

SPRING 2020

Connecting with Youth

By Christina Semmel



Spring abounds with opportunities to connect with youth in non-gathered ways. With the renewal of nature and the celebration of the Easter season, it's a perfect time to revitalize our ministry strategies and reach out to youth in new and different ways.



Have Your Youth Pass the Cross. Find a nice small metal or wooden cross that can serve as an ongoing prayer reminder to the members of your youth group. Give the cross to one member with instructions that he/she should pass it to another member when they see him or her in the halls at school or out in the community. When someone passes the cross, he or she commits to saying a prayer for the person to whom the cross was given. The cross should pass from person to person throughout the day or week. Those receiving the cross know that someone is praying for them that day; those passing the cross know they are committed to praying for someone. *Connect to Lent or Good Friday.*



Invite Youth to Experience the Splendor of the Universe. Let the young people of your parish know that they can enjoy the awe-inspiring grandeur of God's creation of the Orion Nebula, Stingray Nebula, Egg Nebula, Ring Nebula, and images from the Hubble Space Telescope right on their own computer. They can also see: Comet Hale-Bopp, Zarya & Unity, The Sun, The Apollo Rover, The Milky Way, globules, galaxies, our own moon, and more! Use interactive models (e.g. <https://www.solarsystemsscope.com/>) or NASA's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAY-SMFNfynqz1bdoaV8BeQ>) to help them explore space. Also, invite them to get outside and identify the constellations with sky maps (<https://www.skyandtelescope.com/interactive-sky-chart/>). *Connect to Astronomy Day (May 10).*



Help Youth Learn to say "Hello" in an Asian-Pacific Language. Asian Pacific Americans represent many different ethnic groups, each with their own language and culture. Here are some ways to say "hello" in a few different Asian Pacific languages. Send this chart to the young people of your parish and suggest they learn a new way to say "hello".

Language	Where This Language is Officially Spoken	How to Say Hello
Hawaiian	Hawaii	Aloha
Japanese	Japan	Kon-nichiwa

Mandarin	China	Ni hao
Taiwanese	Taiwan	Pêng-an
Thai	Thailand	Sa-wat-dee
Vietnamese	Vietnam	Xin chào ("Seen chaw")
Tagalog	Philippines	Kumusta
Malaysian	Malaysia	Helo
Majel	Marshall Islands	Yokwe
Indonesian	Indonesia	Halo
Hindi	India	Namaste
Korean	Korea	An-nyong Ha-se-yo

Connect to Asian-American Heritage Month (May).



Send Youth a Prayer Stickers or Decals. Consider giving vinyl stickers and decals themed on prayer for [National Day of Prayer](#) that they can use on their cars, tablets, phones, etc. You can find some online (e.g. <https://www.redbubble.com/shop/catholic+stickers>) or create your own (<https://www.customink.com/custom/custom-vinyl-stickers>). *Connect to National Day of Prayer (First Thursday in May) or World Day of Prayer (First Friday in March).*

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Connecting with Family

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Spring brings more energy and enthusiasm to families as the weather changes and nature blossoms. Use the holy days and holidays of this season to reach out to the families of the young people in your programs in creative ways.



Pick a Day for a Simple Meal. To show solidarity with the poor and suffering during Lent, ask families to consider setting aside one day a week for a simple dinner of only soup and bread. Suggest they make a point of praying for the poor as a part of their meal prayer that day.

Connect to Lent.



Become Servants for a Week. Jesus modeled servanthood when he washed the disciples' feet before the Passover feast: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). One way to bring this example home is to become servants for a week. On Palm Sunday, have each person in the family draw the name of another family member. Throughout Holy Week, each member of the family looks for concrete ways to serve the person whose name was drawn, without making a big deal about it. *Connect to Palm Sunday and Holy Week.*



Invite Families to Bless a Family Cup and Plate. Invite families to select a special platter and cup that they can designate as the plate and cup they will use for special occasions. Suggest that on Holy Thursday the family gather to bless these items. The cup and plate can be placed in a place of honor in the home during the year.

Blessing of Family Plate

Leader: *(holding the plate with a piece of bread on it)*

We bless this plate again this Holy Thursday for use in our home this year for special occasions. May we share the bread from this plate with a renewed sense of family. Let our taking of the one bread from this plate remind us that we have a hope in our being together in our tomorrows. When we eat from this plate, let us commit ourselves to be with others in our times of joy, happiness and laughter.

(Plate is passed in silence to each family member. Each eats a portion from the one plate.)

All: Blessed be God and this family forever.

Blessing of Family Cup

Leader: *(holding the cup with wine or juice in it)*

We bless this cup again this Holy Thursday for use in our home this year for special occasions. May we share this cup with a renewed sense of family. Let our drinking from

this one cup remind us that we are a family with a shared history and a future hope. When we drink of this one cup today, let us commit ourselves to be with each other in our times of hurt, pain and sorrow.

(Cup is passed to each member in silence. Each drinks a portion from the one cup.)

All: Blessed be God and this family forever.

Author unknown. *Connect to Holy Thursday.*



Invite Families to Spend Holy Saturday Making Easter Cookies.

Each of the ingredients and actions in the preparation of these cookies is related to an event surrounding Holy Week and Easter. Invite families to gather the ingredients and a family Bible and spend time on Holy Saturday making Easter cookies. (<https://www.catholicicing.com/how-to-make-easter-story-cookies-with-a-printable-recipe/>). The cookies also make great Easter presents for friends and relatives or to bring along to Easter dinner. *Connect to Holy Saturday or Easter.*



Encourage Families to Create a Prayer Corner or Prayer Table.

One way to encourage families to pray together more is to invite them to create a special place in their home to pray. Put together some easy suggestions for assembling a simple prayer corner. Offer a few ideas of what could go on a prayer table during different seasons. Commit to periodically sending families prayer resources and prayer cards. *Connect to National Day of Prayer.*



Help Youth Make the Ultimate Family Cookbook for Mother's Day.

Help youth make an incredible Mother's Day gift by suggesting write down family recipes and fun mealtime stories. Suggest they invite their extended family to contribute recipes and stories. They can then print the responses, put them in plastic sheet protectors (available at any office supply store), and put them in a three-ring binder. *Connect to Mother's Day.*



Invite Families to Celebrate Santacruzán.

May is a month devoted to Mary and in the Philippines, children offer flowers to Mary after the praying of the rosary. On the last day of May, a crown of flowers is placed on the head of the statue of Mary. On the last day of May, they also celebrate Santacruzán. This day commemorates Queen Helena's finding the cross of Jesus after her son Constantine, the Roman Emperor, decreed that the Lord's grave should be excavated. The celebration is usually done at night with people processing with candles around the town. At the end of the procession is a young lady dressed as a queen and holding in her hand a cross and a young man dressed as a king. The Filipino tradition has added young ladies wearing a sash to remind the people of the 3 theological virtues – faith, hope and charity. People pray the rosary during the procession and sing the Hail Mary. Invite families to experience a slightly different form of the May crowing by preparing an evening procession around their house or yard

singing the Hail Mary. One girl can dress as the queen and carry a small cross; one boy can dress as the king. Other girls can wear the white sash. Conclude the evening with some authentic Filipino food. Families can find simple recipes at <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipes/696/world-cuisine/asian/filipino/> . Connect to *Santacruzán (May 31), Mary (month of May), or Asian-Pacific Heritage Month (May)*.

SPRING 2020

Connecting with Parish

By Christina Semmel



The greatest feast day of the church year is in the spring, followed by a joyous 40 days culminating in the “birthday of the church” another one of the greatest holy days of the year. Utilize the wonderful holy days of this season, as well as the many secular holidays, to help parishioners grow in their faith.



Encourage Parishioners to Pray for Enemies. Encourage parishioners to follow the example of Jesus’ forgiveness on the cross and set aside Fridays as a special time to pray for our enemies – to pray for those we dislike or who irritate us, whose who have made us angry or have hurt our feelings, and those who have hurt us or ones we’ve loved. Remind them not to forget to pray for our political and national enemies as well. They should also pray for the courage and strength to reconcile their feelings, especially between family members. *Connect to Good Friday and the anniversary of the beginning of the War in Iraq (March 19).*



Passing of Easter Light with Household Paschal Candle. When we light the Paschal Candle at the Easter vigil, we recall that all our light comes from the one light – Christ. In Greece, it is a custom after the Easter vigil for people to carry the “light” from the paschal candle home to light the lamps at home. Suggest parish households make or purchase a special candle that they can use at home as their “Paschal candle.” They can also make their own using these instructions (<https://www.elizabethclareblog.com/how-to-make-a-paschal-candle-at-home/>).

Have them bring a glass-enclosed votive candle to church at the Easter vigil (or on Easter Sunday) and invite them to come up to the sanctuary after Mass and light that small candle to use to take home the Light of Christ to their family Paschal candle. Parishioners can use this simple blessing for their household Paschal candle:

Loving God, we ask your blessing on this symbol of Christ our Light. May it be a constant reminder to all of us that we, too, are to bring the Light of Christ to others by our lives of justice and kindness. Amen.

Parishioners can use their Paschal candle as a centerpiece on their table during Eastertime. They can also use it on their household prayer table or home altar all year long. It can be used during the Christmas season and on special family occasions and celebrations. Each time they light the candle they can say:

Dying you destroyed our death,

Seasonal Connections – Youth, Family, Parish, Wider Community (Spring 2020)

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rising you restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come to this home
so that we may continue to grow
in our love for each other. Amen.

Connect to Easter vigil & Eastertide.



Distribute a Blessing of Easter Eggs. Arrange to have these simple blessings printed on “business cards” and make available to all parishioners on Passion Sunday in preparation for their household Easter celebrations.

Blessing of Easter Eggs

(Extend hands over eggs and pray)

We praise you, O God, for these signs of life, our Easter eggs.
We thank you for the bright, bursting forth of Christ our Lord.
Amen. Alleluia!

Blessing of Easter Pastries

(extend hands over Easter sweets)

We praise you, O God, for sweetness and delight.
We thank you for the journey of Lent.
We rejoice in the resurrection of Christ and this Eastertime.
Amen. Alleluia!

Connect to Easter.



Suggest a Way to Celebrate the Annunciation. On March 25, the Church calls on us to remember and celebrate the time that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and asked her to become the mother of God. Exactly nine months later, on December 25, we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus. On the Greek island of Kefalonia, the people celebrate the Annunciation by placing a large loaf of bread and a vase of flowers on their table or home prayer table. Then everyone gathers around the table and reads together the Annunciation story (Luke 1:26-38). Suggest families adopt this custom. After the Scripture reading take a few moments to discuss Mary’s willingness to accept God’s will, emphasizing her complete trust in God.

God, you have done great things for us. Thank you. You blessed Mary and entrusted to her the life of our Savior, Jesus. Help us to be like Mary and say yes to you. Bless the bread that we share today. And bless these flowers to remind us of Mary this week. Amen.

Then break the bread and share it. (“From the Field – Lenten Traditions from Other Cultures,” *Catechist Magazine*, February 2003, p. 48. Sent in by Mary Margaret Keaton, 7th grade catechist in northern Virginia.) *Connect to Annunciation (March 25).*



Palm Weaving Demonstration. Find parishioners who know how to do “palm weaving” – making the blessed palms into crosses, grapes, wreathes, hearts or roses, etc. Recruit them to be available in the parish gathering space (perhaps during “coffee and donuts”) to teach other parishioners. Have them sit at a table with plenty of supplies and invite those interested to join them for a hands-on demonstration. Set up as many tables as you have teachers. The more the merrier! For some excellent instructions on palm weaving, check online source like this one (<https://www.mercyhome.org/blog/sunday-mass/how-to-weave-palms/>). *Connect to Palm Sunday.*



Jazz up Volunteer Recruitment Flyers and Post-Event Publicity. Make your recruiting flyers look more professional and attractive. Use free online templates from Canva (<https://www.canva.com/templates/search/volunteer-flyers/>). After the event, show your appreciation and make your publicity and photos look great with these free templates (<https://www.canva.com/templates/search/photo-thank-you-cards/>).

Connect to National Volunteer Week.



Give Parishioners Something to Think About (Prayer). Print this little reflection prayer in your parish bulletin or other means to communicate with parishioners.

Answered Prayer!

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
 I asked for health that I might do great things;
 I as given sickness that I might do better things.
 I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
 I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
 I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God.
 I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
 I received nothing I asked for – but everything I hoped for.
 Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayer was answered;
 I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

Anonymous

Connect to National Day of Prayer or World Day of Prayer.

SPRING 2020

Connecting with Community

By Christina Semmel



The whole community reacts to the coming of spring, and it provides a natural avenue for so many non-gathered ways to connect youth with the larger community and with the world. Try some of these non-gathered ideas to capitalize on the feeling of growth, renewal and hope.



Be Like Simon of Cyrene. We don't know much about Simon of Cyrene except that he had been standing on the sidelines on that fateful day and got dragged into the center of a horrible display of cruelty and injustice when he was made to carry Jesus' cross. Suggest youth and parishioners adopt Simon of Cyrene as their model at the end of this Lenten season. As Simon helped carry Jesus' cross, invite them to help carry the crosses of others by helping a neighbor, family member, classmate, or co-worker with a difficult or unpleasant chore (physical, emotional, or spiritual). *Connect to Lent and Good Friday.*



Called to Plant Seeds. Make little packets of seeds to give out to your community. The seed packets can be imprinted with the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero (see **Resource 1, We Plant Seeds**) or you can attach a simple tag to a packet or envelope with seeds in it. *Connect to Anniversary of Death of Archbishop Oscar Romero (March 24).*



Remember Military Personnel with Green T-Shirts & Socks. Laundry is hard to do – especially when actively serving in the military. Collect olive-green t-shirts and socks from parishioners and arrange to have them sent overseas. Tuck notes of encouragement in with each shirt or pair of socks. *Connect to Memorial Day or Feast of St. Joan of Arc, patron of soldiers (May 30).*



Unique Fundraiser for Favorite Charity. Across the country local communities are designating a mascot and having large fiberglass sculptures made that local artists then paint, place around town, and eventually auction off to raise money for a charitable cause. (For example, several years ago the city of Chicago had large fiberglass cows all along Michigan Avenue.) Adapting the same ideas, check with your parish school or local public schools for any desks they are throwing away. Challenge young people and local celebrities (the pastor, the mayor, the principal) to paint the desk. Display them around your parish grounds during June and then hold an auction (silent or live) and donate the money to a good cause (or YM scholarship fund). *Connect to end of school year.*



Teacher Appreciation. St. John Baptist de La Salle is the founder of the Christian Brothers and the patron saint of teachers. Have youth write a note or send a card of appreciation to their favorite teachers. (Don't let them forget catechists that they appreciate.) Or, arrange for some special snack to be delivered to the teachers' lounge at your local school. *Connect to the feast of St. John Baptist de La Salle, patron saint of teachers (April 7), or the end of the school year.*

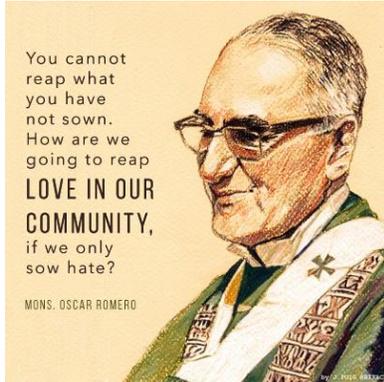


Get a Hair Cut for a Good Cause. St. Catherine of Siena is often depicted with a pair of scissors, cutting off her hair. (She apparently was quite beautiful and cut her hair to "diminish her beauty.") Now here's a different kind of "service project" – let your youth know about the program where you can grow you hair, cut it, and then donate it to make hair prosthetics for children suffering from hair loss. Go to <https://locksoflove.org/> or <https://www.wigsforkids.org/>. Consider making this a long-term service project, beginning on the feast of St. Catherine and ending one year later. Get other parishioners to join in the effort. *Connect to the feast of St. Catherine of Siena (April 29).*

Resource 1

We Plant Seeds

Archbishop Oscar Romero



It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete. Which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. No sermon says all that should be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

That is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and do it very, very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builders... ministers not Messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own.