

Praying the Rosary

Session Focus

This session explores the Rosary as a devotion of the Catholic Church. We will look at how to pray the Rosary, the Scriptural basis for the mysteries, and ways to connect the Rosary to our lives. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

“Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church’s sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, etc.” (1674).

“Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him” (2708).

Learning Objectives

This session on the Rosary guides learners of all ages to:

- comprehend that the four complete sets of mysteries in the Rosary are a journey through the life of Christ
- value and appreciate the Rosary as a meditative and contemplative prayer
- know how to pray a Rosary

Session Overview

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| Part 1. (10 minutes) | Gathering and Opening Prayer Service |
| Part 2. (15 minutes) | All Ages Learning Experience |
| Part 3. (80-90 minutes) | In Depth Learning Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning Format: Activity Centers - participants rotate through selected activities in the same room or in separate rooms. |
| Part 4. (15 minutes) | Sharing Learning Experiences |
| Part 5. (10 minutes) | Closing Prayer Service |

Design for In-Depth Learning: Learning Activity Centers

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Learning activity centers are self-contained learning experiences, focusing on a specific topic or theme. They include brief presentations by the facilitators, interactive and experiential activities, group discussion and sharing. Each center can utilize a different learning method, such as drama or role play, creative arts, prayer, ritual, film, games, demonstrations, exhibits, and music.

One of the best ways to envision a Learning Activity Center Format is to imagine visiting a children's museum or one of the Epcot pavilions at Walt Disney World in Orlando. You will find a variety of interactive, experiential exhibits, media presentations, and staff-facilitated learning activities.

Learning Activity Centers can be used with all age groups. They can be developed for an intergenerational audience or for particular age groups, such as families with children or adolescents or adults. Learning Activity Centers can also be utilized in the families with children learning program within the Age Group Format.

Scheduling

Learning Activity Centers are designed to be conducted within a 20-30 minute timeframe. Depending on the session design, this will allow three or four learning periods to be offered during the In Depth Learning Experience.

Here is a sample schedule with four rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 6:50 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:15 Break (move to next center)
- 7:20 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:45 Break (move to next center)
- 7:50 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:15 Break (move to next center)
- 8:20 Round 4: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:45 Part 4: Presenting the Home Activities (no small group sharing)
Part 5: Closing Prayer

Here is a sample schedule with three rounds of learning centers:

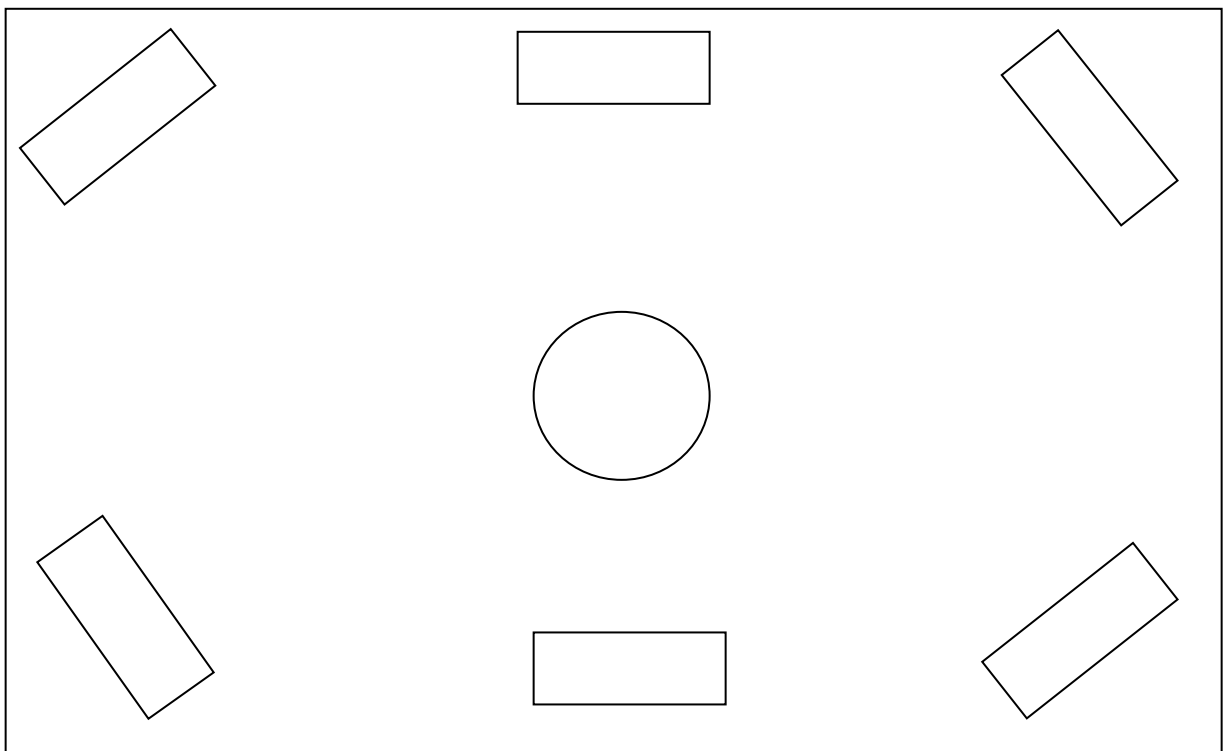
- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 7:00 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:25 Break (move to next center)
- 7:30 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:55 Break (move to next center)
- 8:00 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:25 Break (gather in intergenerational groups)

8:30 Part 4: Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application
8:50 Closing Prayer

Organizing the Activity Centers

There are two ways to set up activity centers: one large room, or multiple break-out rooms.

If you arrange all of the learning centers in one large meeting gym or parish hall, set-up the centers around the outside of the room (see example). The center space can become a storytelling center with a carpet or chairs for children to sit. The example below shows six different learning centers plus the storytelling center. You may still need separate rooms if you have a learning center that focuses on prayer (worship space) or shows a film (meeting room).



Keep in mind the following when organizing in one room:

- Make sure there is adequate space between learning centers so that people are not interrupted by the activity at other centers.
- Set-up each learning activity center with tables and chairs (or carpeted floor space) for participants to listen, discuss, and create. Children and teens can use the floor, but adults will need chairs.
- Assign each learning center a number and post the number on the wall and floor at each center.

If you arrange learning centers in multiple rooms such as meeting rooms, classrooms, parish hall, gym, worship space, assign one learning center to each space. This format resembles a conference where people move from room to room for each session. Place the learning center name outside each room

and develop a list of centers with locations, and a map if necessary, so that people can easily find the correct room.

Organizing Groups

Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly. If you offer four learning centers, you can organize the participants into four groups of equal size and assign each group a specific sequence that they will move through the learning centers. Assign a number to each learning center and an alphabet letter to each group, then describe how they will move through the centers: Group A: 1-2-3-4; Group B: 2-3-4-1, Group C: 3-4-1-2, and Group D: 4-1-2-3. If you offer three learning centers, there would be three groups rotating among the three learning centers. Keep families together in one group.

If you offer more than three or four learning centers, allow people to choose the learning centers they are going to experience. Remind them that if a particular center is crowded, they can move to another center and then return to their first choice in another round. Families with children should stay together because the activities require parents to work with their children.

Staffing

Each center is facilitated by a team of facilitators who guide the participants through the activity plan. The teaching team facilitates the overall learning plan for the center: making presentations, guiding learning activities, organizing discussions, and so on. The number of team members needed depends on the complexity of the activities and the number of participants at a learning center. Teams should have at least two or three people, but some centers will require five or six people. Older adolescents can also serve as members of the teaching team, and are especially valuable in facilitating creative activities and dramatic presentations.

To present the focus of each learning activity center, ask the teaching teams to present a very brief overview of what they will be doing in each center. Give each participant the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule, and the locations of the centers.

Materials for the Session

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities (on CD-ROM)
- Opening Prayer Service – copies for the leader and readers on Handout #1 Opening Prayer
- Symbols for the prayer service: a globe, a picture or statue of a dove, a picture or statue or icon of Mary, a crucifix or cross, an Easter lily (real or artificial), several statues or icons or pictures of saints
- Ball of yarn
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Handouts #1 and #2

In-Depth Learning Experience

- The handouts and materials participants will need are identified in each Learning Activity Center plan.

Sharing Learning Experiences

- Handout 7

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service for presider
- Bible

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering (15-20 minutes)

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign-in for the program.
- Provide name tags (heart shaped) or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session—you can also distribute handouts for the activities at the beginning of the activity.
- Invite people to share a meal. Depending on the time of day, the program may end with a meal.

Optional Warm-Up Activities

Invite participants to share stories about their favorite rosaries, when and how they learned to pray the rosary, and family/community traditions which included the rosary. For example, an older person might remember kneeling to pray the rosary as a family every night during the month of October.

Invite table groups to answer the following questions:

- Why do you think Pope John Paul II added the Luminous Mysteries to the Rosary?
- Who can name all five Mysteries of Light?
- Who knows the five Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries?

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using your own words or the words below:

This session explores the Rosary. We will look at how the Rosary came to be, Christ's and Mary's place in the Rosary, how to pray the Rosary, and the purpose of the Mysteries. We will experience the Rosary as we learn more about this prayer which has been part of our Church's tradition for hundreds of years.

1. Group Formation

Organize people into intergenerational groups of approximately eight people for the All Ages Learning Experience. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

2. Opening Prayer Service

Preparation

Create a prayer space with a globe, a picture or statue of a dove, a picture or statue or icon of Mary, a crucifix or cross, an Easter lily (real or artificial), several statues or icons or pictures of saints

Recruit the following volunteers to help with Opening Prayer Service:

- one person to preside
- two people to proclaim Scripture
- eight volunteers for the praying of the Apostles' Creed
- five people for the first Our Father, three Hail Marys, and first Glory Be
- eleven people for the proclamation of the Mystery and Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, and Glory Be

Give the readers a copy of the Opening Prayer Service handout to prepare.

Immediately before prayer, give to those proclaiming the Creed the symbols they will hold up as they pray their parts. The Apostles' Creed volunteers will position themselves in the shape of a cross. The next five will stand like the first part of the rosary, with the person praying the first Our Father positioned a few steps from those forming the cross, then three persons close together for the three Hail Marys, and one person for the Glory Be. The others will form a large circle around the community. All will be connected by a ball of yarn in the same way the chains or links of the rosary connect the beads.

Have a spotlight shine on the prayer space or brighten the lights in the room when these words are prayed in the Apostles' Creed: "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

Gather

The people who are praying the rosary should take their positions before the opening song.

Presider: As we gather to learn more about the rosary, we pray with Mary, the Mother of God and our own Mother. We unite ourselves with her as we pray:

Presider: God, in your infinite wisdom and love, you chose Mary to be the mother of your Son. Just as Mary gazed with the eyes of love on the life of her Son, we too gaze on the life of Christ when we pray the rosary. Bless us tonight with the sight and insight of our Blessed Mother so that we can come to a deeper understanding of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us listen to how the two prayers which make up most of the rosary—the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary—came into being.

Listen

Matthew 6:7-14 and Luke 1:26-42

Respond

Presider: As a response to the gift of the Our Father and the Hail Mary which Scripture gives us, we will now pray the first part of the rosary and the first decade of the Joyful Mysteries: The Annunciation. If you brought your own rosary, please follow along on your beads.

The people praying the Apostles' Creed position themselves in front of the assembly in the shape of a cross. They now pray their parts, holding up their symbols as they pray:

Reader One: We begin our rosary in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. *(Make the Sign of the Cross.)* I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth... *(Hold up the globe.)*

Reader Two: and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit...*(Hold up the image of the dove.)*

Reader Three: born of the Virgin Mary... *(Hold up the icon or picture or statue of Mary.)*

Reader Four: suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. *(Hold up the crucifix.)*

Reader Five: He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead. *(Hold up the Easter lilies.)*

Reader Six: I believe in the Holy Spirit... *(Hold up the image of the dove again.)*

Reader Seven: the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints... *(Hold up the statues of the saints. The people making up the crucifix join hands to acknowledge that we are all part of the Church and the communion of saints.)*

Reader Eight: the forgiveness of sins... *(The people making up the crucifix hug each other as a sign of forgiveness.)*

Reader Nine: the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen! *(A spotlight shines on the people making up the Creed. If that is not possible, lights in the room are turned up.)*

The next five readers represent the Our Father, three Hail Marys, and the Glory Be which make up the single strand of the rosary. They are joined to the Creed-persons by the yarn, with the Our Father-person standing about two feet from the Creed, the three Hail Mary-persons standing two feet from the Our Father-person but right next to each other, and the Glory Be-person standing about two feet from the last Hail Mary-person.

Our Father Reader: We pray in the words which Jesus himself gave us. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *(Reader raises his/her arm to invite the assembly to respond with the last part of the Our Father.)*

Assembly: Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

First Hail Mary Reader: As Gabriel and Elizabeth recognized Mary's goodness, we too see Mary as our model. We pray with Mary for an increase in our faith. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. *(Reader raises his/her arm to invite the assembly to respond with the last part of the Hail Mary.)*

Assembly: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Second Hail Mary Reader: We pray for more hope in our hearts and in our world. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. *(Reader raises his/her arm to invite the assembly to respond with the last part of the Hail Mary.)*

Assembly: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Third Hail Mary Reader: We pray for more love, more compassion, and more charity in our hearts and in our world. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. *(Reader raises his/her arm to invite the assembly to respond with the last part of the Hail Mary.)*

Assembly: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

First Glory Be Reader: We celebrate our God, who lives in perfect community. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. *(Reader raises his/her arm to invite the assembly to respond with the last part of the Glory Be.)*

Assembly: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The next 11 readers are standing around the outside of the gathering, surrounding the assembly and connected by the yarn. The first reader is standing about two feet from the Glory Be reader, but directly in line with the previous readers. The next ten readers form a circle, standing equally distant from each other but further from the first reader. (Envision a rosary, but with only one decade instead of five.)

Mystery/Our Father Reader: The First Joyful Mystery, The Annunciation. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). God called Mary through the angel Gabriel to become the Mother of his Son. Mary struggled with this invitation. But in the end, she surrendered to God's will for her life. She discerned her unconditional YES to God. As we reflect on this joyful mystery, let all of us search our hearts for God's invitation to us. What is God asking us to do today? What will our answer to God's invitation be? *(Pause.)* Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Assembly: Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

1st Hail Mary Reader: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Assembly: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

This is followed by the nine other Hail Mary Readers, who will pray the first part of the Hail Mary, one at a time, with each one followed by the Holy Mary response from the Assembly.

Mystery/Our Father Reader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Assembly: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!

Go Forth

God, help us to discern your will for our lives today and always. As we enter deeper into the gift of the rosary, be with us. Open our hearts to your love and your will. We ask this humbly in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: What the Rosary Means to Me (20 minutes)

The All Ages Learning Experience is designed to help the participants listen to a variety of people share what the Rosary means to them. There are two parts to the experience: the first includes three people from the Communion of Saints telling their story to the large group. The second part involves parishioners sharing their experience of praying the Rosary in a small-group setting.

Preparation

In advance, ask all participants to bring their favorite rosary to the session. Have extras on hand for those who forget or don't have a rosary.

Get three participants, two adults and one child, to be actors for this session. They will play the parts of St. Dominic, Lucia (one of the children to whom Mary appeared in Fatima), and Pope John Paul II. Give them copies of Handout #1.

Pass out Handout #2.

Introduce the session using the words below or your own words.

To appreciate the Rosary as a prayer of our Church, we're going to meet several people for whom this devotion had a very special meaning. I'd like to introduce you to St. Dominic, Lucia of Fatima, and Pope John Paul II. St. Dominic, rumor has it that you were responsible for creating the Rosary. Is that true?

St. Dominic: There are many different stories in the Catholic Church as to how the rosary came into existence. Perhaps the reason so many of these legends point to me is because I tried to bring intellectual pursuits and the needs of everyday people together. I truly believed that studying helped faith, which is one of the reasons I formed the Order of Preachers. But I also saw the people of the Middle Ages trying hard to live a holy life. Most of them were illiterate, so they couldn't study or read the psalms like the monks did. Some of them came up with the idea of praying 150 Our Fathers in order to somewhat imitate the monks' praying the 150 psalms. Others—those with a particular devotion to our Blessed Mother—prayed 150 Ave Marias. Over the course of many years, this practice evolved into the Rosary as you know it today. Isn't it wonderful that a devotion which deepens the faith of so many Catholics today had its origin in people's everyday faithfulness hundreds of years ago?

Lucia: World War I was raging when Our Blessed Mother appeared to three insignificant children in Fatima, Portugal. Two of the children were my cousins Francisco and Jacinta. I was the third child. My name is Lucia, and I was ten years old when I saw and heard Mary, the Mother of God! She was

dressed in a white robe and held a rosary in her hand. She shared many things with us, but one of the most memorable was her message about the Rosary. She told us to pray the Rosary every day for world peace. She also asked us to add this prayer after each decade of the Rosary: “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are most in need of your mercy.” We were asked to pray for the most forgotten person in the whole world. When we asked her where she came from, she told us “heaven.” And she promised to reveal her identity to us in October. When she appeared in that month, Mary called herself the Lady of the Rosary. Some of you will know that Jacinta and Francisco died young, but I joined the convent and lived a long life. I prayed the Rosary every day, just as Mary asked me to do.

Pope John Paul II: In 1978, two weeks after I became pope, I said that the Rosary was my favorite prayer. Twenty-four years later, in 2002, I wrote a pastoral letter—a letter to all of you, my dear people—on the Rosary. And I did something which I think shocked a good number of Catholics. I added a whole new set of mysteries and called them the Luminous Mysteries, or Mysteries of Light. You see, I always believed what Pope Paul VI, my worthy predecessor, said—that the Rosary is a Bible for those who cannot read. The Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries are truly a journey through the Incarnation and early moments in Jesus’ life, his suffering and death, and his resurrection and ascension. But what about his public ministry—his baptism, his miracles, the institution of the Eucharist? We jumped from his teenage identity to the Paschal Mystery. I felt we needed to meditate on what his adult life means for us as disciples. Hence the Mysteries of Light. I hope you find them as helpful to your prayer life as I did in mine.

I also love the Rosary because it unites us with Mary. We follow the mysteries of the life of Christ through her loving eyes.

Why should you study and pray the Rosary? I repeat what I wrote in 2002: “Today I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer...the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family...To pray the Rosary *for children*, and even more, *with children*, training them from their earliest years to experience this daily ‘pause for prayer’ with the family, is not to be underestimated.”

Instruct participants in each table group to take Handout #2: The Rosary in My Life and share the answers to the questions at their tables.

1. Share the story of the rosary you brought with you to this session. Where did you get it? Was it for a special occasion? If so, which one?
2. Why do you pray the Rosary? What is meaningful to you in this devotion?
3. Is there any special way you pray the Rosary? Do you pray the mysteries in a particular way? Do you pray Scripture or other prayers as you move through the decades?

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience: Praying the Rosary (80-90 minutes)

Introduce each center by having a team member who is conducting the center provide a brief overview of what is going to happen at the center. If you wish, give each participant or family the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule, and the locations of the centers.

Each learning center is designed for 20–25 minutes, allowing everyone to participate in three or four learning activities. Choose Activities 1, 2, 5, and/or 6 for families with children. Choose Activities 2, 3, 4, and/or 6 for adolescents and adults. Make sure to include the first activity for those who are totally unfamiliar with the Rosary.

1. The “How To” of the Rosary (All Ages, particularly for those who don’t know how to pray the Rosary)
2. Praying Scripture with the Mysteries (All Ages)
3. Creating Your Own Mysteries (Adolescents and Adults)
4. Seeing Through Mary’s Eyes (Adolescents and Adults)
5. Making a Rosary (Families with Children)
6. Praying the Rosary for Peace (All Ages)

Activity 1. The “How To” of the Rosary

This learning activity center engages participants in the actual steps of praying the Rosary as well as techniques for making the Rosary more meaningful in their prayer lives.

Preparation

Print Handout #3 (give in advance to leaders conducting this activity) and Handout #3A for participants.

Choose one mystery which you will pray with the participants once you’ve taken them through the steps of the Rosary. Base your choice upon the time of year in which you are conducting this session (e.g., Sorrowful Mysteries if it is Lent, Glorious if it’s in the Easter Season or the month of May), or a particular issue in the community right now. In advance, write a paragraph reflection on the mystery you chose, including a question for reflection (similar in style to the reflection on the Annunciation used in the Opening Prayer).

Display an image, icon, or statue which matches the mystery you choose to pray with the participants.

Mark the Bible you will use with the Scripture passage which matches your mystery.

Make sure each participant has a rosary.

Activity Plan

Begin by sharing in your own words:

After Vatican II, the practice of praying the Rosary diminished. Part of this was due to the fact that many Catholics had prayed the Rosary during Mass. With the renewal of the liturgy, including celebrating in the language of the people, Church leaders emphasized the importance of active participation. People were discouraged from private devotions during the celebration of the Eucharist. In addition, a new generation of Catholics, growing up in the post-Vatican II Church, never learned how to pray the Rosary.

When Pope John Paul II declared October of 2002 to October of 2003 the Year of the Rosary in the Catholic Church, new attention was focused on this ancient devotion. The Rosary has been a blessing in so many people’s lives that we want to share it with you. Just as there is no “wrong” way to pray, there is no wrong way to pray the Rosary. But there is a pattern to the Rosary, and there are ways of keeping this devotion relevant in your life. So let’s begin.

Introduce participants through the prayers of the Rosary.

1. Sign of the Cross
2. Apostles’ Creed
3. Our Father
4. Three Hail Marys (for faith, hope and charity)
5. Glory Be
6. 1st Mystery/Our Father
7. 10 Hail Marys

8. Glory Be/2nd Mystery/Our Father
9. 10 Hail Marys
10. Glory Be/3rd Mystery/Our Father
11. 10 Hail Marys
12. Glory Be/4th Mystery/Our Father
13. 10 Hail Marys
14. Glory Be/5th Mystery/Our Father
15. Glory Be
16. Hail, Holy Queen (optional)

Some days the Rosary helps us pray when we can't find our own words to express our inner needs. So we move through the familiar routine of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be, trusting that God knows what is in our hearts even better than we know ourselves. So specific words aren't important.

Other days, we feel the need to pray with a particular focus because of where we are in our personal lives. Although Pope St. John Paul II suggested a schedule for praying the four sets of mysteries (see Handout #3A), he also encouraged people to pray what they are experiencing. For example, if you have encountered a loss or grief, the Sorrowful Mysteries will resonate. If you want to thank God for blessings, the Joyful Mysteries will connect you with an attitude of gratitude.

Church seasons might also help you choose which set of mysteries to pray. During Ordinary Time the Luminous Mysteries are appropriate, while the Easter Season lends itself to the praying of the Glorious Mysteries.

To pray with the mysteries, consider beginning each decade with the name of the mystery, followed by a Scripture passage which describes the event in the life of Christ. Or choose a song which fits the theme of the mystery, listen to it, then begin the Our Father. If visuals are helpful to you in prayer, you might want to have in front of you an image which helps you focus. For the 3rd Joyful Mystery, you might want to focus on a Nativity scene. For the 5th Sorrowful Mystery, you could gaze upon the crucifix on your rosary.

Instruct participants to take their rosaries. Tell them you will pray together a decade of the Rosary, using the mystery which you chose ahead of time. Follow these steps:

- Set out your image or icon or statue where the whole group can see it.
- Announce the mystery.
- Play the song you chose.
- Read the Scripture passage.
- Read your reflection with the question.
- Invite the group to take the question to prayer.
- Pray the first part of the Our Father, inviting them to respond.
- Lead them through the ten Hail Marys.
- Lead them in the Glory Be.

After prayer, invite comments from the participants. Did the music help? Was the visual focus meaningful to them? How did they connect with the Scripture and the reflection?

Activity 2. Praying Scripture with the Mysteries

This learning activity center explores the connection between Scripture and the Mysteries of the Rosary.

Preparation

In advance, give Handout #4 to the catechists who will facilitate this activity.

Materials

- Bibles
- Rosaries, one for each participant
- Handout #4 for catechists and Handout #4A for participants, one per family or individual.

Activity Plan

Introduce the activity by reminding participants that Pope St. Paul VI called the Rosary a Bible for those who can't read. The Rosary traces the journey of Jesus from his Incarnation through his sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The mysteries exist to give us a particular focus for meditation as we move through the decades.

Tell participants that they are going to make the connections between Scripture and the Mysteries of the Rosary in this activity center.

Guide the participants through the following steps, referring them to Handout #4A.

Choose one set of mysteries to work on as a family or table group. Base your decision on what is happening in your life right now. Look up the Scripture passage(s) for each of the five decades, read the passage, then select one of the following options to connect what Jesus and/or Mary did to what God wants you to do in your own lives.

1) Create a human sculpture of the scene in each of the five mysteries. As a table group, get inside the passages and become the characters in each passage.

Or

2) Write a paragraph meditation on each of the five mysteries. For example, for the First Joyful Mystery the paragraph might include the words we heard in our opening prayer: "God called Mary through the angel Gabriel to become the mother of his Son. Mary struggled with this invitation. But in the end, she surrendered to God's will for her life. She discerned her unconditional YES to God. As we reflect on this joyful mystery, let all of us search our hearts for God's invitation to us..."

Or

3) Draw a picture for each of the five mysteries. The picture can depict the Scripture passage or represent a current experience which connects the meaning of the Scripture passage in your own lives.

After you do your sculpture or meditation or picture, choose a key question which you can use as a focus when praying the decade. For example, in our opening prayer on the First Joyful Mystery, the questions were: "What is God asking us to do today? What will be our answer to God's invitation?"

When the group is finished with the five mysteries, invite participants to pray one decade of their choice, using the sculpture, picture or reflection and the question as they enter into the prayer.

The passages for the Five Joyful Mysteries include:

- The Annunciation, Luke 1:28-38
- The Visitation, Luke 1:39-45
- The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Luke 2:1-7
- The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, Luke 2:22-32
- The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, Luke 2:41-52.

The Luminous Mysteries, or Mysteries of Light include:

- The Baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River, Matthew 3:17
- The Wedding at Cana, John 2:1-12
- The Proclamation of the Kingdom, Mark 1:15
- The Transfiguration, Luke 9:31-35
- The First Eucharist, Luke 22:17-20 and John 13:1.

The Sorrowful Mysteries include:

- The Agony in the Garden, Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46
- The Scourging at the Pillar, John 18:33-19:1
- The Crowning with Thorns, Matthew 27:27-31 and John 19:1-16
- The Carrying of the Cross, Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-32
- The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus, Matthew 27:33-56; Mark 15:24-41; Luke 23:33-49; John 15:12-15, 19:17-37.

The Glorious Mysteries include:

- The Resurrection, Matthew 28:1-10; John 20:1-29
- The Ascension, Acts 1:6-11
- The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, Acts 2:1-12
- The Assumption of Mary into Heaven (No passage)
- The Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth (No passage).

Activity 3. Creating Your Own Mysteries (recommended for tables with Adolescents and Adults)

This learning activity center offers the opportunity for participants to create their own mysteries around a theme which is important in their lives right now.

Preparation

Make copies of Handout #5 for each participant.

Materials

- Bibles (preferably a translation with a thematic index, such as the *Catholic Youth Bible* from St. Mary's Press)
- Handout #5

Activity Plan

Pope St. John Paul II, in his apostolic letter on the Rosary in 2002, urged all of us to “let the mysteries on which you reflect, whatever they are, help you to pray in harmony with the demands of your daily life” (RVM 28). We are going to do just that in this activity center—pray in harmony with our daily lives. Brother Philip Armstrong, C.S.C., wrote a book about choosing your own mysteries. He called it *Your Own Mysteries—Praying Your Life through the Rosary*. Brother Philip created several sets of mysteries around important themes in life, including a set of Vocations Mysteries, Golden Rule Mysteries, Rites of Passage Mysteries, even Psalm and Isaiah Mysteries. For his Rites of Passage Mysteries, he identified the following episodes from Jesus’ life as the focus of meditation: Jesus becoming aware of his call in Luke 4; Jesus praying about his call in Matthew 16 and Mark 8; Jesus making a decision to embrace his call in Luke 9 and John 11; Jesus acting on his decision in John 7; and Jesus reaffirming his decision in Mark 1 and 6 and in Luke 5 and 6 (*Your Own Mysteries*, pp. 38-40).

In groups of two or three, or as a family, think of a key issue you need to lift up in prayer. It could be struggling to live a good, moral life; it might be choosing your vocation in life. It might be treating others with dignity and respect; or perhaps you need to reach out to the poor and vulnerable more and not get caught up in materialism. Once you have chosen your theme, take a Bible and, beginning with the Gospels, try to find five passages which line up with your theme. In other words, create your own set of mysteries! If you get stuck finding a passage, talk about people in Scripture who seemed to struggle with your issue and found a way to live faithfully through the struggle.

Use Handout #5: Creating Your Own Mysteries to record your set of mysteries.

If time permits, invite participants to share their new sets of mysteries with each other.

Activity 4: Seeing Through Mary's Eyes (recommended for Adolescents and Adults)

Note: If you choose to do *this activity*, you will need obtain a copy of *Blessed Art Thou* by Michael O'Neill McGrath with prayers by Richard N. Fragomeni (Franklin Park, IL: World Library Publications, 2004). Although quite effective, this activity is not crucial to the overall success of this session. This activity will work best if done with a group of twenty people or less.

This learning activity center offers the opportunity for participants to practice contemplative prayer by focusing on selected mysteries, using Mary's point of view to explore the meaning of each mystery chosen.

Environment

Collect as many different images, statues, and icons of Mary as you can. Try to include diverse images, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Czestochowa, and so on. Have the images placed around the activity center space.

Preparation

Review the prayers and mark the following pages in the *Blessed Art Thou* book:

- Our Lady of the Rosary
- Cause of Our Joy
- Promised Land of Milk & Honey
- Mother of Sorrows
- Gate of Heaven
- Our Lady of Light
- Assumption over Bethany

Materials

- *Blessed Art Thou* by Michael O'Neill McGrath with prayers by Richard N. Fragomeni (Franklin Park, IL: World Library Publications, 2004)
- Paper for writing diary entries

Activity Plan

Share the following:

Praying the Rosary is like learning Jesus' life through the eyes of his mother. As Pope St. John Paul II said in his apostolic letter on the Rosary (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae: On the Most Holy Rosary*), "The contemplation of Christ has an *incomparable model* in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary..." (RVM 10).

Contemplative prayer requires no words—it is truly a prayer of the heart. But the Rosary can be a tool for entering into the contemplation of Christ, especially when viewed through the eyes of his mother.

Invite participants to assume a restful posture. Make sure all can see your book as you read the prayers in *Blessed Art Thou*. Then share:

We are going to use images of Mary and prayers to Mary to enter into contemplative prayer. We will hear a particular Mystery of the Rosary, followed by a prayer and an image which connect to the mystery. Then we will rest in the mystery we are called to celebrate—without more words. Let's begin by praying a prayer to Our Lady of the Rosary. Repeat each phrase after me.

Read the prayer "Our Lady of the Rosary" in *Blessed Art Thou*. Pause after each sentence or phrase so the participants can echo your prayer. When the prayer is concluded, turn the book to show the image of Our Lady. Continue to hold the book so the participants can focus on the image. Allow one to two minutes (depending on the ages in the group) for contemplative prayer before moving to the next prayer and image. Repeat the pattern through the following selections in *Blessed Art Thou*. If it is hard for people to maintain their focus as they contemplate the images, pray several Hail Marys with them while you hold up the images.

1. Proclaim: "The Joyful Mysteries: The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Birth of Jesus, The Presentation, and the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple." Read the prayer for "Cause of Our Joy," then hold up the image for one to two minutes.
2. Proclaim: "The Third Luminous Mystery: The Proclamation of the Kingdom." Read the prayer for "Promised Land of Milk & Honey," then hold up the image for one to two minutes.
3. Proclaim: "The 5th Sorrowful Mystery: The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord." Read the prayer for "Mother of Sorrows," then hold up the image for one to two minutes.
4. Proclaim: "The 1st Glorious Mystery: The Resurrection." Read the prayer for "Gate of Heaven," then hold up the image for one to two minutes.
5. Proclaim: "The 3rd Glorious Mystery: The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles." Read the prayer for "Our Lady of Light," then hold up the image for one to two minutes.
6. Proclaim: "The 4th Glorious Mystery, The Assumption of Mary into Heaven." Read the prayer, "Assumption over Bethany," then hold up the image. Lead the group in praying an Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and a Glory Be.

After you finish, invite participants to choose one mystery which struck them and, looking through Mary's eyes, write a diary entry on that event as they think Mary would have done. Invite them to share their entries with one other person in the activity center.

If time permits, invite sharing on how helpful the prayers and images were to entering into contemplation. Brainstorm with them ways they can use images or statues or icons to contemplate the face of Christ.

Activity 5: Make a Rosary (recommended for Families with Children)

This learning activity center offers the opportunity for families to learn about the Rosary by making one.

Preparation

Review the origins and meaning of each of the prayers of the Rosary: the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be.

Draw a rosary on a large sheet of newsprint, writing which prayers are said with which beads. Post it where all participants can see it.

Materials

Materials to make simple rosaries

- Heavy thread or wire
- Crucifixes
- Medals
- Beads or seeds of different colors for the Our Father/Glory Be beads (6) and the Hail Mary beads (53)
- Baggies for rosary materials so participants can take unfinished rosaries home to complete

If you have a limited budget, use heavy thread for the whole Rosary. The thread can be knotted to form the prayer beads. Using your favorite internet search engine, enter the term "make a rosary" for suppliers of rosary-making materials or other creative ideas for making rosaries.

Activity Plan

Walk participants through the design of the Rosary, using the newsprint prepared in advance.

We won't have time to make an entire rosary in this session, but we will get as far as we can, then you can finish your rosaries at home. While we make our rosaries, we are going to invite members of the communion of saints—both the living and the dead—to pray with us as we create our decades. Pope St. John Paul II wrote of the rosary: "A fine way to expand the symbolism of the beads is to let them remind us of our many relationships, of the bond of communion and fraternity which unites us all in Christ" (RVM 36).

The rosary begins with the Sign of the Cross, an acknowledgment of the triune God to whom our prayer is made. Let us begin making our rosaries "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." With whom do you want to pray to the Trinity? With whom do you want to profess your faith through the Apostles' Creed? Think of that person, someone you know and love, someone who needs your prayers, or someone deceased—perhaps a loved one who died or a saint you want to pray with you.

Allow time for the making of a knotted crucifix or connecting the crucifix to the first bead. Continue:

The Apostles' Creed identifies the great mysteries of our faith, including the significant events in the life of Christ. The Creed is a declaration of our faith and a powerful way to begin the rosary. We are united with the communion of saints as we continue our prayer.

Pray together the Apostles' Creed.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Then continue:

The Lord's Prayer, which follows the Creed and begins each decade of the rosary, comes directly from the Gospel stories of Matthew and Luke. Both evangelists describe Jesus teaching this prayer to his apostles. Because the words are Christ's, we call this the perfect prayer. When we pray the words "Our Father" in the rosary, we celebrate an intimate relationship with God. We surrender ourselves to God's will, and we pray for God's Kingdom before praying for our own needs. The Lord's Prayer demands trust on our part that God will give us whatever we need to live a life of fidelity, dignity, and hope. We also seek reconciliation with God and the community when we ask to be forgiven as we forgive others. With whom do you want to pray the Our Father?

Pray an Our Father together as they make the first bead or knot. Then continue:

The first part of the Hail Mary is God's salutation to Mary through the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation. "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" reminds us that Mary's grace comes from God's presence in her life. When we pray these words, we ask that we, too, can be made holy by the presence of God in our lives. The next words are those spoken to Mary by her cousin Elizabeth: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth was the first to call Mary blessed because Mary bore Christ to the world. The second part of the Hail Mary is our prayer to Mary to be our intercessor: "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." We acknowledge our sinfulness and our need for God today as well as at the end of our lives. We picture Mary in heaven talking to Christ in a mother to son way, taking our prayers to him and reminding him of our needs. With whom do you want to pray to our Blessed Mother?

Now let's make the three beads or knots which make up the three Hail Marys as we pray three Hail Marys for faith, for hope, and for charity.

Pray the prayers as participants add the three beads, then continue:

The Doxology, or Glory Be, is prayed at the end of each decade of the rosary. It is a continuation of the Lord's Prayer, celebrating the Triune God whom Mary worshipped so faithfully. It serves to

remind us that God is eternal and will always be there for us. With whom do you want to pray the Glory Be?

Pray the Glory Be as participants add the single bead. Then continue:

We're now ready to create our five decades—named after the ten Hail Marys in each one. The medal or knot which connects the first set of prayers to the five decades will serve as the touch point for the first mystery and Our Father, and the final Glory Be. Choose one set of mysteries—the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful or Glorious—to reflect on as you make your rosary. (*Pause.*) With whom do you want to pray these prayers?

Guide participants through their rosary-making, inviting them to choose people with whom to pray as they create their rosaries. Continue until there are two minutes left, then instruct participants to collect their rosary supplies in baggies so they can take them home to finish.

Activity 6. Praying the Rosary for Peace (recommended for All Ages)

This learning activity center offers the opportunity to understand and experience the Rosary as a prayer for peace.

Preparation

Make copies of Handout #6 for each participant.

Materials

- Handout #6
- Song of peace (e.g., *Let There Be Peace on Earth, All We Are Saying Is Give Peace a Chance, Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, Peace I Leave*)
- Pipe cleaners—four or five per participant (enough for each participant to shape them into a pair of eyeglasses)
- Play-Doh or other modeling clay

Activity Plan

When Mary appeared to the children in Fatima during World War I, she told them to pray the Rosary for peace in the world. Pope St. John Paul II echoed those words when he said in his apostolic letter on the Rosary: *“The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace, since it consists in the contemplation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is “our peace” (Eph. 2:14). Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ—and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary—learns the secret of peace and makes it his life’s project. Moreover, by virtue of its meditative character, with the tranquil succession of Hail Marys, the Rosary has a peaceful effect on those who pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 14:27; 20:21)...The Rosary is also a prayer for peace because of the fruits of charity which it produces. When prayed well in a truly meditative way, the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted...In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world” (RVM 40).*

Invite participants to enter into the peace which the Rosary calls for by singing together a song of peace.

Then continue in your own words or using the words below:

We are going to take selected Scripture passages about peace and weave them into praying a decade of the Rosary for peace. The Old Testament passages paint a picture of what the world would look like when the Messiah came. It was a world of peace because it was a world of justice.

Instruct participants to take the pipe cleaners and make a pair of eyeglasses with them. Invite them to put on the glasses so they can envision a world of peace as the prophets did. Then continue:

In the Gospels, we hear that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets' dreams. Jesus' own dream—the Kingdom of God—is now possible. The epistles continue this theme: Jesus is the source of peace in our lives and in the world.

Instruct participants to take Handout #6 and read the Scripture passages on peace. Then invite them to come up with a symbol which represents the peace of Christ to them. They might, for example, see peace as two hands clasped. Or they might symbolize peace with a dove. Have them use the Play-Doh to develop their symbol.

The Scripture passages include:

- Isaiah 11:6-9 “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”
- Micah 4:3-4 “He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”
- Luke 2:12-14 “ ‘This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.’ “
- John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”
- Colossians 3:13-15 “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you indeed were called in the one body.”

After groups have finished their symbols, tell them they will be asked to hold up the symbol and share its meaning in one sentence as you pray together a decade of the Rosary for peace. Share the following:

Let us pray for peace in the world, peace in our communities and families, and peace in our hearts.
Our Father...

Invite the first person or family to share their symbol, then pray a Hail Mary. Invite a second symbol and second Hail Mary. Continue until all groups have shared their symbol. Then conclude with a Glory Be.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20-25 minutes)

Preparation

Print Handout #7 for each participant.

Invite participants to take Handout #7: Reflection on the Rosary and spend a few quick moments completing the sentences.

Reflection on the Rosary

1. I think that praying the rosary could help my prayer life by...
2. The _____ Mysteries really connect with where I am on my faith journey right now because...
3. I commit to praying a rosary in the coming week on..... at(day of the week and time of day)
4. I will pray the rosary for the following intention: ...
5. The role of Mary in my prayer life is...

Ask participants to gather in intergenerational groups to share what they have learned and created. Invite them to take several minutes to share their responses to the following questions:

- What is one new thing you learned about the Rosary that you didn't know before?
- What value do you see in praying the Rosary as an individual? As a family? As a faith community?
- Which mystery is particularly meaningful to you at this stage of your life? Why?

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

Gather

Loving God, we thank you for sharing the Mother of Jesus with us and making her our mother. We thank you for the Rosary, a prayer which Mary herself encouraged us to pray. As we go forth, help us to be more like Mary. When she became pregnant with Jesus—God's own Son—she didn't sit back and let others wait on her. She went to take care of her cousin Elizabeth. God, make us more like Mary, focused on the needs of others more than on ourselves. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Reading

Luke 1:39-56

Decade of the Rosary

Invite a group which did a meditation or sculpture of the Joyful Mysteries in the Activity Center to come forward and share their work on the Second Joyful Mystery, The Visitation, including their question for reflection. If no group chose the Second Joyful Mystery, ask for any group which would like to share their work to come forward. Invite the assembly to reflect on the group's question as they pray a decade of the Rosary.

Our Father...

10 Hail Marys...

Glory Be...

Hail, Holy Queen

If a priest is present, invite him to bless the rosaries of the participants. Have them hold up their rosaries as he prays.

Go Forth

End with a Mary song.