

LIGHT POLLUTION

Hope in Darkness

GOAL

The goal of this session is to invite youth to trust in God and his promises to help them and to share hope with others in their trials and sufferings.

Scripture

John 14:1-7, John 19:30, Romans 5:1-5, Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 10:26-27

Catechism

CCC 1819-1821

Resources

Article

Dr. Tom Neal, “How to Find Hope When Everything Seems Dark” (wordonfire.org)

Encyclical

“Spe Salvi,” 37-40 (vatican.va)

Handouts

“Counting Stars”

“Light Pollution” Parent Letter

Media

“City Lights of the United States 2012” (earthobservatory.nasa.gov)

“Don’t Lose Hope: Level 2” (lifeteen.com)

GlassworksVFX, “TFL Viral - Awareness Test (Moonwalking Bear)” (youtube.com)

GATHER

Youth play a chance-based game with a star theme, connecting to the series theme and introducing the idea of putting hope in uncertain things.

PROCLAIM

The following are the main teaching points of the Proclaim:

- True hope is a guiding light through dark times because it depends on God and not on what the world promises us and often fails to deliver.
- Jesus is the reason we have hope because he permanently made a way for us to reach heaven.
- When we embrace hope in difficult circumstances, we are strengthened through virtue and better able to share hope with others when they need it.

BREAK

The youth participate in a visual demonstration with yarn as an image of the connection between members of the Body of Christ and our effect on others, followed by a small group discussion.

SEND

The youth spend quiet prayer time in the church or chapel, reflecting on situations in need of hope and inviting God to bring light to them.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Next time you attend Mass, count the number of lit candles you see. In prayer, offer up one intention for each candle.

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PREP

Collect all materials needed for the Edge Night.

Download, print, and copy the “Counting Stars” handout found online at lifeteen.com. Print enough copies to exceed the total number of youth and core members.

The Send for this Edge Night takes place in the church or chapel. Reserve the necessary facilities in advance.

SETUP

Follow the environment suggestions for the series.

Tape the “Counting Stars” handouts to the floor using clear packing tape. Ensure that there are more stars than youth and core members playing the Gather game.

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

- ☐ “Counting Stars” handouts
- ☐ Clear packing tape
- ☐ Rewards (candy, stickers, etc.), one per person

Break

- ☐ Balls of yarn, one per small group

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:

- During the Send, remain attentive to any youth who may become emotional. Be sure to check in with them afterward, offering a listening ear and the opportunity to pray with them directly. Present any serious concerns to the youth minister immediately.

Setup: _____

Opening Prayer: _____

Gather – Falling Stars

- Game Leader: _____

Proclaim – Light Pollution: _____

Break – Ties That Bind, Small Group Discussion

- Activity Leader: _____

Send – Light Shines in the Darkness

- 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:

Light is a necessity for life. Plants use light to make food through photosynthesis. Our eyesight only works by taking in the light reflecting off of things around us. The waves of light in our microwave ovens heat our food! We can take for granted how many benefits light gives us — but we definitely notice its absence. This is the same with hope. Even when the darkness is all around us, the light of hope shines brightly, guiding our way.

Falling Stars (10 min)

Ask the youth to spread out around the room. Direct their attention to the “Counting Stars” handouts spread out and taped to the floor. When the music starts, the youth walk slowly around the room. When the music stops, they must quickly move to stand on a numbered star. Only one person can stand on a star. There are enough stars on the floor for everyone to stand on one. Some stars will remain unoccupied.

The game leader then rolls a six-sided die multiple times to obtain three different numbers. These numbers represent the “falling stars” for that round. The game leader announces the numbers, and all players standing on the selected numbers must complete a challenge or receive a reward.

Choose from the list below or come up with your own:

- Do a cool, improvised handshake with the person closest to you.
- Bust out your silliest dance move for ten seconds.
- Receive a crisp high five from the youth minister.
- Play the next round while hopping on one foot.
- Receive a round of applause from the remaining players. Take a bow!
- Do five jumping jacks.
- Choose two stars to stand on for the next round.

- Receive a piece of candy or sticker.
- In the next round, you can remove another player from a star you want before the numbers are announced.
- In the next round, you must walk around with your hands on your knees.

Play as many rounds as time allows.

Suggestion

This can also be played as an elimination game, playing until only one player wins.

Step It Up

Print the handout pages on six colors of paper. To select the stars for each round, roll both a numbered die and a colored die (like those in the game Trivial Pursuit).

PROCLAIM

“Light Pollution” Teaching (10 min)

Let The Light Shine

- Before the discovery of electricity, daily activities were limited by the rising and setting of the sun.
- When the sun was up, people could work, learn, and play, but once it went down, we were limited to candlelight, lanterns, and moonlight — much harder to work with, especially on detailed things!
- Around 200 years ago, when the light bulb was invented, it changed everything. Now, it no longer mattered what time of day it was; people could work, learn, and play all through the night.
- This initial invention led to greater developments like LED bulbs, which require so little electricity that keeping them on is more efficient than frequently turning them off and on!
- Why would we ever tolerate staying in the dark when light is literally at our fingertips?

Suggestion

Project or show the “City Lights of the United States 2012” image linked in the Resources section. This image shows a satellite view of earth at night. Note the orange glow from major cities, even in the middle of the night.

Ask whether the youth know the meaning of the phrase “light pollution.”

- Light pollution occurs in populated areas at night when streetlights or lighted signs from businesses obscure the ability to see the stars.
- It is not that the stars disappear, but we cannot see them because of the lights closer to us.
- We know our great hope — the everlasting promise of eternal life with God and his help to get there. Our great hope of heaven is like a bright star; yet, like other shining stars, hope can be obscured by external influences that make it difficult to see.
- The world gives us many chances to hope for smaller things — clothes, video games, sports, academic achievements, and even things as important as our dreams and desires for life.
- These are like little lights closer to us, initially warm and inviting, but, in great numbers, they can obscure our view of our hope in God.
- If we take our eyes off our hope of heaven, we can lose sight of what we were created for. We could focus solely on the concerns right in front of us, forgetting what lies above and beyond.

- Then, when those little lights go out around us and the world seems very dark, like in times of grief, mourning, illness, and even despair, we may forget to look up and remember our great hope.

Going Deeper

The Catechism describes two sins against hope — despair and presumption. Despair is a complete lack of hope in God for our salvation. Presumption is either to expect God's forgiveness and mercy without contrite repentance or to expect to reach heaven without God's help. Sins against hope deny God is who he says he is and that we need him. **(CCC 2091-2092)**

Play the “TFL Viral - Awareness Test” video from the Quick Glance resources to illustrate this point.

- This video may be kind of silly, but it demonstrates that what we pay attention to is what we perceive. If we are very focused on small details, we can easily miss something big! If we focus only on smaller earthly hopes, we miss seeing the best and greatest hope God has for us — heaven.

Once For All

- Heaven was made possible for us through the saving actions of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the answer to God's promise to us that we could someday be with him in heaven.
- To understand how Jesus fulfilled God's promises, we have to go back to the beginning.
- After the Fall in the Garden of Eden, humanity lost its closeness of our relationship to God through sin. The ultimate consequence of sin was death, a complete separation from God forever. **(Romans 6:23)**
- We were unable to bridge the gap back to God on our own — we needed a savior.
- Throughout the Bible, God slowly brings his people back to him, teaching them how to have a relationship with him. This is called salvation history.
- In God's great plan for salvation, he sent his Son, Jesus, to fully redeem and establish a path to heaven for us to follow.
- Jesus took the punishment and freed us from the consequences of sin. Through his life, death, and Resurrection, Jesus permanently made a way for us to get to heaven. **(CCC 654)**
- By receiving Baptism and saying yes to God through the other sacraments and daily practices of prayer and service, we accept the offer of heaven.
- The best part about it? There is nothing we can do to make Jesus take it back. Even when we sin or reject God after Baptism, we can always repent, receive forgiveness in Reconciliation, and start again.

- No matter how lost we are, how much we sin against God, or how hopeless our lives may be, the path to eternal life is always offered to us.
- In the great mercy of God, we can always return to him and return to the path that leads us to heaven.

Light Bearer

- Embracing hope and trust in God is a gift to us in dark times, like when we feel lonely or afraid, or we lose friends or loved ones.
- These moments of darkness can threaten to cover up the light. But the stars shine brightest on the darkest nights.
- In many ways, we can accept suffering because we know our earthly life is not the end. We are strengthened by hope to persevere through darkness and keep our eyes on heaven, even when our circumstances are grim.
- Hope is also a powerful gift to share with others. As we know, there are many terrible and dark situations in the world, even in the lives of people close to us and our local communities. Our call as Christians is to bring the light of hope and compassion into this darkness.
- The word “compassion” comes from Latin and means to “suffer with” someone. To love others — to be compassionate towards them — means to get into the dark with them and bear its weight alongside them.
- This is what Jesus did for us in bearing the weight of the Cross for our sins. His example shows us what to do for others who are in dark places.
- We are not saviors, but we are companions, and a heavy weight is easier to carry when more people help to lift it.
- When we reject or run away from the suffering of others, we communicate that they are on their own and must carry the weight of their suffering alone. That is not what God desires for us. We are all members of the same body. When one member suffers, so does the rest of the body. Therefore, we must manage suffering together.

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

- When our family, friends, or community members are in periods of darkness, we can share the light of hope through an attitude of joy and service.
- This does not mean being recklessly optimistic or telling people not to be sad. Ignoring problems does not make them go away. What is helpful is to offer a listening ear, be empathetic, and help in any way we can. We can also take these concerns to prayer, as prayer is powerful and effective. **(CCC 2740-2741)**

Going Deeper

St. Jude Thaddeus, an Apostle of Jesus, is regarded as the patron saint of hopeless or impossible causes. Part of the reason he holds this patronage is that he shares his name with Judas Iscariot, the Apostle who betrayed Jesus, and if any person was desperate enough to invoke his name, then it must be serious. Even now that we can distinguish between the two Apostles, we can ask for the intercession of St. Jude to help us in hopeless situations.

- Jesus came to bring light into our lives and lead us to heaven. No matter how dark the world becomes, it will never overpower the light. **(John 1:5)**
- Let us carry the light of hope throughout the world, sharing it with those who need it most.

BREAK

Ties That Bind (15 min)

Gather youth into their small groups and ask them to stand in circles throughout the main meeting space. Give each small group leader a ball of yarn. Starting within the small group, whoever holds the ball of yarn calls the name of another person in the group and gently tosses the ball of yarn while holding on to the yarn tail. The person named catches the yarn, holds on to the loose string, and then names another person in the group to toss the yarn to. Repeat until each member of the group holds at least one strand of yarn.

Then, invite the groups to call out the names of people in other groups, gently tossing them the ball of yarn. Continue tossing the yarn for a few minutes. This part of the activity is meant to be fun!

After some time, instruct the youth to pass the remaining yarn to the nearest core member but continue holding their strands of yarn. Provide a reflection on the activity, using the following as an example:

As we heard in the Proclaim, hope is not meant to serve only ourselves. By trusting and hoping in God, even in dark circumstances, we are strengthened to bear the load with others who need hope. This yarn represents the connection between us as members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and humanity as a whole.

Project and read **1 Corinthians 12:26-27**.

Ask all of the girls to slowly squat while holding the yarn. The yarn will get pulled very tight. After a few seconds, invite the girls to stand, then instruct all of the boys to slowly squat. After a few seconds, invite the boys to stand again.

We can feel it when some of us are low, carrying heavy weights. By the same bonds, we can lift each other up.

Look around the room at how the yarn is woven around and among everyone. From above, the yarn looks like a net and represents how our community can be a safety net to catch and hold us when we need a safe place to land.

To transition into small groups, ask the youth to lower their strings onto the ground and step out of any loops they may be caught in. Gather up the tangled yarn.

Suggestion

Prepare the yarn by winding it into balls rather than simply keeping it in the skein as purchased. This preparation makes throwing easier and prevents the yarn from unwinding loosely and creating knots. Consider keeping the tangled yarn and including it in the environment for the rest of the series as a reminder of this activity.

Step It Up

Create small tassels or balls of yarn with the variety of colors used for the youth to take home as a reminder of this activity.

Small Group Discussion (15 min)

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

- Whip Around: If you were some type of light, what would you be? For instance, a neon sign, a theater marquee, an LED light strip, a lighthouse, etc. Why did you choose this?
- Share about a time when you were distracted and missed something important.
- What things in a middle schooler's life draw their attention and focus?
- What does it feel like to lose hope? How can we remind ourselves of our hope in God in those times?
- How can we support and bring hope to our family or community?

Eighth-Grade Adaptation

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

- Share about a time when someone gave you hope in a difficult situation.
- Who can we talk to when we are in need of hope?
- What is the difference between hope and optimism?

SEND

Don't Lose Hope (5 min)

Gather the youth again in the main meeting space. Show the “Don't Lose Hope: Level 2” video.

Light Shines in the Darkness (15 min)

Bring the youth into the church or chapel. Invite them to sit in the front pews, leaving space between each person.

Allow a minute of silence before introducing the time of prayer. Use the following as an example:

There are many dark circumstances in the world: war, hunger, anger, hatred. We may have darkness in our lives: the death of someone we love, loss of a friendship, broken promises, loneliness. God is not absent or far away from us in these situations. Yet just as we can see by the light of stars shining from hundreds of light-years away, so is God with us even when he seems far away. God cares about us. God's heart breaks with ours. He wants to walk with you in your struggles, carrying the heavy load alongside you.

Call to mind the situations in the world or your life that need light or hope. Invite Jesus to bring his presence there. Whatever may come to mind, bring it to God. Invite him to shine the light of hope into its darkness. He will never let it overcome you when you invite him into your struggles.

Spend the rest of the time in silent prayer. Conclude with a communal prayer, followed by announcements.

Suggestion

Place boxes of tissues in the pews where youth can access them if needed.

Step It Up

Dim the lights in the church or chapel and light numerous candles around the altar and sanctuary for a more immersive environment.

Weekly Challenge

Invite the preselected core members to present the Weekly Challenge.

Next time you attend Mass, count the number of lit candles you see. In prayer, offer up one intention for each candle.

Dismiss the core members preassigned to parking lot safety.

Make announcements related to your program.

Dismiss the youth.