

Olympic-Sized Fun!

By Ann Marie Eckert

Purpose

With the summer Olympics, comes the opportunity for young people to participate in some Olympic inspired games, and to have a fun and engaging evening reminiscent of the excitement and togetherness inspired at the Olympics. The closing prayer will invite young people to prayer for people throughout the world to be more open to friendship across national boundaries.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m.	Welcome
7:05 p.m.	Opening Ceremonies
7:30 p.m.	Track and Field Events
	Extend the Session: Additional Games (add 90 minutes or more)
	Extend the Session: Olympic Trivia (add 10 minutes)
8:10 p.m.	Break and Snacks
8:20 p.m.	Closing Prayer
8:30 p.m.	Good Night!

Extend the Session: Additional Games (unlimited possibilities)

If you wish to extend this session beyond 90 minutes, simply insert additional games into the event. You can include games such as volleyball, softball, and basketball. Tug of War was an Olympic sport for a while (1900-1920) so you could engage the young people in a tug of war. Or, if you prefer, make up games that match with the spirit of Olympic games—such as a balance beam event on a low fence in the parking lot or a rowing contest (have young people sit on skateboards and row themselves to a finish line).

Extend the Session: Olympic Trivia (10 minutes)

Put participants into small groups and give each group a copy of Handout 1, Olympic Trivia. Give them about five minutes to work on the quiz. When time is up, have each team give their answers to each question (Resource 3, Olympic Trivia—Answer Sheet), one question at a time. Award a prize, if desired, to the winning team.

Materials Needed

“Olympic Theme” by Frederick Fennell and the Cleveland Symphonic Winds
Fun, party music
CD player
Stopwatch
Newsprint, one sheet for each group, plus three extra sheets
Markers, a collection of colors for each group
Masking tape, one roll for each group (or peel off a long strip for each group)
Resource 1, Opening Ceremonies, one for each group
Resource 2, Olympic Events, (see #3 in Prepare in Advance)

Small table covered with a cloth
Bag of M&Ms, each participant needs three M&Ms of a unique color
Toothpicks or small wooden skewers, three for each group)
Additional wooden skewers (about 50) if doing games in grass
Rope (if outdoors) or tape (if indoors) to create lines
Individual, adult-sized, jump rope
Medals – gold, silver, and bronze – hung on ribbon, 5 of each (if desired)
Water and cups available during the competition
Snacks and refreshments
Bible
Index cards, one per participant
Pens or pencils, one per participant

Prepare in Advance

1. Invite a volunteer to play the role of Bob Costas (or whoever is the host of the Olympic coverage for this year). This person has to be able to really get into the role, creating a funny “MC” for the event and helping people to feel comfortable. This person must be able to highlight young people without playing favorites and must be able to cover the sports competitions without making people feel self-conscious or embarrassed. It is helpful if the MC knows the young people. This role is distinct from any other group leaders.

2. Create a “stadium” for the opening ceremonies. Use a space that young people can walk around within. This can be a parish gym or hall, or an outdoor space. If using an outdoor space, designate the “stadium” in some way—use the parking lot, set up cones to outline space on the lawn, etc.

3. Make copies of Resource 2, Olympic Events (2 pages). Cut these pages so that you have four slips from each page, cutting off the header and footer on each page. Each small group will need eight slips to indicate the athletes needed for each event. Each small group will need:

Discus
Javelin
Relay
Relay
Relay
Relay
High Jump
Triple Jump

4. Using a blackboard, sheet of newsprint, or some other format, create a Tally Board that lists each team’s country name (to be added after small groups choose a country name), and the gold medal count for their team. It should look something like:

Country Name:	Gold Medals	Silver Medals	Bronze Medals
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TOTALS:

To set-up for the track and field events:

5. Discus Throw: Separate the M&Ms into color groups. Each participant will need three M&Ms of a unique color. Create an area for the discus throw. In advance of the session, practice to see how far you can throw an M&M to get a feel for the area you will need. Create a line where participants will throw their M&Ms. This is best done in the grass because the M&Ms will not break or bounce. If done on grass, make sure you have someone who will be the spotter to be sure they can be found!

6. Javelin: Paint the end of the toothpicks or skewers with different colors. Each participant will need three toothpicks/skewers of a unique color. Create an area for the javelin throw. In advance of the session, practice how far you can throw a toothpick/skewer to get a feel for the area you will need. You may wish to use the same area for the discus and javelin throws. If done in grass, the skewers will be much more easy to see, and might be strong enough to dig into the grass. If done indoors, use toothpicks because they will travel shorter distances.

7. Relay Race: Create a starting line and a tag line. The teams will run from the starting line, tag something, and then return to their starting line. The tag line can be a building/wall, a chair (one for each team), etc. It should be something that can be touched. Keep the distance somewhat short – perhaps 20 yards.

8. High Jump: Using a ladder, hang newsprint on the side of a building or the wall of a building. The young people will jump with a marker to see how high they can get, so hang the newsprint as high as you think they will be able to jump.

9. Triple Jump: There is no set-up. This will need to be done on a hard surface.

10. Invite two young people to read for the closing prayer.

11. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. Hospitality is important: As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

Session Outline

Welcome (5 minutes)

Greet the participants as they arrive and make sure that people have nametags if everyone doesn't know each other.

As people are arriving, consider playing the Olympic theme song on a continuous loop, or use it to get everyone's attention. When the group is gathered and attentive, have "Bob Costas" greet participants as though they were Olympic athletes (ham it up as much as necessary):

Greetings Olympic Athletes! We are thrilled and excited to be embarking on the 2008 Olympics with you. You have been training for this event for years, having dedicated yourself to the pursuit of perfection. You have been chosen. You represent yourself, your family, and your homelands. You are our future, our present, and the best the world has to offer.

Opening Ceremonies (25 minutes)

Assign the participants to their small groups. Provide each group with a sheet of newsprint, markers, masking tape, and the 8 strips of paper (representing the different events).

Have "Bob Costas" set the stage for the first activity, the Opening Ceremonies:

Athletes! This is your moment to prepare for the Opening Ceremonies. As you know, the Opening Ceremonies are a chance for all 200 nations, and over 10,000 athletes, to come together to launch the Olympics. In a very small way, it gives every country a chance to proudly parade into the Stadium and join the rest of the world as friends.

Give the following directions to the small groups, referring to Handout 1, Opening Ceremonies:

To prepare for the Opening Ceremonies, you have a number of jobs that must be done quickly.

Decide what "country" you will represent. You can choose a real country or make up a country. You are not allowed to use the USA, Canada, or Mexico.

Use the whole sheet of newsprint to make your country's flag. Be as creative as you wish!

Decide in which of the events each person will participate. The papers that you have been given should be taped to the backs of the participating athletes. Everyone must participate in one event, but some people may need to participate in more than one event. You must make your decisions based on who you think has the greatest chance of success in events you might not really yet understand!

Choose the person who will carry your flag into the Stadium.

You only have 15 minutes to prepare for the Opening Ceremonies, so please work quickly.

Do not answer questions about the events or what the competitions will be. Let them guess. After 10 minutes, check in with the group and move them towards finishing. At

the end of 15 minutes, line up all groups for the Opening Ceremonies. Line them up alphabetically (by name of their country).

Play the Olympic Theme Song and other music to create a party atmosphere. Have at least a few volunteer clappers available so they can applaud each new country as they arrive. Begin the procession. Have “Bob Costas” do a play-by-play for each country, naming the country, and highlighting some of the athletes who have assembled. (Be sure to showcase all sorts of different young people, not just the most popular or those who ham it up the most.)

Track and Field Events (40 minutes)

Once everyone has gathered in your “stadium” have “Bob Costas” begin the games. If doing all the games individually, move all the participants to the first event and explain the rules. Once the event begins, have “Bob Costas” provide the color commentary for the event.

It is important to keep the games moving. The young people will lose interest if there is a lot of fighting about rules, long explanations of the games, or if too much time is taken by the “athletes.” Do your best to keep everyone engaged and if you are losing people, consider doing the directions for the next event while the previous one is being played, so only those competing have to hear the rules.

There is no order for the events, although it might be best to end with the relay race since it involves the most people. You can expand or contract the number of games that you play, or, if necessary, you can have multiple events happening at the same time.

Make sure that you have water throughout the competition, especially if done outdoors or in hot conditions

Discus Throw

Assemble all the discus throwers together. Provide each participant with three M&Ms (of the same color). Tell them that their job is to throw the discus (M&M) as far as possible. The person who throws it the farthest will be awarded the gold, second place the silver, and third the bronze.

As each person throws, have a few volunteers who are tracking where the discus lands. If done in grass, place a skewer in the grass to indicate where it has landed. If done indoors, make a decision about “bounce” – does it count or not? Place a piece of tape on the floor to indicate the distance, and then put the M&M on the tape (to indicate the team color).

Have each team throw once before beginning the second round. Finish with the third round. When all have thrown, determine the gold, silver, and bronze medals and add them to the Tally Board.

Javelin

Assemble all the javelin throwers together. Provide each participant with three javelins (toothpicks/skewers). Tell them that their job is to throw the javelin as far as possible. The person who throws it the farthest will be awarded the gold medal, second place the silver, and third the bronze.

As each person throws, have a few volunteers who are tracking where the javelin lands. If done indoors, make a decision about “bounce” – does it count or not?

Have each team throw once before beginning the second round. Finish with the third round. When all have thrown, determine the gold, silver, and bronze medals and add them to the Tally Board.

Relay

Assemble the four participants from each team to the race area. (This explanation will go best if it includes a demonstration.) Explain the race as follows:

This is your starting line, and that (indicate tag line) is the place you need to run to and back from.

We have had a very bad equipment failure and the batons for the relay were not delivered to us. Therefore we have determined another way to run the relay.

Each team will line up, one behind the other, in a leap-frog fashion. Make sure there is about an arm's length between each person.

The first runner is the last person in the line. They must leap-frog over their teammates, run to the tag line, tag it, and then run back and get into a leap-frog position at the front of the line. Once they are down, they call out “go” and the last person in line (second runner) will do the same thing. Then the third runner, and then the last runner. The team that gets their last runner back on the ground (in leap-frog position) will win.

You are not allowed to race until the runner before you is back in their scrunched up position and says “go.” Runners will be disqualified if they leave early.

Since the last runner will run the shortest distance, you should decide on your order.

Answer any questions that participants may have, and invite the teams to take their position at the starting line. Have one person (or more) at the tag line to make sure that people tag it, and have one person (or more) at the starting line to ensure that no one leaves early.

At the end of the race, award the gold, silver, and bronze medals and add them to the Tally Board.

High Jump

Assemble the high jumpers together. Give each a different color marker. Tell them that their job is to jump as high as they can and mark the newsprint. They cannot use anything other than themselves to propel them upwards. They will have two chances.

Let each high jumper take their first jump before going to the second round. At the end, award the gold, silver, and bronze medals and add them to the Tally Board.

Triple Jump

Assemble the Triple Jumpers together. Explain that for this competition, they will be asked to jump rope for 30 seconds. The person who can jump the most during that time will be the winner.

Give the first volunteer the rope, set the stop watch for 30 seconds, and begin. Have someone (not the jumper) count the number of jumps. When time is up, record that number and move on to the next person.

After everyone has jumped, award the gold, silver, and bronze medals and add them to the Tally Board.

Conclusion of Track and Field Games

Note to Leader: You may wish to do this as a part of the break so that the participants get something to drink/eat and then are gathered together for the awards ceremony.

Bring the young people to the Tally Board and celebrate the medal count. If you want to create an overall winner, you can award 100 points for each gold medal, 75 points for each silver medal, and 50 points for each bronze medal. Or, you can do a large-scale medal presentation, complete with medals (and flowers).

Break (10 minutes)

Make sure that you have water throughout the competition, especially if done outdoors or in hot conditions. During the break, provide additional refreshments.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

For this prayer, consider moving to a parish chapel or the Church if you think that you will need a change of space to help focus the participants. As people enter into the prayer space, provide each with an index card and a pen or pencil.

Gather

Prayer Leader: (begin with the Sign of the Cross)

God of all people, of all nations, we thank you for today—for laughter, and competition, and the ability to join together in community. We celebrated the spirit of the Olympics which reminds us of the global community of which we are but a small part. Help to open our hearts and minds today to all those who struggle around the world. May our awareness, prayers, and actions bring healing to our world. We make this prayer in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Invite the participants to think about countries and places in the world that are in need of healing, support, emergency relief, etc. Invite them to think specifically of those places

in the world that they have heard about on the news recently. Invite them to write the names of these places on their index card.

Listen

Invite the reader to proclaim Psalm 89:11-15.

Respond

Prayer Leader:

The Olympics remind us that we are a part of a large, diverse global community. There are people of all sizes, shapes, colors, languages, and backgrounds. Let us pause today to pray for people and situations in other countries that are in need of healing, help, and support. I invite you to look at your index card and to name the concern that you bring to this prayer. For instance, you might say “I pray for the people and creatures of Antarctica who are negatively affected by the melting of the ice-cap. We pray to the Lord.” We will all respond: Lord, hear our prayer.

Give time for all to share a petition, if possible.

Sending Forth

Invite the participants to respond “Amen” to these prayers. Encourage them to do it with the Olympic enthusiasm. If necessary, let them know that Amen means “so be it.”

Prayer Leader:

Strengthen us, Lord, to be good sports—in play and in life.

Forgive us, Lord, for the times we forget about the people and places for whom we have prayed.

Be with us, Lord, as we continue to become global citizens and people of good will.

Encourage us, Lord, to be your disciples, today, tomorrow, and always.

This session was written by [Ann Marie Eckert](#), Coordinator of Youth Ministry Services, Center for Ministry Development, Buffalo, New York.

Resource 1

Opening Ceremonies

Your team has a few tasks to accomplish in a short period of time:

Decide which “country” you will represent. You can choose a real country or make up a country. You are not allowed to use the USA, Canada, or Mexico.

Use the whole sheet of newsprint to make your country’s flag. Be as creative as you wish!

Decide in which of the Olympic events each person will participate. The papers that you have been given should be taped to the backs of the participating athletes. Everyone must participate in one event, but some people may need to participate in more than one event. You must make your decisions based on who you think has the greatest chance of success in events you might not really yet understand!

Choose the person who will carry your flag into the Stadium.

You only have 15 minutes to prepare for the Opening Ceremonies, so please work quickly!

Resource 2
Olympic Events

Discus

Javelin

High Jump

Triple Jump
Relay

Relay

Relay

Relay

Handout 1

Olympic Trivia

A - Which sport was not a part of the first Modern Olympics?

Water Polo

Diving

Rowing

Equestrian

B - Which sport was added most recently to the Olympics?

Taekwondo

Mountain Biking

Softball

Table Tennis

C- One of these sports was never in the Olympics. Which one?

Tug of War

Power Boating

Darts

Croquet

D- In the last Olympics, how many volunteers were involved?

3,000

45,000

12,000

600,000

E - Which of these is not actually a country?

Andorra

Pedros

Togo

Burkina Faso

F – Approximately how many more men athletes are there than women athletes competing at the Olympics?

2,000

4,000

1,000

3,000

Resource 3

Olympic Trivia—Answer Sheet

A - Which sport was not a part of the first Modern Olympics?

Water Polo

Diving

Rowing

Equestrian

B - Which sport was added most recently to the Olympics?

Taekwondo

Mountain Biking

Softball

Table Tennis

C- One of these sports was never in the Olympics, which one?

Tug of War

Power Boating

Darts

Croquet

D- In the last Olympics, how many volunteers were involved?

1. 3,000

45,000

12,000

600,000

E - Which of these is not actually a country?

1. Andorra

Pedros

Togo

Burkina

F – Approximately how many more men athletes are there than women athletes competing at the Olympics?

2,000

4,000

1,000

3,000