

Homecoming!

to focus on the broader theme of “homecoming” as found in our faith.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Arrive and mingle; welcome, introductions, rules, small groups

7:05 p.m. Pep Rally – Icebreaker

7:25 p.m. Homecoming Parade – Join Our Team

7:45 p.m. Homecoming Dance – A Popularity Contest

Extend the Session: Homecoming Game – Playing by God’s Rules (add 25 minutes)

8:05 p.m. Grand March – Christ our King, Mary our Queen (Closing Prayer)

8:15 p.m. Announcements and Refreshments

8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session: Homecoming Game – Playing by God’s Rules (25 minutes)

One of the best “homecoming” stories in the Gospels is that of the Prodigal Son. **Resource 2** has this gospel story in narrative form. Make copies for five readers. Select a narrator, younger son, father, servant, and older son to read this story to your group. Your readers will present the story twice; the first time, have your group listen casually, without instruction. Prior to reading it a second time, instruct your group to “keep score” by raising their hand each time the younger son, older son, or father should get a point for good behavior or attitude. Your group may also want to assign “negative” points for what they consider poor behavior! Interrupt the reading to write scores on board or paper. Save “debates” for after second reading, then mark a line down the middle of your room with a rope, string, or streamer, and ask your large group the following questions:

1. Do you think the younger son was right to ask his father for his share of his inheritance? If yes, stand on the right side of the line; if no, stand on the left side of the line. (Solicit a few responses from each side as to why they chose that side.)
2. Do you think the older son was justified in his anger toward his younger brother’s actions, and his father’s response? If yes, stand on the right side of the line; if no, stand on the left side of the line. (Solicit a few responses from each side as to why they chose that side.)
3. Do you think the father’s homecoming party for his son was extreme? If yes, stand on the right side of the line; if no, stand on the left side of the line. (Solicit a few responses from each side as to why they chose that side.)

Conclude with the following in these or similar words:

This Gospel story exemplifies God’s love for us, even when we make mistakes. God is always willing to take us back, and celebrates our homecoming!

Materials Needed

- Markers for each small group
- Newsprint or poster board, one sheet for each small group
- Pen or pencil, one for each small group
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or another sheet of newsprint or poster board
- Party decorations, such as streamers and balloons
- Prayer table with pictures and/or statues of Jesus, Mary and the saints
- Votive candles, one for each participant, placed on the prayer table
- Candle lighter
- **Resource 1, A Popularity Contest**, one for each small group
- **Resource 2, The Prodigal Son**, five copies for readers – if using the Extend the Session activity
- **Handout 1, Closing Prayer – Homecoming Litany**, one for each participant
- *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* by Tom East, et. al. (Saint Mary’s Press, 2004), optional

Prepare in Advance

1. Decorate your meeting space in a festive way with streamers and balloons, with a sign that says “Homecoming” in the center. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, 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.
2. Create small groups of 5-7 youth and 1 adult leader. If you cannot do this in advance of the session, determine a way to make small groups (i.e., placing different stickers or symbols on nametags).
3. Set up the room with enough chairs for everyone, and tables for small group work.
4. List all of the activities and ministries that youth are involved with at your parish, such as mission trips, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, fundraisers, Mass, retreats, cantors/choir/musicians, vacation bible school, spring/fall clean up days, youth ministry sessions, committees, prayer, service projects, etc.
5. For the closing prayer, invite eight participants to help. One person will proclaim Acts 2:53-47. For the litany, assign one of the saints to each of the remaining seven participants (see **Handout 1, Closing Prayer-Homecoming Litany**).
6. (Optional) Read *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* in preparation for this session.

Session Outline

Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

Welcome the participants as they arrive. Introduce yourself and any other adults who will be assisting you. Introduce the theme of “Homecoming” to the participants and give them a simple overview of the session, without revealing too much. Remind them to turn off their cell phones and music devices, and then announce any other rules you may have. Introduce small groups and their adult leaders.

Pep Rally – Icebreaker (20 minutes)

Take five minutes for the small groups to get to know one another. Have group members introduce themselves (name, grade, school) and share what comes to mind when they think of the word “Homecoming.”

Then, give each small group the task of inventing a “cheer” for your church. They can use the melody/rhythm of their favorite high school team cheer, or they can invent their own, such as a rap. They must come up with their own words/lyrics. Encourage them to be really creative and even add a little dance, movement, or clapping. The focus of the cheer should be on what’s great at “St. Your Parish,” or why someone should join your church, etc. Give them approximately 10 minutes to invent and practice their cheer, and 10 minutes for a “pep rally” where they present their cheers to the large group.

Homecoming Parade – Join Our Team! (20 minutes)

Note to Leader: *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* (Saint Mary’s Press, 2004) is a guidebook that combines solid research on parish youth ministry with real life wisdom from youth, adult leaders, and parish staff members. This book includes the following quotations (p. 17) from two youth participants, which can be used to introduce this activity:

"Our church is like my second home. It's, like, the best place..."

and

"I see a lot of teenagers that really love to be involved in their parishes and youth ministry gives them the opportunity to share their talents with their whole parish and to help build their faith even more. So that when they become adults they'll still want to be involved in their parishes and do even more things because the youth are the future of the church and so starting now we develop an even greater love and want to do the Lord's work."

Then say the following in these or similar words:

Our church really can be a "home away from home." A church can be a welcoming place to meet new friends and share faith. A church can be a place where people work together for the common good and to care for those who are most in need. A church can be a place where you try new things and find out what your gifts are. A church can also be challenging, just like a home: learning to live with others, taking care of each other, and doing chores such as cleaning and upkeep on the building. Think about all of the things that make up our "church home." What would a church homecoming parade look like?

Give each small group a sheet of newsprint and markers. Using your prepared list of activities and ministries in which youth are involved at your church, assign one area to each small group, and instruct them to make a banner highlighting that particular ministry or activity. Try to assign activities to groups where someone is actually involved in that ministry. Draw a comparison to the different clubs, teams, and organizations found at a high school that might actually participate in a real homecoming parade. How can you make your activity/ministry banner look inviting so that others would want to join you? Give each group approximately 15 minutes to complete their banners, and 5 minutes to present to the large group and attach banners to a wall or bulletin board. (If possible, keep banners up for parish to see!)

Homecoming Dance – A Popularity Contest (20 minutes)

Say the following in these or similar words:

We all know that peer pressure plays a big role in your lives—both positive and negative peer pressure. Hopefully our faith can give us some direction in what is really important. We have the ultimate role model in Jesus Christ, who turned "peer pressure" on its head by not following the norms of his society.

Use another youth quotation (p. 52) from *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* to introduce this next activity:

"I definitely saw Christ in the people we served. It didn't matter what they were doing. I understood why Jesus includes outcasts in his ministry because these kids are the kids that people in society don't really want."

Then say the following in these or similar words:

Who are the people that society doesn't want? Let's do some investigating. Imagine that you are conducting a popularity survey at a local high school homecoming dance. The person in your group whose birthday is closest to today will record your group's answers to the questions on this paper.

Hand out a copy of **Resource 1** and a pen or pencil to each small group. Assign one question to each small group. Take 10 minutes to discuss and answer these questions as a group. Then ask each group to present their findings.

Conclude with the following in these or similar words:

The perfect homecoming, where all are welcome, may not exist at school or in society, but we can certainly do our part to make people feel at home. The same applies to church – do we feel at home here? Do we help others feel at home here?

Grand March – Christ our King, Mary our Queen (Closing Prayer) (10 minutes)

Give each participant a copy of **Handout 1, Closing Prayer – Homecoming Litany**, and a candle. You will need a lightstick available for this prayer.

Note to Leader: If your group is large (over 25 people), the lighting of candles ritual will take too long for this time frame. It is suggested that you name categories of people (grandparents, parents, teachers, coaches, family friends, parish ministers, aunts and uncles, youth ministry team members, friends, etc.). Ask each young person to call to mind someone who fits into that category and pray for them. For instance, you will say “Grandparents” and then pause for 10 seconds to give people time to pray. Continue through your list, pausing after each one. In this case, you should either eliminate the candles, or have many light sticks available so that the young people can light their candles more quickly.

Introduce the prayer using these or similar words:

Our church has a language of faith, a body of words, a lingo that has been handed down to us through the centuries, even as it has been translated to and from other languages. Such words and images have become familiar to us, and we recognize them from the Mass and prayers. Sometimes this language even becomes part of our personal prayer.

What does this have to do with Homecoming? Lots of things!

High schools have a Homecoming King and Queen. We use images of royalty in our faith. As Catholics, we claim Christ as our King, and Mary as our Queen.

High schools have mascots that represent the school at games and events. Catholic parishes have a “mascot” of sorts—who we call a patron saint to whom we are specially entrusted and to whom we can pray for intercessory help.

We all have our own personal community of saints – people who we take inspiration and joy from. People we know have led us to know and believe in God in a deeper way. As a part of our prayer, you will each have the opportunity to light a candle in honor of someone who is a saint in your faith life. We will pass the lighter around the room, when it comes to you, light your candle, and if you wish, say the name of the person out loud. When all the candles are lit, we will call on God to bless these special people.

Gather

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

God of heart and home,

We thank you for our parish and the home in faith it provides us. As we call on Jesus, Mary, and all the saints to pray for us, remind us that our community in faith can always be “home” for us. We remember that our life’s journey toward homecoming with Christ is our ultimate goal in life and faith. In this we give you thanks and praise, O God. Amen.

Listen

Invite a volunteer to proclaim Acts 2:43-47. Allow a few moments of quiet after the reading.

Respond

Invite the seven participants to lead the litany. Then begin to pass the lightstick around the room, inviting each young person to name someone who has helped them to grow in faith. When everyone

(including leaders) have shared, pray the concluding prayer on **Handout 1, Closing Prayer – Homecoming Litany**.

Go Forth

Invite the participants to pray “The Lord’s Prayer” followed by a sign of peace.

Announcements and Refreshments

Thank the young people for their participation, make any announcements you have regarding upcoming activities, and invite them to enjoy some refreshments.

This session was written by Brenda Cline, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, St. Joseph Parish, Grafton, Wisconsin.

Resource 1

A Popularity Contest

1. What does it mean to be popular at school? What types of people are considered popular?
2. What does it mean to be an outcast at school? What types of people are considered outcasts?
3. Have you ever pre-judged someone based on their actions, words, or appearance? If so, have you ever been wrong about someone you pre-judged, once you got to know them? How did you feel?
4. Have you ever taken the chance to get to know someone different than you or your group of friends? What happened?
5. What type of person does our society accept?
6. What type of person does our society reject?
7. Jesus turned our world upside down by accepting people that most of society rejected. Share a story from the Gospels where Jesus demonstrates acceptance.

Handout 1

Closing Prayer—Homecoming Litany

Prayer Leader:

All:

Jesus Christ, King of Life.....**Teach us to live like You.**

Mary, Queen of Heaven.....**Guide our thoughts and actions.**

Holy Saints of Ages.....**Be our models of faith.**

Jesus, Prince of Peace.....**May we be peacemakers.**

Mary, Mother of God.....**Bring our prayers to your Son.**

<Insert parish patron saint>.....**Pray for us.**

Our Departed Loved Ones.....**You are with us always.**

When all have named their faith mentors:

These Faith Mentors.....**Help us learn from their examples.**

Resource 2

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32 NRSV

Narrator: There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father,

Younger Son: ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’

Narrator: So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said,

Younger Son: ‘How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’

Narrator: So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him,

Younger Son: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Narrator: But his father said to his slaves,

Father: 'Quickly, bring out a robe — the best one — and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!'

Narrator: And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied,

Servant: 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

Narrator: Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father,

Older Son: 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you kill the fatted calf for him!'

Narrator: Then the father said to him,

Father: 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Narrator: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.