give up for Lent this year. Allow them a little time for conversations. Ask anyone who wishes to share their ideas and plans.

GO:

Ask people to make a Cross on their foreheads. Pray, “May God be in your thoughts, and in your understanding.”

Ask people to make a Cross on their lips. Pray, "May God be on your lips and in every word you speak."

Ask people to make a Cross over their hearts. Pray, "May God dwell in your hearts and fill you with love."

Ask the pastor or an older person present to give a blessing to send people home.

Easter Family Gathering: Focus on Baptism



ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. JOHN'S

Materials needed:

- Paper/ Pens
- Empty bowl and jug of water
- Bowl of oil (scented if possible)
- White Baptismal Garment
- Paschal Candle
- Smaller Baptismal Candles

GATHERING:

Any Easter hymn with "Alleluia"!

Give families some time to share stories about the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism in their families.

Give them some opportunity to write down some of the memories of when this sacrament was celebrated. Where did it take place? Who

was present? Who were godparents? How was the child's name chosen?

Many families have pictures, videos, Baptism candles, garments at home...encourage them to look at these again during the week!

Have some sharing time among the group.

Reflecting on our Baptism.

THEME 1: WHAT DO YOU ASK OF THE CHURCH FOR YOUR CHILD?

This question is the one asked during the Rite. Parents respond to the question by responding with one word: **Baptism**.

Ask family members to share some of their hopes and dreams coming from their child's baptism with the entire group, and talk about how at Baptism the entire Church has hopes and dreams for the children.

Many of the hopes are the same as those held by the parents and godparents. We want this child to be part of our family, we want to be part of the child's life, we want to give them the best we have, etc. We want to know this child and help parents to raise the child in faith, hope and love.

THEME 2: SYMBOLS OF BAPTISM

Everybody thinks that symbols are static things, but they are not. Symbols are verbs. Thus, they entail doing.

1. **GIVING A NAME**—A name is a precious gift that you give your child. During the Baptism Rite, parents are asked what name they give their child. Parents have thought long and hard about the name they will give this tiny person. Often many names have been tossed around! Sometimes, children are named after a well-loved or well-respected relative, a father, mother, aunt, friend, or role model. That story is part of the gift given the child; the child will be called by this name, and others will learn

to use that name with love and care. God will know your child by this name as well.

2. The **POURING** of water—shows us and shares with us God’s cleansing and healing love, always poured out on and in us in abundance, never stingy. The flowing water is a sign of the love of God flowing over us, poured out upon us. Get them to place their hands under the flowing water and feel its coolness and refreshment, which IS God for this child. Talk about this.
3. The **ANOINTING** with oil – Pass around a bowl of oil (scented if possible), and ask the participants to take lots of oil and try to rub it off, but they can’t; they can only rub it IN! This is like the love and the very presence of God. God wants to get into our lives and, once in, will never, ever leave. God only goes in deeper and deeper, like the oil. You can run away from God, but you can never hide, and God will never, ever abandon you.
4. The **CLOTHING** with a white garment. The children probably come to the Baptism with a white garment already on, but, in any event, talk about the importance of remembering, that day of the Baptism, that the white garment that you place on your child is a sign of them being clothed and covered and warmed with the love and the beauty of God, surrounded by God, and putting on the garment of a child of God.
5. The **RECEIVING OF A LIT CANDLE**—this symbolizes not only the light of Christ, but how the light of Christ is entrusted to the elders to pass on to one another and to the little ones. We pass on the light of Christ to one another.

THEME 3: WELCOME TO THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Baptism is the sign of a New Beginning as a disciple of Christ. Through Baptism we all become children of God, members of Christ’s Church (Family) on earth, and heirs to God’s Kingdom in Heaven. When parents decide to have our children baptised we make a life-shaping decision to raise our children in the faith and lead them on those first few steps along the path that will eventually lead home to God’s Heavenly Kingdom.

It has been said that “Baptism is God’s smile upon us”. What a beautiful expression. When someone smiles at us it is a sign of love

and understanding. In the Sacrament of Baptism, God is telling us how precious each of us are to Him. We are God's own children. As we commit our lives to Him so he commits Himself to us as our guide and protector along the journey of life and faith. Just as we can call upon any loving parent for the help and assistance at any time, so we can call upon the help and assistance of God.

Baptism is really our beginning on the path of being a Christian. Throughout our lives we will learn the skills and the capacities that we will need to walk that path well. Our first guides are parents and caregivers. Other guides may include grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours, teachers, friends and colleagues.

Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation into the Christian Community; later, God will confirm that God chooses us, and God and the community will feed and send your child out on mission every Sunday through the celebration of the Eucharist. Our parish will support you all along the way, and will help you to prepare your child for these Sacraments of Initiation.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises (Light candles from Paschal Candle)

Leader: Do you reject Satan?

Response: I do.

Leader: And all his works?

Response: I do.

Leader: And all his empty promises?

Response: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

Response: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Response: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Response: I do.

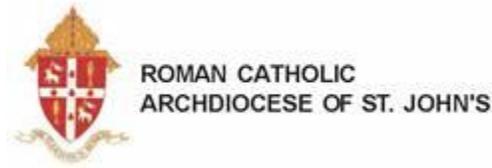
CLOSING PRAYER

O God, we long to know you and to love you, but the busyness of life often gets in the way. Help us to recognize the ordinary, daily ways that our family can learn about you and grow closer to you. We know that you are with us, leading us and guiding us on our way. Amen.

Let us pray often during this Alleluia time for the grace to see the Holy Spirit working in us and in our world. Look for signs of new life this week. Look at new life in the signs coming with Spring.

Enjoy a snack and share as community!

May Family Gathering: Mary Mother of God



Materials needed:

Paper/ Pens

Colours, crayons, scissors, blue yarn



GATHERING:

Immaculate Mary (Hymn)

**Immaculate Mary, thy praises we sing
Who reigns now in heaven with Jesus our King.
Ave Ave Ave Maria. Ave Ave Ave Maria!**

Wedding at Cana



www.osv.com
Break into small groups.

Ask those present to recount one story of Mary they can remember from the Gospels. Have them write key points down along with their thoughts about what each story one speak to concerning what we know about Mary and her characteristics. (10 minutes)

Bring groups back together and have them share with the larger groups. Chart response that are shared and discussed. (20 minutes or so)

Catechesis

The Church always speaks to Mary's faithfulness. She is a woman of faith and a faithful woman. We identify with her as she was fully human. She was faithful to God's plan. She responded to the annunciation when the angel announced that she would bear God's Son. She responded with her faithfulness. She gave birth to her son in the poverty of the stable. Along with her husband Joseph, she was a refugee, fleeing their homeland for safety. As a parent, Mary was always faithful to Jesus. She never had all the answers to life's struggle, but she lived with faith in Him, as a parent, watching him grow to maturity. She watched her son be condemned and die and felt the great pain and sorrow of his death.

When things go wrong we often turn to mothers for comfort. We turn to Mary, knowing she knows about our human needs and fears. She intercedes for us to her Son.

When finished speak about the special place Mary has in our faith. The Church adores her with special prayers and images. Can you name some ways the Church does this?

Some ideas for Catechists:

You can also look at some of the following Marian devotions; You may wish to share and explore some of these with families:

Prayers:

Hail Mary,
Full of Grace,
The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among
women,
and blessed is the fruit

of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of death.

Amen.

Memore

Remember, Oh most compassionate Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your assistance, or sought your intercession, was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, we fly unto you, Oh Virgin of Virgins, our Mother; to You, we come; before You, we kneel, sinful and sorrowful. Oh Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions; but, in Your

clemency and mercy, hear and answer them. Amen.

Exploring an Icon: Our Lady of Perpetual Help



O Mother of Perpetual Help, grant that I may ever invoke thy most powerful name, which is the safeguard of the living and the salvation of the dying.

O Purest Mary, O Sweetest Mary, let thy name henceforth be ever on my lips. Delay not, O Blessed Lady, to help me whenever I call on thee, for, in all my needs, in all my temptations I shall never cease to call on thee, ever repeating thy sacred name, Mary, Mary.

An icon is painting done on wood. We do not know who painted this icon, or when. It was brought by a Cretan merchant to Rome, Italy, in 1498, and in 1499 it was placed in the Church of St. Matthew. It was known as a miraculous icon. It remained in St. Matthew's about 300 years. The Napoleonic armies had overrun Italy, and St. Matthew's and a number of other churches in Rome were destroyed. The Icon was kept hidden for the next 68 years. Later, the Church of San Alfonso was built very near the site of St. Matthew by the Redemptorists. In 1866 Pope Pius IX ordered that the Icon be given to Redemptorists and placed in their Church at San Alfonso. He also encouraged them to make Mary known throughout the whole world under the title of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They have successfully done this, and that is why there are many shrines to OLPH throughout the world. They are places of prayer and devotion

LOOKING AT AN ICON OF LOVE



LOOK AT MARY'S EYES

Mary isn't looking at her Son—she is looking at you!

- What does she see when she looks at you?
- What would she say to you if she could speak?

LOOK AT THE HANDS OF JESUS AND MARY

- One of Mary's hands cradles her baby.
- The other hand holds the hands of Jesus



LOOK AT THE SANDAL

In his haste, Jesus has almost lost his sandal as he ran to His mother's arms. The sandal is a symbol of all the cares and concerns that we bring to Jesus and to Mary. It is also a symbol of her motherly care for us.

- What do you bring to Jesus and Mary?
- What are your concerns and cares?
- What do you want to let go of?
- What are you running from?
- Where are you running?

MARY'S LOVE AND MERCY ARE AN ECHO OF GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY.

- Mary is your Mother, too. She treasures you as she treasures her Son.



Novena Prayer for Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

Oh Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord JESUS and our Mother, penetrated with the most lively confidence in Your all-powerful and never-failing intercession, manifested so often through the Miraculous Medal, we, Your loving and trustful children, implore You to obtain for us, the graces and favors we ask during this Novena, if they are beneficial for our immortal souls, and the souls for whom we pray.



For many families in Newfoundland and Larador, there has been a strong connection to having a “Miraculous medal”. Here is a brief history of this medal:

November 27 marks the anniversary of the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, popularly known by Catholics the world over as the Miraculous Medal. The Miraculous Medal has a special place in the hearts of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, since it paved the way for the Church's official declaration of the dogma in 1854.

The medal is striking because Our Lady herself presented the familiar design.

The front of the medal depicts Mary standing on a globe, with the head of a serpent beneath her feet. Circling the oval-shaped medal is the signature, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." On the reverse, twelve stars surround a large "M," from which a cross arises. Below the "M," the medal depicts two flaming hearts. The left heart, circled with thorns, represents Jesus. The right heart, pierced by a sword, symbolizes Mary.

An Unlikely Helper

By what intervention and through what vessel did the Blessed Mother convey the design of this medal? As in the case of The Divine Mercy revelations to St. Faustina, a young, unassuming nun in 1930s Poland, once again God chose an unlikely helper. Nearly 100 years earlier, He selected a 24-year-old novice in the community of Sisters known as the Daughters of Charity, Paris, France, in 1830.

The extraordinary story begins on the night of July 18, 1830, when a mysterious child awakens Sister Catherine Laboure. The child leads her to the convent's chapel. There, Sister Catherine sees the Virgin Mary, sitting in a chair. She kneels beside Mary, and rests her hands in the Virgin's lap. The two speak for several hours. During the conversation, Mary promises she will return and give the young nun "a mission." The child leads Catherine back to her bed. Catherine hears the clock strike 2 a.m., July 19.

A little more than four months later, Sister Catherine learns what Mary wants.

During her evening meditation on Nov. 27, 1830, Catherine has a vision of Mary standing in a position similar to the depiction on the medal. Later, the vision changes to include the inscription found on the front side of the medal.

Mary speaks to Catherine, saying, "Have a medal struck upon this model. Those who wear it will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around their neck."

Iconic Attraction

It was as Mary said. The medal's effects were immediate.

The first medals were made in 1832 and distributed throughout Paris. According to the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the blessings that Mary promised "began to shower down" on wearers of the medal. The devotion spread rapidly. In 1836, a Church investigation declared the apparitions to be genuine.

Since Mary asked Catherine to have the medal struck, devotion to the Miraculous Medal has spread the world over, the image having achieved iconic stature.

But what does the medal mean? In answering that, one discovers why it works.

The Front Side

- *Mary stands on a globe, crushing a serpent beneath her feet. Describing the original vision, Catherine said the Blessed Mother appeared radiant as a sunrise, "in all her perfect beauty."*
- *Rays shoot out from Mary's hands, which she told Catherine, "... symbolize the graces I shed upon those who ask for them."*
- *Words from the vision form an oval frame around Mary: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."*

Seen as a matrix, the elements of the front design encapsulate major Marian tenets:

Quality of Our Lady As Illustrated by the Medal

- *Mother Her open arms, the "recourse" we have in her*
- *Immaculate The words, "conceived without sin"*
- *Assumed into Heaven She stands on the globe*
- *Mediatrix Rays from her hands symbolizing "graces"*
- *Our Protection Crushes the serpent (Gn. 3:15)*

The Reverse Side

- *A cross-and-bar surmounts a large, bold "M"*
- *12 stars disperse around the perimeter*
- *Two hearts are depicted underneath the "M," the left lapped with a crown of thorns, the right skewed by a sword. From each, a flame emanates from the top. Again, employing a grid analysis, we can see how the reverse-side design contains great symbolism reflecting major tenets of the Catholic faith.*

Design Element and its Catholic Meaning

- *The large letter "M" — Mary as Mother, Mediatrix.*
- *Cross and bar — Jesus' cross of Redemption.*
- *12 stars — 12 Apostles, who formed the first Church.*
- *Left Heart — The Sacred Heart, who died for our sins.*
- *Right Heart — The Immaculate Heart, who intercedes for us.*
- *Flames — The burning love Jesus and Mary have for us.*

The Association of the Miraculous Medal, in Perryville, Mo., notes that there is no superstition or magic connected with the Miraculous Medal, nor is it "a good luck charm." Rather, it is "a testimony to faith and the power of trusting prayer. Its greatest miracles are those of patience, forgiveness, repentance, and faith." *Information on the Miraculous Medal from:*

<http://www.marian.org/news/The-Meaning-of-the-Miraculous-Medal-2942>

If you have these medals in your parish, you can have some blessed and distributed to families.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Mary was honored in special ways throughout May. Many people would traditionally wear a blue ribbon in her honour. Another tradition was to have May altars decorated.

The following is a picture which families can color, trim with blue ribbon and place in a special place in their homes during this month.

Another idea is to give any Marian symbol, picture or statue, that families have at home, a special place during the month of May.

<http://combcarr.dynu.com/coloring-pages-of-mary>

Family Gatherings: FOR MORE, VISIT WWW.RCSJ.ORG

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