

Church Teaching and the Right to Life Middle and High School Session

Purpose

This session is intended to acquaint the young people with Catholic Teaching on the Dignity of the Human Person and the Church's teaching on the Right to Life. The young people will reflect on the following:

- That humans are created in the image and likeness of God
- The sacredness of all life
- What makes someone human
- God's unconditional love for all of his creation, in particular each human person

Materials Needed

News print and markers (one for each participant)

Masking tape

Computer access to the Internet

Bibles one for each participant

Pens or pencils one for each participant

The Teaching of Genesis 1-3. (Handout #1)

3 Posters designated AGREE DISAGREE NOT SURE

3 x 5 index cards with one of the following topics/scenarios listed on the card

- a group of friends making fun of the 'different kid' in their class
- some girls talking about advising a pregnant friend who doesn't know what to do
- some kids from school talking about how stupid Special Olympics are
- some friends from biology class who think that animals have the same rights as human beings
- some boys who think that we should just bomb *those Muslims* till they surrender
- a group of kids who think we should send all the illegal immigrants to jail
- a girl in the group who got pregnant and had an abortion
- a group of friends talking about getting wasted and crazy at the party this weekend
- kids talking about how assisted suicide should be left up to the individual, not society or religion
- a group of friends who see nothing wrong with using frozen embryos for stem cell research

Prepare in Advance

1. Invite, two youth to proclaim Isaiah 49:14-16a and Deuteronomy 30:15-20
2. Go to <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/index.shtml#documents> make copies of "Selected quotes from Church Documents".
3. Utilizing magazines, newspapers, and the internet located pictures of the following: An Elderly Person, Pictures of Toddlers, Wheelchair Bound Person, 4A Dead Person in coffin, Saddam Hussein, Mentally disabled persons, Steven Hawking, 28 Week Old Fetus.

Gathering and Welcome (10 Minutes)

The Leader begins with these or similar words. *In this session we will examine the Catholic Church teaching on the Right to Life and why the Church has continued to issue such a strong condemnation of the practice of abortion in all circumstances.*

The Leader will then conduct a brief Brainstorming session on what the young people believe is the Catholic Church's position on Abortion. Record the conversation on newsprint, (If perchance some statements are inaccurate, correct them in a positive way before they are recorded.)

After a few minutes post the newsprint around the room, invite the young people to come forward and examine the information on the newsprint placing a check next to any statements or facts that they did not know before this session. The Leader should then proceed to the next activity without further comment.

The Dignity of the Human Person (20 Minutes)

Divide participants into groups of 3 or 4. Distribute Bibles one per group. Assign half the groups Genesis 1:2-2:4a and the second half Genesis 2:4b-25. Ask the groups to read the scripture and then develop three statements or teachings about the Dignity of the Human Person from the passage and record them on newsprint.

Invite the groups to present their 3 statements and post them around the room next to the Brainstorming Lists. After the lists have been posted, distribute **Handout #1, "The Teaching of Genesis 1-3."** Invite the participants to read the handout, read over the posted brainstorming lists, and the posted small group statements and to respond to the question, "How do the handout, the brainstorming lists, and the small group statements based on the passages from Genesis, agree or disagree. After their comments, the Session Leader should summarize with these or similar words:

The Creation accounts and the teachings of the Catholic Church have clearly proclaimed that the Human Person has an innate dignity because she or he has been created in the Image and Likeness of God. All of God's creation is good and has as its source the very life of God. Combine that with the human vocation to have Dominion or co-responsibility for creation, Genesis forcefully reminds us that life, all life, is sacred. Furthermore, the creation of human life is something that intimately involves man and woman, and that their sexual love is ordered to human intimacy and new life. There can be no question that the 'fruit' produced through human sexual intimacy is life that has its own origin and destiny in human personhood. Thus, the Church has consistently taught that from the moment of conception, a human person is present and that both the Divine and the human have helped create life.

What Makes a Person Human? (20 Minutes)

The Session Leader introduces this section in the following manner:

*We are going to examine 8 different pictures, **An Elderly Person , Pictures of Toddlers , Wheelchair Bound Person , Dead Person in coffin , Saddam Hussein , Mentally disabled persons, Steven Hawking, 28 Week Old Fetus,** as each picture is shown you will be asked to respond to the following statement:*

THE IMAGE(S) IN THE PICTURE IS/ARE HUMAN?

If you agree with the statement move to the area designated AGREE.

If you do not move to the area DISAGREE.

If you are uncertain move to the area NOT SURE

As each picture is shown and the young people have made their choice, ask for a small sampling of opinions as to why they chose as they did. After the final picture lead a discussion about what make someone human.

As the group discusses insert the following questions:

- **If someone has lost the ability to see or speak or walk are they less than human?**
- **Does the performance of evil against others make a person non-human?**
- **What does it mean when we say a person is inhuman?**
- **If someone can't take care of himself or herself is their worth as a person reduced or forfeit?**
- **How would you label life that exists in the womb? Is such pre-natal life human?**
- **Why does the medical profession put such emphasis on pre-natal care for pregnant women?**

- **Define Dignity:** “bearing, conduct, or speech indicative of self-respect or appreciation of the formality or gravity of an occasion or situation; nobility or elevation of character; worthiness: dignity of sentiments” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dignity>)
- **DIGNITY:** “The excellence that deserves recognition and praise in a person or thing. Highest in dignity is God, whose superiority over all creation is the basis for adoration. (Etym. Latin dignitas, dignity, worthiness, worth)” (All items in this dictionary are from Fr. John Hardon's *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, © Eternal Life.) (<http://www.catholicreference.net/>)

So Now WHAT! (30 Minutes)

Divide the participants into small groups of 5-8. Give each group one of the prepared index card with the topic for a skit or role-play. Allow each group 7 minutes to prepare their presentation. Provide the following instructions:

- Create a role play that portrays the situation or scenario. The role play should be only 2-3 minutes. Please present your situation or scenario but do not reach any conclusions.
- Select a small group leader.
- Advise the small groups that, as each scenario is presented, the small group leader will be asked to present specific words or actions that the small group believes should be offered to the person or persons involved in resolving the situation in line with Church teaching.
- The small group leader must to be ready to direct the conversation and be ready to clearly present an appropriate response in accord with church teaching. (Invite small groups to utilize copies of “*Selected quotes from Church Documents on Life.*”)

Invite the small groups to present their skits and facilitate large group discussion. (20 minutes)

Following the presentations and discussion, the Leader invites the group to prayer with these or similar words:

The Catholic Church stands for the right to life from womb to tomb. It calls every person to recognize, protect, nurture, and defend the gift of life especially at its most vulnerable. The sin and tragedy of Abortion on Demand in our society is a direct attack on God's creative act of love, on the dignity of the human being created in the image and likeness of God, and finally on a society and a world that consistently denies the intrinsic value of each individual human person. We are called to speak for and give witness to Life. We are

called to Choose Life at every turn, in every decision. As we gather for prayer today, let us ask God to give us the strength to practice and live what we believe.

Sending Prayer (10 Minutes)

The Leader distributes Handout # 2 as the young people gather for prayer. Invite the youth to quietly read over the points contained in the handout. Without further comment begin the Sending Prayer.

The Word of God: Isaiah 49: 14-16a.

Response: Prayer for Unborn Children (Recited Together)

O God, our Heavenly Father, You sent your Son into this world that
He might bless and consecrate all life to you.
Your constant love protected him as the ever Virgin Mary bore him in
her womb for nine months.
In his mission he taught us the greatness of your love and the sanctity of
Life
We pray that we may always cherish the life that you have us.
In a special way we ask and pray that you grace and protect all unborn
children
with your caring love.
We pray this in the Name of Jesus, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

(Most Rev. Louis E. Gelineau, Bishop of Providence)

<http://www.angelfire.com/ri/prayers4life/unborn.html>

The Word of God: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Reflection and Closing Song:

Choose from among the following:

- In the Laughter of Children by Joia Farmer, Copyright brotherblue, 2008.
- Sing Over Your Children by Matt Maher, Copyright, Matt Maher, 2009
- Choose Life by Big Tent Revival. Refer to the following:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_H0R6Mw_5w&feature=related

Handout #1: The Teaching of Genesis 1-3

- God is the source of all that is and every created thing is good.
- Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and have a special dignity and vocation as a result.
- God gave Man and Woman dominion over the rest of the creation
- Woman and Man are equal partners and are complementary beings called to live in loving relationship
- Men and women are to be fruitful and multiply, and 'subdue the earth;
- As a result the goodness and beauty of sexual relationships within marriage is established and recognized.
- Human beings were given the gift of free will and commanded to use it in accordance with the divine will.
- From the beginning human beings acted contrary to the divine will and sinned, causing a rupture in the relationship between God and humanity and humanity and the rest of creation.
- God promised that despite the sin of Adam and Eve redemption would still be offered to the human race.

Handout # 2

The Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Sacredness of Life and the Dignity of the Human Person

- the dignity of the human person is rooted in the creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God. (1700)
- -the human vocation is directed to divine beatitude and to freely strive for this fulfillment. (1700)
- -the divine image is present in every person (1702)
- -every human person is endowed with a spiritual and immortal soul (1703)
- -the human person participates in the life of the Divine Spirit and can understand (1704)
- the order of things established by the Creator and by free will direct himself toward his true good (1956)
- -human life is to be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of creation (2270)
- -from the first moments of existence a human being must be accorded the rights of a person (2270)
- -the church's teaching on the evil of abortion dates from the first century and is unchangeable (2271)
- -participation in abortion is a grave offense (2272)
- -the inalienable right to life of every innocent human being is a constitutive element of civil society (2273)
- -if the state deprives a category of human beings such protection, it is denying the equality of all before the law. (2273)

Author

Tony Tamberino, Campus Minister, Our Lady of Good Counsel High School,
Olney MD