

AGES 5-6

How They are Developing

- Very active; beginning of self-control which is mostly governed by what gives pleasure and what gives pain. Emotional control is not great. Feelings and emotions are usually freely expressed; the feelings of others are internalized.
- Egocentric and not able to take another person's point of view. Their world centers on "me" and "mine."
- Short attention span; no sense of chronology of or historical development.
- Strong sense of awe and wonder.
- Approval of adults is all-important; influenced deeply by adults and what they do in terms of faith, behavior, and rules. Family-centered; this begins to change as they start school.
- View God in human terms.
- See prayer as having magical validity.
- "Bad" is seen in terms of the amount of harm done. Most at this age will say that to break two cups by accident is worse than breaking one on purpose. (Piaget)
- The Church is understood as the church building.
- Learn by doing, concrete experiences and through play.
- Connections between events are not made; each is isolated or unrelated.
- May focus on a peripheral element of a story, missing the main point.

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- God as the Maker of all.
- Jesus Christ as a special person who loved and helped everyone.
- We help God by taking care of people, animals, things.
- God loves us even when we have been bad.

Specific Content

- Bible stories that emphasize family.
- Stories that appeal to the senses and let the children use their senses.
- What we see and do in church.
- Creation story in simple form.
 - o ***Psalm 104 as a basis to hear, smell, touch and see the wonders of nature***
 - ***What the first church (the Tabernacle) looked like, in simple***

Methodology

- Take children to church when no service is going on and let them see, touch, and smell things.
- Teach actions: sign of the cross, lighting candles in Church, approaching Holy Communion.
- Rhymes and brief prayer phrases that use gesture and melody.
- Include them in rituals and celebrations that take place in church.

AGE 7

How They are Developing

- Still egocentric, but becoming more aware of others.
- Moving beyond home and family to other environments.
- Are “believers” who love ceremony and ritual, processions, blessings. Can sense mystery though they cannot explain it.
- Thinking is concrete; not ready for metaphors, which they treat literally.
- Beginnings of chronological understanding; may be able to differentiate between Bible stories that took place before Jesus lived on earth, those stories that are about His life, and those that took place after He went back to heaven.
- Understanding of symbolism is developing; a stick can be a gun. So a lighted candle can be understood as symbolizing a prayer, or incense symbolizing our prayers rising to God.
- Enjoy learning, stories, jokes (often have a delightful sense of humor.)
 - o ***See God in anthropomorphic (humanized) terms and as a parent figure.***
 - o ***Growing physical independence and ability to do things for themselves.***

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- Bible as containing many places, people, and things.
- When we pray, we speak to God. We thank Him, praise Him, ask Him for what others and we need.
- What we do in church has special meaning.

Specific Content

- Short prayer sentences and phrases that they can learn, to help them participate in church services (such as “Alleluia” and “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”)
- Identifying some of the people, places, and things in the Bible.
- Stories from the Bible and lives of the saints about how people pray to God.
- Liturgical actions and gestures, ceremonies, blessings.

Methodology

- Well-told (not read) stories
- Lessons divided into short periods during which children are doing different kinds of things and giving different kinds of attention, and between which they move around (moving from listening to story sitting on floor to cutting out shapes at table, etc.)
- Act out stories, make and use simple puppets.
- Take part in feast day and holiday ceremonies.

AGE 8

How They are Developing

- This is the age of transition from early to middle childhood. Increasing ability to exert physical and emotional self-control.
- If there are siblings, strong competition is common.
- Growing awareness of environments outside the home and school.
- Can begin to draw conclusions from the concrete to the general, but still not abstract thinkers.
- Strong sense of right and wrong, fairness or unfairness. Increased ability to see how their actions affect others.
- Loyalty to friends is important.
- Strong desire to be members of a community, and to learn its "story."
- Want to have friends, and maybe a best friend.
- Increasing ability to see chronological order.
- Capacity for retelling stories, learning and singing hymns, learning but also composing prayers.

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- God as giver of Law (using the abbreviated versions of the Ten Commandments found in the New Testament.)
- Jesus' law of love. Holy Communion as a gift of His love.
- Old Testament and New Testament stories relating to life themes.
- Simple introduction of the need for forgiveness and God as one who forgives.
- Introduction of the idea that Jesus was killed by his enemies and rose from the dead, without physical details of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

Specific Content

- Ten Commandments (taught using the abbreviated versions found in the 3 Synoptic Gospels).
- Friendships of Jesus and of New Testament and Old Testament Figures (Paul and his helpers; David and Jonathan, Daniel and the youths).
- Stories of sibling rivalry, conflict and resolution (Prodigal Son, Jacob and Esau).
- Simple study of how the Church is organized.

Methodology

- Make models of life in Palestine: jars, houses, sheep, tents.
- Group work and research (co-operative learning.)
- Learn about the chronology of Jesus' life.

AGES 9-11

How They Are Developing

- Start of puberty for girls.
- Beginnings of ability to think abstractly; better grasp of time and space which enables them to discover more of the world and God's creation.
- Can classify and relate factual information.
- Keen interest in facts, dates, people and places, rules, definitions of things (often start collections of rocks, cards, or some other collectible item).
- Interested in the veracity of stories: "Is it true?" "Did it really happen?" "What did Jesus look like?"
- Images of God are more symbolic; decreasing anthropomorphism or "humanizing" of God. His justice, glory and power are acknowledged, though His presence in daily life is not always discerned.
- Jesus Christ is seen as a unique person who can work miracles.
- Ready for thematic approach to the Bible.
- For 10-year-olds and 11-year-olds, conscience is developing, but they do not always have the strength to act on what they know is right; need adult guidance.
- Beginning to see that a story told about someone else can apply to them.
- Legalistic attitude toward sin (it is seen as being about rules and regulations, not yet seen as being about broken relationships).
- Ability to see simple cause and effect relationships is better developed than earlier.

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- There is order in God's creation and in His Church.
- We are called by God to have active concern for other people (forgiveness, helping those in need, not judging).
- God has a plan for the world. He acts in the world and in our lives.

Specific Content

- Parables.
- Sacraments, especially penance, which is part of the child's life now.
- The order of the Liturgy.
- Simple study of the history of the Church.

Methodology

- Activity still important.
- Role-play parables.
- Make charts or illustrations of the Church's liturgical seasons.
- Have students work together to study sacraments and Church history.

Development and Methodology

-Prepare and encourage students to take part in the Liturgy.

AGE 12-13

How They Are Developing

- Puberty brings much physical, emotional, and intellectual development: children vary widely.
- Ego is strong; becoming aware of themselves as individual persons.
- Great self-consciousness and often dissatisfaction/embarrassment concerning personal appearance, weight, height, etc.
- Tension between genders; preference for same-gender groups.
- Emotionally quite stable, but as adolescence begins, behavior may fluctuate widely and there can be a tendency to moodiness.
- Ready to begin reflecting on the “why” and “what if” of situations.
- Beginning to understand metaphors and slightly complex comparisons.
- Often look for friendship with an adult other than parents (perhaps a priest, teacher, coach.)
- Good understanding of sequence, series, and chronology.
- Influenced greatly by peers; may prefer small select group of peers in which to take part.
- Concrete and some abstract logic can be followed.
- Interested in history and science as these relate to them.
- May be critical of parents as period of adolescent rebellion approaches.
- Beginning to think about and examine faith with some readiness to compare their own beliefs to those of others; they have many questions.

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- Science and religion can co-exist.
- There is objective information about the people and events that are part of our faith.
- Christian faith can stand up to questions.
- Faith is for all of life, not just “for Sunday.”
- Conflicts between people exist but can be resolved.

Specific Content

- How science and religion fit together.
- Life of Jesus Christ (emphasis on Jesus growing up with beloved family but also separating from them--story of Jesus and the elders in the Temple.)
- Biblical stories of moral and family conflicts (Judas, Peter, Joseph and his brothers.)
- The Creed.
- Salvation history.
- Stories of saints who lived in non-Christian societies (in order to tie the faith to the problems of daily life.)

Methodology

Development and Methodology

- Open-ended stories that let students express their ideas and feelings.
- Asking students various types of questions that will engage their thought and encourage their own questions.
- Research in groups; discussion by groups together.
- Role playing situations that help students relate Church teachings to daily life (Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan, Zacchaeus, blind Bartimaeus, dilemmas from lives of saints.)

AGES 14-17

How They Are Developing

- Have increased intellectual ability and can begin to reason abstractly.
- Feel conflict between needing to be secure and needing to throw off restrictions. This can lead to rebellion or resentment toward adult family members and other adults in authority.
- Often impulsive, sometimes hyperactive. Peak energy, co-ordination, stamina.
- Self-conscious about physical features, height, weight continues.
- Beginning to doubt and question basic ideas about God and life. "What do I believe?" Some may reject religious teaching as childish; others may
- Hungry for significance and status.
- For many, a strong need not to be different from peers in opinions, dress, or behavior.
- Common questions may be on the order of, "Why should I?" and "How do you KNOW?"
- Want to figure out their own faith and their own stand on things. May be interested in learning the teachings of religions other than Christianity.
- Often idealistic, altruistic, seeking justice.
- Interested in what is fashionable, faddish.

What Concepts Can We Teach?

- Authority is not authoritarianism. (This can help them resolve any resentment toward authority figures.)
- The Church's teachings, moral and doctrinal, are protective rather than repressive.
- It is all right to question, to experiment, to explore, to express uncertainty concerning faith.
- We are called to a personal relationship with God.

Specific Content

- Parables of the Kingdom and of the Last Judgment.
- Passages from the Sermon on the Mount that apply to daily life.
- Early Church history, showing how conflicts and problems existed then as they do now.
- Bible passages showing that doubt and struggle with faith are not new, and that God loves and accepts those who doubt and struggle (Jacob wrestling with the angel, the apostle Thomas.)
- Old Testament and New Testament passages and stories showing how God acts in people's lives.

Methodology

- Balance discussion with imparting of information. Encourage questions and dialogue; when possible accept more than one answer to questions.
- Use newspapers, movies, popular books and other media that deal with daily life to lead to presentation of what the Church teaches.

Development and Methodology

- Visit other churches to encourage discussion of varieties in faith.
- Discuss meaning of difficult passages in prayers, and put them in different words to understand them (not to replace the original words when praying.) Students can also compose their own prayers.
- Plan fundraising activities for others, not for students themselves, so as to encourage their altruism.
- Have students take responsibility in the parish—choir, altar service, greeting visitors, etc.
- Retreats and field trips to events sponsored by other parishes.