

Nourishing Our Family with God's Word

Purpose

This special time is designed to assist families in realizing how God's Word strengthens their family bonds and their relationship with God. The retreat is based on prayer, readings, and selected activities. It will take 90 minutes to 2 hours.

Materials Needed

- Small prayer table with cloth, Bible, candle, plant, and cross or crucifix
- Round tables for participants to gather around, or rectangular tables allowing participants to sit facing one another
- Paper and pencils for each participant
- Copies of Handout A, "Seek the Lord" (one for each participant), and Handout B, "Family Shield" (one for each family)
- One Bible for each table of participants
- Table for refreshments
- Podium for leader
- CD/tape player to play the song "We Are Many Parts," from the album *Anthology Volume 1: 1980-1984*, Marty Haugen, GIA Publications

Preparation

- Prepare the room by setting up tables and chairs.
- Put paper, pencils, and song sheets on the tables.
- Set up the prayer table.
- Place a Bible on each table.
- Set up the refreshment table.
- Have the music ready in the CD/tape player.

Schedule

Welcome and Gathering (10 minutes)
Family Preferences Activity (30 minutes)
Break (10 minutes)
Naming Our Virtue as a Family Activity (20 minutes)
Compose Family Prayer Activity (10 minutes)
Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome and Gathering (10 Minutes)

Welcome everyone with words of introduction and an opening prayer, such as the following:

Leader: Each family is unique in appearance as well as in the gifts, talents, and values its members have. And each family also brings these gifts and values to the larger family of our parish. We gather today to enjoy this time with our families and to let God's Word nourish us.

Let us begin with a prayer: God is with us! God is present all around us—in Church, in the Sacraments, in God's Word, in the community of [parish name], in nature, and deep within the heart of each one of us here. Take a moment of quiet to remember God's presence here in our midst and to say your own private prayer in gratitude for the gift of God's presence.

Pause for about a minute. Conclude the prayer with the following:

Leader: We give thanks for your presence, O God. Amen.

Family Preferences Activity (30 minutes)

1. Family Preferences Discussion

Gather participants in a large group, and invite them to discuss different categories of opposites. Name two categories at a time, starting with "your favorite places" and "places you don't like," and ask participants to list examples for each pair. Use the following four opposite pairs:

Your favorite places Places you don't like

Good movies Bad movies

Healthy foods Unhealthy foods

Things that bring you closer to God Things that move you away from God

After discussing all four pairs, help the group process the discussion, using the following text as a script or a model.

Leader: The first category was totally subjective—your responses could be decided only by your personal likes or dislikes. Favorite or disliked places are based on personal taste or past experience. But the categories get less subjective as we go. For example, you might enjoy any given movie, or find it useful for a school project, but it could also be rated good or bad by industry standards. Healthy and unhealthy foods are even easier

to distinguish and agree on than movies. The things that bring us closer to God or move us away from God are always specific actions, but they are guided by the specific values and principles we learn. For example, someone might say that the Rosary brings us closer to God, or that reading Scripture does. While both of these things are true, a fuller answer might be that prayer brings us closer to God. The value or principle here is that we need to pray in order to deepen our relationship with God as an individual, as a family, and as a community.

2. Family Preferences Activity

Now introduce the activity portion of this part of the retreat.

Leader: Let's go to the tables and work on our first handout, "Seek the Lord."

Distribute copies of Handout A, "Seek the Lord," to everyone on the retreat. After the families at the tables have discussed the handout for 7 to 10 minutes, ask volunteers to contribute some of the ideas discussed at each table so the wisdom of the group can be shared.

Break (10 minutes)

Naming Our Virtue as Family Activity (30 minutes)

1. Introduction to Family Shield Activity

After the break, read Philippians 2:1-11 aloud to the large group. Introduce the activity, using the following text as a script or model.

Leader: In this reading Paul encourages us to have "the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" and names many virtues that demonstrate that attitude. As we reflect on who we are as a family, we should be able to see this image of Christ in and among us. There is a proverb that says, "You may be the only Bible some people will ever read!"

Our families and households are communities where the gifts of God are lived. Mindful of the gifts God has given you as a family, and thankful for who you are as a family, you are invited to create a family shield.

2. Family Shield Activity

Distribute copies of Handout B, "Family Shield," to each family. Instruct the families about how to complete the shield, with words such as the following.

Leader: Work with your family to design a “family shield” on the handout. Each shield should include

- The family name in the scroll at the top
- The name of a virtue that describes the family in the scroll at the top
- A symbol of this virtue on one part of the shield
- A cartoon or image that illustrates the virtue in another part of the shield
- In word or picture, an indication of another virtue your family would like to strengthen

Before you begin work on the handout, take time to discuss the virtues you have as a family and to specify a gift that your family values. When others look at your family, what makes you a visible witness of the Good News? Is your family especially generous, thoughtful, compassionate, courageous, loving, faithful, supportive, joyful, humble, or forgiving?

Be honest about your virtues. Remember, humility is honesty! This is not meant to be bragging; rather it is an affirmation of God’s blessings that you share with others.

Next, be honest with one another as you choose a virtue that your family will work on strengthening after this retreat is done. Maybe everyone in your family needs to be more patient with one another, or more forgiving. Maybe you would like to work on listening attentively to one another. Choose one virtue to work on as a family, and have each individual family member choose one specific way he or she can put that virtue into practice.

Allow time for the completion of the shields.

After everyone has finished their shields, invite members of each household to briefly share their family shields with the large group, describing how their virtue is Good News for the entire Christian community.

As part of the closing prayer, each household will be invited to place their shield on the prayer table and identify the virtue they have chosen to work on.

3. Family Prayer Activity

Ask the families to compose a family prayer that (a) thanks God for all the gifts the family enjoys, (b) asks God for help in using those gifts (which the prayer should mention by name), and (c) concludes with thanks or praise. Ask the families to write the family prayer on the back of Handout A.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Begin the closing prayer by playing the song “We Are Many Parts.” At the end of the song, lead the group in the following closing prayer:

Leader: During our time together we have been humbled and have named our virtues. Please bring your family shields forward and place them on our prayer table.

Wait for the families to place their family shields on the prayer table.

We’ve also been honest in naming the virtues in which we want to grow. Let us place our intentions before God so as to make ourselves ready for God’s guidance. Please tell us the virtues you will be working on this week.

Each family should name the virtue it has chosen to strengthen. After each virtue is named, invite the group to repeat the following blessing:

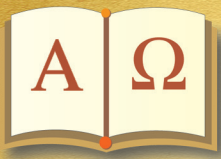
All: Blessings on your efforts.

After all the families have named their virtues, conclude the retreat with the following prayer:

Leader: Let us pray for God’s blessing on our family and friends:

May the Lord bless us and keep us.
May the Lord lead us to be Christ for others.
May the Lord guide us as God’s household.
Amen.

All make the Sign of the Cross together.



Handout A

Seek the Lord

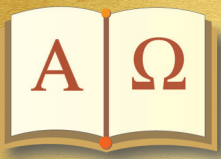
Using the Bible provided, one member of the group reads Isaiah 55:6 aloud to those at the table. Next, each group member answers one question of his or her choice in each of the two boxes below. Finally, share and discuss your answers with the rest of the group.

Choose one:

- Where do I look for the Lord?
- How do I look for the Lord?
- Who helps me look for the Lord?

Choose one:

- What favorite prayers do I use to talk to the Lord?
- What favorite names or titles do I call the Lord?
- Who are some of the people who have taught me how to pray?



Handout B

Family Shield

