

## **Respect Life Week: Resources for Youth Nights**

### **Topic: Immigration**

Opening Prayer: Select one of these [Collected Prayers for Immigrants](#).

Intro: Leader introduces topic of immigrants and refugees. This [USCCB website](#) may provide helpful resources for explaining the Catholic perspective on immigration.

- [Catholic Social Teaching 101: Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#) 3.5 minute video from the US Bishops with interviews from Bishop Barron, Jonathan Reyes, and Helen Alvare. Fantastic introduction to understanding the dignity of every person and deciding what must be our personal response and a global response to injustice.

Simulation and Reflection:

- Catholic Relief Services has developed an excellent 50-minute simulation, debrief, and reflection titled [On the Move](#) to help youth understand the refugee experience.

Activity:

- Contact your local [refugee resettlement agency](#) to ask if they would be open to your group making “welcome to the USA cards” or donating other needed items. If they are in need of donations, spend this time making a plan with youth for how they will collect and deliver the items.

Closing Prayer: You may want to reflect with a song such as [“Come As You Are”](#) by David Crowder or [“Give Me Your Eyes”](#) by Brandon Heath. Invite youth to offer prayers aloud for immigrants and refugees, concluding with an Our Father or Hail Mary.

### **Topic: Abortion**

Opening Prayer: Pray with a decade or full Rosary from these [Rosaries for life](#).

Introduction: Leader introduces topic of abortion as well as the Church’s stance on it. These [USCCB resources](#) may be helpful. Abortion is a highly emotional and charged issue for many people, and throughout this session be sensitive to the fact that this can be a deeply personal topic for some of the youth. Though it goes without saying, a tone of mercy and love is much more effective than that of judgement.

General Discussion Questions:

- When does your life start to matter? (Leader may suggest different time frames, such as when a child can walk, when she can talk, when she is born, or when God created her.)
- Why do we believe that life is so precious?
- How can we help people to see how valuable their lives are? How can we come to believe that our own lives are immensely valuable if we are doubting that?

Suggested videos and discussion questions:

[The Most Important Question about Abortion](#) 5 minute video that discusses the morality of abortion in a logical and non-emotional way. This is an excellent overview or refresher for students who haven't had much exposure to the moral discussion surrounding abortion.

- Discussion questions from the video's [study guide](#):
  - What are some of the difficulties the average person faces in attempting to come to their own conclusion about whether to support abortions (in general) or not? What are some of the questions and arguments that proponents on both sides of the issue raise?
  - Should there be such a huge difference in how a human is treated and valued before birth versus after being born? Why or why not?
  - Mr. Prager concludes the video by stating, "Good societies can survive people doing immoral things, but a good society cannot survive if it calls immoral things moral." What exactly does he mean by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

[What "Choice" Actually Does](#) Abby Johnson's story of the day she watched an abortion on the ultrasound and finally realized what was actually taking place. Non-graphic but compelling testimony that is not argumentative or defensive but is very powerful. 5.5 minutes.

- Discussion Questions: How does Abby Johnson's story make you feel? How does Abby communicate her reverence for life as she tells the story? How can we live out that same respect for life ourselves? What is the main message of this video?

[A Birthmother Story: Grace](#) A birth mother shares her moving story of choosing adoption for her baby. This video stresses that adoption is chosen because birth mothers love their children more, not less. 4 minutes.

- Discussion Questions: Grace says that adoption is "something that you do out of love". How was her love for her child apparent in this video? What are your reactions to this video and the idea of adoption in general? How does adoption uphold the dignity of every person?

Suggested articles and discussion questions:

[Abby Johnson My Church Kicked Me out](#) Abby Johnson's story of the way she was treated by her church forces us to ask the question of whether our actions could ever be encouraging someone to choose abortion instead of encouraging her to choose life. A very interesting and easy to read article about the importance of mercy and ministering from the Church. Even reading an excerpt as a group would be powerful.

- Discussion Questions: Abby Johnson encourages us to "BE pro-life, not just say it". How are we doing this in our own lives? How can we do it better? What role can the Church play in the Abortion discussion? How can the Church intervene and show mercy? Why is mercy important in relation to abortion?

Activity: "[Facts of Life](#)" quiz from the Diocese of Arlington. Conduct this as a fun contest with a prize for the individual or team who gets the closest to the correct answers. Remind students beforehand that in the womb, time is measured in days or weeks.

1. When did your heart begin to beat? *24 days*

2. How old were you when you could first feel pain? *9 weeks*
3. How many weeks old were you when your brain, eyes, jaw, and arms were showing signs of development? *6 weeks*
4. How many weeks old were you when your elbows and fingers were evident, and you began making your own blood? *8 weeks (note: this is the point when 62% of abortions take place)*
5. What age was your fingerprint developed? *10 weeks*
6. What age were you when you could start to suck your thumb? *12 weeks*
7. When could your parent determine if you were a boy or a girl? *60 days with ultrasound*

Future Involvement:

[40 Days for Life](#) Inform your youth about the next 40 Days for Life campaign near you and make a plan to participate as a group, witnessing and praying in support of life.

Contact a local organization that supports pregnant mothers such as [Good Counsel Homes](#). Inquire as to what items they are in need of and organize a drive with your youth, or plan a baby bottle drive to collect monetary donations.

Closing Prayer: You may want to reflect with a song such as "[10,000 Reasons](#)" by Matt Redman or "[Beautiful Things](#)" by Gungor. Conclude with one of these [prayers to end abortion](#).

## **Topic: Assisted Suicide**

Opening Prayer: Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to be with your group at this time so as to grow closer to God, recognize His mercy and love in our lives, and better live out His will for us. Feel free to incorporate Scripture into your prayer, such as [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#). There are several songs that would be appropriate to pray with, including "[Take a Moment](#)" by Will Reagan and "[Praise You In This Storm](#)" by Casting Crowns.

Intro to Topic: Leader introduces assisted suicide, the current debate surrounding it, its status in current legislation, and the Church's stance. The USCCB's [Top Reasons to Oppose Assisted Suicide](#) will be a helpful resource.

Suggested videos and discussion questions:

[Pulling Back the Curtain on Assisted Suicide](#) 3 minute video sharing the economic and social effects of assisted suicide on a community. This video has many compelling statistics and good graphics but leaders should know that it is specifically addressing California.

- Discussion Questions: What are your reactions to statistics such as these? As Catholics, how can we support those who are suffering and resist the cultural shift toward assisted suicide?

[Man of Steel](#) 5 minute video of JJ, a former Marine fighting brain cancer, whose desire to live for his family, even through his disease, is a great inspiration. Like Brittany Maynard, JJ had terminal brain cancer but chose to live rather than die by assisted suicide.

- Discussion Questions: How does JJ's story contribute to the discussion surrounding assisted suicide? What were his reasons for choosing to live? From where did he get his strength? How could this video help you explain the Church's stance against assisted suicide?

[Me Before You Trailer](#) 3 minute trailer of popular teen romance movie that came out in 2016 and promotes assisted suicide as a sacrificial, romantic act of love. Many teens may have seen or heard about this film.

- [Sr. Helena Burns Review](#) for group to read or leader to recap
- Discussion Questions from [National Catholic Register](#):
  - Will's character suffers from severe depression and suicidal ideation, both of which are seen in able-bodied people as mental illness and treated by healthcare professionals. Why, in your opinion, are depression and suicidal ideation accepted as not signs of mental illness for wheelchair users? Should they be?
  - This book/movie has been applauded by the able-bodied community, but almost universally condemned by those in the disability community. Is that an indication that perhaps there's a problem with the way his life has been portrayed?
  - Is it socially acceptable to be disabled in American society?

#### General Discussion Questions:

- In your opinion, what message is the increasing support for assisted suicide sending about our society's value for human life?
- Do you think that the legalization of assisted suicide would impact the way that teen suicide is viewed?
- As Catholics, how can we respond with love and mercy to the issue of assisted suicide?

#### Activity:

- [Make cards for Rosary Hill Home](#): Home in Westchester County for individuals suffering from terminal cancer. Make handmade holiday-themed cards in packs of 30 for the residents to brighten their day and remind them that they are loved. Contact: Sr. Mary Thanh, (914) 769-0114 or [srmjoseph@hawthorne-dominicans.org](mailto:srmjoseph@hawthorne-dominicans.org)

#### Closing Prayer: Intercessions from the [USCCB](#)

For all who are about to die: that through our love, care, and devotion, they might know the beauty of life, as they prepare for death;

We pray to the Lord: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those who have grown tired of life, and especially for those tempted to suicide: that God might grant them patient endurance and the support of loved ones;

We pray to the Lord: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those tempted to despair because of constant pain: that they might join their suffering to the Cross of Christ;

We pray to the Lord: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For nurses and all professionals who care for the sick and dying: that they will be given the grace to love each patient with the love of Christ, and to never see those they care for as a burden;

We pray to the Lord: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those who have grown weak or infirm: that we might see God's power in their fragility and experience a new revelation of God's love for them;

We pray to the Lord: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

## **Topic: Marriage**

Opening Prayer: Adapted from the blog [Unveiled Wife](#).

Dear Lord, Thank You for the gift of marriage. We pray a blessing over husbands and wives today. May Your Holy Spirit anoint marriages and help couples to grow in love and understanding. We pray husbands and wives can serve each other, comfort each other and experience deep intimacy in their marriages. We pray for protection of marriages from the enemy and from temptation to sin. We ask for freedom, healing, reconciliation, and joy to overflow in these relationships in Jesus' name. Please guide people towards holy and loving marriages and bring Your hope and healing to all those who are struggling in marriage. Amen.

Introduction: The leader introduces the topic of marriage. This note from the Respect Life Week curriculum may be helpful for leaders to keep in mind:

- "Marriage numbers are decreasing around the world. And, there is much confusion about the nature of marriage and why people even ought to get married. Students will explore the benefits of marriage for individuals and society and learn how to have a successful marriage.

The topic of marriage has been highly politicized in our culture in recent years, resulting in a great deal of confusion. Add to that the reality that so many children live in homes with unmarried parents or divorce parents or only one parent, and we are often left believing that it is better to not teach about the reality of marriage rather than offend any student.

Actually, the opposite is true. By teaching the truth of marriage—a loving, permanent commitment between a man and a woman to each other and any children they may have—we allow students to realize that God did intend something special for us; that we are made for and capable of lasting, authentic love; and that even if they do not have this example at home, they can still aspire to it as adults. Rather than offending, this teaching is liberating."

Opening Discussion Questions:

- Marriage is a sacrament in the Catholic Church - what does that mean to you? Do you think that we uphold the sacredness of marriage as individuals and as a society? If so, how? If not, how could we? What is the difference between seeing marriage a purely legal institution and as a sacrament?

Suggested Videos: There are a wide variety of excellent videos on this topic. Leaders should tailor their meeting to the needs of their youth.

- [Sophia Sketchpad: Marriage](#) for an introduction on the Catholic teaching on the sacrament of Marriage.
  - Discussion Questions: What did you think of the idea that marriage is a reflection of the Trinity? What does the statement “love is an act of free will” mean to you and what does it look like in real life? How can married couples help get each other to Heaven? How can we set the tone for the marriage that we want when we are dating?
- For videos on the purpose, meaning, and rightful place of sex in our lives watch this [5-part series](#) from LifeTeen.
  - Discussion: After each video, ask youth to reflect on what stuck out to them the most and address any questions that may arise.

Activity: Pray for marriages in your own life.

- Write to religious community asking for prayers for the marriages of your family members and friends. There are so many religious communities that would love to receive your prayer requests; below are just a few.
- The Dominican Nuns of Summit, NJ
  - <https://www.summitdominicans.org/prayer-requests/>
- The Dominican Nuns of Bronx, NY
  - Corpus Christi Monastery 1230 Lafayette Avenue Bronx, NY 10474
- The Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration
  - <http://ssfpa.org/prayer/>

Closing Prayer: You may want to end with a song such as “[One Wild Life](#)” by Gungor or “[I Need You, I Love You, I Want You](#)” by Tenth Avenue North. Lead the group in a prayer that reflects the themes that you have explored in this session and asks for God’s guidance and grace as these students continue on their life journeys.

## **Topic: Environment**

Opening Prayer: Open with a song such as “[Indescribable](#)” by Chris Tomlin. You may also want to draw from these [prayer resources](#) for the environment to conclude your session.

Introduction: The leader introduces Laudato Si’ to the group. This [brief summary](#) may be helpful.

Suggested Videos:

- [Animated Introduction to Laudato Si’](#) 4 minute video that summarizes the main points of Laudato Si’ with an emphasis on the role that young people have in caring for creation.

### Activities:

- Any of these activities from the [Catholic Agency for Overseas Development](#) would be a fitting way to engage youth with Laudato Si' and help them to understand the way that our faith is calling us to care for creation. Four activities that can be conducted separately or collectively take an hour and a half.
- Brainstorm ways that youth can become better stewards of the Earth in their own lives. Have each student make a commitment to at least one action that will help the Earth and plan on future check-ins for them to report back on how their steps are going.

### Closing Prayer:[A prayer for our Earth](#) from Laudato Si'

All powerful God, you are present in the universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with your peace that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle, for justice, love and peace. Amen.

## **Topic: Loneliness**

Opening Prayer: Dear Lord, speak to us in the silent depths of our hearts, instill the knowledge into each of our hearts that we are never alone, that I really am not alone; I never have been alone in my life; I never really will be alone for the simple but profound reason that you have promised. In your Word, you say "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). You are a faithful God who keeps His promises. Open our hearts to receive this promise in faith more fully, and open our eyes to see others around us who may be suffering loneliness and are longing to be in friendship with others. Teach us how not to be afraid to love those who need it most. Amen.

You may also begin by praying with and reciting Psalm 23, or there are also several songs that would be appropriate to pray with, including ["I Am Not Alone"](#) by Kari Job.

Introduction: Leader introduces the topic of loneliness to the group. This full [article](#) from the Respect Life Week curriculum may be helpful. Here is an excerpt:

- “Today, we are facing a crisis of loneliness. Study after study finds that roughly 40% of all Americans say they feel lonely or isolated. How is this possible, you may ask? Look around. People are connected to one another now more than ever. New ways to connect are being created each day. With the touch of a screen, we can connect with thousands of people instantly, knowing their most intimate thoughts and what they just ate for lunch.”

Students will explore their relationships with God and others and learn how they can build a culture of relationship.

General Discussion Questions:

- What are signs of loneliness? Can you identify loneliness when you or others are experiencing feelings of loneliness?
- Is it possible to be lonely while simultaneously connected electronically?
- How can building friendship with others help the struggle of loneliness?
- What are some steps, small or large, that could be taken at your school to decrease loneliness? How can you build intentional, meaningful relationships with others?

Suggested Videos for Group Discussion:

- [Learning to be Alone](#)(6 min) Fr. Mike Schmitz discusses loneliness versus being alone. How are we to be alone when we are made for relationship? How do we find love in a broken world?
  - How can we embrace solitude, or our experience of aloneness, as an invitation to grow closer to God and others instead of it leading us to greater loneliness and isolation from others?
  - What ways can you lovingly give of yourselves more to others to imitate God as He gives himself to us?
- [Talking about Suicide](#)(8.5 min) If you know someone struggling with suicidal thoughts, don't hesitate to reach out to them with reasons to have hope.
  - Personal Testimony: "[I Jumped Off the Golden Gate Bridge](#)"(2.5 min) Kevin talks about his darkest day, working through mental illness and feeling as though his life was a burden. He shares his thoughts on his gift of life and hope!
  - What are reasons to have hope that we can call to mind ourselves or to share with others who may be struggling with loneliness and suicidal thoughts?
  - What words of encouragement would you give to others who need hope? What acts of kindness could you do for others that may help them without our even knowing it?
- [Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?](#)Fr. Mike Schmitz talks about the difference between God making bad things happen and letting them happen and why that is important for us and our world.
  - One idea for leaders may be to have the youth pair up and practice giving their own answers in their own words to this question with their peers after watching this video.



Additional Article/Blog Resources: See the Respect Life Week [curriculum](#) resources for further resources if helpful.

Activities:

- Challenge the youth to reach out to a person in their lives, maybe a classmate, or another student in their school or parish that seems like he or she may be struggling with building meaningful peer friendship relationships. Encourage the students to initiate and have a conversation with a person they wouldn't normally talk to, and ask them to share about their experience next time you meet.
- Plan an upcoming community service project with your youth group to visit the elderly in a nursing home, feed the homeless, help teach children, help children with special needs, help pregnant mothers and babies. Help someone who needs a friend! There are many opportunities to help right in your neighborhood.

Future Involvement:

- If you or someone you know is struggling with loneliness, and are Catholic, strive yourself and encourage and invite others to receive Jesus in the Eucharist as often as possible. Share this video from Fr. Mike Schmitz entitled ["You're Worth Dying for Right Now"](#).
- You may find the USCCB's project [Communities of Salt and Light](#) ([video](#)) helpful to learn about more ways to "pray together, reach out together, learn together, act together."

Closing Prayer: Close by praying again with Psalm 23 aloud, and by praying with the song and music video of ["Fear is a Liar"](#) by Zach Williams.