



Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Loving All Life from Beginning to End

Session by Fr. Robert Holet and Kira Senedak
Originally written for the Great Lent Giveaway 2016
Leader Packet

Needed Items: Photo copies of various people (see Activity 2)
An icon of Christ on the cross surrounded by the two thieves
Copies of the participant worksheets

Background

This session is designed to provide a myriad of images of human life, and by asking simple questions, allow students to probe their thoughts and experiences about other people, with the hope that they can come to see and value each person as created in the image of God (without using theological language).

Pictures of people can be printed off or displayed using a computer projector one by one – and in the later question session, need to be viewed all at once.

The questions need not be all asked, rather allow the discussion to flow with the goal of helping the students ask themselves questions about what they've experienced, what they believe, and perhaps why they believe it.

If each person is of great value in the eyes of God, then we are our 'brother's keeper' (Gen. 3) and hence organizations like Zoe for Life strive to promote God's grace and goodness in the life of each person, especially those not valued by others in our society.

Goals-

- To assist youth to become aware of their distinctive place in the heart and mind of God as His children and to see the world and all people in light of this unique vision.
- To see how every person, even (especially) those different from us, are worthy of life and love.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW Session III – Life and Death

I. Opening prayer

- Recite together Heavenly King, emphasizing the words '*Giver of Life*'
- The Holy Spirit gives us all life – in this world and in eternity.

II. Life at Every Stage

A. Activity 1- Taking a Trip (5 minutes)- Begin the session by asking students to complete the following activity.

Imagine you are going on a trip to your favorite vacation spot, or maybe a place that you wish you could go. Use the space below to describe or sketch your destination. It could be a specific location like Waikiki Beach in Hawaii or any beach. What makes it a place you would go on your dream vacation? Let students respond in words, sketch their ideas, Google to find a picture or have them come prepared with one. Once they have an idea, ask students to share their spot with the group. If there isn't enough time for everyone to take a turn talking to the whole group, students can turn to someone sitting next to them to share briefly. At the end of the discussion, let students know that we will come back to these ideas a little later in the session.

B. Activity 2- Who is My Neighbor? (10 minutes)- Gather/View Pictures of People from every stage of life. Some suggestions are listed below. For the most effective discussions, be sure to include images that represent a diverse group of people considering gender, skin color, age, physical ability, geographic location, activity they are engaged in, etc. One of the goals of the lesson is to help students recognize value in all life, so it is important to try to include a diverse group. Students should be able to see people who look like them, as well as those who do not look like them.

- pre-born
- newborn
- young child
- youth
- high school
- married -> enables them to be co-creators with God in new life
- a monk
- parent
- middle aged
- elderly person
- person in a coma, near death
- a famous person
- a celebrity
- a person who has died (perhaps from the parish, recently) who they may have known.
- an icon of Jesus

Have the pictures printed out on pieces of paper (preferably 8.5" x 11"). The images should be visible for the rest of the session. One way to display them is to have children choose or randomly select an image as they arrive for the meeting. After the opening prayer, have the student describe the people in their image. They can talk about the number of people, stage of life, other characteristics that they observe, etc. This might be very easy for some students, and difficult for others. Many students worry that if they use the "wrong" label, they will offend others (for example, disabled vs. handicapped vs. differing ability, etc.), others may be offended by something a peer says because of a personal experience. Encourage students to be listening and supportive as their peers share and be sure to address any feelings of discomfort. After describing, the student can hang their picture on the wall.

C. Discussion and Question Session- (20 minutes)

Begin the discussion by asking students-

1. Which of the people portrayed in each of the picture is alive?
2. Is there any person pictured who is not alive?

(Answers to 1 & 2 will vary based on who you have chosen to hang up.)

For the next part of the discussion, remind students of the vacation spot they chose earlier in the session. Ask students:

3. Of the people on this wall (or where ever your group has posted them) who would you take with you if you could only take one person with you?

(Give students a minute to think, then ask them to share their choice and explain why they made that decision. Ideally, their choices will highlight the many ways in which others can be important and valuable in our lives- did they choose the person because they might be fun to be around, for practical reasons like having knowledge or expertise about the place or activities the student wants to go, because they seem more similar to themselves based on age, or race, or ethnicity. We might also rule others out because they aren't similar- much older, younger, from a different part of the world, etc. While we are called to love everyone, it can be a natural tendency to seek connections with those who are similar to us. Be sure to bring these ideas up if they don't naturally come out through conversation.)

4. Think to yourself-would your choice be different if you knew you were never coming back from your trip? If you had a personal connection to someone in the pictures, would that change your mind?

(Students can quickly indicate if they would change their minds. Regardless of answers, encourage students to discuss reasons why they might choose someone else. If that person who is near death is my grandmother, her life is very precious to me. Sometimes people forget about the elderly. If that unborn child is the baby being carried by my mother – and is my sister soon to be born, she's very important to me.)

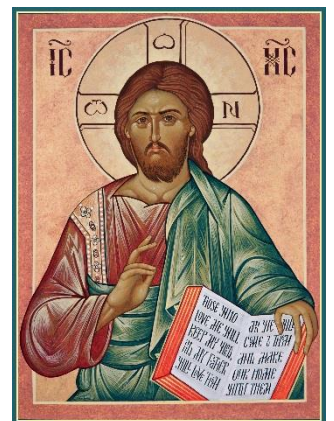
5. If you were able to take every person with you, would you intentionally leave anyone behind?

(Ideally, the answer would be no- they wouldn't intentionally leave someone behind, but it is a reality of our society that there are those who are left out or undervalued and students may identify this in their school environment as well. A good follow up question would be to ask students if they see others being left out or actively excluded and why that might be. Before students share their answers to this question, ask them how they can answer this question honestly, but without hurting someone else's feelings. It might be a good idea for students to write their answers on a piece of paper privately, before beginning discussion.)

After sharing some answers to each question, follow up with the following information:

Our lives are a journey to heaven-a destination more amazing than any of the places we imagined earlier.

(If time permits, you could solicit answers here- a big mansion, beautiful gardens, the beach 24/7, etc.)



We don't know exactly what heaven will look like, but what we do know is that being in heaven means being with God for eternity and that He chose all of us to join Him there. Every life- whether it lasts a minute, a year, or 100 years- is created by God in His image and no one is left out or excluded from the opportunity to join Him in heaven. Look at the images you posted in the room. Is there anyone pictured who was not made

in the image and likeness of Christ? Look around the room at the people sitting next to you and ask the same question.

(Everybody pictured was created by God except one – one was born of God the Father, which one? Jesus was born of God the Father (begotten) not created) – everyone else is created. In the Creed we say that He was begotten, not made (created).)

Are children important to God? Read Mark 10:15 –

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And He took the children in His arms, placed His hands on them, and blessed them.”

If you ever are tempted to think that you are not important, or valued by God, regardless of your age, or gender, or what you’ve done, remember this passage.

God has also given us free will. There is no person who will be unwelcome in God's Kingdom if they have lived a life following His Will and His commandments. The gift of free will also means that we can choose not to follow Him, knowing that our choice means that instead of joining Him in heaven, we will be somewhere away from God for eternity. But God wants us to return to Him so much that He even gives us a way to make things right when we knowingly or accidentally make a mistake. If we are truly sorry and repent through Holy Confession, there is no sin that will be unforgiven.

Ask students, are there any people pictured that Jesus did NOT come to love, and save? Show an icon of Christ on the Cross, between the two thieves as students read the following passage:

Even as He was hanging from the cross, Jesus lets us know that this is true. We read in Luke 23: 39-43 *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”*

Which of the two thieves did Jesus love? Which of the two was given the opportunity to join Him in heaven? God loves every person, regardless of age, gender, race, whether we’re healthy or near death (like the thief), or even like the criminal in that what we have done has offended Him.

(Be sure to emphasize the fact that both were given the opportunity- we can choose not to follow Him, but we are not valued any less.)

So if God has created everyone, and loves everyone, then it is for us to first respect everyone, and by His grace, love them as part of the human family loved by God.

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C. Conclusions from the Exercise –

Closing Question – Is there any person I have trouble loving? If so, I can go to Confession and admit this, and ask Jesus to forgive me because He loves me, and also help me to love this person.

Closing Prayer for Ukraine