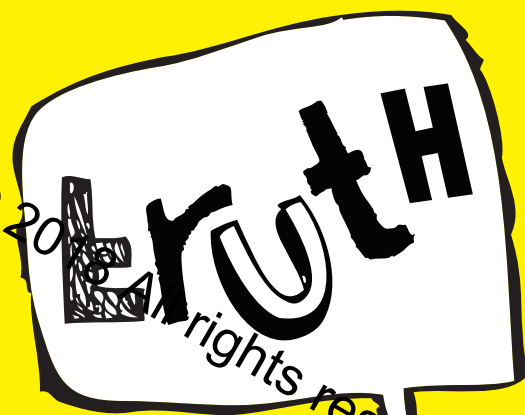


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A **Confirmation**  
**Course** for  
**Teenagers**

**QUOTE**

"Truth?" said Pilate. "What is that?" (John 18:38)

Jesus said: "I am the Way; I am Truth and Life." (John 14:6)

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# Truth: A Confirmation Course for Teenagers

Published by **Redemptorist Publications**

Alphonsus House, Chawton, Hampshire, GU34 3HQ UK

Tel. +44 (0)1420 88222, Fax +44 (0)1420 88805

Email [rp@rpbooks.co.uk](mailto:rp@rpbooks.co.uk) [www.rpbooks.co.uk](http://www.rpbooks.co.uk)

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First published September 2011.

Reprinted February 2012, December 2017.

Layout and cover design by Chris Nutbeen.

Course concept devised, and written by Danny Curtin.

Additional material by Marguerite Hutchinson and Andrew Lyon.

Edited by Marguerite Hutchinson.

ISBN 978-085231-967-6

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Redemptorist Publications is grateful to acknowledge the assistance of the following people in the development of *Truth*:

Fr David Parmiter, Canon Frank Harrington and the parish of St Dunstan's, Woking, as well as

John Toryusen, Rebecca Barber, Monica Conmee, SS Mary and Joseph, Poplar, Stephen Byrne and pupils of Gumley House School, David Beresford, Elizabeth Ridley and Michael Doherty.

The DVD which accompanies this programme was produced for Redemptorist Publications by Bob Walters at Digital Media Production and Training: [www.bobwalters.co.uk](http://www.bobwalters.co.uk)

The publishers also wish to thank the following for their gracious assistance in making this possible:

Paula Macquieira and Carl Fisher at St Matthew Academy, Blackheath

Barry O'Sullivan at Nicholas Breakspear School, St Albans

Rachael Blackburn and Gerard Shepherd at St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School, Newcastle

Katherine, John Jo, Conor, Vicky, Hugh, Mwende, Michael and Nicolette for taking part, and their parents for granting permission for their images to be used on the DVD and within the books.

The DVD was filmed on 5 and 6 July 2011 at SPEC, a vibrant Catholic community working with young people from parishes and schools from the ages of 7-18 years. Our thanks, sincerely, to Jon Rogers, Terry Toolan and the team there. [www.spec.org.uk](http://www.spec.org.uk)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed by Blackmore Ltd, Shaftesbury, Dorset.

## About the author

Danny Curtin has spent more than a decade working in Catholic youth work and parish evangelisation and catechesis. His experience working in parishes and the Diocese of Westminster led to him joining the Young Christian Workers (YCW). He became YCW National President (2005-2010) and worked with thousands of young people across the country and the world. This confirmation course is based upon materials he developed at this time.

During his time with YCW, Danny developed a great passion for working with hard-to-reach young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and overlooked in society. As a result, in 2011, Danny helped to found Million Minutes, a charity that seeks to support projects which transform young people's lives.

Danny was also the founding Vice-Chair of the Catholic Youth Ministry Federation (CYMFed) and co-author of 'Mapping the Terrain', the CYMFed research project into the life and faith of young Catholics in England and Wales in 2010.

Danny now works on a freelance basis with many Catholic organisations, charities and dioceses, helping them in their mission within the Church.

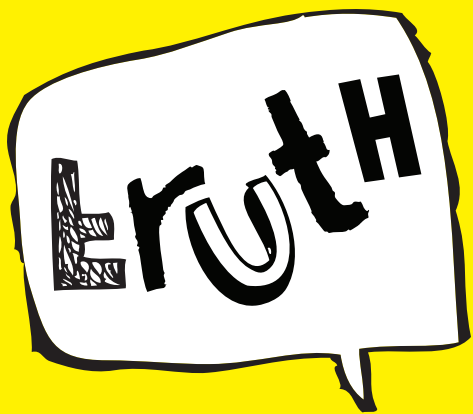
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#truthconfirmation



**"The truth will set you free."**

*John 8:32*



# A Confirmation Course for Teenagers

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## Introduction

### ***How to use this book***

This book has been written to help you to run a successful confirmation programme in your parish. All the ideas in *Truth* have been used by many parishes before they were written into this book. So if you do want to do all the sessions, using all the materials in this book, you will find everything you need here to make your confirmation programme challenging and inspiring for your group of young people.

You are the expert on what will work in your parish. Once you have met your group you will also be the expert on what will work with your group of young people. All the information and ideas in this book are meant to help you, not to constrain you. If there are sections you don't feel will work with the people, or the resources, or the physical environment you have in your sessions, you don't need to use them. If you want to do a different number of sessions or arrange them in a different order that's fine too.

### ***My journal***

There is a journal for candidates which accompanies this course. It is designed to look fun and accessible. It contains more prayers, more information, and more inspiring quotations and Bible readings for each session. Each candidate in your group will need a copy. It is theirs to personalise, scribble on or jot down notes. It isn't a school book. It is their book to do with as they wish. They will need to use the book during the sessions in your group but they can also use it outside the group as a source of inspiration. We hope that in customising their copies and making their book their own, they will keep it as a reminder for years to come of the spiritual journey they have been on.

In this catechist's guide we have included a vertical yellow bar beside text which is also to be found in the candidates' journals.

### ***See - Judge - Act***

All too often, as Catholic Christians we struggle to find a way to balance our faith and the reality of our everyday life. We know about the truth of our faith. When we start living our lives from this perspective we know that we should always strive to live in ways which reflect our God-given dignity, and always try to promote the dignity and worth of others. However, the reality of our everyday life can sometimes take over. In our homes, places of work, study and leisure, we don't always see the dignity and worth that God gave us. Sometimes we strive to live our lives in ways that ensure our own personal security in monetary wealth, material possessions, or power.

If we ask any fourteen- or fifteen-year-old what the truth of their everyday reality is, we will hear back many, many positive aspects of life. But we will often also hear a list of heartbreaking facts: pressure from parents to succeed, expectations from peers to act in certain ways, bullying, violence, abuse of so many kinds, and escapism into today's world of ceaseless entertainment or of alcohol, sex and sometimes drugs. Often they will also tell us that they desire success, and with that often comes the desire to have security in money, a big house and the perfect relationship. Nothing wrong on the surface, and nothing for us to criticise, but we must ask: is this all that God wants for us?

Our task, when working with young confirmation candidates, is to enable these two starting points – faith and real life – to come together. We can bring the truth of our faith into every aspect of our everyday reality so that we are building our lives on one foundation stone, with our faith in Jesus Christ affecting every aspect of our daily reality.

This can't be done by just teaching our young people the truths of faith. Simply teaching teenagers about the faith will not enable our young people to experience that faith in their everyday reality. Neither can we solely focus on the experience of the young people and their opinions. Each of these approaches lacks what the other contains. The doctrinal, teaching approach concentrates on the truth of faith, and can fail to transfer any of that truth into the reality of the young people's lives. The experiential approach quickly turns into a discussion where everyone's opinion is valued, but no real proclamation of Christ is achieved.

The two can come together. We can ensure that the Word of God and the teaching of Christ are heard in the midst of young people's experience. Then they can enquire into it, and see the relevance of their faith in their lives. Following this, these young people can commit themselves to action and living the faith, so that the truth of our faith can be lived in their everyday reality.

For example take the Holy Spirit. Simply teaching about the Holy Spirit could easily end up with the doctrine on the Holy Spirit becoming some external concept that has no part in or relevance to the young person's life. But if we start with experience, we need to ask: what occurs in young people's lives? When in their life do they need to make decisions, or need courage, or need to be strong? When do they gasp in awe and wonder? What knowledge do they cherish the most? These, just some gifts of the Spirit, can be identified in young people's lives, before moving on to our doctrine, and the fact that we have an advocate to help us in all these areas. Are we aware of this great gift? If not what can we do about it? How can we notice the work of the Spirit in our lives... how can we act in different ways... how can we ask him for help...?

This is the method of enquiry and action developed by the movement of Young Christian Workers (YCW), in which I was privileged to have the role of National President for five years. The YCW exists to enable young people to be trained to be apostles: young Christian leaders in life. The method is known as See-Judge-Act. In this simple approach we discover a practical catechesis perfect for confirmation preparation, wherein candidates commit themselves to living out the faith they receive. In this sense, we can begin to address the dilemma of confirmation, so often termed the "sacrament of exit". Rather, it can become the confirmation of the vocation received at baptism: to live as disciples of Christ. Instead of viewing confirmation as an adult faith-commitment ceremony (it cannot be this once we realise that some dioceses confirm candidates as young as seven), we embrace an understanding of the sacrament as an occasion when the candidate is empowered, through the specific gifts of the Spirit, to live out the Christian vocation they received at baptism. They are anointed and given the specific task of fulfilling their baptismal reality, and working to build up the Kingdom of God in the world.

One of the reasons that many dioceses choose to confirm at an older age is so that the candidates have a fuller understanding of what is happening. No sacrament is a magic moment with magical changes effected in the candidate. Most especially in confirmation the candidates need to co-operate in the work that God is doing through the sacrament, and allow the Holy Spirit to work

within them. So, all confirmation candidates need to enquire into their own lives, and see how God works in their life, and what their response to God should be. See-Judge-Act is the ideal method to help young people do this:

- We **see** the importance of realising our own reality: Who am I? What do I want in life? What is my reality? What occurred at baptism? What will occur at confirmation?
- We **judge** what God wants for us in living that reality out: What does God want for me? How does God help? What is the role of faith and the sacraments in my life? What is my response to God's loving help?
- We **act** to link our life and faith: What can I do, through Confirmation, to be happy and help others to be happy? How can I help? How can my faith change things?

See Appendix 3 for more information on the YCW and supporting your group after Confirmation.

### **Role of the catechist**

It is helpful, as a catechist, to imagine yourself with the specific role of being a "companion". A companion is one who travels along with someone – who shares the same bread (in Latin, *companis*: *com* = with; *panis* = bread). Catechists who view themselves also as companions will balance their own experience, wisdom and commitment in their own adult faith with the patience, dedication and sensitivity needed when working with young people who are often searching, hesitant and questioning. It follows the example of Christ in the Gospels who showed great faith in the disciples he called (who were probably young), despite their questioning, misunderstanding and failures.

This helps with the See-Judge-Act methodology. For example, as adults we do not really know the reality of the young people we are working with. It is important that we accept this. Only the young people know their own reality, and so it is the young people who will learn from each other and grow together through their enquiry into life, reflection on faith, and commitment to lived Christian action. The adult's role, then, is to be a companion and:

#### **Listen**

- to take the attitude of a listener who is ready to understand their life;
- to always begin with acceptance of young people as they are.

#### **Help**

- to help the young people to speak;
- to ensure one or two young people do not dominate;
- to invite them to stop and think, to analyse and try to solve difficulties;
- to help them to express their experiences and their faith;
- to help the young people to see their projects through to the end.

#### **Encourage responsibility**

- to enable the young people to take an active role;
- to enable young people to "lead" their group discussions  
(this can work particularly well if someone is dominating – suggest they lead the conversation with the specific role of ensuring everyone speaks!)
- not to take over from the young people in their action and decisions, nor overrule them;

- to be concerned that the young people grow in responsibility;
- to pay attention to the fact that responsibility in faith cannot be separated from responsibility in everyday life.

### **Take part in the formation and education of the young people**

- to play a significant role in their faith formation;
- to ask questions which help to deepen reflection and contrast life experience with the Christian values of the Gospel;
- to help the young people to be more sensitive to and aware of their situations.

### **Sustain**

- to give lots of encouragement;
- to support the continual review of their weekly actions;
- to give moral guidance and support;
- to awaken and encourage initiatives;
- to accompany the young people in an experience of a missionary Church.

### **Preparing the sessions**

Although this book gives you all the information you need to run the course, you will still have a little preparation to do. Each week, the materials you will need to run the session are listed at the beginning of each chapter. Try to look at this long enough in advance to get the materials ready in time, or you might have to make a last-minute dash to the shops!

Spend time reading through the material for each session well before the day of the session. Try to make the content your own as much as possible. This will help you create a relaxed environment where a conversation can take place among the young people. When it comes to preparing the Confirmation Mass, there is some important forward-planning advice on page 93, of which you may wish to be aware.

Before the course begins you may wish to meet with all the catechists to plan at least the first session and to think about other issues. Some things you might like to consider are:

- Do your group already know each other: are they from the same school, or even the same class? If they all know each other already you won't need much "getting to know each other" time and you might not want to do the activity suggested for each session as an icebreaker. Alternatively, you might want to consider mixing the group out of their usual friendship groups to ensure everyone engages. If they don't all know each other, or if there are just a few teenagers who come from a different school, it is really important to spend a lot of time on "getting to know you" and small-group work.
- What are the facilities like? Does this affect what activities you do? For example if space is extremely limited you might not be able to do some of the "To get us started" activities, or if it is a huge space you might need to think creatively about how to generate a prayerful atmosphere for the final prayer session.
- How big is the group? This course will work with any size of group, but you will frequently need to get the group into pairs or small groups so that they can discuss things well. If you have enough catechists you might like to assign a catechist to each small group for some of the activities and discussion topics.
- It often works best to keep the same groups each session, with the same supporting catechist. This helps to build relationships and to form trust among the group. At times

it may seem difficult to get conversations started. Don't worry and don't be afraid of silence. Gently encourage people to contribute by asking questions. Resist the temptation simply to talk, and to fill the silence by saying what you think. Don't be too concerned if one or two young people seem not to want to talk, and don't assume that they are not engaged. Some will be shy, others may find that someone else always makes their point first.

- What times and dates are the sessions going to take place? Does this affect the structure of the course? For example, if you only have hour-long sessions you will find you need to miss out some sections of each session; if you only have six sessions, you will need to prioritise which sessions to run and which to miss out.

### **Structure**

*Truth* is made up of nine sessions. Eight of these are preparation for the sacrament of confirmation and the final session is a post-confirmation session, to allow the young people to reflect on their confirmation and what it means for the rest of their lives.

Each session contains different sections. While sessions are similar in structure to one another, they aren't all the same. Here is a brief outline of a typical session and how to use it:

**Leader's reflection:** this is for the leader's own personal reflection and is not intended to be shared with the group of young people. If you have a group of catechists, you could use this reflection as the starting point of a discussion between you when preparing the session.

**Opening prayer:** this is here if you like to begin with a prayer. There is a longer and more formal prayer section at the end of each session, so if you don't feel it helps your group to gather and begin with a prayer you do not need to use this opening prayer.

**"To get us started..." activity:** these fun group activities have been chosen to help the group get to know each other and have fun. There is often a serious point linking the game to the theme of the session.

**See:** this section always encourages the young people in your group to think about something that is going on in their lives, examining their behaviour and their beliefs. If you find very serious issues being raised in this session, you might want to spend extra time working on this.

**Judge:** this section encourages the group to use scripture and church teaching as a guide to their lives. The group can then link what their faith says to what is going on in their lives.

**Act:** this is the natural follow-on from the previous two sections: once they have thought about what is happening in their lives and what their faith says, they can choose how to act. Each session features a real-life story of someone who has used their faith to guide their life. The group are then encouraged to think of personal actions, and group actions.

**Final prayer:** each week a short prayer and scripture reading section is included. You might want to make this a big feature of the course, preparing an area of the room or the church to create a good atmosphere for prayer and reflection. You might want to think about lighting, music,

images. You could use other prayers and have some quiet time for meditation too. There are more prayers and Bible readings in the candidates' journals which you might like to use if you want to expand this section.

### ***The DVD***

The DVD which comes with this programme can be used to encourage the small-group work. Show the DVD to the whole group (when you see the  symbol in this book) before splitting into smaller groups. The comments made by the young people featured on the DVD are unscripted, and were their honest reactions to the questions. As such they will help to inspire and challenge the ideas and reflections from the young people in your group.

### ***Supporting the programme***

Depending on the nature of your parish there are lots of activities you and your group could organise to support this programme. By getting the group involved in something more than weekly sessions for a couple of months, you might find they get more engaged with their sacramental preparation. Here are a few things you could do:

#### **Service projects**

Is there a project the group could take on? The best service projects are ones which help the young people to see the practical relevance of their faith. Choose projects that allow them to see the difference they are making and are not simply token gestures. For example, if your parish hasn't got a welcome ministry, can the group help to start one by welcoming people at the door of the church and handing out hymn books? It could be something that enables the whole parish to see the value, faith and commitment of the group. They might want to organise an event for the parish, a Mass, or get involved in a community project such as volunteering with elderly people, or providing assistance at the primary school.

#### **On-Location sessions**

Some parishes have their sessions on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and visit a different location each time, which has some relevance to the theme of the session. So, for example, visiting a charity that works with people who have learning disabilities may link to reflecting on the gifts each person receives and how they put them into practice (e.g. in Session 3). The location needs to have suitable meeting space to complete the group-work for the session.

#### **Social events**

Is there an opportunity to organise social events as part of the confirmation programme in your parish? This could be something which is just for the group to enjoy together like a trip to the cinema or bowling or a pizza night. Or it could even be a social evening which the young people organise and to which their families are invited: perhaps a barbecue or a talent night, or a charity fundraising event.

#### **Retreat**

Some parishes have the resources to take their confirmation group on a weekend or a day retreat. The sessions in this book could be used in a retreat setting just as easily as in a weekly meeting in the parish.

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Our Journey

## Session 1

# OUR JOURNEY



### Aim:

To help the young people recognise our identity as children of God, and how God wants us all to share in God's dream for our lives.

### Leader's reflection:

*What did you want to be when you were growing up? Have you realised your dreams? Or has life taken you on a different path from that which you would have chosen yourself? Whatever direction life takes us in, and whatever our circumstances, the Lord calls each one of us to follow him, and to get to know him personally. Following him means being able to discern his call for our lives. How can we do this? How can we become the people God wants us to be? This first session on our journey towards confirmation with young people explores these questions. It should help you to open a conversation with the young people about their hopes for the future, and get them thinking about how God might be at work in their lives.*

**TiP**

If there's a team of catechists in your parish, perhaps you could meet together for a few minutes before every session and read and think through the leader's reflection each week?

### You will need:

- A candle and something to light it with
- Some relaxing/meditative music
- Flip-chart paper and pens
- Small pieces of paper for the young people to write their prayer intentions on and some pens/pencils to write with
- A basket or something to place the prayer intentions in at the end of the session

### Candidates will need:

- Their candidate journal and a pen

**QUOTE**

**"Love is from God and everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God."**

*From the First Letter of St John*

## Begin with a prayer...

*As the young people begin to arrive have the lights in the room dimmed, a candle lit in the centre. As each person arrives, invite them to sit quietly in a circle around the candle. Perhaps play some reflective music in the background.*

Lord God,

As we begin this journey of faith together, we ask you to guide us along the way, and be patient with us as we follow. Support us, Lord, as we begin to ask questions, as we discuss issues and as we grow in our faith. We pray that you inspire us, Lord, to be open to your leadership in our lives. Amen.

**TIP**

This prayer is also printed in the candidates' books. Perhaps ask one of the young people to pray it out loud while everyone adopts a posture of their choice, conducive to prayer.

## Break the ice...

*Introduce yourself to the group. Introduce any other catechists or helpers too. Welcome the young people. Tell them how glad you are to see them and how you are looking forward to travelling on their journey to the wonderful sacrament of confirmation with them.*

*This is a good time to mention any "housekeeping" items: from how many sessions there will be and what dates and times they will be on, to where the toilets are, and whether there will be a break in the middle of today's session.*

*To get everyone started, begin with a group exercise to help everyone feel comfortable in each other's company and get to know one another a little. Use the following icebreaker, or another one of your choice. For this activity, if you have a large group you might want to split them into smaller circles of six to eight people.*

- Standing in a circle, at precisely the same time everyone starts to say out loud how they define themselves. For example: "My name is John; I am fourteen years old; I live in Warwick Avenue; I have a pet dog; my favourite colour is blue; I am good at maths but not good at French."
- As they are speaking (not shouting!), encourage the group to make eye contact and really address each other, even though they can't necessarily hear what other people are saying. Also encourage them to really try to make themselves understood, even though the other person is trying just as hard to speak to them.
- This continues for a few minutes, until everyone stops at precisely the same time, shuts their eyes and stands absolutely still. (You'll need to agree how you'll indicate these few minutes are over.)
- Ask the group to notice their posture, breathing etc, and to notice how much they hang on to their identity. Notice, too, how "noisy" competing identities are. When they open their eyes invite them to sit for a moment of silent reflection.
- Now get them to take it in turns to introduce themselves to the rest of the circle.

# SEE

*In this section we encourage the young people to examine the things that happen to them in their lives and the lives of those around them.*

*What are the things in our lives that give us happiness? Friendship? Games consoles? Holidays? Allow a few minutes to give the young people some thinking time. Encourage the young people to make notes in their journals. Read aloud the following questions and discuss them in the group. We'll return to them in section 5 as a basis for thinking about what action we could take this week.*

## "What makes you happy?"



**Ask the young people to think on their own and to write in their journal.**

- Think of something you have achieved which you are pleased with. What did you have to do to achieve it?
- Think of one real event which has made you happy, and another which made you unhappy, or which really wound you up. They may be small things, which happened recently, or things which stick in your mind from a while ago; they may have happened to you or to someone close to you.

**Then ask the young people to get into small groups and discuss the answers that they have written down.**

*If it seems tricky to get the conversation going, try offering some examples and asking whether the young people have experienced something similar. The answers to this section could be as simple as getting to the next level on a game (making them happy) or their teacher telling them off for something they didn't do (making them wound up), the death of a pet (making them sad).*



It often helps to allow the young people to discuss their responses in pairs before sharing them with the group.

**Next encourage them to share their answers and thoughts with the whole group.**

*Encourage each small group to share their responses with the whole group unless you have an enormous group in which case stick with small groups or it will take for ever!*

*What did they write down? Why? As you begin this conversation ask someone to write down the responses on the flip chart so that everyone can see. Are there any issues you can explore further? If there are take a few minutes to look at them in more depth:*

- Why did these issues make you happy/unhappy?
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Who did it affect?
- How did they feel?

**"Create your own life story!"**



*Split into small groups or pairs to do this exercise. Encourage the young people to be honest about what they really want in life. Once they have finished encourage some people to share their ideas, and write the answers down on a flip chart. Once you have filled your flip-chart page, stick it up on the wall. You will come back to them as part of the "Judge" section when we examine what God wants in our lives.*

**There is space in their journal for them to write their responses to these questions.**

**Ask the young people:**

If you could write your own life story, where would you be in five years' time, ten years' time and when you are 65 years old? *Write these answers down.*

**To get the conversation going you might give them some ideas:**

- **5 years** – in work or at university?
- **10 years** – married or single? What possessions do you think you might have? House? Car?
- **65 years old** – grandchildren? Retired or working?



In this book all text with a yellow bar beside it is also printed in the candidates' journals.



# JUDGE

Choose **two** or more of the four sections below. If you have lots of time or you want to add in an extra session you could do all the options. All the options are available in their journal. Alternatively you could encourage the young people to do further work on it at home during the week if they are interested and motivated.

## A: Gospel enquiry

Invite the group to listen carefully to the story and to think about the time, place and people involved. Perhaps you could ask a member of the group to read.

### Read the Gospel, Luke 15:1-6

"The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man,' they said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them: 'What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? 'Rejoice with me,' he would say, 'I have found my sheep that was lost.'"

### And discuss together...

- Who is in this story?
- What happened?
- What was said?
- How do you think the people present would have reacted to this? Why?
- Who do you think the lost sheep represents in this story? Who does the shepherd represent?
- What does this story say about how God views each one of us?
- What meaning does this story have for our lives?

### Leader's ideas:

*Repeat the story: a shepherd, leaving ninety-nine sheep on the hillside to go in search of just one, was risking losing his other sheep while he was away.*

*Tell the meaning: the meaning is that each one of us is special in God's eyes. We are told at the beginning of the Bible that we are made "in God's own image", and so we have a value that nothing in this world can take away. This is the message of the story: we are worth so much to God that God will search us out and care for us.*

*What does this mean in our lives? Put simply, God wants us to be happy and fulfilled. This is why Jesus also said, "I have come to give you life to the full." What does this say about our identity? That we are people who are loved by God!*

## B: What does our faith say?



**"I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full."** *From the Gospel of John*

### Leader reads aloud:

Our faith says that anything that is good, and all love, is from God. This is how God wants us to be happy: to strive for goodness and to always love.

### And discuss together...

- Is this realistic?
- How many of your answers to what Jesus wants for us agree with your answers during the "See" section about what you think will make you happy in life?



## C: God's life story for you...

Ask the young people to consider what they think God wants for them in five years' time, ten years' time and when they are 65 years old.

Write these answers down on a flip-chart page and stick it beside the flip chart full of their own aspirations.

Then discuss whether there are any differences between what they wrote down that they wanted in the earlier exercise and what they think God wants for them, and explore why this might be.

*Things you might want to explore: What are the things society teaches us to desire (e.g. wealth, fame, possessions, success, etc.)? Are these the things we actually want and will make us happy? What are the things that God finds valuable in life (e.g. caring for others, loving, being in a community, being the best person we can be, etc.)? Try to tease out of the young people what Jesus stood for: Love, peace, justice, forgiveness, joy, righteousness, etc. Jesus came to show us to serve one another. Being a Christian is more than about being nice, it's about being good. What do you think this means? What is the difference between being nice and being good?*

## D: A sacramental sign

If your parish priest is happy for you to do so, show the pot containing the oil of chrism to the young people so that they can see what the oil of chrism looks like.

### Tell the group:

When you are confirmed you will be anointed with the oil of chrism. This is a special oil which was used at your baptism. It is a sign of your life in God.

Anointing in biblical times was a sign of abundance and joy. It marked you out as special.

Anointing is a way for God to show us that we are worth more than riches and that we will have fullness of life in God.

### Ask the group:

- To think about what ways other people show you that you are valued.
- Are there any other ways that God shows you that you are valued and loved?

# ACE

## Meet

*This section is intended to show the Catholic faith working in some people's lives. Each week there will be a profile of a young person and of someone who has been motivated by their faith to do something amazing. These texts are also in the young people's journal. You could mention them as something for the young people to read during the week, or you could make it the basis for a discussion in the whole group about living as a Christian.*

### Mwende

My name is Mwende. I came from Kenya two years ago. I'm still new to the country and I'm still learning new things. I enjoy being a Christian because it's something I like doing.

I serve in the church as an altar server, and it's something I do because I feel like I'm relaxed here. It's good for me because back home you don't have the opportunity to serve in the church, so being an altar server is a good honour for me.

I would like to be a nutritionist, and to help people know what's good for them and what's bad for them, and what they need to have in life to grow and prosper. An alternative to that: seeing young people happy makes me happy, so that encourages me to be a care worker, or someone who takes care of children.

### José Antonio Abreu:

A Professor of Economics who is also a government minister doesn't really sound like the kind of person to start a youth movement. But that is what José Antonio Abreu has done. He turned his Catholic faith into action. After a distinguished academic career and time spent as the culture minister for the government in his native Venezuela, José Antonio Abreu founded an organisation called El Sistema (The System). It brought classical music lessons to children in the slums. These children were often not in school and many were involved in crime. The capital city, Caracas, is one of the most violent places in the world. Many people thought his scheme would have no effect. They were wrong.

Today more than 400,000 people are involved in El Sistema. Giving children in slums music lessons doesn't just give them the chance to play music, it widens their horizons, gives them a sense of achievement and teaches them skills. All around the world Venezuelan slum kids are getting jobs with top orchestras. One of these is Edicson Ruiz. When he was eleven he was given lessons on the double bass. He said having music in his life saved him: "When I woke up in the morning I didn't know if I would have any food to eat but I knew I could play music and feed my soul." Today he plays with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, one of the best orchestras in the world.



## QUOTE

**"Let us reveal to our children the beauty of music and music shall reveal to our children the beauty of life."** José Antonio Abreu

## Deciding on your action

So far we have looked at hopes and aspirations in life, and what causes sadness and happiness. We have thought about what our faith has to tell us about this. When we look at how our real lives and faith combine, it leads to action. Once we have thought through God's perspective on our lives, we are ready to decide on an action.

### Personal action:

*Encourage the young people to commit to doing something during the next week which will help bring God's goodness and love to someone else. Ideally this should be as a result of their own notes about **real life** and **faith**. The action can be very small and hidden if they want. They can write the action down in their journal but they do not need to share it with the group at all.*

*To get their ideas started you could make some suggestions or ask some questions. Perhaps suggest doing something for someone in their family or being kind to someone at school. Or ask questions such as "Can you think of anyone who would welcome a helping hand?"*

*Tell the young people that at each session they will be asked if they have done their action and whether they want to share their experience with the group. Remind them that they do not have to share or tell anyone about their action if they do not want to.*

Let's look back at the notes we made at the beginning. Think again about the areas of our lives we said have made us unhappy.

- Is there anything we can do to change that situation?
- Can we help others that may be in that situation too?

### Group action:

- What can we pray about?

*Ask everyone to write a very simple intention (e.g. "for victims of bullying", "for my little sister who is ill", etc.) on a small piece of paper. These will be used during the closing prayer.*



*If the young people are planning a service project for after confirmation, there may be things they've noticed in today's discussion which they could help do something about.*

*Before you begin the closing prayer section, encourage the young people to read through and fill in their journal during the week ahead. Remind them that it is a tool to help them on their journey to confirmation. Their journal contains lots more information and ideas than can be covered in each section.*



**"This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you."** *From the Gospel of John*

# PRAYER



*You will need the candle and a basket or bowl for prayer intentions.*

*This short prayer and meditation can be done in church with candles lit and lights dimmed. Perhaps you could all gather on the sanctuary, sitting on the floor in front of the altar. If using the church isn't practical you could instead sit in a circle around the candle as at the beginning of the session. You can use all the prayer and meditation below or just the prayer if you prefer. You might find it helpful to have meditative music in the background and perhaps an image – whether a photo, a statue, an ikon or a Bible – beside the candle and basket to act as a prayer focus.*

*Ask the young people to put their prayer intentions in the basket. They don't need to tell anyone what they have written. Invite the group to become still. Light the prayer candle again.*

**TiP**

Why not ask different people to pray these prayers out loud?

## **Read the following excerpt from Psalm 139**

*This is a reading from one of the ancient psalms in the Bible. It reminds us that we are all special to God:*

Lord, you examine me and know me,  
You know when I sit, when I rise,  
You understand my thoughts from afar.  
You watch when I walk or lie down,  
You know every detail of my conduct.

A word is not yet on my tongue  
Before you, Lord, know all about it.  
You fence me in, behind and in front,  
You have laid your hand upon me.  
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,  
A height to which I cannot attain.

You created my inmost self,  
Knit me together in my mother's womb.  
For so many marvels I thank you;  
A wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.

## **Final Prayer**

Thank you, Lord,  
for loving us into existence.  
Thank you for helping us to understand  
the world around us  
and for inspiring us to change it for the  
better.  
Protect us, Lord, as we follow you  
through this week.  
Strengthen us in our quest for  
happiness for ourselves  
and for all our friends.  
Amen.

*As you end the session, remind the candidates of the date and time of the next session.*