

# PASSAGE INTO DISCIPLESHIP

I dedicate this book to Jennifer, my wife,  
for her loving support and encouragement to complete this project.

I also dedicate this book to my children,  
Sara and Walker, who remind me of the childlike qualities  
that teach us adults about faith in God.

# PASSAGE INTO DISCIPLESHIP

## Guide to Baptism

Christopher W. Wilson



Copyright © 2009 by Christopher W. Wilson

All rights reserved. For permission to reuse content, please contact Copyright Clearance Center, [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400.

Bible quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover image from a photo by: Martin Barraud/OJO Images/GettyImages

Cover and interior design: Elizabeth Wright

Visit Chalice Press on the World Wide Web at  
[www.chalicepress.com](http://www.chalicepress.com)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

EPUB ISBN: 978-08272-30149 • EPDF ISBN: 978-08272-30156

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilson, Christopher W. (Christopher Walker)

Passage into discipleship : guide to baptism / by Christopher W. Wilson.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-8272-3008-8

1. Christian education of children—Study and teaching. 2. Baptism—Study and teaching. I. Title.

BV1475.3.W56 2009

268'.433—dc22

2009024089

Printed in the United States of America

# Contents

---

Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Rationale	5
Class Component	14
Session 1: Orientation	15
Session 2: Confession (classroom)	17
Session 3: Confession (experiential)	21
Session 4: Contrition (classroom)	23
Session 5: Contrition (experiential)	28
Session 6: Covenant (classroom)	30
Session 7: Covenant (experiential)	35
Session 8: Community (classroom)	39
Session 9: Community (experiential)	45
Session 10: Connection (classroom)	47
Session 11: Connection (experiential)	51
Session 12: Church	52
Mentor Component	57
Retreat Component	61
The Role of Worship	67
Appendix Materials	71
Appendix A: Orientation Handouts	71
Appendix B: Class Outlines	74
Appendix C: Class Exercises/Handouts	80
Appendix D: Mentor Materials	93
Appendix E: Retreat Materials	99
Appendix F: Worship Materials	102

## Acknowledgments

---

I would like to acknowledge several people and churches that helped me reach the point of writing and sharing the content of this publication.

I want to acknowledge the late Dr. Kenneth Lawrence for his constant support of my education in knowing personality development and learning theory for congregational life. I also want to thank Dr. J. Cy Rowell, whose dedication to Christian education in the local church has inspired me to create meaningful experiences and liturgy for the church. It is with his encouragement that I share the content of this book with other congregations.

I want to thank the following congregations for allowing me to share various forms of this publication's content in guiding people toward baptism and the continued Christian life that baptism brings:

Ridglea Christian Church of Fort Worth, Texas

River Oaks Christian Church of Fort Worth, Texas

Los Altos Christian Church of Albuquerque, New Mexico

Rush Creek Christian Church of Arlington, Texas

These congregations provided a healthy environment for youth to grow in their faith and in the Christian community.

I want to thank Make It Clear Ministries for permission to use the spiritual gift inventory. They wrote a helpful gift exercise appropriate for the age I target in this book.

Last, I want to give thanks to Martha Schooley for her reading and reflections during the writing process.



## Introduction

---

One of the most exciting moments for me as a minister is when a young person approaches me and shares the desire to be baptized. I am thrilled when a young person wants to learn more, grow more, and embrace fully the Christian faith. Baptism is a significant moment in any person's life.

I remember when Holly walked up to me in the halls of the church one Sunday morning. She tugged on my shirt. I turned my head to find Holly with an eager face ready to talk. She said, "I think I'm ready." "What are you ready for?" I asked. "I still have a lot of questions about God and the church, but in my heart I want to be baptized and follow Jesus." All it takes is a nudge in our spirits to enter us into a new world. Holly went through the process I am proposing in this book. The day of her baptism was a true celebration. She began to make her way into the baptistry. I could tell she was nervous by the way she grasped my hand as I guided her down the steps. I introduced her and her family to the church and celebrated her confession of faith made the week before. I placed my hand on her head and blessed her. I slowly lowered her into the water and raised her back out. As soon as she wiped the water from her face, a huge smile appeared. The fear was gone and the joy filled her being. I said to her, "Holly, I want to welcome you to the family of God on behalf of the universal church. Today, you are a new creation in Christ." The congregation had watched Holly grow up in the church. Her baptism marked a new chapter in her life. It was a few weeks after that glorious day when I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Holly. She had a calm sweet smile on her face and simply said, "Thanks." Her passage into discipleship had begun.

I encounter too many Christians who have little memory of their baptismal process. They might recall being baptized, but do not remember how they were nurtured toward their baptism. This is a tragedy for the church. We need to be able to recall and remember our baptism and what led up to it. *Passage into Discipleship: Guide to Baptism* is a book seeking to prepare young people not only for their baptisms but for the Christian journey that follows. It is helpful to know baptism is not a static moment in time. Baptism has claim on us for the remainder of our Christian lives. The title of this book implies entry into an active life with Christ.

## 2 Passage into Discipleship

Passage into Discipleship: Guide to Baptism is the result of many years of working with young people with a desire to know Christ more fully through the act of baptism. Early in my ministry, I had a hard time finding what I was looking for in a preparation process. I could not find resources that encompassed all I wanted to accomplish in preparing young people for baptism. I began writing my own curriculum and structure. This publication is a result of over ten years of exploring what did and did not work well. It is my hope that you will find Passage into Discipleship to be a helpful resource in guiding young people in their faith and in preparing them for baptism.

This book is intended primarily for students from approximately fourth through seventh grades. The content and structure relate to the spiritual and mental development of that age range. The intent is to use learning methods that best instill memory and retention about key theological and biblical concepts. The main audience for this book is leaders who educate youth in a believer's baptism tradition. The content of this book can also be used by denominations that practice infant baptism and confirmation. Confirmation occurs at a similar age to when we practice believer's baptism. The substance is applicable to a confirmation tradition. The goal is guiding young people to embrace a journey of faith with Jesus Christ.

Every Christian can recall or claim particular moments, experiences, people, and places that shaped their faith. My desire is to offer a process for young people so they can look back to their baptismal preparation and baptism as one of the most meaningful and moving times in their Christian journey. It is my hope they will not look back upon their baptism as a faint memory, but rather as a vital time that encouraged them to grow deeper in faith and seek lives of hope as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

This publication offers a new and comprehensive approach to guiding people to and beyond their baptism. A former model for preparing young people for baptism involved meeting with the minister a few times to learn what baptism meant. The person was baptized once those few discussions were completed. This method was not wrong or without integrity or great intention. The idea was to ensure young persons knew what they were doing before the act of baptism was complete. This process may have led them to know what baptism "meant," as if it were a subject taught in school. The process I am introducing attempts to engage the minds, hearts, and souls of young people. I want them not only to grasp the meaning of baptism, but to embrace the Christian journey knowing baptism is their entry into a glorious life with God and other Christians. I want them to know baptism is an event that will continue to shape them throughout their lives. It is a process of

discipleship and joining others in this quest to be faithful Christians together. Many of us have heard the liturgical phrase, "Remember your baptism and be glad." May the young people that benefit from this process remember their baptismal process as a time of confirmation in which God was active and alive in their lives.

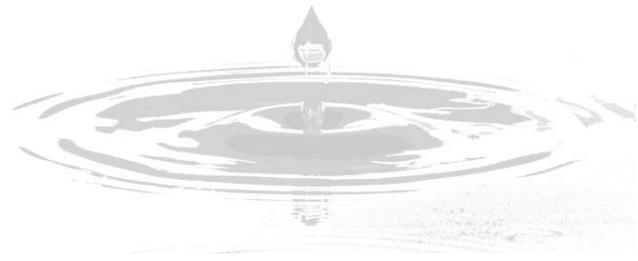
Teaching about baptism and the Christian life should instill excitement and curiosity in young people. They are at an age with lots of questions. Youth not only hunger for knowledge, they hunger for inclusion and love. The hope is to encourage the whole church to celebrate their passage toward the baptismal waters. We are to have a covenantal relationship with any person seeking to be baptized into the Christian community. This is particularly true for the young people who will shape and give life to the future of our church.

This book is intended for ministers and other church leaders who will lead youth through the preparation process for baptism and the journey of the Christian life. The content is a multidimensional approach, inviting youth to learn the material in multiple ways. Appendices at the end of the book contain class outlines, worksheets, and other helpful materials. Please review the material in the appendices so you are fully aware of the content to aid you in the overall conducting of the process.

The desire to write this material is a desire for churches to provide a process for our youth to embrace the moment of baptism and the ongoing claim it has upon our lives. Baptism welcomes us into the family of God as newly cleansed and renewed persons in body, mind, and spirit. My expectation is for youth, once baptized, to enter the full life of the church beyond the youth group. They will have been exposed to all facets of the church, its beliefs, and its mission outside the walls of the church, while remembering it is all because we seek to know and honor God with our blessed lives.

You never know when a Holly will tug on your shirt and inquire about baptism. The church should be ready with a process to guide students to live in the Christian faith after they are baptized. Let God bless each of you in the work you do to serve the church of Jesus Christ.





## Rationale

---

### Why Are We Baptizing?

Through the baptismal process, a person enters into the Christian faith blessed and strengthened by God. They also enter into the life of the church to express faith in the midst of a wider Christian community. Baptism is about building up the body of Christ. Each time a person enters into the fold, the church expands and is enriched. The church is about relationships and working together in Christ's name. The church is not a place of individuals with a disconnected purpose. Unity in Christ is a guiding principle that connects Christians to one another in the midst of our diversity of gifts and abilities. We are baptizing people to enter into eternal life with God and a committed life to Christ's church as a people of faith.

### Developmental Assessment

I believe it is important to know who we are teaching and guiding in order to maximize the learning experience. The material in this book targets young people between the fourth and seventh grades. There is some flexibility on either side, depending on the development of a particular person.

I try to imagine the person who will be attending the sessions I am teaching. This is the kind of young person I imagine walking in the door:

- Begins to identify with Jesus in a personal way and begins to ask religious questions
- Senses the love and support of a Christian community
- Wants to act with justice and to be fair with others
- Has a high level of respect for ministers and teachers
- Is beginning to move beyond concrete thinking into some abstract thinking
- Enjoys the value of friendship and working with others
- Beginning to develop convictions about what she believes is right and wrong
- Values his parent(s)/caregivers and is starting to add value from what his peers share

## 6 Passage into Discipleship

- Is eager to be accepted and included by others
- Can begin to take concepts and apply them to her personal life
- Finds joy in working and exploring areas of interest
- Is filled with great creativity and enjoys interactive processes

These qualities are indicative of the kind of youth that entertain thoughts about baptism. They are at a transition time in their spiritual, moral, relational, and mental development. Curiosity is at an all-time high. The preparation process for baptism is important to capture much of what they are going through developmentally. The material should be supportive of this stage of development for these young people.

Passage into Discipleship seeks to get the most out of the youth by providing discussion and activities matching where they are in their faith development. Youth are to be challenged and engaged without having to remember too much theory. Instruction is to be balanced with left and right brain approaches. The content of this book balances theology and ideas with interactive exercises and experiences.

### Learning Theory

This book is a multidimensional learning approach. Youth learn from different methods of teaching. This book's process includes four learning theories that overlap one another. One reason for this approach is to make sure all the youth learn the concepts and content conveyed, since different models work for different people. Another reason is to reinforce what they learn through more than one learning model. They will get the same material taught in different formats.

The traditional model of classroom teaching is still valid, but needs to be surrounded by other models to capture the minds of youth. The process of baptism preparation is not about reciting the right answers, but rather aiding them in exploring the Christian faith and how they will express and share that faith in Christ's name.

What do we know about older children and youth in terms of learning techniques? In her book *Transforming Bible Study with Children: A Guide for Learning Together*, Patricia W. Van Ness argues that children and youth targeted at the age of this book learn through personal experience much more so than through words and classic classroom instruction. This does not mean we should not include this style of teaching, but we should be aware of additional models that encourage greater memory and engagement. Van Ness includes in her book a diagram by Arlen Ban, which states that young

people remember 10 percent of things we tell them with words while they remember 90 percent of things they do. The 10 percent is when the learner is listening only. The 90 percent is when the learner is actively involved. And young people remember 60 percent when the learner has something to see.<sup>1</sup> All this data tells us we ought to be including in our learning processes as many experience-based opportunities as possible. This will yield the greatest chance for remembering what we teach them.

To make the point stronger Van Ness utilizes another diagram by Edgar Dale called Dale's Cone of Learning. This diagram shows 10 degrees of effectiveness in learning for children. Number ten, or the least effective means of learning, is words. The most effective is direct, purposeful, personal experience. Adults are so concerned about the words with which we teach, yet Dale reminds us that this is the least effective practice for teaching children.<sup>2</sup> Van Ness argues that we as Christian teachers should be transforming our models of teaching to engage and inspire youth in the learning process.<sup>3</sup> We are invited to combine experiences and words to take full advantage of the learning that is possible with a young person.

The content and approach of learning includes four models to reinforce and strengthen the experience base for teaching youth interested in baptism. The four learning models are:

- Instructional sessions: Classes teaching basic Christian concepts, theological beliefs, scriptural knowledge, and methods of prayer
- Experience-based sessions: Living out what was learned in the instructional sessions
- One-on-one relationships: Forming a mentor relationship with a leader in the church to teach similar concepts taught in the instructional and experiential sessions
- Retreat format: A full day of experiences that could not be accomplished in a smaller one-to-two-hour session; provides a way to build relationships with other youth and leaders in the church by sharing common excursions and experiences of expressing faith.

Three of these four models are experience-based. The instructional model still exists to communicate language and concepts to provide a base of knowledge for what youth experience in other parts of the learning process.

---

<sup>1</sup>Patricia W. Van Ness, *Transforming Bible Study with Children: A Guide for Learning Together* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

## 8 Passage into Discipleship

John Westerhoff reminds us, "Together children, youth, and adults must have an opportunity to experience the activity of the people of God and become involved in the reflective action of the community of faith. Only then can we call the church an educating community."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that relevant church education is found with congregations who are serious about the role of experience in the lives of youth.<sup>5</sup> Youth who encounter this type of learning will grow exponentially compared to those taught by methods that do not include a high number of experiences for them. It is important to know who you are teaching in order to provide the best method for assimilation and growth in the learner.

It has been my experience in teaching youth who previously participated in the process that they recall the experiences before they remember any classroom sessions. If they can remember the experiences and what they were intended to accomplish, then the content of the classroom sessions will be retrieved from their minds much easier. It makes sense that even though we teach classroom first and then practice what we learn, the youth remember the practice before the instruction. This strengthens the argument for greater attention being given to experience-oriented learning combined with classroom-oriented learning, rather than exclusively using classroom learning. The more ways we can stimulate the minds of young people the greater the retention becomes.

### The Power of Memory

I have already highlighted a primary way that memory is instilled in the youth who go through this program: through the combination of learning approaches being used to teach the same content. Youth are being taught similar Christian themes in four different ways. This style of teaching reinforces what they are learning by how they are learning.

The other part of developing memory and the remembrance of what they learn is through alliteration. All of the basic concepts taught begin with the letter "c." It is much easier to remember basic concepts through memory techniques. If I know that what I am learning follows a pattern, then I am much more likely to remember a pattern if it exists. There is simplicity to the themes even though they communicate a rich relevance to the Christian faith. The "c" words I teach are:

---

<sup>4</sup>John H. Westerhoff III, *Values for Tomorrow's Children: An Alternative Future for Education in the Church* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 45.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

- Confession: What we believe
- Contrition: Restoring relationship with God
- Covenant: Holy moments with God through Christ
- Community: Strengthening the church and serving the world
- Connection: Discovering our spiritual gifts and how they are used with the gifts of others
- Church: What is the purpose of our being together in Christ's name?

The multiple learning styles, combined with the use of alliterative language, create powerful memories. The hope is that, years from now, the youth could look back upon their baptisms and the process of preparing for those baptisms and remember events, classes, and a congregation that supported them in their faith journey to serve Jesus Christ and the church.

### Theological Approach

What are the theological foundations of Passage into Discipleship? The theological approach communicates three main ideas with the youth. The first one is that they are an important part of the body of Christ as manifested in the church. The second idea is that baptism is not a destination, but part of a longer journey with God and other Christians. The third foundation is celebrating the young people as a special and unique part of God's creation in the human family.

Youth are often told they are the future of the church, yet they are part of the church right now. Sometimes youth do not know how important they are to the church, which hopefully will change through this process. Youth can be actively involved in church life if given the opportunity to serve. They have gifts and abilities like everyone else. Each youth needs to hear the church say they are an important part of the church family.

I remind youth going through the class that the desired result of the classes is not baptism. If they choose to be baptized in the end, it is a celebration for them, their families, and the church. I tell them they are beginning a journey of faith with God that will unfold throughout their lives. Baptism is a way to formally seal their love of God and Christ. Baptism enters us into eternal life with God, but it should not mean we are finished growing and developing as persons of faith. Baptism should compel us to learn more and be open to how God might use us in the world.

Youth need to be affirmed for who they are. They need to feel more confident in how God made them. We so easily compare ourselves to others and may look down on ourselves. God believes in each of us. We were created

## 10 Passage into Discipleship

for a purpose. We all have something to offer this world. Youth need to learn early how important they are and that God loves them for who they are. The whole process is a guide in discipleship and baptism, and it is also a way to develop a more confident and mature young person.

### Baptism Training as a Faith Community

Ministers historically have been the sole teachers of youth preparing for baptism. It is my desire to create an intergenerational environment for young people. The inclusion of mentors, parents, and other church leaders is designed to nurture relationships for youth beyond the youth group. Churches tend to congregate in age groups. Youth gravitate toward youth. We can best integrate youth into the full life of the church if they develop meaningful relationships with adults in the church. Then they will be more inclined to talk and participate in events beyond youth functions.

The church's role in guiding youth to baptism is a congregational role and not one reserved exclusively for the minister. Expanding the responsibility for baptism to the whole church invites more involvement from the church membership. The hope is to change the title of preparing youth for baptism from the "Pastor's Class" to more of a "Discipleship Class," which implies greater involvement from the church community.

### Discipleship Process Overview

If more people are going to be involved, then it is important to know where they can be involved. It might be helpful to visualize the three primary parts of the discipleship program for youth.

#### Class Component

Session 1	Orientation with Youth and Parents
Session 2	Confession (classroom)
Session 3	Confession (experience)
Session 4	Contrition (classroom)
Session 5	Contrition (experience)
Session 6	Covenant (classroom)
Session 7	Covenant (experience)
Session 8	Community (classroom)
Session 9	Community (experience)
Session 10	Connection (classroom)
Session 11	Connection (experience)
Session 12	Church (classroom)

### Mentor Component

- Each youth is connected with a mentor for the duration of the class sessions.
- The mentor and youth have continual things and one-time projects to accomplish together.
- The mentors will provide insights about their journeys of faith and connection to the church not covered in the class sessions and relate those insights to the subject being learned in the sessions above.

### Day Retreat Component

- The day retreat has three components
  - Human-Creation relationship: go to a creation setting
  - Human-Human relationship: care project for others
  - Human-God relationship: prayer/worship experience
- The purpose is to understand the above three primary ways we relate in the world.
- The retreat is intended to come at the end of the twelve class sessions.
- The church leadership can recruit people to help with class sessions, be open to mentoring youth, help coordinate events for group outings, and encourage congregational members to talk and ask questions of the youth going through the process. Invite all to share what they are learning and what they enjoy about the process.

### Adapting to Church Size

How can this material be used in churches of different sizes? The key is training staff and members of the church to be leaders of the process regardless of the size.

#### Smaller Churches

Smaller church may have less youth going through the process. In this case give additional strength to the mentor component of the program. The minister or key leaders of the sessions can give greater attention to a small number of youth than a large number. Invite more participation from the congregation in surrounding this youth with support, encouragement, and intergenerational activities.

## 12 Passage into Discipleship

### Larger Churches

Larger congregations will need to train additional congregational members/leaders to assist with class sessions and group outings. Leadership teams will need to be in touch before each session to lead sessions with a common understanding and approach for the youth. Larger churches might need to be creative with youth/mentor shadowing. Be sure to check with worship planning and service logistics to ensure a smooth experience for the mentors guiding youth in worship.

### Adding a Creative Edge

I always welcome creative ideas and thoughts from others as they read a book or reflect on curriculum material. I encourage you to consider ways to add your own identity to the work presented in this publication. There may be other exercises or games that could strengthen a session. The use of technology can be a great benefit. I encourage the support of the material in this book by watching movies or video clips, using Christian or secular music, or even inviting youth to interact with certain Web sites if you think it would be helpful. The overall goal is to reach into the minds and hearts of the young people we are guiding.

### Logistics

It is always important to protect the youth anytime they are the focus of an activity. The church should do background checks on any adult directly involved with a youth. This would be true for any teachers of class sessions as well as mentors. The last thing you want is to have an adult that would be a danger to the process.

Most churches have permission forms for youth to travel as a group beyond the church facility for an event. Since the program calls for several experience sessions away from the church, it is important for parents to complete these forms before any traveling occurs.

Recruit parents or congregational members to assist with transportation needs. Those offering to help with rides can also serve as additional adult supervision. Leaders of sessions will be hindered if they have not pre-planned transportation logistics.

Have a backup plan. If something you coordinate does not work out as anticipated, then have an alternative activity ready to go. Our best plans do not always unfold the way we imagined.

### Opportunity for the Minister

The minister's involvement and leadership in this process create an excellent opportunity to make connections with the youth in the church. The shared classes and experiences provide a concentrated time with the youth a minister rarely has. This is important in creating an environment for the minister to connect with people of all ages in the congregation. This class has afforded me a way to create healthy bonds with the youth of the church, which allows me to develop a continued relationship with them for years to come. A minister is not always able to attend and participate in all the youth functions. The preparation process for baptism opens a doorway of connection to youth that might otherwise be limited.



## Class Component

---

Session 1	Orientation
Session 2	Confession (classroom)
Session 3	Confession (experience)
Session 4	Contrition (classroom)
Session 5	Contrition (experience)
Session 6	Covenant (classroom)
Session 7	Covenant (experience)
Session 8	Community (classroom)
Session 9	Community (experience)
Session 10	Connection (classroom)
Session 11	Connection (experience)
Session 12	Church

---

## SESSION 1: Orientation

### Getting Oriented

The orientation session with youth and parents helps each family learn about the discipleship and baptism process. Promote the baptism process through newsletters, phone calls, or face-to-face interactions. Invite the youth and their parents so both hear about the details of the process and what is expected of each person who wants to participate. The orientation session is to be led with excitement to highlight the joy of these young people who are interested in becoming more faithful in their lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

The orientation is an overview of all that the youth will encounter in the weekly sessions, in the interaction with mentors, and in a closing retreat. The purpose is creating an environment with various learning approaches to best help a young person grow in his or her Christian faith. The process includes four learning approaches: (1) class instruction, (2) experience instruction, (3) mentor instruction, and (4) closing retreat. The design is to reinforce and build on the content and learning covered throughout the process. Distribute the overview sheet that shows how the different components are scheduled. This allows the youth and parents to see that classroom sessions are a combination of instruction and experience. The purpose is to practice what they learn the week before. Mention that many of the classroom sessions include a worksheet or activity that is to be completed before the youth return for the next session. Encourage parents to work with their children in completing assignments. The completed assignment provides the best preparation for the next week.

The process is intended to inform youth about the covenantal nature of our faith. We rely on God to guide us and love us, and God relies on us to become faithful followers. The draw to the process is to discern about baptism, but it should not be an expected outcome. If any youth reach the

## 16 Passage into Discipleship

end of the process and do not feel ready, then they can wait to be baptized at another time. I have had the experience of youth deciding to wait rather than feel the peer pressure to be baptized because everyone else is being baptized. The process is about becoming and continuing to be faithful followers of Jesus and disciples of Christ.

The mentor selection is very important for the youth. The youth will be asked to submit three names of church leaders of the same gender they would like as mentors. You will make the contacts. When their mentor is confirmed, you notify the youth. The mentor process begins once this pairing is accomplished. Mentors will be given clear instructions of activities and material to complete with you.

The closing retreat will be a day you will all share together, which allows you to experience three distinct areas of learning that you are covering in small ways throughout the class. It is a day of fun and growth for everyone.

Remind the parents that full participation of their children ensures the best overall experience. Also remind them to stay involved with what the youth are learning and share the journey with their children. Parents may be called on to help with transportation and help with the experience sessions of the process. This includes help with the retreat day.

Allow time at the end for youth and parents to ask questions. Questions help give clarity to anything you might have failed to mention or cover.

The final part of the orientation is deciding on the best time for the group to meet weekly. I have found that different groups often have different optimal times to meet during the week. Work with your group, for you want to ensure as full attendance as possible.

Remember to begin and end the orientation with prayer for these young people who are interested in baptism and becoming more familiar with being faithful followers of Jesus.

The materials you will need for the orientation are the outline and the overview sheets found in appendix A.

“Confession is investing our lives in what we feel is important to us and how we should live our lives.”

---

## SESSION 2: Confession (classroom)

Theme: Confession

### Class Concepts

- Confession as a belief statement
- Confession as the moment we write or say what we believe to others
- We should not be afraid to share with others what we believe
- We learn from scripture that followers of Jesus had to decide for themselves what they believed about Jesus

Scripture Emphasis: Matthew 16:13–20

### Theological Foundation

- This session helps youth develop a credo (personal faith construction) that will help them in their Christian journey
- What we believe and communicate about God, Christ, and church is an important step in developing our foundation of faith
- An important part of our Christian identity comes in sharing the gospel message with others (as commanded in the great commission in Matthew 28:18–20)

### Class Outline for Leaders

#### Opening Prayer

#### Sentence Completion Exercise

The first exercise consists of completing sentences. Share with the group that God created us all. Each person is special and unique. Share more about yourself with the youth by completing the following statements seen below.

## 18 Passage into Discipleship

Then have each of the youth complete the same statements. An easy way to begin the confessional process is by sharing basic information. Once everyone feels comfortable and safe, the conversations will open up to sharing deeper faith beliefs. There are no right or wrong responses to the uncompleted sentences.

- My name is...
- I was born...
- Three words that describe me are...
- Something important to me is...
- I am involved in the church because...
- I am in this class because...

### Bragging Exercise

The next exercise is a “bragging” session. You will want a stopwatch or other watch to keep track of time. Each person will have two minutes to share as much about him- or herself as possible with the group. Each person can share freely and name the following kinds of things: family details; hobbies or personal interests; favorite movie, music, food, color, etc.; special talents; and what is unique about him- or herself. You might discover that the youth have a hard time filling the two minutes talking about themselves. Speaking out loud about ourselves can be harder than we realize when we are the center of attention. More extroverted youth will do better with this activity and it will challenge others to expand their comfort zones.

### What Is Confession?

Discuss what the word confession means. First, ask the class members what they think the word means. After the group has shared their responses, teach two ways that confession may be understood. One definition is that it is the act of telling another person or God that you are sorry for something that has happened. A second definition is that it is an oral or written statement of belief, which is what this session is all about.

### Scripture Discussion

When focusing on confession as a statement of belief, the participants are going to put this into action. Read Matthew 16:13–20. Jesus was learning what the disciples were hearing about him and also what his followers were thinking of him. Discuss the difference between saying what others believe and what one personally believes. The community of believers around us

shapes our faith, but we must come to terms with what we ourselves believe. Our confessions can tell us about our priorities in life and how we see and experience the world around us. Confession is when we own what we say to others and ourselves.

When we say or write what we believe, then it becomes a confession. Ideas and thoughts need to be articulated and brought out into the open through sharing. Confession occurs when God and others know what it is that we believe. Young people are often instructed to recite back what is taught to them. Confession is more than reciting what we are told to believe. Confession is investing our lives in what we feel is important to us and how we should live our lives. This kind of confession helps shape our identity and enables us to relate to others in our world—to people who believe in similar or different ways.

It is important for Christians to know what they believe and be willing to share that belief with others. It is important to be proud of our belief system and be confident in why we believe it.

### Other Christians' Confessions

Have the youth look in the Chalice Hymnal at examples of what other Christians have said about their faith and church throughout Christian history.

- A Disciples Affirmation (no. 355)
- Nicene Affirmation of Faith (no. 358)
- Apostolic Affirmation of Faith (no. 359)
- United Church of Christ Statement of Faith (no. 361)

Ask the group to share what they see as common threads among all the statements of faith. What is unique about some of the statements? Remind the class that each statement is a way for a community of faith to express what they believe as Christians. (If you do not have access to the Chalice Hymnal, then you can find these and similar statements in denominational resources or on the Internet.)

### First Person Exercise

The next activity is called "First Person Exercise." Split into three groups, dividing up as evenly as possible. Each group will take on a faith entity and share with the rest of the class who they are and why they are important. The groups will take on the following entities: God, Jesus Christ, and Church. They must use "I" statements to share who they are.

## 20 Passage into Discipleship

Here is an example. If there are six youth in the class, divide the class into three groups of two. One set of two people will be assigned "God." They will write up to five sentences starting with "I" without using the word God. The statements should describe God or God's actions and give clues for the other class participants to guess who they are describing. The other sets of two youth will do the same for Jesus Christ and the Church.

The hope is for the youth to better understand the nature and function of God, Jesus Christ, and the Church by using language to characterize them. It is one thing to believe in God, and quite another to describe God to another person.

### Confession Exercise Worksheet

In concluding the session, pass out the worksheet for the Confession Exercise found in appendix C. The students are to write what they believe about the three words listed on the page in sentences, phrases, words, or images. They are to bring the confession worksheets back for the next session.

### Closing Prayer

Close the session with a prayer that allows the youth to share something with God that they are thankful for in their lives.

### Supplies Needed

- Copies of the session outline to hand out at the beginning of your time together (see appendix B) or write the outline on a board or paper for all to see
- Pencils/pens and paper for the class members to take notes
- Bibles for all class members for the scripture discussion
- Hymnals or other copies of creeds for all class members when discussing historical confession statements
- Stopwatch or watch for "bragging session" exercise
- Confession Exercise worksheet to pass out at the close of the session