

INTRODUCTION

This book is filled with ideas for catechists, teachers, and families who walk with children on their faith journey. Pope Francis said, “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ” (*Joy of the Gospel*).

We want children to know that Jesus Christ is already here present in their lives, and that he loves them without end. Then they will be able to respond to the love of Jesus. The learning experiences in this book will help them explore ways they can encounter Jesus Christ in their heart, in other people, in prayer, in the gospels, in serving others, by living as peacemakers, and by sharing the good news.

The learning experiences in this book will help guide children as they learn about having a relationship with Jesus and with other people. Each idea is divided into three parts—message, activity, and prayer. The children learn what Jesus Christ shows us by his words and actions in the gospels.

It is important for children to understand that Jesus calls each of us to be his disciples. We want children to say yes to walking with Jesus and

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being his disciples. We explore how to live in hope each day. The ideas are great for children ages 5–8 but also work well with older children.

This resource can be used in a variety of ways including:

- children’s faith formation programs,
- Catholic schools,
- homeschool programs,
- whole community catechesis,
- groups of families,
- individual families of all ages.

The ideas in this book invite children to learn by doing as they walk with Jesus. The variety of things to do will appeal to many different types of children, who learn in different ways. Activities include echo pantomimes, crafts, gospel charades, prayer activities, scenarios, group projects, service ideas, and many others.

These learning activities will help you engage the interest of children as they explore their relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another. With the help of caring people in their lives, children learn to live in joy as disciples.

CHAPTER 1

Encounter Jesus in our hearts

It is so important that we help children encounter Jesus, who is already here in our lives and in our hearts. We are called to have a relationship with him, who loves us without end. We are to follow his way of love each day. We are never alone because Jesus is always with us.

It sometimes seems like we search in all directions for meaning and purpose in our lives. But we sometimes forget that Jesus is already here with us. We just have to open our hearts to see that Jesus was with us all along. We have a purpose. There is a plan for each of our lives. Jesus will show us the way.

It is so important for us to share the love of Jesus Christ with the children in our programs, our schools, our families, and our communities. Only when children know they are loved by our Lord Jesus Christ are they able to respond to that love in their hearts and in their lives. We help children hear the call of Jesus in their hearts and live in joy as his disciples.

Jesus loves each of us

EXPLORE THE MESSAGE

Jesus loves each of us now and always. We do not have to look for Jesus because he is always here with us. Jesus will never stop loving us, no matter what. Jesus shows us God's love for all people.

Jesus said to his followers, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."

» JOHN 15:9

Jesus reminds us that God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will guide our lives. Stress to the children that God has loved us since before we were born and will always love us. We don't have to earn that love. God created each of us and thinks we are wonderful and amazing!

Remember that each of us is special to Jesus. We belong to Jesus, and he loves us just as we are. We are called to respond to the love of Jesus in our lives. Jesus is here with us in our hearts, our lives, our world, and beyond. The love of Jesus Christ for us lasts forever.

HAVE A PRAISE PARADE FOR JESUS

Invite children to celebrate Jesus' love for them with a praise parade. Play an upbeat children's song. Pick a song with a refrain that is easy to sing so all the children can join in.

Children can clap their hands or play a variety of children's instruments such as tambourines or wrist bells. Rhythm sticks can be made by cutting wooden dowels into pieces. Children then tap two sticks together in time to the music.

While the music plays, the children walk in a line around the space where you gather—and outside if weather permits. Encourage children to sing and use their instruments to praise Jesus for the love he has for each of us.

PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer starter » *Jesus, thank you for...*

Share your love prayer » *Lord Jesus, we know that we belong to you. Open our hearts to your love in our lives. Help us remember that you will always love us. We do not have to earn your love, because you give it to us freely. By our words and actions, may we be a sign of your love for others. Guide our lives so that we may walk with you always. Amen.*

Jesus calls us to follow him

EXPLORE THE MESSAGE

Just as he called his first disciples, Jesus calls each of us to follow him. Encourage children to listen for the call of Jesus in their lives.

Jesus said to them, “Follow me.”

» MARK 1:17

These words of Jesus echo through the years. Jesus speaks to our hearts and lives today. We are called to follow him and live as his disciples. The Holy Spirit will help us follow in the footsteps of Christ.

We encounter Jesus:

- in our hearts,
- through other people,
- in the gospels,
- when we pray,
- at Mass,
- in the sacraments,
- through serving others,
- in sharing the good news.

Each day we are called to live as disciples of Jesus. We give praise to Jesus. We live the gospels through our words and actions toward others. Jesus is here with us in all that we do, and we can always turn to him.

DO A DISCIPLES ECHO PANTOMIME

The catechist goes line by line saying the words and doing the actions. Children echo the words and the gestures.

As Jesus was walking	<i>walk in place</i>
he saw Peter and Andrew fishing.	<i>shade eyes</i>
Jesus said to them,	<i>hands by mouth</i>
“Follow me.”	<i>gesture with arm</i>
So they left their nets	<i>push away hands</i>
and followed him.	<i>walk in place</i>
Jesus calls us today	<i>stretch out arms</i>
to be his disciples.	<i>hands on heart</i>
Jesus shows us the way.	<i>shake head yes</i>
to live in love	<i>hands on heart</i>
with one another.	<i>arms out at side</i>
We are to walk always	<i>walk in place</i>
with Jesus our Lord.	<i>point to palms</i>

PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer starter » *Jesus, help me to hear your call and...*

Live as disciples prayer » *Jesus, hope of the world, we know you call us to live as your disciples. Help us to hear your call in our lives. Help us become all that we were created to be. May we follow you in what we do each day. Remind us that we never walk alone because you are always with us. Amen.*

Jesus asks us to come and see

EXPLORE THE MESSAGE

In the gospel Jesus calls people to come and see. He invites them to follow him and be his disciples.

Jesus said to them, “Come and see.”

» JOHN 1:39

Jesus also calls us to come and see who he is. He invites us to encounter him in our lives, just as the disciples did in theirs. Jesus shows us the way to the Father with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to live as God’s creation. Jesus walks with us on our faith journey.

We say yes to Jesus:

- Yes, we will be disciples of Jesus.
- Yes, we will open our hearts to others.
- Yes, we will follow Jesus in all things.

In following Jesus we become all that we can be. Each of us is someone special who has been chosen by God. Jesus calls us to come and see the possibilities in our lives. We follow his way of love for all people. We will never be alone, because we walk with Jesus through this life and beyond.

MAKE A WALK WITH JESUS PLEDGE

Talk with the children about ways to follow Jesus. Encourage children to contribute their ideas. Explore ideas and encourage children to give specific examples.

How to walk with Jesus:

- Love other people.
- Live in peace.
- Help the poor.
- Forgive others.
- Pray each day.

Make a pledge form for each child to fill out with how he or she will walk with Jesus. Put the title “Walk with Jesus” at the top of a half sheet of paper. Then print “I will walk with Jesus by...” and add a line for the child to put what he or she will do. Add a shorter line near the bottom for the child’s name. Add a cross on the left side. Duplicate two to a page.

Each child gets a pledge to fill out. This helps personalize the idea of walking with Jesus. It reminds children that each of us is called by Jesus to follow him. We invite children to hear that call and answer it in their lives.

PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer starter » *Jesus, I know that I am never alone because...*

Come and see prayer » *Jesus, Savior of all people, we ask you to bless us this day. Help us to say yes to you in our lives. Show us how to come and see who you really are. Guide us to live as your disciples with love for you and for all people. Amen.*

Jesus chooses us to be his disciples

EXPLORE THE MESSAGE

Jesus calls us to follow him and be his disciples. Jesus called his first disciples, and he calls us today. This call comes to each one of us. Each of us encounters Jesus in our life. We must respond to his call and live as his disciples.

Jesus called his disciples and chose twelve of them.

» LUKE 6:13

We open our hearts to hear the call of Jesus. Jesus has chosen each of us to be his disciple. Encourage children to walk the way of Jesus. We sign ourselves with the cross as a sign of our faith in Jesus Christ.

What the cross means to us:

- Jesus loves us.
- Jesus brings us new life.
- Jesus came for all people.
- Jesus shows us the way.
- Jesus calls us to be his disciples.

God has created each of us for a purpose. By following the way of Jesus, we find meaning for our lives. Jesus gives each of us special gifts and talents that we can use to help others. Walking with Jesus is an adventure. It can lead us places we never expected. Jesus helps us be all that we can be.

CREATE A JEWELLED CROSS

The cross reminds us to live as disciples of Jesus each day. Help each of the children create a colorful cross of their own. Use foam crosses, peel and stick craft foam, self-stick jewels, and scissors.

To make a jeweled cross, each child selects a foam cross. Then they cut seven colorful squares from self-stick craft foam. Children peel off

the backing and place five squares down the middle and two across. Then they place a self-stick jewel in the middle of each square. Assist children as needed. Ask the children to display their cross at home to remember that Jesus calls us to follow him each day.

PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer starter » *Jesus, may I hear your call and...*

Prayer to Jesus » *Jesus, Lord of all people, thank you for calling us to be your disciples and for your love for each of us. We praise you for all that you have done for us. Help us to walk in faith and follow your way of love in all that we do. Amen.*

Jesus is with us always

EXPLORE THE MESSAGE

Jesus loves us with an unending love. Jesus is with us at all times and places. We are never alone. Jesus will never turn away from us. We can count on Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples, “And remember, I am with you always.”

» MATTHEW 28:20

Jesus makes this promise to all his disciples, including us. We can have faith in Jesus, who loved us even to the cross. We are called into a relationship with Jesus and with other people. We must trust in Jesus in good times and in bad. We are to be people who hope in Jesus always.

Encourage children to look for ways that Jesus is in their lives. Let children know that being disciples of Jesus does not mean that the way will be easy but rather that Jesus will be with us through it all. We must let the light of Jesus shine in our hearts and our lives. In what we say and do we can bring the light of Christ to others.

BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Help children think about what it means to say Jesus is always with us. Give examples, and encourage children to contribute their own ideas. Let shy children learn from listening to others.

Jesus is with us:

- at home with family,
- when we're with friends,
- in times of sadness,
- when we are afraid,
- when we try something new,
- at school,
- if we are sick,
- at Mass,
- when we are happy,
- when we pray.

Explore with children the idea that Jesus always walks with us no matter where we are or what we are doing. We know that Jesus will never leave us. Remind children that we don't have to earn the love of Jesus. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—created us out of love and will love us always.

PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer starter » *Jesus, help me to know you are with me when...*

Faith in Jesus prayer » *Jesus, we know that you are with us in all things. Guide us to have faith in you always. May we remember that you walk with us each day in the happy times and in the sad times. Thank you for being with us in our hearts and in our lives. Amen.*