

# We Believe in the Communion of Saints

## Session Focus

This session explores our belief in the communion of saints: “We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church” (*Credo of the People of God*). The session presents the Church’s understanding of the communion of saints and its relevance for Catholics today. It examines the lives of the saints and the Scriptures to discover insights and guidance for living a saintly life today. Participants will discover the “saints” among their family members, both dead and living.

## Learning Objectives

The session on the communion of saints guides learners of all ages to...

- comprehend the Catholic belief in the communion of saints and identify the characteristics of saintly living in the lives of the saints and Scripture
- recognize the significance of the communion of saints in the Catholic tradition and its relevance to their faith lives today
- discover practical ways to live a saintly life today

## Session Overview

**Part 1. (10 minutes)      Gathering and Opening Prayer Service: Celebrating All Saints**

**Part 2. (30 minutes)      All Ages Learning Experience: Meet the Saints**

**Part 3. (75 minutes)      In Depth Learning Experience: Communion of Saints**

- Option 1. Whole Group Format - all participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format - participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

**Part 4. (10 minutes)      Sharing Learning Experiences**

**Part 5. (10 minutes)      Closing Prayer Service: Celebrating All Souls**

## Design Options for In-Depth Learning

### Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners

- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of catechists who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leader catechists to have one catechist work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

**Facilitation Tips for This Format:**

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, catechists and small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

## Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators and catechists to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

**Facilitation Tips for This Format**

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while catechist move from table to table assisting.

**Guest Presenter**

In addition to the learning activities in this session, you might want to invite a guest presenter to speak to the adults. Use the session plan for adults as a guide to focus the speaker’s presentation and engage the adults in activities and discussion to complement the presentation.

## Preparation Before the Session

Ask the participants to bring one photograph of deceased family members (parent, grandparent, spouse, brother, or sister) they would like to remember. Invite family members to bring flowers to remember their loved ones. Send out a postcard reminder or e-mail notice asking people to bring their photographs.

In addition to the learning activities in this session, you might want to invite a guest presenter to speak to the adults. Use the session plan for adults as a guide to focus the speaker's presentation and engage the adults in activities and discussion to complement the presentation.

## Materials Needed

### Gathering

- Name tags
- Opening Prayer Service Handout
- Bible

### All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Handout #1
- Profiles on the lives of saints
- For Option 1: equipment for the game show—podiums, large display board (easels, white board) and/or multimedia projector, dice
- For Option 2: saints costumes for actors

### In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts #2-6
- Materials for the Guided Tour of Saints are listed in the learning plan.
- For family learning plan: The materials families will need are determined by which activities are selected. A list of materials is included with each activity.
- For the adolescent learning plan: Newsprint, markers, masking tape, large file card for each person (4x6 or 5x7 size).

### Closing

- Closing Prayer Service

# Session Plan

## Part 1. Gathering (15 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 or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

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

This session explores our belief in the communion of saints: “We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church” (*Credo of the People of God*). This session presents the Church’s understanding of the communion of saints and its relevance for Catholics today. It examines the lives of the saints and the Scriptures to discover insights and guidance for living a saintly life today. Participants will discover the “saints” among their family members, both dead and living.

Present an overview and the schedule of the program.

### 1. Group Formation

Organize people into intergenerational small 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.

For the In Depth Learning Experience (Part 3) organize the participants into three types of table groups: family clusters of two or more families, groups of adolescents, and groups of adults. See the session plans for adolescents and adults for more instructions on organizing groups. Conduct an icebreaker or community building activity if you wish.

## 2. Opening Prayer Service

### Preparation

Set-up a prayer table with white tablecloth, Bible, pictures of saints.

Create an art gallery of saints to communicate the concept of the communion of saints. Imagine this as a museum presentation. Organizing this gallery of art will prepare you for one of the learning activities in each of the age group learning plans. One way to create a gallery is to purchase posters of icons, mount them on foam core and organize the icons in a circle around the gathered assembly (in your meeting space or in the church). Put the names of the saints on the displays. Add a little information on each saint. You can purchase icons of the saints from Monastery Icons and Printery House. Check their web sites online. Another way to create a gallery is to gather in the church and utilize statues, paintings, stained glass windows, as well as posters of icons. Arrange the environment so that people “feel” surrounded by the communion of saints.

Set up a “Wall of Remembrance” in the church or other meeting space. Participants need to be able to post or hang their photos on the “wall.”

Provide small or large votive candles (in glass) that can illumine the “Wall of Remembrance.”

Light the paschal candle and the cluster of candles in the prayer space to begin the prayer service.

### Gather

God our Father,  
source of all holiness,  
the work of your hands is manifest in your saints;  
the beauty of your truth is reflected in their faith.

May we who aspire to have part in their joy  
be filled with the Spirit that blessed their lives,  
so that having shared their faith on earth  
we may also know their peace in your kingdom.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.  
(Alternative Opening Prayer, All Saints, *Roman Missal*)

### Listen

Leader: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Side 1: Blessed are the poor in Spirit,  
Side 2: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Side 1: Blessed are those who mourn,  
Side 2: for they shall be comforted.  
Side 1: Blessed are the meek,

Side 2: for they shall inherit the earth.  
Side 1: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
Side 2: for they will be filled.  
Side 1: Blessed are the merciful,  
Side 2: for they will receive mercy.  
Side 1: Blessed are the pure in heart,  
Side 2: for they will see God.  
Side 1: Blessed are the peacemakers,  
Side 2: for they will be called children of God.  
Side 1: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
Side 2: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:1-12).

Leader: Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

Leader: This is the Gospel, the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Respond**

Offer the following reflections on the Beatitudes, using the words below or your own words.

Who are the happy, fortunate, blessed people? What is the source of human happiness?

One of the most important and paradoxical sections in all Scripture is the vision of happiness Jesus gives in his Sermon on the Mount. In the Gospels of Matthew (5:3-10) and Luke (6:20-26), Jesus proclaims what blessedness is and makes promises to those who follow his proclamation. The blessed, the happy, the fortunate, he tells us, are the poor in spirit, those who mourn and are merciful, those who seek righteousness and peace, the ones pure in heart, the persecuted. The promise that awaits them is God's kingdom!

The Greek word *makarios* means 'blessed' or 'happy,' which implies a certain freedom from anxieties and worries. In Matthew's Gospel the notion of beatitudes conveys deep joy flowing from the grace of salvation and the promise of God's kingdom. The blessed and 'successful' people are those who put on Jesus' mind and heart.

### **Go Forth**

God is the glory and joy of all his saints,  
whose memory we celebrate today.  
May his blessing be with you always.  
Response: Amen.

May the prayers of the saints deliver you from present evil;  
may their example of holy living  
turn your thoughts to the service of God and neighbor.  
Response: Amen.

God's holy Church rejoices that her children  
are one with the saints in lasting peace.

May you come to share with them  
in all the joys of our Father's house.

Response: Amen.

(Solemn Blessing, All Saints, *Roman Missal*)

## Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Meet the Saints (45 minutes)

The focus of the All Ages Learning Experience is to help the participants surface their knowledge and experience of saints and to expose them to a variety of saints in a creative format.

### Preparation

Print Handout #1 on both sides of one sheet of paper and distribute it to all participants (parents, teens, adults). Participants will use side one in the "Who Do You Know" reflection activity and side two to record their notes during the presentation of the saints.

Select Option 1 or Option 2 and follow the instructions for preparing and conducting the learning activity.

Both options require background information on the lives of the saints. Handout #6 includes one-page descriptions of the following saints and their feast day.

- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (January 4)
- St. John Bosco (January 31)
- St. Scholastica (February 10) and  
St. Benedict (July 11)
- St. Katharine Drexel (March 3)
- St. Oscar Romero (March 24)
- Sr. Thea Bowman (March 30)
- St. John Baptist de la Salle (April 7)
- Blessed Damien of Molokai (April 15)
- St. Joan of Arc (May 30)
- Pope Saint John XXIII (June 3)
- St. Peter and St. Paul (June 29)
- St. Benedict (July 11)
- St. Ignatius of Loyola (July 31)
- St. Clare (August 11)
- St. Maximilian Kolbe (August 14)
- St. Hildegard of Bingen (September 17)
- St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)
- St. Teresa of Calcutta (September 10)
- St. Francis of Assisi (October 4)
- St. Teresa of Avila (October 15)
- St. Martin de Porres (November 3)
- St. Francis Xavier Cabrini (November 13)
- Dorothy Day (November 29)

- St. Francis Xavier (December 3)
- Thomas Merton (December 10)

Here are several other resources to consult:

- Cowan, Tom. *The Way of the Saints—Prayers, Practices, and Meditations*. New York: Putnam, 1998.
- Ellsberg, Robert. *All Saints—Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997.
- Foley, Leonard, editor. *Saint of the Day: The Definitive Guide to the Saints*. Franciscan Media, 2017.
- McBrien, Richard. *Lives of the Saints*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.

Distribute Handout #1: What Saints Do You Know?

## 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of the communion of saints. Use the words of Edward Gabriele below or your own words.

“For many people, a saint is someone who has been declared a saint either through popular acclaim as in the cases of martyrs and leaders of the early Christian communities or through the canonization processes established much later in the church.

“The early church proclaimed that the glory of God is the human being fully alive. The saints are heroic because their lives demonstrate that they are fully grounded in their own humanness. The saints are complete human beings endowed with many of the same tasks of maturity, the same successes, the same aspirations, and the same defects and problems that we all face. Real saints are grounded thoroughly in their humanness.

“Saints are also grounded completely in Jesus Christ, in the quest for God’s light in their lives and in the world. Sanctity requires the conversion of one’s life into the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Saints are men and women who engage in the joys and intense struggles of prayer and conversion of life—hardly an easy path. . . . The mark of the saint is fidelity to the process of becoming a new person in Jesus. Wherever the human spirit tenaciously clings to the gift of faith in Jesus, there sanctity is found.

“Saints embrace the world. After all, Jesus took on our human flesh. He walked among us, healed sick people, preached the good news that God loves human beings, and ate with anyone who would share a meal with him. Real saints serve in the world with the same tenacious love with which the Word became our flesh.

“Clearly the saints have served the world in various ways. Hidden away, hermits, nuns, and monks witness to the power of prayer and solitude. Like Jesus in the desert, their quiet presence reminds us that all activity for good can be sustained only if it is rooted in attentive love, sustained hope, strong faith renewed through meditation. Other saints take to the streets to care for orphans, struggle against injustice, bind up the wounds of a battered world. Saints witness to the presence of

a God who created the world, who loves the world, who gives us the world to steward, and who embraces our worldly lives with passion and delight.” (Edward F. Gabriele, *Prayer with Searchers and Saints* )

Invite the participants to identify the saints they know by completing Handout #1. Participants should include as much information as they can. Families with children should complete the activity as a family. Everyone should be able to do this activity. Remind them that there are saints in the New Testament!

Invite participants to describe the saints they know by using the words below or your own words.

What saints do you already know? Take a few minutes to identify the saints you know and describe a little information about their lives.

Saint's Name	Where and When Did This Saint Live?	What Did This Saint Do and Stand For?
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In intergenerational groups invite the participants to share information about the lives of saints they identified on Handout #1.

## 2. Meet the Saints: Select Option A or B

### Option A: Saints of Fortune

“Saints of Fortune” is modeled on the “Wheel of Fortune” game show format. The following format is designed to encourage participation by the audience. The game will need a strong moderator who keeps the game moving at a brisk pace.

#### Preparation

Select eight saints that you want to present to the assembly. Try to select saints who represent different eras of Church history, different countries and cultures, and a variety of charisms/ministries such as education, justice/service, prayer/spirituality, pastoral care, evangelization/mission activity, and work with children or teenagers. Be sure to include at least one American saint. Check names and descriptions in the recommended resources on the lives of the saints listed above.

Organize the game show set:

- six podiums—one for each contestant
- moderator with microphone
- large display for the letter names: several newspaper easels with one word on each easel, a PowerPoint slide projected on a large screen, large white board

You will need at least two leaders to play the game: a Host who will ask the questions and confirms the correct answer, and a Recorder who will write the correct letter on newspaper or white board or type it onto a PowerPoint slide.

#### Supplies:

- Dice

## How to Play the Game

1. Divide the assembly into four to six (roughly) equal “contestant groups.”
2. Select a representative, “contestant,” from each group to play “Saints of Fortune.” In this version of the game, the contestant’s group will be able to help with answers.
3. Bring the representatives to the front. Ask each to stand in front of a podium.
4. The moderator reviews the rules of the game and then each person rolls the die. The person with the highest number begins the game.
5. The first contestant names a consonant he or she thinks is in the saint’s name. To make the game a little more challenging contestants will not be able to select vowels. They will have to name the saint without the help of vowels. (You can modify this and have the contestants select only one vowel in the entire game.)
6. The contestant’s audience group can make suggestions. If the letter appears in the saint’s name, the Recorder writes it for all to see. If the letter appears multiple times, the letter is written in each appropriate space.
7. If the contestant correctly guesses, he or she receives another guess. If the letter is not in the word, then the next person to his or her right gets a turn.
8. A contestant may try to guess the saint’s name at any point during his or her turn. The contestant must first say, “I’d like to solve the saint’s name.” The contestant can ask for help from the from the contestant’s group. They can shout-out answers. Then the contestant states his or her guess. The moderator announces whether the answer is correct. If it is correct, the contestant is declared the winner. If it is incorrect, the contestant must sit out until the puzzle is solved correctly by another contestant.
9. A contestant wins by guessing the name of the saint exactly.
10. After the correct answer is obtained, the moderator provides everyone with information about the life of the saint. The presentation needs to include the following information:
  - Saint’s name
  - Where and when did they live?
  - What did they do and stand for?
11. The moderator starts the next round and begins with the person who has the next turn after the winner.

## Sample Saint’s Names:

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASISI  
SAINT ELIZABETH AN SETON  
SAINT ANGELA MERICI  
SAINT PAUL  
SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALE  
SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL  
SAINT MARTIN DE PORES  
SAINT BENEDICT  
SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA  
SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA

## Option B: Living Saints

Living Saints presents the lives of the saints through actors who take the role of the saint, dressing in the same clothes their saint would have worn and speaking about the life of their saint in the first person. A moderator keeps the presentations moving.

### Preparation

Select eight saints that you want to present to the assembly. Try to select saints who represent different eras of Church history, different countries and cultures, and a variety of charisms/ministries such as education, justice/service, prayer/spirituality, pastoral care, evangelization/mission activity, and work with children or teenagers. Be sure to include at least one American saint. Check names and descriptions in the *People of Faith Collection* (Harcourt Religion) or the recommend resources on the lives of the saints listed above.

Select an actor for each saint who will tell the story of the saint to the whole group. Actors should dress in costume, reflecting the clothes that their saint would have worn. In presenting their saint actors speak in the first person, giving feeling and substance to the life of their saint. Actors do not state the name of their saint when they are presenting. Presentations should last only 2-3 minutes.

Give each family and individual participant a piece of paper or file card, and pen/pencil.

On large sheets of newsprint or on a PowerPoint slide write the names of the saints you have selected plus an additional ten saints. Participants can use this list to try to guess the identity of the saints.

1. Post the list of potential saints.
2. Introduce the first saint. The actor presents the saint's story. Participants then take a moment to figure out who the saint is. (Participants will discover the identity of each saint at the conclusion.)
3. Introduce the next saint and follow the same process. Continue until the final actor presents his or her saint.
4. After the final presentation call each actor to the front of the room and ask each actor to reveal his or her saint and to identify one distinguishing characteristic that will help remember the saint.
5. Thank all of the actors, and then turn to the assembly to see how successful participants were in identifying the saints. Ask people to raise their hands who identified every saint correctly, then who got one wrong, and so on.

**Note:** You can combine Options A and B. After a correct answer from "Saints of Fortune," the saint (in costume) comes forward to share his or her story.

## 3. Concluding Presentation

Conclude the All Ages Learning Experience by presenting the following reflections by Maura Hagarty on the Communion of Saints, using the words below or your own words. You may want to accompany your presentation with visuals using newsprint or PowerPoint presentation.

When Christians pray the Apostles' Creed they express belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and then the communion of saints. The phrase "communion of saints" is another way to describe the Church. As Pope Paul VI wrote in his 1968 *Credo of the People of God*, "We believe in the communion of all

the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church” (n. 30, quoted in CCC 962).

Perhaps you are surprised that this use of the term “saints” includes the living. If you are like most Catholics today, when you encounter the word “saint” you are likely to think of a holy person who has died and been canonized by Church leaders. In the phrase “communion of saints,” however, the term “saint” has a much broader meaning. In fact, the term it translates, *sanctorum*, has two meanings—holy people and holy things.

The first meaning refers to all the people God has called together, both living and dead. Understood this way the “communion of saints” is a phrase that refers to the Church community as a whole. The inclusion of the living and the dead reminds us that the Church extends beyond the visible world to include a spiritual dimension. Upon death people don’t leave the Church. The dead and the living are united in Christ and therefore share communion with one another.

The second meaning, holy things, refers to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The sharing that takes place in Eucharist strengthens the bonds of the community members with Christ and with one another and with all those who have died. This meaning is closely related to the first. The communion that characterizes the Church involves the holy people (saints) sharing in holy things (Eucharist).

Continue if you are utilizing this intergenerational program with the Feast of All Saints.

On November 1 each year, the Church celebrates a feast called All Saints. The liturgies on this day celebrate the unity of the whole Church in heaven and on earth and gives special emphasis to the dead who have already achieved eternal life in communion with God.

This feast has its origins in the early Church’s practice of celebrating a Eucharistic liturgy in honor of the nameless Christian martyrs, those killed because of their faith in Jesus. As persecution waned and the number of martyrs dwindled, the focus of the feast expanded to include all the dead who lived holy lives of Christian witness.

On this feast, Catholics look to the past, seeking guidance, strength, and inspiration from stories about the earthly lives of the saints now united with God in life after death. We also look to the future, longing for the day when we will be united with all these people in complete communion with God.

The Church’s feast of All Saints on November 1 is far from the only time Catholics pray with the saints in liturgy. In fact, we commemorate the saints each time we pray the Eucharistic prayer at Mass. Those of us on earth join with the saints in giving thanks and praise to God. When we celebrate Eucharist “we are most closely united to the worship of the heavenly Church, when in the fellowship of communion we honor and remember the glorious Mary ever virgin, St. Joseph, the holy apostles and martyrs and all the saints” (*Lumen Gentium*, 50).

The Church also celebrates numerous feast days throughout the year in commemoration of specific saints whose names have not been lost. The dates for these feasts are usually set on or near the saint’s anniversary of death if it is known. This practice focuses our attention on the saint’s new life after death and his or her participation in Christ’s paschal mystery—his passage from life, through

death, to new life. We recall stories from their lives and hold them up as examples to follow. We see in them an image of Christ and a sign of the kingdom that is to come and we thank God for them.

Explain that in the in-depth learning experience participants will explore what it means to be a saint and how to live a saintly life.

## Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience: (75-80 minutes)

### A Guided Tour of Saints (for all age groups)

Each group—families with children, adolescents, adults—begins their in-depth learning with the Guided Tour of Saints. This activity can be conducted in separate age groups, or in intergenerational groups.

#### Preparation

Identify artwork of the saints in your church: stained glass windows, statues, paints. Supplement this artwork by purchasing icons of the saints and/or by creating a PowerPoint presentation with pictures of the saints in paintings and icons. If you create a PowerPoint presentation, try to select artwork from different eras of Church history and different forms such as mosaics, frescoes, paintings, and statues.

To purchase posters of the saints, check web sites for Monastery Icons and Printery House. To download free icons, check the web site for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. To download free religious art, check the web site for the Web Gallery of Art. Also check the web sites of museums to download religious art.

Develop a team of tour guides to give a guided tour of the saints artwork. Both options require background information on the lives of the saints. Handout #6 includes one-page descriptions of saints and here are several other resources to consult:

- Cowan, Tom. *The Way of the Saints—Prayers, Practices, and Meditations*. New York: Putnam, 1998.
- Ellsberg, Robert. *All Saints—Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997.
- Foley, Leonard, editor. *Saint of the Day: The Definitive Guide to the Saints*. Franciscan Media, 2017.
- McBrien, Richard. *Lives of the Saints*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.

#### Materials

- Tracing paper, white card stock paper, pens/pencils, colored pencils and marking pens

Saints have been depicted in artwork since the earliest days of Christianity. This activity provides a guided tour (real and virtual) of stained glass windows, statues, paintings, and icons of the saints. Imagine this activity as a museum tour. This activity can be used with all ages.

A Guided Tour of Saints is designed as a break-out activity using the church and, if needed, a separate room for a presentation. Tour guides lead the participants through the display in the church (and a PowerPoint presentation if you have added this feature), explaining the story of the saints depicted in

the artwork. Keep the descriptions of the artwork and lives of the saint short and keep the tour moving so no one gets bored.

### **Additional Activity**

After the tour invite the participants to select one piece of artwork to draw. Provide tracing paper, white card stock paper, pens/pencils, colored pencils and marking pens. Give people time to create their own art work of the saints.

## **Families with Children Learning Experience**

### **Preparation**

- Make copies of Handout #3.
- The materials families will need is determined by which activities are selected. A list of materials is included with each activity.
- Write the essential instructions on newsprint or create a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions.

### **#1. Saints in Our Family**

Following the “Guided Tour of Saints,” guide families through the following process using your own words or the words below. The activities can be conducted at table groups or within individual families. Handout #3 provides the information for parents to use with their families. A variety of activities are included, more than can be conducted in one session. Select the activities that you want to include.

Working together as a family, identify the important things that the saints do in their lives and what they stand for (beliefs, convictions). For example: saints pray, are generous, help people in need, teach others about God, are courageous.

Who are the saints in your family, living and dead? Remember communion of saints refers to “all the people God has called together, both living and dead.

Together identify three living saints in your extended family of relatives. As you think of each person, name one reason why you think they are a saint. How do they show us God?

Look at the people you have named. Which Beatitudes do you see in their lives? Try to identify one Beatitude for each person.

Write these three names on your family “Family Coat of Saints” and one reason why you think each person is a saint.

### **#2. Saints Activities**

Select up to three learning activities to conduct with families. Each activity is described on a separate page on Handout #3, so it will be easy to select and copy the materials you need. These activities can be conducted at table groups or at individual learning activity centers. Learning activity centers are facilitated by a leader. Tables and chairs (or floor space) are essential so that individuals and families can learn, create, and discuss. Divide the large group into a number of smaller groups that corresponds to

the number of activities you will conduct. Each small group begins with a different activity. After 25 minutes, they rotate to the next activity, and so on.

- Activity 1: Saints Posters and Gallery
- Activity 2: Letters to Saints
- Activity 3: Praying with the Saints  
Version 1: Writing Prayers to the Saints or Version 2: Praying with the Saints (requires a separate meeting space)
- Activity 4: Saint for a Week

Advance preparation varies depending on which activities are selected. Review the activity to determine preparation requirements.

Make copies of only the activities that you are going to conduct with families.

## Activity 1: Saints Posters and Gallery

### Preparation

Prepare a number of saint profiles so that each child receives one. Prepare enough different profiles so that there are no duplicates in any one family or table group. The profile should contain basic information about the saint: where and when the saint lived, what the saint did, what the saint stood for. Use Handout #6 and/or a children's books on the saints.

### Materials

- Poster: butcher paper or table covering (on a roll) so that children can outline their entire body on paper (You can adjust the activity to use poster board or newsprint.)
- Creative arts supplies: paper, pens/pencils, marking pens, crayons, magazines for photos, tape or glue sticks (You may want to prepare for this activity by cutting-out a variety of pictures from which the children can select. Display all of the pictures on the table or floor so that the children can easily choose which pictures they want to use. This advance preparation will save time during the session.)

### Learning Process

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

The purpose of this activity is to explore the life of one saint and to create a poster that illustrates the special characteristics of your saint.

Read the saint profile for younger children or ask the older children to read their saint profile. Discuss the special characteristics of each saint: serving the poor, caring for the sick, living a life of prayer, starting schools, establishing a religious community, and so on. Write these characteristics on a piece of paper.

Read Matthew 5:1-12. (Gospel for the Feast of All Saints on November 1.)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:  
'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Identify which of the Beatitudes best describe your saint. Write these characteristics on a piece of paper.

Begin the Saints Poster by drawing an outline of the child's body on the poster/banner.

Write the name of the saint in the middle of the body. Write the special characteristics of the saint above the name and one beatitude that describes the saint under his or her name. Older children can write these words for themselves.

Illustrate these special characteristics by finding several pictures from magazines that illustrate the life and actions of their person. Paste these on the poster, leaving room under the saint's name for the next step.

Complete one or two of the following sentences and then write it under the saint's name:

- (Saint) wants us to live our Catholic faith by . . .
- If (Saint) were here today, he or she would tell us to . . .
- If we want to follow the example of (Saint), we should . . .

## Activity 2: Letters to Saints

### Preparation

Prepare a number of saint profiles so that each child receives one. Prepare enough different profiles so that there are no duplicates in any one family or table group. The profile should contain basic information about the saint: where and when the saint lived, what the saint did, what the saint stood for. Handout #6 includes one-page descriptions of saints. Consult other saints resources for children to develop your descriptions.

To expand this activity, consider the following ideas:

- Ask each child to complete an envelope to accompany their letter and address it to the saint at their own home address. Collect the letters and mail them within the next two weeks or, if this connected to the Feast of All Saints, so it arrives on November 1.
- Consider collecting the letters and publishing them in the bulletin or parish newsletter in time for All Saints Day.
- Consider publishing a separate booklet of "Letters to the Saints." Distribute the booklet at the All Saints Day Mass or on the Sunday before or after All Saints Day.

## Materials

Paper, pens or pencils, crayons or colored markers, magazines for photos, tape or glue sticks, envelope.

## Learning Process

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

The purpose of this activity is to write a letter to a saint describing how much you appreciate his or her contribution and explaining how the saint can still make a difference in our lives as Catholics today.

Begin by reading the saint profile for younger children or asking the older children to read their saint profile. Discuss the special characteristics of each saint: serving the poor, caring for the sick, living a life of prayer, starting schools, establishing a religious community, and so on. Write these characteristics on a piece of paper.

Read Matthew 5:1-12. (This is the Gospel for the Feast of All Saints on November 1.)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Identify which of the Beatitudes best describe your saint. Write these characteristics on a piece of paper.

Write a letter to your saint describing how much you appreciate his or her contribution and explaining how the saint can make a difference in our lives as Catholics today. For example, a letter to St. Francis could thank him for his life of service to those in need and for his love and appreciation of God’s creation (the environment); and how important it is for Catholics, and all people, to serve the poor and respect creation and the environment today.

Include the appropriate Beatitude (or key words) in their letters, for example, “Thank you for being poor in spirit” or “Thank you for suffering for your faith.”

Begin the letter with “Dear...” The following questions can guide the letter-writing. The children can illustrate their letters with a picture or symbol.

- Thank you for giving us the example of . . .
- Thank you for teaching us . . .

- If you were here today, you would tell us to . .
- If we want to follow your example today, we should . .

Examples:

*Dear Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, you taught many young people to know and love God. Help us to understand our faith and to talk joyfully about God. . . .*

*Dear Saint Martin de Porres, you happily spent your life giving everything you had to others. Help us to be generous with what we have been given, and to share our blessings cheerfully. . . .*

### Activity 3: Praying with the Saints

**Note:** There are two versions of this activity. The first is designed for family table groups. There is a handout page for families with the instructions for this activity. The second is designed as a break-out activity in a separate room that is conducive to a prayer experience. Version 2 requires a team to guide the participants through an experience of praying with the saints. The two versions can be used in conjunction with each other.

#### Version 1: Writing Prayers to the Saints

##### Materials

- Paper, pens or pencils, crayons, marking pens
- Paper in different formats to record the prayers: bookmarks (file card, cut to size) with ribbon, placemat (8.5x14 or 11x17 paper), poster (poster board), prayer card (file card, cut to size)

##### Learning Process

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

The purpose of this activity is to write a prayer for each saint chosen by a family member. The prayer should capture the saint's life and actions, incorporate the unique spirit and contribution of the individual, and challenge us to live as Christians today.

Through the All Ages Learning Experience and the other family learning activities you have learned about the characteristics of a number of saints. Each family member should select one saint as the focus of their prayer. Write a prayer that incorporates the unique spirit and contribution of the individual and challenges us to live as Christians today. For example, if you wrote a prayer to St. Mary, the mother of Jesus, you could speak about her courage to accept the responsibility that God gave her. If you wrote a prayer to St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Martin de Porres, or St. Vincent de Paul you could emphasize service and generosity. If you wrote a prayer to St. Paul, you could emphasize his work in bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the whole Roman empire. If you wrote a prayer to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, you could emphasize the importance of teaching people about Jesus and the Catholic faith.

Here are several examples:

- Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, you taught many young people to know and love God. Help us to understand our faith and to talk joyfully about God.

- Saint Martin de Porres, you happily spent your life giving everything you had to others. Help us to be generous with what we have been given, and to share our blessings cheerfully.
- Saint Joan of Arc, God called you from your simple life as a shepherdess to lead a nation to freedom. Help us to be brave and respond to God's call.

Work together as a family to write your prayers to the saints.

Use the different formats available to record your prayer:

- a bookmark with the prayer and a symbol
- a table placemat with the prayer and illustrations
- a poster with the prayer and a picture
- a prayer card

Conclude the activity by sharing your prayers with each other.

## **Version 2: Praying with the Saints**

### **Preparation**

Select up to three saints as the focus of the activity.

Write or find prayers for three saints (see examples below). Begin by consulting the *Sacramentary* or *Roman Missal* which contains prayers (opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, prayer after communion, and final blessing) for the saints on the Roman Calendar of Saints Days and Church Feasts.

Create a prayerful space with candles, music, chairs, or a carpeted room. You can use the worship space or chapel for this activity.

### **Learning Process**

Use the following process for each saint. It takes 7-10 minutes for each presentation/prayer experience. Take each saint individually and repeat the following process. Present or dramatize the life of the saint. Have each person dress in costume and speak about his or her saint in the first person.

Share a prayer from the saint or lead a short prayer service inspired by the saint (see the examples below). Write the prayers on newsprint or poster board or on PowerPoint slides so that everyone can participate.

#### **St. Vincent de Paul (September 27)**

*This is my prayer to you, O Lord! Give to me your special favor. Pour out your truth and mercy on me in an abundance that will enable me to put your love into practice, filling me with true affection for you, for my neighbor, and also for myself.*

#### **St. Ignatius Loyola (October 17)**

*Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and call my own. You have given to me all. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.*

**St. Teresa of Calcutta (September 5)**

*Make us, Lord, worthy to serve our brothers and sisters who are scattered all over the world, who live and die alone and poor. Give them today, using our hands, their daily bread. And, using our love, give them peace and happiness. Amen.*

**The Prayer of St. Francis (October 4)**

*Lord make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,  
Where there is injury, pardon,  
Where there is doubt, faith,  
Where there is despair, hope,  
Where there is darkness, light,  
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may seek,  
not so much to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved, as to love,  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

**St. Vincent de Paul Prayer Service**

Leader: St. Vincent de Paul, you always shared what you had with the needy. Help us to do the same so the suffering of others may cease.

Everyone: May we share our daily bread so that others may eat.

Leader: Help us, St. Vincent de Paul, to also share our time with one another, with our friends and neighbors, and with those who are in need.

Everyone: May we share our daily bread so that others may eat.

Leader: Show us, St. Vincent, how to use our talents, our special gifts, and our abilities, to give joy to those around us.

Everyone: May we share our daily bread so that others may eat.

Leader: St. Vincent de Paul, give us hearts that are filled with compassion for others, Christian hearts

Everyone: May we share our daily bread so that others may eat.

**St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Prayer Service**

Leader: St. Elizabeth's faith was so strong that she could cope with her trials. She had courage to do what she thought was right when others criticized and condemned her. She had energy to begin anew and to start new things. She was full of zeal because she was full of love for God.

Leader: People of faith brought St. Elizabeth to the Catholic Church, and she brought others. Let us pray that our faith may be a strong light that attracts other people to God.

Everyone: Holy Spirit, thank you for the gift of faith.

Leader: St. Elizabeth, help us to make our faith grow by practicing it, by praying, and by living according to what Jesus taught.

Everyone: Holy Spirit, thank you for the gift of faith.

Leader: St. Elizabeth, help us to share our faith with others by talking with them about what we believe.

Everyone: Holy Spirit, thank you for the gift of faith.

Conclude each saint's prayer with a song.

### **Additional Activity**

Participants can work together to create a Litany of Saints using the saints they have experienced in the session. For example:

*We ask for continued guidance from those who have gone before us in faith. Long ago, they were called and chosen by God to share their gifts generously. The example of their lives can help us to strive to be more loving, more giving, and more Christ-like. And so we pray:*

***Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton**, you taught many young people to know and love God. Help us to understand our faith and to talk joyfully about God.*

***Saint Martin de Porres**, you happily spent your life giving everything you had to others. Help us to be generous with what we have been given, and to share our blessings cheerfully.*

***Saint Therese**, you wanted only to love God, but you helped many people at the same time. Help prayer to be easier when we find it difficult.*

***Saint Joan of Arc**, God called you from your simple life as a shepherdess to lead a nation to freedom. Help us to be brave and respond to God's call.*

## **Activity 4: Saint for a Week**

Prepare saints profiles for families to review. Prepare enough different profiles so that there are no duplicates in any one family or table group. The profile should contain basic information about the saint: where and when the saint lived, what the saint did, what the saint stood for. To expand the choices provide people with profiles or passages from the Gospels about saints, e.g., Mary and the annunciation. Handout #6 includes one-page descriptions of saints. Consult other saints resources for children to develop your descriptions.

### **Materials**

- White card stock paper, piece of yarn cut in lengths for a name tag, pen/pencils, marking pens, crayons
- Stickers to decorate the name tags

### **Learning Process**

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

The purpose of this activity is to develop ideas about how each family member can live like a particular saint for one week. Parents will need to help younger children develop their name tag.

Review all of the saints that your family learned about in this session. Discuss the particular characteristics of each saint: what they did in their life (actions) and what they stood for (beliefs).

Ask each family member to select one saint that they would like to be for one week. Describe how you will be this saint for one week.

- Identify one of the most important gifts your saint gave to us, such as a life of prayer, courage to live one’s faith, service to those in need.
- Identify two or three actions you will take this week to live like this saint.
- Identify one important belief that you will remember all week.

Make a name tag out of paper. Punch a hole at the top of the name tag and thread a piece of yarn through the hole so that you can wear the name tag. Children can decorate it with a symbol or artwork.

<p>Saint for the Week</p> <p>My Saint’s Name</p> <p>My Saint’s Gift:</p> <p>I will do:</p> <p>I believe:</p>
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When you get home, put the name tags on the refrigerator or on a door knob to remind you to live like a saint for the next week.

## Remembering Saints in Our Family’s Heritage

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

As Christians, we hope in the resurrection and celebrate our belief that Jesus shows us the way to eternal life. As Catholics we celebrate and take comfort in the communion of saints—a community of faithful people who have gone before us in life and death. We have an awesome heritage of people who have shown us the way to Jesus by the way they have lived. Some of these people are our own family members.

Together identify two or three saints in your family who have died. Look at the photographs of the people you brought to the program. Think back across the generations to identify people. As you think of each person, name one reason why you think they are or were a saint. How do they show us God?

Look at the people you have named. Which Beatitudes do you see in their lives? Try to identify one Beatitude for each person.

Write these three names on your family “Family Coat of Saints” in your handout and one reason why you think each person is a saint. Post your “Family Coat of Saints” on your refrigerator or wall at home.

When families have finished the final activity, ask them to post the photos of their deceased family members on the Wall of Remembrance.

# Adolescent Learning Experience

The **Guided Tour of the Saints** is an activity that you can do with all ages. It is included in the family session as an option. It is recommended that you conduct this activity with adolescents. The purpose of this activity is to familiarize the young people with artwork of the saints in your church and around the world: stained glass windows, statues, paints. The tour includes a tour of the church's artwork plus creating a PowerPoint presentation with pictures of the saints from different eras of Church history and different forms such as mosaics, frescoes, paintings, and statues. Instructions for creating the tour can be found in the learning plan.

You might want to adapt one or more of the following activities from the family learning session to use with adolescents, especially middle school or junior high adolescents.

- Activity 3: Praying with the Saints: Version 1: Writing Prayers to the Saints or Version 2: Praying with the Saints (requires a separate meeting space)
- Activity 4: Saint for a Week

## Materials

- Newsprint, markers, masking tape
- Large file card for each person: 4x6 or 5x7 size

After completing the "Guided Tour of Saints" guide the young people through the following process of presentations, discussion, and activities.

## 1. Introduction

Introduce why it is important to remember and celebrate the lives of saints with these words. Use the words below or your own words.

There are a lot of good reasons to remember and celebrate the lives of saints. Here are just a few:

- Saints challenge us to be more than we would be on our own. They show us daring, exciting, and noble things that can and should be done.
- Saints inspire us. When life seems dull, saints add excitement, there are still good and exciting people around to admire!
- Saints show us what to be and do. When we are confused about what we ought to be like or what we ought to do with our lives, saints give us examples to follow.
- Saints encourage us. When we feel like failures, knowing that a saint we admire also struggled helps us realize there's still hope for us.
- Each one of us is special and gifted. We can be saints too! Our gifts will grow best when we use them in the service of the one who blessed us with them in the first place—God!

Some saints are so well known that we honor them in a special way and designate a special feast day for them on the Church calendar. Of course, not everyone who is a saint becomes famous and is officially named a saint by the Church. That's why, every November 1, we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. It's a day to honor all the people who have lived and who, although now deceased, remain connected to us in Christ. Many of you were named for a saint; most of our churches are named for

saints. However, most saints do not have a day or a church named after them. They are ordinary people who believed in God, who loved God and their neighbor, who lived faithfully and touched the lives of their families, community, and world.

Together review what the adolescents learned about saints from the all ages opening activity:

- Which of the saints in the presentation were new to you?
- Did you discover any other saints from the members of your intergenerational group?
- What did you learn that you did not know before?
- What is your impression of saints?

## 2. Characteristics of Saints

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

Review the saints presented in this session. Working together as a group, identify the important characteristics of saints: what they do (actions) and what they stand for (beliefs, convictions). Review the saints presented in the opening activity: what they did they do in their life (actions) and what did they stand for (beliefs). Write the saints characteristics on a sheet of newsprint.

Here are several examples of characteristics: saints pray, are generous, help people in need, teach others about God, are courageous, are willing to sacrifice for others, are committed to what they believe, speak out against injustice.

Ask the young people to review Handout #2 “Scripture Readings for Living a Saintly Life.” Identify characteristics for a saintly life based on the Scripture passages. Add these to the newsprint sheet.

Ask the young people: If you were asked by the Pope to develop a job description for a saint that he could use to determine if someone is a saint, what would you include? Work as a group to develop a job description for a saint, including what saints do (how they live) and what saints stand for (what they believe). Make it real and practical. Be sure the job description can cover a wide variety of saints with different gifts or charisms. Write the job description on a sheet of newsprint.

## 3. Living a Saintly Life

Invite the participants to review the job description of a saint. Discuss:

- Do you want to live like a saint? Is there one saint that you want to be like?
- What would other people saying if you lived like a saint?
- What is easy about living like a saint? What is difficult?
- What would it take for you to start living like a saint?

Ask the young people to take a few moments to consider living like a saint by completing the reflection questionnaire on the Beatitudes (see Handout #4).

At the conclusion of their reflection ask them to develop their own plan for living the wisdom of the Beatitudes and the saints in their own lives. Provide the following instructions:

- Develop one or two insights from the saints and the Beatitudes that will be helpful to you in living the Catholic faith today.
- Develop one or two specific practices, inspired by the Scripture passages (see Handout #2) and the lives of the saints, that you can begin living now, such as examining your attitudes about money and materialism, getting involved in service to those in need, developing a more prayerful life, becoming more active in the church's ministries, and so on.
- Conclude by writing or offering a prayer in the spirit of one of the saints for the gift that you need to live your faith such as courage, inspiration, perseverance, humility. Remind the participants to consult the Beatitudes for inspiration in writing their prayer.

Encourage participants to spend time this week living-out their commitments.

## 4. Remembering the Saints Who Have Died

Introduce the concept of the communion of saints. Use the words below or your own words.

As Christians, we hope in the resurrection and celebrate our belief that Jesus shows us the way to eternal life. As Catholics we celebrate and take comfort in the communion of saints—a community of faithful people who have gone before us in life and death. We have an awesome heritage of people who have shown us the way to Jesus by the way they have lived. Some of these people are our own family members.

When we die, we don't suddenly stop being members of the Church. The Church considers both living and deceased members to be part of the faith community. When a person dies, they are still a member of the body of Christ. So we never really lose touch with our neighbors, friends, and relatives when they die. We remain united with them as a community of believers in Christ. This is what we mean when we say we believe in "the communion of saints."

Together identify two or three saints in your family who have died. Think back across the generations to identify people. As you think of each person, name one reason why you think they are or were a saint. How do they show us God?

Ask the adolescents to identify two or three people in their life whom they consider saints, such as grandparents, great grandparents, other family members, friends, adult role models.

Direct the young people to write these three people on a 5x7 file card and to add a short prayer in thanksgiving for gift of these people's lives and what they gave to them.

## Wall of Remembrance

If the young people brought pictures of deceased family members, invite them now to post them on the Wall of Remembrance. (If their parents are participating, ask them to join with their parents to create a family section of the Wall of Remembrance.)

# Adult Learning Session

The adult learning plan begins with a **Guided Tour of Saints**. The rest of the session has been created as a self-directed small group activity. Facilitators can guide the adults through the learning activities as outlined below and on Handout #5. Write the essential instructions on newsprint or create a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions.

This session plan can also be utilized as a series of large group presentations with small group discussions and activities. Presenters can utilize the commentary in the session plan as source material for their presentation. A facilitator can guide the participants through the activities and discussions in the session plan.

## Wall of Remembrance

Invite all the adults who brought pictures of deceased family members to post them on the Wall of Remembrance at the conclusion of the adult learning session.

## 1. Exploring the Communion of Saints

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

Take a moment to review the meaning of the communion of saints.

When Christians pray the Apostles' Creed they express belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and then the communion of saints. The phrase "communion of saints" is another way to describe the Church. As Pope Paul VI wrote in his 1968 *Credo of the People of God*, "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church" (n. 30, quoted in CCC 962).

Perhaps you are surprised that this use of the term "saints" includes the living. If you are like most Catholics today, when you encounter the word "saint" you are likely to think of a holy person who has died and been canonized by Church leaders. In the phrase "communion of saints," however, the term "saint" has a much broader meaning. In fact, the term it translates, *sanctorum*, has two meanings—holy people and holy things.

The first meaning refers to all the people God has called together, both living and dead. Understood this way the "communion of saints" is a phrase that refers to the Church community as a whole. The inclusion of the living and the dead reminds us that the Church extends beyond the visible world to include a spiritual dimension. Upon death people don't leave the Church. The dead and the living are united in Christ and therefore share communion with one another.

The second meaning, holy things, refers to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The sharing that takes place in Eucharist strengthens the bonds of the community members with Christ and with one another and with all those who have died. This meaning is closely related to the first. The communion that characterizes the Church involves the holy people (saints) sharing in holy things (Eucharist). (Maura Hagarty)

Now reflect on the questions below. Then share your reflections with your group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share without interruptions or discussion.

- Is there a saint who is important to you—someone who has inspired you, influenced you, guided you? Share with the group why this saint is important and how he or she has made an impact on your life.
- What does “communion of saints” mean to you in the real world?
- Is “communion of saints” an important concept? Why or why not?

## 2 Characteristics of Saints

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

What makes someone a saint? Work together as a group to identify the important characteristics of saints: what they do (actions) and what they stand for (beliefs, convictions). Review the saints presented in this session: what they did they do in their life (actions) and what did they stand for (beliefs). Write down some of these important characteristics.

Take a moment to review “Scripture Readings for Living a Sainly Life” on Handout 2. As a group discuss the characteristics of a saintly life based on the Scripture passages. Write down some of these important characteristics.

Discuss together:

- What insights do we gain about living a saintly life from our examination of the lives of saints and the Scripture readings.
- How can an “ordinary person” live a saintly life?
- Are there saintly people that you admire and try to imitate?

## 3. Living a Sainly Life

Guide participants through the following activity.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matthew 5:2-12)

Take a few minutes to read these reflections on the Beatitudes from Bishop Robert Morneau:

“Who are the happy, fortunate, blessed people? What is the source of human happiness?”

“One of the most important and paradoxical sections in all Scripture is the vision of happiness Jesus gives in his Sermon on the Mount. In the Gospels of Matthew (5:3-10) and Luke (6:20-26), Jesus proclaims what blessedness is and makes promises to those who follow his proclamation. The blessed, the happy, the fortunate, he tells us, are the poor in spirit, those who mourn and are merciful, those who seek righteousness and peace, the ones pure in heart, the persecuted. The promise that awaits them is God’s kingdom!”

“The Greek word *makarios* means “blessed” or “happy,” which implies a certain freedom from anxieties and worries. In Matthew’s Gospel the notion of beatitudes conveys deep joy flowing from the grace of salvation and the promise of God’s kingdom. The blessed and “successful” people are those who put on Jesus’ mind and heart.

“The mission of Jesus was to take people from the mysteries of sin and death into the happiness of heaven. The Beatitudes describe his vision and chart the paths to make that journey. In the end, it is all the work of the Holy Spirit.”

Discuss together:

- What makes you happy? What are the things in your life that truly make you happy?
- Jesus’ recipe for happiness differs from the world’s. How is living the Beatitudes countercultural? If you truly lived the Beatitudes, what would it mean for your life?

Examine how you are living the challenge of the Beatitudes in your life by completing the following reflection questionnaire.

### The Beatitudes in My Life

Take a moment to reflect on how you are living the Beatitudes in your life.

- ❶ I find this too challenging or countercultural to embrace and live.
- ❷ I need to open my life to embrace this Beatitude and find ways to practice it in my life.
- ❸ I am living this Beatitude and growing in my practice of it in my life.
- ❹ I believe this is one of my strengths.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

❶ ❷ ❸ ❹

In our more honest moments, we recognize our profound neediness, our intellectual limitations, our spiritual inadequacy, our moral failures. In our helplessness, we turn to God. Our response of gratitude and trust, itself a grace, means that the kingdom of heaven is ours.

*“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

❶ ❷ ❸ ❹

The journey of life involves having our heart broken time and time again. Sometimes this is due to our own sin, sometimes because of the cruelty of others. Jesus reminds us that the truth does set us free. Those who are honest about their sorrows and sins will gain the consolation of the Lord. They will be comforted and will be given the gift of courage.

*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.”*

① ② ③ ④

God seems to be vulnerable to those who are humble and lowly. These meek individuals place themselves under the Lordship of Jesus, striving to emulate him in obedience and submission to whatever is sent their way. But the meek know that God is ultimately in control, and they are about doing the divine will. The great inheritance that will be given is peace. This is not an earthly inheritance but one that is everlasting.

*“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”*

① ② ③ ④

We all have longings: for meaning, for intimacy, for depth. But one of the deepest is for justice—where relationships and life are properly ordered. Only when rights are protected and promoted, only when we fulfill our obligations to God and to one another will we have this hunger and thirst satisfied.

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

① ② ③ ④

If we give mercy, we shall get mercy. God has been merciful to us, and we are to pass the gift on to others. A merciless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Mercy is love in the face of sin and injury. Mercy is the presence of Jesus in a wounded and fractured world.

*“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.”*

① ② ③ ④

The pure of heart are those who are not defiled and polluted by values and attitudes that take us away from God. We know that our seeing is dependent upon the condition of our hearts. If pure, we shall see the glory of God and our own as well as others’ dignity.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*

① ② ③ ④

God’s peace is the rightness of relationships. Peace embraces four satellites: truth, charity, freedom and justice. Peacemakers are instruments of all four of these graces. When that work is done well, they know themselves to be blessed because they are truly sons and daughters of God.

*“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

① ② ③ ④

This Beatitude shows how radical the message of Jesus is: that persecution and happiness go together. The true Christian longs to share fully in the life of Jesus: his life, suffering, death and resurrection. This is the gateway into the kingdom of heaven.

(Text describing the beatitudes comes from “Living a Saintly Life—The Beatitudes’ Promises” by Bishop Robert F. Morneau, excerpted from *Everyday Catholic* January 2002).

### **My Action Plan**

Develop two or three specific practices, inspired by the Scripture passages for a saintly life and the lives of the saints, that you can begin living now, such as examining your attitudes about money and materialism, getting involved in service to those in need, developing a more prayerful life, becoming more active in the parish’s ministries. Name what you will do this week to live-out your commitment.

### **My Prayer**

Write a prayer for the gift that you need to live your faith such as courage, inspiration, perseverance, humility. Consult the Beatitudes for inspiration in writing their prayer.

Share reflections and insights that you gained from examining the way you are living the Beatitudes. Tell the group at least one practice that you are going to try to start living.

#### 4. Remembering the Saints Who Have Died

Guide participants through the following activity using your own words or the words below.

Take a moment to read the following:

“Jesus said to her (Martha), ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’” (John 11:25-27)

As Christians, we hope in the resurrection and celebrate our belief that Jesus shows us the way to eternal life. As Catholics we celebrate and take comfort in the communion of saints—a community of faithful people who have gone before us in life and death. We have an awesome heritage of people who have shown us the way to Jesus by the way they have lived. Some of these people are our own family members.

When we die, we don’t suddenly stop being members of the Church. The Church considers both living and deceased members to be part of the faith community. When a person dies, they are still a member of the body of Christ. So we never really lose touch with our neighbors, friends, and relatives when they die. We remain united with them as a community of believers in Christ. This is what we mean when we say we believe in “the communion of saints.”

Identify several saints in your family or among your friends who have died. Think back across the generations to identify people. As you think of each person, name one reason why you think they are or were a saint. How do they show us God?

Write these people on a file card and add a short prayer in thanksgiving for gift of these people’s lives and what they gave to you.

Group Sharing: Share with your group one person who stands out for you as a saint and why.

#### Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (15 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Ask the participants to rejoin their intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience.

Focus the sharing around the saints in people’s lives. Ask families to share their “Family Coat of Arms” with the group. Adolescents and adults can identify the people they identified as saints in their lives, both living and dead.

Second, present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to understand the Communion of Saints. To help us take our learning from this session and live in our lives and homes, reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your group.

- What new insights about the Communion of Saints, the lives of the saints, and how to live a saintly life did you discover through this session?
- Do you need to revise or expand your understanding of Communion of Saints and its relevance to your daily life as a Catholic?
- How will your learning influence the practice of your faith at home and in the world?

Invite participants to take several minutes for small group sharing.

## Part 5. Closing Prayer Service: Celebrating All Souls (5-10 minutes)

Conduct the closing prayer in front of the wall of remembrance

### Gather

Lord God,  
you are the glory of believers  
and the life of the just.  
Your Son redeemed us  
by dying and rising to life again.  
Since our departed brothers and sisters believed in the mystery of our resurrection,  
let them share the joys and blessings of the life to come.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever.  
(Opening Prayer, All Souls II, *Roman Missal*)

### Listen

Select one of the following readings:

- John 11:20-27
- Romans 6:3-9
- Romans 8:31-35, 37-39
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-57
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

### Respond

**Note:** the following litany is only an example. Create a litany for the saints presented in this session. Identify the charism of each saint. Model your litany on the one below.

We close by asking through prayer for continued guidance from those who have gone before us in faith. Long ago, they were called and chosen by God to share their gifts generously. The example of their lives can help us to strive to be more loving, more giving, and more Christ-like. And so we pray:

Saint Martin de Porres, patron of all who work for social justice, pray for us.

Response: St. Martin de Porres, pray for us.

Saint Vincent de Paul, servant to those in need, pray for us.

Response: St. Vincent de Paul, pray for us.

Saint Edith Stein, woman of courage and faith who died in solidarity with her Jewish community, pray for us.

Response: St. Edith Stein, pray for us.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who challenged education systems to be inclusive and serve the needs of all students, pray for us.

Response: St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, who taught many young people to know and love God.

Response: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us

Saint John the Baptist, you proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to the people of your day.

Response: Saint John the Baptist, pray for us.

Saint Francis of Assisi, your life gave true witness to the Beatitudes.

Response: Saint Francis of Assisi, pray for us

For all the saints in our families, living and dead, who give witness to their faith in Jesus Christ.

Responses: All saints and holy people, pray for us.

We ask all of this through Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Lord, forever and ever.

Response: Amen.

### **Go Forth**

In his great love,  
the God of all consolation gave man the gift of life.  
May he bless you with faith  
in the resurrection of his Son,  
and with the hope of rising to new life.

Response: Amen.

To us who are alive  
may he grant forgiveness,  
and to all who have died  
a place of light and peace

Response: Amen.

As you believe that Jesus rose from the dead,  
so may you live with him for every in joy.

Response: Amen.

(Solemn Blessing, All Souls, *Roman Missal*)

Turn toward the wall of remembrance and prayer together:

May eternal light shine on them, O Lord, with all our saints forever, for you are rich in mercy. Give them eternal rest, O Lord. (4 Ezra 2:35, 34)