God’s Plan for Companionship

Jesus insists that the little children be allowed to come to him.

◆ When the disciples try to keep small children from “bothering” Jesus, Jesus indignantly insists that the little children come to him.
◆ Today’s story is a wonderful message to young children who might sometimes hear the dispiriting message of “Don’t bother me” from the people in their daily lives.
◆ In today’s core session, children celebrate Jesus’ whole-hearted welcome of them into his life.

Question of the Week
Where do we find the kind of love or inter-relationship Jesus describes?

Core Session
◆ Getting Started
◆ Gospel Story: Let the Children Come
◆ Clay Children (clay, plastic knives, craft sticks)
◆ Praying Together

Enrichment
◆ Discover the Good News
◆ Singing Together
◆ Sorting Game
◆ Art: Chagall’s Vision of the Artist’s Family
◆ Info: Looking at a Work of Art
◆ Info: Young Children and the Gospel
◆ Info: Where You’ll Find Everything Else

Helps for Catechists
◆ More about Today’s Scriptures
◆ Reflection
◆ The Scriptures and the Catechism
◆ The World of the Bible: Marriage and Divorce
**Getting Started** (5-10 minutes)

Play Come Over, Come Over, a variation of Red Rover, to prepare children for today’s story. Ask the children to gather along one wall. Sit across from them on the other wall.

Ask a volunteer to say “yes” or “no” when you ask, “Can the children come over?” (If you have an adult helper, ask that helper to say “no” two or three times before saying “yes.”)

When the volunteer says, “Yes!” hold out your arms and say, “Come over!” Let all the children come at once. Let the children decide whether or not to receive a quick hug.

Ask the children to play the game again, using children to take the two leading parts: the person who asks, “Can the children come over?” and the volunteer who says “yes” or “no.”

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

Let the Children Come

“Jesus is coming,” one child called to another. “Let’s go play with him!” The other children heard. All the children came running to play with Jesus.

Some of Jesus’ friends tried to stop them. “Jesus is too busy,” they said. “Jesus can’t play.”

Jesus heard his friends. “Don’t say that to the children!” Jesus said. “You let all the children come to me. Never stop the children from coming to me!”

Jesus took the children into his arms. Jesus hugged them and played with them. Jesus loved to be with children! And children loved to play with Jesus.

**Clay Children** (5-15 minutes)

Children make simple clay figures to surround a figure of Jesus. Distribute clay to the children. Invite them to make clay figures of children who want to play with Jesus. (Ask one volunteer to make a figure of Jesus.)

Show the children how to use plastic knives or craft sticks to “cut” the clay or to mark with features such as eyes or mouths.

Ask a volunteer to place the clay figure of Jesus in the center of a table. Ask the other children to place their figures around the figure of Jesus. Affirm that Jesus welcomed all the children who came to him.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Stand in a circle with the children. Walk around the circle, gently touching one child at a time on the shoulders as you say, “Jesus loves (child’s name).” Help the children to respond, “Thank you, Jesus, for (child’s name).” Continue for every child in the room.

Then pray:
- Jesus, thank you for welcoming each one of us.
  Amen.

**Note:** Distribute this week’s *At Home with the Good News* to children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)

Page 1 of today’s Discover the Good News offers a shortened version of today’s gospel story, which could be used as a story review in the session, if you wish.

On page 2 of Discover, you’ll find a poem titled Friends.

Page 2 also includes a To Parents note for families to use at home.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)

From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Season of Harvest” (songbook p. 4, also available as an MP3)
◆ “God’s Creation” (songbook p. 7)
◆ “The Last Will Be First” (songbook p. 14, also available as an MP3)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Sorting Game (10-15 minutes)

Children play a sorting game designed to underscore two facts:
◆ God makes all of us friends.
◆ We are all different.

Explain:
◆ God made each one of us. God makes us all friends. But did God make us all alike? (Invite children to elaborate on their answers: we have different clothes, bodies and hair colors; we like different food and games, etc.)
◆ Let’s see how God made the friends in this room.

Ask the children to stand together. Ask the children that God made differently (according to the game directions below) to remain standing. The other children sit down.

Give a series of directions, so that at the end of each direction several children sit down. Continue until only one child remains standing.

Emphasize how that child is special: God made him or her different from everyone else. Repeat so that each child experiences being chosen as a unique creation of God.

Sample directions:
◆ God made friends with black shoes.
◆ God made friends with curly hair.
◆ God made friends with names that begin with the letter T.

Art (10-15 minutes)

Vision of the Artist’s Family

Use the attached painting by the artist Marc Chagall to inspire children’s responses.

Talk with the children about what they see in the picture. Ask:
◆ What do they like to look at?
◆ What would they like to touch?

You can also invite the children to find crayons that match the colors they see in the picture.

Explain that Jesus was as happy to be with children as the painter was to be with his family. Ask one volunteer to use bright crayons to draw a picture of Jesus in the middle of a sheet of poster board.

Ask the other children to use bright crayons to draw pictures of themselves all around Jesus. Children can add pictures of people, animals or things they love, too.

Help the children talk about their finished poster.

Note: To learn more about Marc Chagall visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Chagall.
Looking at a Work of Art

To enrich the way you see and talk about works of art, try asking yourself these questions about today's work by Chagall. Then try asking yourself these same questions about a child's work of art.

Lines: What lines do you see? small, large? straight, curved? vertical, horizontal, diagonal? regular or irregular? soft or bold? How do they vary from one part of the work to another?

Colors: What colors do you see? bright or muted? cool or warm? dark or light? How do they vary from one part of the work to another?

Values: What values do you see? What parts of the picture are dark? medium? light? Are there accents? What value do they have? Against what background?

Shapes: What shapes do you see? Are they realistic or abstract? geometric or natural? regular or irregular? broad or detailed? soft or sharp? curved or angular? Are there figures you can name?

Textures: What textural elements do you perceive? Are there any variations in real texture? in perceived texture? Are there areas that appear rough, smooth, dimpled, bumpy, plush, grainy? Is the overall feeling flat or textured?

Space: What spaces do you see? Is there a foreground, background, middle ground? What do you see in each? Is there an appearance of depth or does the work seem two-dimensional?

Movement: What movement do you see? Where does your eye go first? in the work as a whole? in parts of the work? in objects shown in the work? Are there rhythms in the work that you can describe?

Reactions: What personal reactions do you have to the work? What thoughts or emotions do you perceive in yourself? What in the work draws your attention? What questions would you have for the artist?

Young Children and the Gospel

In today's gospel, Jesus expresses his concern for human families, ending by opening his arms to the children who long to be with him. This story of Jesus' embrace of the children may be the most important gospel story for children to hear in a faith formation setting. In everyday language, Jesus' message echoes the language of the late Mister Rogers, whose television ministry to children was marked by the phrase, “I like you just the way you are.”

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

- Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled More about Today's Scriptures.
  - Directions for helping the children make Dish Gardens in honor of our first parents.
  - A copy of today's Gospel Story which can be distributed or e-mailed to children and their families.
  - A copy of today's At Home with the Good News to print or to e-mail to children and their families.
  - Chagall's Vision of the Artist's Family, used in today's Art activity.

- Open your Fall-B Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  - Information on Fall-B's Models of the Faith.
  - A printable article titled Learning through the Visual Arts.
  - A printable article titled Learning through Music.
  - A PowerPoint presentation for catechists titled Why Use the Arts?
  - An article for catechists exploring the seasons of The Church Year.
  - A handout for parents titled Sharing God's Word at Home, which could be printed and distributed or e-mailed.
  - The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings explore the richness of interdependence. The reading from Genesis describes the complementary nature of man and woman, as God originally intended it at creation. The author of Hebrews explains the relationship of Jesus to God and to God’s creation, and of Jesus to humanity. In today’s gospel, Jesus answers a question regarding marriage and divorce by pointing out the importance of doing what God wants in relationships.

**Genesis 2:18-24**

This account of the creation of woman is taken from the second (2:4-24) of the two stories in Genesis. Humankind is introduced as social by nature (2:18). The Hebrew word used for “man,” adam, is a collective, not individual, term and so includes both maleness and femaleness. The phrase “a deep sleep” (v. 21) usually indicates a state in which God sends someone an unsought vision or message. Unlike the creation of all other beings, woman was not created from the earth but from the original man (adam), showing equality and identity.

Although the woman’s creation is subsequent to the man’s, it is not thereby subordinate. While the word helper today has connotations of assistant or subordinate, the Hebrew word is also used of God’s Spirit and depicts the woman as an enabler, one who completes and facilitates the smooth functioning of the human community and is a partner in all the work the community is called to do. The recognition of woman as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23) affirms a relationship of kinship and quality.

**Hebrews 2:9-11**

Today’s reading begins a seven-week series of readings from the letter to the Hebrews. Though some thought Paul wrote it, the early Church did not agree on this, and few scripture scholars today consider Paul to be the author. The author stresses that Jesus is unique, the supreme representative of God. He is the fullness of God, and in his work, he is the expression of God.

Earlier in the letter (2:6-8), the author quotes from Psalm 8 to demonstrate God’s plan for humanity. But instead of having “all things under their feet,” humans are “held in slavery by the fear of death” (2:15). Jesus enters into solidarity with us—becoming our Brother, experiencing our suffering—so that he might set us free to join the family of God.

This new relationship is possible because of the Son’s total identification with a humanity subject to temptation, suffering and death. He himself became “perfect through sufferings” (v. 10)—not morally perfect, since he was already that, but perfectly complete. Through his obedience (10:5-10), he achieved access to God’s presence for humanity.

**Mark 10:2-16**

Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce is revealed in the context of controversy. The Mosaic regulation (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) assumes that the practice of divorce is initiated by the husband. The “certificate of dismissal” (v. 4) was intended to protect the wife by freeing her to remarry.

Jesus’ surprising answer transforms the question from what is legal to what is right. He quotes from both creation stories (Genesis 1:27; 2:24) to reestablish God’s original intention for marriage. The words “Let no one separate” (v. 9) refer more to the husband, the agent of divorce in Jewish law, than to a judicial authority. The kingdom calls for a return to the kind of relationships created before the fall, for obedience to the Creator’s will rather than to a law necessitated by sin.

The adult parties involved in divorce are not the only victims of such a system. In verses 13-16, Jesus embraces the most vulnerable members of a society in which children always suffered most from famine, war or social disintegration. Jesus’ teaching about the relationship of the kingdom of God to the child focuses the disciples’ attention on those qualities—humility, submission, honesty and openness—that are necessary in a healthy relation to God.
Reflection

Where in today’s society do we find the kind of healthy interdependence Jesus describes? There may be different configurations, but the same love. A priest presiding at a wedding makes a habit of inviting the couple to turn around and face the assembly. There, they see many different faces of love looking back: married people, single people, gay and lesbian people, divorced and remarried people, widowed people, partners, a whole variety of faces.

The faces and descriptors may have changed, but human beings are still as dependent on each other as they were in the Genesis story Jesus cites. They still yearn to belong to each other with the kind of fidelity Jesus describes. Resilient, they learn from their mistakes and try to move on when love has died.

Furthermore, they honor the ideal Jesus holds up: the protection of the small and vulnerable. And if two dads adopt two hard-to-place children, is it our place to judge them? The gospel moves us into mystery, where familiar mental constructs and labels lose their rigidity. Instead, we can celebrate the marvelous world of love in which we are blessed to live.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today’s readings remind us of the importance of Christian marriage in a world where almost half of all first marriages break down. Our sacramental marriages must become signs of God’s faithful relationship with humanity (CCC, #1601–24). We have been created for community with God and with one another (CCC, #355–84). How different would our relationships with others be if we recognized each other as children of God (CCC, #39–43, #238–42, #370, #2779–93)?

The World of the Bible

Marriage and Divorce

We often misread the biblical meaning of marriage because marriage then was very different from today. Marriages were arranged by families, whose primary purpose was increasing the family’s status or wealth in the community and secondly the continuation of the family through children. People did not necessarily marry for love nor was there an emotional intertwining of lives as is normal today.

Divorce is the dissolution of a marriage. Its particular form and meaning are directly related to the cultural customs of marriage. Since marriage in biblical times was primarily a compact between families without a high component of emotional attachment between husband and wife, dissolving a marriage did not mean so much the untangling of years of emotional commitment as today but rather the untangling of family alliances.