

JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE

The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will (John 10:17-18 GNT).

In Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the 'stray sheep,' a suffering and lost humanity. [Jesus'] death on the Cross [...] is love in its most radical form (Deus Caritas Est 12).

The Good Shepherd ought to be the model and form of the bishop's pastoral office. Conscious of his own weaknesses, 'the bishop can have compassion for those who are ignorant and erring. He should not refuse to listen to his subjects[, and the] faithful should be closely attached to the bishop as the Church is to Jesus Christ, and as Jesus Christ is to the Father (CCC 896).

Goal of this Session:

To be able to articulate that Jesus laid down his life for us, through the cross, because he loves us and wants to protect us and that our bishops, priests, and parents shepherd us today.

Scriptural References in this Session:

- John 10:11-18; a good shepherd is willing to die for their sheep
- John 15:9-14; there is no greater love than laying down your life for your friends (15:13)

Good Shepherd Trail Mileposts to Keep in Mind:

- Qualities of a good shepherd
- Our shepherds
- Psalm 23
- Home altar



Highs and Lows:

An Examen, or examination of consciousness, is a prayerful method of "checking in" on how well we are living out our Christian faith on a daily basis. Developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola more than four hundred years ago, the Examen invites us to reflect on how God has been present in our day and how we have responded to that presence in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. With the help of the Holy Spirit, a daily examination can draw us ever closer to God.

A simple way to prepare children for a lengthier, more involved Examen and get them in the habit of recognizing God's presence in their lives is with Highs and Lows.

At the beginning of every session, give each child a turn to share the high point(s) and the low point(s) of their week. It may be helpful to go first as an example, use a talking stick or a small toy or stuffed animal to make sure only one person is talking at a time, or do this activity in a circle where everyone is at the same level, including you, and you can see every child's face.

Opening Prayer:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord is my shepherd;

I have everything I need.

*He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.*

He gives me new strength.

*He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.*

*Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with me.*

Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.

*You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me as an honored guest
and fill my cup to the brim.*

*I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life;
and your house will be my home as long as I live (Psalm 23 GNT).*

Jesus, you taught us that laying down our lives means making sacrifices for the people we love. You gave your life up for us because we're not just your sheep, we're your friends, and you love us and want to protect us. Thank you for the cross and for sending us bishops, priests, and parents to be our shepherds today. Help us to follow your commands and to love like you do.

Amen.

Fun Activity: Review Memory Verse with Hand Motions

Briefly go over the hand motions from last week. Do this together as a repeat-after-me activity.

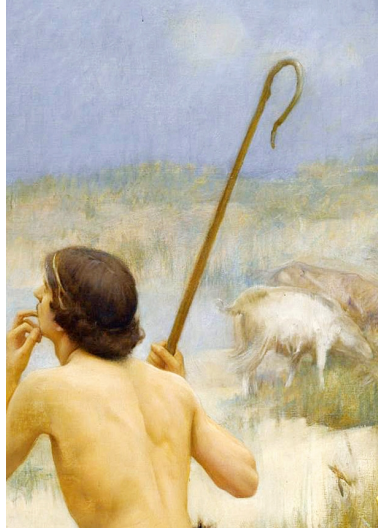
- *The Lord is my shepherd* – point up with right hand
- *I have everything I need* – gesture arms outwards in a big circle in front of you
- *He lets me rest in fields of green grass* – put your hands together and pretend to sleep
- *And leads me to quiet pools of fresh water* – make waves with right hand
- *He gives me new strength* – flex both muscles
- *He guides me in the right paths* – walk in place
- *As he has promised* – put right hand up in a pinky promise
- *Even if I go through the deepest darkness* – cover eyes with right hand
- *I will not be afraid, Lord* – shake head no
- *For you are with me* – use both hands to point up (at “you”), then to yourself (at “me”)

- *Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me* – pretend to hold a staff with your right hand
- *You prepare a banquet for me* – pretend to hold a plate or bowl with your left hand and to eat food with your right hand
- *Where all my enemies can see me* – use both hands to make binoculars over your eyes
- *You welcome me as an honored guest* – hands on hips superhero pose
- *And fill my cup to the brim* – cup both hands together in front of you
- *I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life* – use both hands to make a heart shape in front of you, then use your right pointer finger to tap your left wrist twice
- *And your house will be my home as long as I live* – make a roof over your head
- Psalm 23 – hold up 2 fingers with your right hand, then 3 fingers

Teaching:

- Who is our Good Shepherd? (Jesus) *Read John 10:11-16*. What does Jesus say a good shepherd is willing to do in verses 11 and 15? (Shepherds love their sheep so much they are willing to die for them!) How did Jesus lay down his life for us? (The cross)
- *Read John 10:17-18*. What is Jesus saying here? (Giving up his life = the cross, receiving it back again = the Resurrection, no one is making him to do it, he wants to do this for us because he loves us and wants to protect us from the hurt that comes with sin)
- In this passage, Jesus talks about giving up his life and receiving it back again. Because of the cross, we are able to give our lives to Jesus and live forever with him in Heaven.
- What does a bishop wear and do? Watch this 5-minute video from the Bishop of Trenton, New Jersey: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfWUb093w-0> What is a bishop's staff called? (A crosier) What does it look like? (A shepherd's staff) Why? Who is a bishop? (A successor to the apostles and the shepherd of God's flock in a certain area)
- Who loves us, protects us, and gives their lives to us today? (Bishops, priests, parents) How are our bishops, priests, or parents like Jesus or like shepherds?
- *Read John 15:9-14*. How much does Jesus love us? (He loves us just as the Father loves him, we are his friends and he wants to give us everything) How should we love other people? (Just as Jesus loves us) Jesus tells us that he loves us with the greatest of loves. What are some ways we can reflect God's love to our friends, families, and neighbors?
- *The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them (John 15:13 GNT)*. Loving someone or being a good sister or brother or friend doesn't necessarily mean dying for them, but it does mean making sacrifices and giving up things that we like or that are important to us to make them happy and to take care of them and to show them how much they matter to us. When we love someone, we give ourselves as a gift.
- Our bishops, priests, and parents are our shepherds and God's gift to us, to make sure we are taken care of and have everything we need to follow him and get to Heaven. We should always make sure to say "thank you" to them for their "yes" and for laying down their lives for us out of love, like the good shepherd who sleeps at the gate of the sheep pen to keep their sheep safe at night and leads them to food and water in the morning.

Hands-On Activity: Clay Crosier for Home Altar



Crosier

Pectoral Cross



Episcopal Ring

Give each child a pre-cut square of wax paper and a large handful of clay, and tell them to roll it between their palms into a thick snake-like rope. It should be long and wider than 2 fingers. After each child writes their name in Sharpie on their piece of wax paper, have them lay down their clay in a straight line, then curve the top like a shepherd's staff or a candy cane.

Water can be added to air-dry clay to soften or join pieces. If too much water is added and clay is very soft, allow excess to evaporate before molding pieces; otherwise, cracking may result. If dried correctly, kids can paint their crosiers with acrylic, tempera, or poster paint at home.

Leave the crosiers to dry for the remainder of the class session. We may throw them in the oven for you to speed up the process! In the meantime, you can discuss the following questions with your kids: What does it mean for something to be holy or sacred? (Set aside for a special purpose) Is there a place in your house that is set aside for prayer? What is an altar? What kind of things can you put on a home altar? (See examples in the Prayer and Petitions section below, i.e. prayer cards, a Rosary, a candle). Remind the children they now have a crosier to put on their home altar so that when they pray, they can think of Jesus as their Good Shepherd.

Break

Game: I Love My Neighbor

I Love My Neighbor is a great game to keep in your back pocket. It can raise energy levels, snap a classroom out of a brain fog, and build relationships by encouraging kids to see similarities between themselves and others. Have everyone stand in a circle, with one person in the middle who is 'it.' The person standing in the middle of the circle begins the game by saying "I love my

neighbor who..." and completes the sentence with a piece of information that is true about them (for example, "I love my neighbor who is wearing jeans," "I love my neighbor who likes pepperoni pizza," or "I love my neighbor who was born out of state"). All players who fit the description must move across the circle to a different spot, not the spot next to them. The last player to find a spot remains in the middle and the game continues.

Tying it Together

- Today we learned that Jesus is not the only one who shepherds us. Our bishops, priests, and parents love us, protect us, and lay down their lives for us just like good shepherds do! A bishop actually has a special staff called a "crosier" (everyone say "crosier" with me) that is shaped like a shepherd's staff. We know from Psalm 23 that a shepherd's rod and staff lead us, guide us, and protect us. Do you remember how hard it was to herd our balloon sheep? We must pray for our shepherds, and especially our bishops, because it's a big responsibility to lead, guide, and protect so many sheep.
- Jesus tells us that the greatest love involves making sacrifices and giving our lives to our friends, families, and neighbors. With the game "I Love My Neighbor," we were able to see how much we had in common in other people! We always have something in common with someone, and figuring out what someone likes or what we have in common with them can help us love them better. Jesus loves us so much he laid down his life and gave his life for us through the cross, and because we are his friends, he wants us to love people like he did.

Prayer and Petitions:

Faith is a living friendship with God that, like any other friendship, requires both talking and listening to remain healthy. Another word for this communication with God is prayer.

As you invite the children to enter into prayer, remember that you are both a model and a participant. At the end of every session, open with spontaneous prayer (if you are unused to this practice, begin with the Sign of the Cross and a simple "Thank you, God, for..."), then give children a turn to share who or what they would like to pray for. You may get prayer intentions that sound silly to you; do not laugh. Remain prayerful. Speak slowly, deliberately, and reverently. If possible, move the children to a special prayer space in the room during this time. In this space, place two or more of the following: a Bible, a small bowl of holy water, a crucifix, a religious image or statue, a Rosary, prayer cards, saint medals, a plant or flower, or a candle.

Try to mention this week's theme, Jesus Lays Down His Life, when you pray out loud!