

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

by Walter Mees, Jr.

PURPOSE

For young people to realize the connection between actions and consequences and to help them see more than one side of an issue through debate.

PREPARATION

Gather pencils, paper and songbooks.

Ask someone to be prepared to close the meeting with prayer.

Prepare and duplicate the following information:

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

Lorrie just celebrated her 18th birthday. She is not married, has a 6-month-old son, and has been supported by her boyfriend Fred who is not the father of her baby. A week ago Fred left her saying he was in love with someone else.

Lorrie did not tell the father of her baby about the pregnancy. She has lost contact with him and cannot remember his last name.

Lorrie's parents, Chuck and Barbara, live in the city and are respected members of a local church. Chuck teaches high school and Barbara is a nurse. They had high expectations for Lorrie, but she never did as well in school as they thought she should. In fact, a year ago Lorrie quit school and left home after an argument with her parents about a boyfriend and her poor school performance. Lorrie's brother is in graduate school, and

her sister is in high school.

She has telephoned her parents twice in the past year—when her baby was born and at Christmas. Her parents have not called her.

In two weeks the rent will be due on Lorrie's apartment, and she has a three-day supply of food.

What should Lorrie do or not do? Read each suggested action and write down your reason.

1. Return to parents' home.
2. Move in with girlfriend in the same situation.
3. Apply for Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which provides cash, food stamps and medical aid.
4. Investigate school or job training programs.
5. Move in with a 29-year-old man she met last night at a party.

OPENING

This meeting can be opened with several songs from your group's favorite songbook or with the following game.

Divide the group into small circles of six to eight youth. Ask the young people to give their name and a color that best describes how they are feeling. Each person must precede his or her name by remembering all the other names and colors, for example, "This is John and he's blue and that's Mary and she's pink."

When everyone is done, have the

participants explain why they picked their color.

THE "MEAT" OF THE MEETING

Distribute pencils and papers with the story of Lorrie plus suggested actions. Give the young people a certain amount of time to read the story and write down reasons for each action. Ten to 15 minutes should be adequate.

When everyone has finished writing, separate into discussion clusters of five. Number the members of each cluster. One's will give their reasons for choosing or not choosing answer one from the story of Lorrie. Two's will give their reasons for choosing or not choosing answer two, etc., until all five have shared. Allow five minutes for the small group to discuss the reasons, seeking a consensus.

Don't wait for the youth to reach a final conclusion; stop them in mid-debate. Renumber the members and have them repeat the sharing process until they have debated all five alternatives.

Reassemble the group and ask a member of each cluster to report on her or his impression of the best action for Lorrie.

vice Jesus gave about such a situation. Responses might include the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11).

Discussion may lead to action number one as Lorrie's best choice. However, that choice would depend upon her parents' ability to respond as the prodigal son's father or like Jesus, and not every parent can do that. Even though some parents are unable or unwilling to forgive, the church should be able to do so. Questions to consider are: How could the group be Jesus to Lorrie, if she were a member? How could each person be Jesus to Lorrie? Don't forget the baby. How could the group help them both?

Close with prayer and enjoy the refreshments.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Study governmental aid programs such as AFDC. Contact your local social service office for more information or brochures.

Research job training and school programs for unwed mothers by calling a nearby employment or job training service.

Study *Bread for the World*