

BLUE SKIES

The Certainty of Hope

GOAL

The goal of this session is for middle school youth to know that hope is a concrete reality that flows from Baptism and is strengthened by faith in God, who always fulfills his promises.

Scripture

Psalms 39:7, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Jeremiah 29:11-13, Lamentations 3:21-23, Romans 15:13, Hebrews 6:16-20

Catechism

CCC 1817-1818

Resources

Encyclical

“Spe Salvi,” 9 (vatican.va)

Handouts

“Act of Hope Prayer Card”

“Blue Skies” Parent Letter

Video

“Don’t Lose Hope: Level 1” (lifeteen.com)

GATHER

Youth compete with their small group to earn points by aiming their “hopes” high into targets, introducing the theme of hope.

PROCLAIM

The following are the main teaching points of the Proclaim:

- Christian hope is not simply wishing for something that has not happened yet. Hope is a gift from God that allows us to trust in him because he fulfills all of his promises.
- Hope is a virtue given to us through Baptism, and we can strengthen our hope through daily acts of trust in God.
- Rather than hoping in the promises of the world, we should place all of our hope and desires in God because he is the only one who can — and has — fulfilled all of his promises.

BREAK

After a small group discussion on the topic of hope, youth are led through an artistic reflection on **Jeremiah 17:7-8**.

SEND

Youth pray the Act of Hope as a tool to ask God for an increase in hope and trust in him.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Pray the Act of Hope each night before going to bed this week.

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PREP

Collect all materials needed for the Edge Night.

Download, print, and copy the “Act of Hope Prayer Card” handout found online at lifeteen.com. Cut into individual cards.

SETUP

Follow the environment suggestions for the series.

Gather each small group’s supplies into a basket for easy distribution during the Break.

Test all audio-visual elements of the Edge Night.

Project the environment image and play the “ES - Stargazing” Spotify playlist as the youth enter.

SUPPLIES

Prepare the following supplies:

Gather

- ☐ Bucket, one per small group
- ☐ 100 pieces of paper, one stack per small group, in a different color for each group
- ☐ Umbrellas, one per small group
- ☐ Whiteboard and whiteboard marker

Break

- ☐ Tables and chairs
- ☐ Legal- or Ledger-sized paper, one per person
- ☐ Various art supplies, one set per small group
- ☐ Basket, one per small group

Send

- ☐ “Act of Hope Prayer Card” handout cut apart, one card per person

NOTES

CORE ASSIGNMENTS AND NOTES

This youth minister worksheet provides writing space to detail core member assignments and notes specific to running this Edge Night. Write the names of core members assigned to the roles listed.

Highlights:

- For the Gather game, small group leaders are responsible for telling the group how many points each shot is worth (one to five) and then counting successful shots in their group's umbrella.
- Set up the tables and chairs for the Send during the Break.
- During the "Rooted Reflection" activity, participate with your small group to model active engagement for the youth.

Setup: _____

Opening Prayer: _____

Gather – High Hopes

- Leader: _____

Proclaim – Blue Skies: _____

Break – Small Group Discussion, Rooted Reflection

- Tables and Chairs Setup (3): _____
- Reflection Leader/Artist: _____

Send – Act of Hope

- Leader: _____

Weekly Challenge: _____

Parking Lot: _____

NOTES

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GATHER

Introduction (5 min)

Welcome the youth and introduce those who are there for the first time. Invite the preselected core member to begin in prayer. Give a brief overview of the Edge Night topic, using the following as an example:

We love to dream big! The '80s movie "Back to the Future Part II" was set in the year 2015 and showed flying cars, shoes that tied themselves automatically, and even screens that take your food order! While the last one has actually come true, I'm sure the filmmakers and audience at the time would be disappointed to know that it would not all be a reality 30 years later. They waited so long for something that ultimately did not happen! The great news is that hope — the greatest hope — is not something we have to wait for. No spoilers, but true hope is even better than flying cars.

High Hopes (15 min)

Gather youth into their small groups and give each a large bucket filled with a stack of paper in a unique color for each small group and an umbrella. For each round, the small group must agree on where to place the opened umbrella and how to throw wadded paper balls into it.

The small group leader determines the point value for successful shots, which range from one to five depending on their difficulty. Lower-difficulty shots earn one or two points. These shots could involve placing the umbrella on the ground and forming a circle around it or lining up five feet away and throwing the balls directly.

Higher-difficulty shots earn three to five points. These may look like setting the umbrella on a tall stack of chairs or tossing the paper balls backward over their heads. Encourage the youth to be creative in their placement of the umbrella or how they throw the paper balls.

The game leader announces when each one-minute round begins. On "go," youth attempt to throw the paper balls into their umbrella target, with only one player throwing at a time. After one minute, the small group leader counts how many paper balls successfully made it into their target and brings their total to the game leader to keep a tally on the whiteboard.

Play as many rounds as time allows, inviting the small groups to change the umbrella's position and their throwing method between each round. The small group with the most points after all rounds wins!

Suggestions

Hang an umbrella high on the ceiling worth 10 points for each group that successfully makes a shot into it. They can only count one successful shot per round. Anchor the string holding the umbrella to the wall so that you can easily raise and lower it between rounds.

Step It Up

Use colored ping pong balls instead of paper balls.

PROCLAIM

“Blue Skies” Teaching (10 min)

I Wish I May

Share about something you were recently hoping for. Describe how you thought you would feel and compare or contrast the imagining to the reality of how you felt once your hope did or did not come true.

- We hope for many things, including good weather, good grades, vacations, and other joys of life.
- These hopes reflect our desires or what it is we actually want. For example, I hope for good weather so that I can enjoy going outside.
- Our hopes for the future reflect our deepest desires. We hope to earn awards, travel the world, or accomplish bucket-list goals.
- In this sense, hopes are more like wishes: things that we want to happen but have no or little control over if they do.

Ask the youth to raise their hands if they have felt disappointed when something they hoped for did not happen.

- Hope seems a lot like luck! And the odds do not always go in our favor.
- If we limit our understanding of hope to mere wishes, we will often be disappointed and may even struggle to keep hoping once those wishes fail.
- The good news is that, as Catholics, we have a deeper understanding of hope.
- In the Catholic faith, hope is understood as our desire to go to heaven and trust in God to help us get there. The more common definition of hope is similar because it also reflects a desire of our heart, but our Catholic definition is founded on a more sturdy foundation of faith.

Going Deeper

Pope St. John Paul II once said, addressing young people, “It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise.” In this quote and throughout his ministry, Pope St. John Paul II encouraged young people to seek after God alone and not be satisfied with what the world offers as a replacement. (Address Of The Holy Father John Paul II, Vigil Of Prayer, 15th World Youth Day 2000)

- Christian hope is not something we invented for ourselves. Our hope was placed into our hearts by God, who also desires for us to be with him in heaven.
- Common hope — or wishful thinking — is uncertain, and we have little control over whether it will be fulfilled. On the other hand, the virtue of hope is a sure gift God instills in us that can never disappoint. **(Romans 5:5)**
- The virtue of hope comes with guarantees. First, a good God exists who loves and cares for us. Also, heaven is real and is somewhere we can get to with God's help.
- While heaven may seem far off now, like our other hopes that have yet to come true, we still experience the virtue of hope in the present moment through our relationship with and trust in God.

From the Beginning

- The supernatural gift of hope is given to us when we are baptized.
- Baptism is the first sacrament we receive as Catholics. It wipes away sin and makes us God's adopted children. **(CCC 1263-1266)**
- When we are baptized, we receive the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, who from then on resides within us. **(CCC 1265, 1997)**
- This gift of the Holy Spirit also includes the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.
- The theological virtues orient us toward a relationship with God. Hope is the virtue by which we desire heaven with God and trust in Jesus' promises and the grace of the Holy Spirit to help us get there. **(CCC 1813, 1817)**

Going Deeper

The human virtues — prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance — are strengthened through moral choices and help us be in right relationships with others. Fostering the human and theological virtues in our life helps us fulfill the commandments to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. **(CCC 1804-1811, Luke 10:27)**

- We were given the gift of hope through Baptism, yet it takes time to unwrap and fully live it.
- Like a gift received for a birthday or Christmas, it must be opened and used for it to be fully received!
- For us to experience the fullness of hope, we have to foster and deepen our relationship with God, the source of our hope.
- It is through God's grace and coming to know him better that we increase our hope.
- We do this through prayer, receiving the sacraments, and better understanding our faith through reading Scripture and learning about the teachings of the Church.

- All of these are gifts that God gave us to know him better and better understand his gifts. God is a very generous gift-giver!

Expect Great Things

- Oftentimes, the “gifts” the world offers play on our natural desires in order to benefit the people who sell them and not ourselves.
- “Do you want to be accepted? Then you have to own this, and I can sell it to you.” “Do you want to be loved? Then you have to look like this, and I will tell you how to achieve it.”
- We can get dragged into a cycle of trying to satisfy our desires with a lot of little hopes that the world promises will make us happy. But it is like trying to fill the oceans a bucketful at a time. If that is the extent of our hope, we will end up disappointed and empty.
- Now that we know the object of our true hope, where it comes from, and who can satisfy it — God — what if we placed that same kind of expectation on him?
- What would it mean for us to place all of our expectations of being happy, satisfied, and fulfilled on God’s shoulders? This is what God invites us to do!

Project and read **1 Peter 5:7**.

- Unlike the world and its little promises, God has made huge promises and has always followed through to fulfill them.

Project and read **Jeremiah 29:11-13**.

- God has good plans in mind for us. We need only to rely on him to come through on his word.
- The letter to the Hebrews describes God’s promises as an oath that is “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.” (**Hebrews 6:19**)
- God gave us the gift of hope in him and his promises. We can trust that he will not let that hope and our desires go unfulfilled.
- We can practice and foster hope in our lives by taking daily steps of trust in God. If we invite God to work in our lives — even in small ways — we open ourselves to expecting him to follow through.
- Through these acts of trust and hope, we can start to see the ways that he blesses us, giving us confidence to trust in him more!
- Rather than trusting in uncertain promises, let us place our trust in our all-powerful God, who always keeps his word.

BREAK

Before transitioning to small groups, show the “Don’t Lose Hope: Level 1” video.

Small Group Discussion (15 min)

Use the following questions to foster a discussion within the small group:

- Whip Around: Would you rather pilot an airplane 10,000 miles above sea level or captain a submarine 10,000 miles beneath it?
- What is something you are hoping for this year?
- Why is the virtue of hope important?
- What kind of situations in the world need hope?

Eighth-Grade Adaptation

Use the following questions for a more challenging discussion for eighth-grade youth:

- How is the virtue of hope different from wishful or positive thinking?
- Who do you know that has been an example of holding on to hope during difficult times?
- What does it look like to trust in God versus trusting our own abilities?

Rooted Reflection (20 min)

Gather the youth back together in the main meeting space and invite them to sit with their small group at a table. Distribute a basket of supplies to each small group, then pass out a large blank piece of paper to each youth. Place the drawing supplies in the center of the table where all the youth can reach.

Play quiet instrumental music in the background. Standing at the front of the room, the leader guides the youth through an artistic reflection exercise. The leader draws an example from the front and provides verbal prompts. Begin the activity using the following as a guide:

We each have a unique experience of hope based on what we have encountered throughout our lives. We may be very hopeful about the future and God’s work in it, disappointed because of unmet expectations, or anywhere in between. We will take this time with God to examine our experience of hope, what we hope for, what may threaten our hope, and dream of what a life lived in hope can do for others. Let us begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Listen attentively to the following Scripture verses.

Read aloud **Jeremiah 17:7-8**, pause briefly, then read the verses again.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water.” Another word for “blessed” is “happy.” Happy is the one who trusts in the Lord.

On the right side of your paper, draw the outline of a large tree with branches.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth draw the tree.

Inside the tree, write things you hope for in your life. What is a goal you hope to accomplish this month? What is a goal you hope to accomplish this year? Name a virtue or good habit you want to develop.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth write their ideas. Circulate and answer questions as the youth work on this step.

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream.” For our hope to remain in God, we must be fed by the water of life that God provides.

Draw a stream of water on the lower left side of your page. Extend the roots of your tree to touch the bank of the stream.

Within the stream’s current, write down words that describe true hope and God’s promises. To help you get started, you can use words like hope, faithfulness, always-present, Jesus, and love.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth illustrate the stream and write in it.

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes for its leaves remain green.” The heat will come. What causes you to swelter and sweat? Periods of stress, trial, and suffering are unavoidable. But to the tree planted firmly by the water — to the person who trusts fully in the Lord — there is no reason to lose hope.

In the upper left corner of the page, draw a large sun. Within the sun, write down those things that threaten your hope — fights with friends, school stress, questions about the future. Be honest with God about these things. He wants you to cast your cares on him.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth illustrate the sun and write in it.

Because of our certain hope in the Lord, we do not wither away when the heat comes. Draw the leaves on the tree. Color them in with colors that bring you joy.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth illustrate the leaves.

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does

not fear when heat comes for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” The hope that fuels us has effects — our words and actions reflect the confidence that, no matter what happens, God is still good.

The virtuous behaviors and actions of a hopeful person are the fruit of their hope in God. Draw at least five fruits on the branches of the tree and on the ground surrounding the base of the tree. In each, complete the prompt, “A hopeful person...” with the words or actions of someone who lives in hope. For example, a hopeful person encourages others, prays faithfully, attends Mass, serves others, speaks kindly, and inspires others.

Pause for a few minutes as the youth illustrate the fruit and write in them.

Now that we have completed our image, I will read the verses once more. Keep a pen in your hand and write down anything else that comes to mind as you hear the Scripture again. God may have more to reveal to you.

Read the verses again, pausing briefly after each line, as printed below:

*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.*

Suggestion

Project example answers on the screen for youth to reference during each prompt.

Step It Up

Use an overhead camera projector or webcam to display the leader’s drawing on the screen so that the youth can follow along visually. Alternatively, invite a local artist to lead this activity and paint a large canvas along with the youth

SEND

Act of Hope (5 min)

Pass out a card from the “Act of Hope Prayer Card” handout to each person. Lead the recitation of the prayer, using the following as an example to introduce it.

The Act of Hope is a prayerful statement of hope and trust in God. We can pray the Act of Hope to affirm our hope or ask God to help us trust him more deeply. Use this prayer to ask God for the hope you may not yet have. We offer this prayer with open hearts.

*God, I hope by your grace
for the forgiveness of all my sins
and, after my life here, to gain eternal happiness in heaven
because you have promised it
who are infinitely powerful, faithful, kind, and merciful.
So, in this hope, I will trust you until my last day. Amen.*

Weekly Challenge (5 min)

Invite the preselected core members to present the Weekly Challenge.

Pray the Act of Hope each night before going to bed this week.

Dismiss the core members preassigned to parking lot safety.

Make announcements related to your program. Invite the youth to take home their drawing and prayer card.

Dismiss the youth.