Chapter 1

Our Loving God: Father and Creator

Parish Religious Education Adaptation

Student Preparation

- Students were asked to read Chapter 1: Our Loving God: Father and Creator (pages 183–203) in preparation for this session.
- Students were requested to complete the "Introduction Test," questions 1–20.
- Students were asked to find a story of someone—famous or otherwise—who put his or her faith in God on public display.
- Students were to complete letters to someone in their lives who has been a model of faith for them, and to bring the letter and an addressed and stamped, but unsealed, envelope to this next session.
- Students were invited to ask two adults and two peers for two reasons for believing or not believing in God and to bring those responses to share in this session.

Warm-up (15 minutes)

- Check the students' responses to the "Introduction Test," questions 1–20. Answers may be found on page 39 of the TWE. Take time to address any questions the students may have.
- Review the "Introduction" by asking the students to name major beliefs that make us Catholic. List on the board.
- Introduce this chapter by asking two or three students to share the stories they discovered about people—famous or otherwise—that put their faith in God on public display. Be ready to share an example to get the ball rolling.

Part 1: Lesson (45–50 minutes)

Text Reference: One, True God; Beliefs about God (pages 20–28)

- Have different students re-tell the stories of Josh Heupel and Shelly Pennefather from the opening text story. Then ask the students to share times when they have put their faith in God on display in a public way as well as other times when they put God on the backburner and saved thoughts of God only for special times or places.
- Point out the "Beliefs About God" exercise on the bottom of page 22. Then read the statements on the top of page 23 and have the students hold up one, two, or three fingers based on the scale (page 22). Pause after each statement to ask one or two students to explain their beliefs. Finally, point out and ask the second "Discussion Question" on page 23. (Answer: Catholics must accept the first and fifth statements. These are revealed truths about God that are fundamental to the Catholic faith.)
- Write the sentence "Is there a God?" on the board. Tell the students that this questions has always intrigued people. Explain that some people say "Yes" (theist); some say "No" (atheist); still others say "Maybe so" (agnostic). Use the following jokes/riddles to make sure the students know the definitions of theist, atheist, and agnostic:
    - What do you call someone who denies that God doesn't exist? (A theist.)
    - Why did the over-worked fellow give up atheism? (No holidays.)
    - What did the dyslexic, insomniac, agnostic woman do every night? (She lay awake wondering if there really was a doG.)
- Distribute copies of the "I Believe" activity sheet from the end of the lesson. Direct the students to underline any of the "I believe" statements they believe and to add some of the other things they believe to the list. Call on volunteers to share what they underlined and/or wrote.
- Go on to ask the teens how they would go about proving each of their beliefs. For example, we can confirm

a belief about the weather simply by looking out the window. We can prove or disprove a mathematical belief by "doing the math." But other proofs aren't so easy. Ask students how they would prove some of the other listed beliefs. For example:

- What evidence is there that your mother loves them?
- How do you know you are funny?
- How can you prove something in the future (e.g., finding a cancer cure) will happen?

End with a brief discussion on which beliefs are reasonable even though they can't be "proven." Help students recognize that we know that many things in life—things like truth, beauty, compassion, and love—while not quite molecular, are, even if they are difficult to prove.

- Write the statement "I believe in God" on the board. Ask the students why they think this is or is not a rational and sensible statement. Distribute copies of the "I Believe in God—Intellectual Proofs" activity sheets, and have a student read aloud the quote on the top of the sheet. Tell the group that these are the words of Albert Einstein. Go on to explain that the great saint Thomas Aquinas offered five intellectual proofs of God to show that faith and human reason are not in opposition. Divide the class into four small groups. Explain that each group is to create a couplet—a pair of rhymed lines of poetry—to illustrate one of Aquinas's intellectual proofs. Refer the students to the explanation of the proofs on page 25 of the text. Read aloud the description of the first type of proof (The Unmoved Mover). Then write the following rhymed couplet on the board as a sample and have the students copy it on the lines provided on the activity sheet:

  How is it that you're groovin'?
  It's cuz God has set you movin'.

- Randomly assign each small group to one of the four remaining "proofs" and have them create their own couplets. Afterward, invite the small groups to share couplets, and have the students write all four on their activity sheet. *Note*: The students should have no difficulty coming up with their own couplets, but—just in case—the following are some samples for the remaining proofs:
  - **First Cause**

    If you're lookin' for the best,
    God was first before the rest.
  - **Everything Comes from Something**

    Every-thing-and-body's got a source.
    What could that be? Why, God, of course!
  - **Supreme Model**

    No matter the fashion, the rage, or the style,
    God is the only model worthwhile.
  - **Grand Designer**

    If you want a grand designer,
    Check out God; there is no finer.
- Write the words "**Problem**" and "**Mystery**" opposite one another on the board. Help the students understand that a problem is like an obstacle in our path. Explain that once we remove or circumvent the obstacle, we can continue on our way. A mystery, on the other hand, is not "removable." The more we know about a problem, the smaller it becomes. The more we know about mystery, the larger it becomes. For example, in the 1960s we solved the problem of getting people to the moon. However, the mystery of the universe grew only deeper. Tell the teens that when we try to understand mystery—especially the mystery of God—we find ourselves searching for a new language, a language not of the intellect but of the heart.
- During the following activity, consider playing a piece of music that appeals to human emotion, for example, "Sunrise" from Ferde Grofe's *Grand Canyon Suite*. Distribute copies of the "I Believe in God—Heartfelt Proofs" activity sheet. Direct the students to page 26 in their texts and have them write the four "Heartfelt Proofs" in the spaces provided on the sheet. When they finish writing, explain that each of the four quotes on the sheet "speaks" to one of the heartfelt ways we experience God's existence. Read each quote aloud. After each one, have the students tell which proof it best speaks to. Then have the teens write the appropriate proof's number in the box next to the quote. Be sure to invite comments about the musical piece you played. Remind the teens that often music, poetry, and art speak more clearly to us about God than does any other language. Each is truth speaking to the senses.

- Before moving on, call attention to "Understanding God" on page 26. Explain that sometimes we experience God as above and beyond us and sometimes as deep within. Invite volunteers to share how they experience God whey they are: happy; sad; lonely; excited; peaceful.
- Finally, ask the teens to share the reasons for believing or not believing in God they discovered in the interviews they conducted with adults and peers prior to the session. Ask the students to evaluate the reasons, which ones they find worthwhile and which ones they do not.

Break/Writing Exercise (10 minutes)

- Join the students in a break with refreshments.
- Point out the "Discussion Questions" on page 27. Tell the students to choose one of the questions to respond to in their journals now. At the end of the break, suggest that the students take time at home to journal their responses to the two questions they did not write about.

Part 2: Lesson (40–45 minutes)

Text Reference: Divine Revelation; Who Is God?; Creator of Heaven and Earth (pages 28–39)

- Introduce the section on Divine Revelation by writing the following sentences on the board: **"The God we can *think* is too little. The God we can *imagine* is too flimsy."** Ask the students what they think these statements mean. Accept all replies. Then go on to explain that the mystery of God is so vast, so deep, God must speak, must open and uncover, must make the first advance. Explain that we have a name for God's speaking, opening, uncovering, and advancing: *Divine Revelation*.
- Write the word "**covenant**" on the board. Tell the students that God revealed himself not through a string of miracles or a set of laws, but through numerous covenants of love with us. If necessary, explain to the students that unlike a "contract," which simply establishes an exchange of services and may or may not be binding (depending on circumstances), a covenant establishes a relationship that *endures* no matter the circumstances. Invite the students to name and briefly describe some of the covenants God established with human beings (Noah, Abraham, Sinai, Jesus—see page 29 in Student Text). Explain that Jesus' coming is the climax of history, the full and complete revelation of God to us.
- Summarize the material in the subsection "Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition" (pages 29–30), making sure the students understand the following terms:
    - *Scripture*—the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments;
    - *Tradition*—the living transmission of the Gospel message through the actions of the Church;
    - *Magisterium*—the teaching authority of the pope and bishops;
    - *Dogma*—a core truth of revelation that Catholics are required to believe.
- Draw attention to the first paragraph in text section "Who Is God?" on page 31. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Explain that this is the first time in the Bible that God's name is used or given. Ask the teens what they believe is true about God because of this revelation.

  To help the students recognize their own image of God, share this vignette with them:

  One day a mother looked in on her little girl who was busy with crayons and paper. "What are you doing?" the mother asked. "I'm drawing a picture of God," the girl replied. The mother smiled to herself at her child's naiveté then said, "But, honey, nobody really knows what God looks like." The little girl worked silently for a moment, then looked up at her mother and said with a smile, "Well . . . they will when I'm done."
- Distribute drawing paper. Challenge the students to illustrate a favorite image of God, for example, a shepherd. If they need some ideas, refer the teens to the scripture references in the sections "Images of God" on page 30 and those in the section "Describing God" on page 31, as well as the list of "Attributes of God" on pages 31–32. When the students finish their drawing, call on volunteers to share. Post the work in the classroom.
- Ask the students to name or describe qualities of an ideal dad. List on the board. Then use questions like the following to discuss God as a father:
    - If God is a father, what kind of father is God? (Answers will vary but should express caring, loving, compassionate, etc.)
    - Why is it appropriate to call God "father"? (Doing so expresses the truth of God's parental care for us; it reminds us that we are all sisters and brothers; it is the way Jesus taught us to address God.)

    - What other images describe God? (Refer the students to the pictures they drew.)
- Remind the students that when they learned the difference between "problem" and "mystery" earlier in this session, the example cited was of astronauts finally landing on the moon, solving the problem of getting there, but still being absolutely overwhelmed by the deepening mystery of space. Introduce the text section "Creator of Heaven and Earth" (pages 33–35) by inviting the students to listen to the Apollo astronaut's response to the mystery of space (the first creation account from the Book of Genesis). You can find it on the Internet as an audio file at www.geocities.com/fdocc/anders.htm.
- Distribute copies of the activity sheet "Creation in a Nutshell" from the end of this lesson. Ask a student to read aloud the quote from Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1416). Help them see that Julian's insight reminds us that saying "I believe in God . . . Creator of heaven and earth" means believing that God created and sustains all things out of surpassing love, and because all things are from love, all things are "good"—no strings attached. Have the students work with a partner to respond to the three questions on the activity sheet. Allow them to refer to Genesis 1–3 in their bibles and to pages 33–35 in their texts. Afterward, check responses. Point out the text at the bottom of the activity sheet and read it aloud. Encourage the students to commit it to memory. Finally, tell the teens that for their next session they are either to complete the writing assignment in "Sharing God's Beauty" (page 35) or to write out their responses to the three "Discussion Questions" (page 36).
- Draw attention to the bottom of page 36 and the "rewards" for those who believe in God. Ask the students which of these rewards is, in their opinion, most comforting? Most important? Most challenging?
- Point out "Explaining Your Faith" on page 37. Encourage the students to refer to this text for help in understanding their own and peers' questions regarding faith in God. Then draw attention to the "Summary Points" on page 38. Give the students a few minutes to look them over and to ask clarification questions.

Prayer Experience (10 minutes)

- Have the students gather in a circle around the Paschal (Easter) Candle. Light the candle. Observe a moment of silence.
- Write the phrase "**I believe in God**" on the board or hold up a poster with the phrase on it for all to see. Then lead the students in prayer with words like the following:

  "My sisters and brothers, 'I believe in God' is not an opinion. It's a decision—a declaration of dependence on Someone beyond and within us. Let us take a stand and declare our belief in God by joining in an act of faith"
- Have the students pray the "Act of Faith" on page 39.
- Conclude by singing or listening to a recording of a hymn to faith such as "We Walk by Faith."

Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Distribute copies of the "Chapter 1 Test"—but only Parts 1 and 2 (online at www.avemariapress.com). Direct the teens to complete both parts at home and to bring their responses to their next class.
- Ask the students to read Chapter 2: Jesus Christ: Lord and Savior (pages 40–65) in preparation for the next session.

I Believe

- I believe in music.
- *I believe that honesty is the best policy.*
- **I believe scientists will find a cure for cancer.**
- **I believe it is raining today.**
- *I believe that tomorrow will come.*
- I believe I'm a funny person.
- I believe that the square root of 529 is 23.
- *I believe my mother loves me.*
- I believe _____
- I believe _____
- I believe _____
- I believe _____

❊ I Believe in God—Intellectual Proofs

"Mine is a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is utterly insignificant reflection."

❊ The Unmoved Mover

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❊ First Cause

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❊ Everything Comes from Something

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❊ Supreme Model

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❊ Grand Designer

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God sure knows how to paint the sky!

Actually, the colors produced by the setting sun are but scatterings of light off the many microscopic particles of dust and gasses which fill the ionosphere. Because the sun is low in the sky, certain short wave-lengths are scattered before they reach us. Therefore, we see only the reds and oranges from the longer-length waves of the light spectrum.

That's what I said: God sure knows how to paint the sky!
Lisle George

Once a king loved a humble maiden, but could not marry her without giving up his throne. He knew that if he remained king and married her she would always be grateful, but would not be able to love him. The inequality between them would be too great. So he decided to renounce the throne, become a commoner, and then offer the maiden his love.

The king knew this was a great risk. He would lose his kingship, and the maiden might also reject him, especially if she were disappointed at not becoming queen. Yet he decided to take the risk. It was better, he believed, to risk everything to make love possible.
Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*

Yet still there whispers the small voice within,
Heard through Gain's silence, and o'er Glory's din;
Whatever creed be taught or land be trod,
Man's conscience is the oracle of God.
Lord Byron, *The Island* (canto I, st. 6)

Thou hast formed us for Thyself,
and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.
Saint Augustine

Creation in a Nutshell

Medieval religious mystic Julian of Norwich held a hazelnut in her hand and asked: "What may this be? It is all that is made. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third, that God keepeth it."

Julian's insight reminds us that the Genesis' revelation is one of totality.

In the first creation story what salute does God give each succeeding achievement?

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Does Genesis give us a chronology or a theology of creation? Explain.

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List the truths divine revelation teaches about God's creation.

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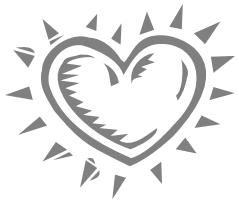
Learn this by heart . . .



"I believe in God . . . Creator of heaven and earth" is both a truth and a prayer. The truth sets us free from any illusion that we live in a God-forsaken place. The prayer is for the eyes to see all things as "given" things and our life as more precious than what we do or make.