

GRADE EIGHT

PERSONAL GROWTH, PART II: THE HUMAN COMMUNITY



*Developing relationships with others and God
is essential to becoming our true selves.*

OBJECTIVES

- To help the young adolescent understand the elements which are essential to developing positive relationships.
- To help the young adolescent understand that true community is built on honest, loving and respectful relationships.

I. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout our lives we develop relationships with many people. To all our relationships – with God, with family, with others – we bring ourselves. Our experiences in these relationships enable us to discover who we are and how we relate to others. The various relationships we have throughout our lives, even the difficult, hurtful or disappointing ones, can be a source of growth because of God’s grace.¹ [1936, 1946, 1996-97]

A. Created as Relational Beings

The Book of Genesis reveals that God created us to be in relationship with God and with one another. Our seeking and needing relationships flows from our very nature as created by God. [357, 1829, 1879]

Created in the image of God, who is a Trinity of persons, we are called to mirror in our own relationships the relationship of love among the divine persons. [355, 1702, 1878, 1890, 2205]

In Baptism we are made a new creation in Christ. Our relationships with God and others are transformed and raised to a new level by grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes possible for us to love as Jesus taught us. [1265-66, 1694-95, 1709, 1997, 1999-2000]

B. Love: The Cornerstone of All Relationships

Before his passion and death, Jesus said to his disciples, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

One of our most basic human needs is to love and be loved. When we seek to form relationships, we are trying to fulfill this need. [1826-27, 1829]

All genuine love comes from God. “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God in them.” (1 John 4:16). [218-21, 257]

In order to love others and let others love us, we must love ourselves. Learning to love ourselves begins with the realization that God loved us first. Indeed, if God did not love us, we would not even exist. Awareness of God’s particular love for each of us leads us to appreciate that our life is sacred and we are precious in God’s sight. This awareness enables us to seek self-knowledge honestly and courageously. Self-knowledge, in turn, can help us to understand and accept ourselves as we are, even with our limitations and weaknesses. [294, 310-11, 357]

By itself, however, self-love is not enough. We are called to love others. In every stage of our lives, God gives us the grace to reach out beyond ourselves and our own concerns and to love others. However, different kinds of love are appropriate to different kinds of relationships. [1604, 1823, 1825, 1889, 2196]

- *Family Love* is shared by family members, including that of a parent for a child, a child for a parent, spouses for each other, and siblings for each other. [2227-28]
- *Friendship* is the deep, tender affection which exists between friends. Friendship includes shared interests as well as mutual trust and enjoyment of one another’s company. [2347]

¹ Difficult or hurtful experiences do not obligate one to endure bullying, abuse, or other harmful treatment from others.

- *Eros* is passionate human love which can exist between a man and a woman. *Eros* always seeks union and thus includes sexual love. [1604, 2331, 2360]
- *Agape* is a conscious choice to will the good of another. It is not a feeling. This Christian love treats all with kindness no matter what they may have done to us, no matter whether we like them or they like us. This is the love that the Holy Spirit enables us to have for others. [1935, 1939]

During our lifetime we will probably experience these different kinds of love through our various relationships. Some of our relationships may well involve more than one kind of love.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Read and reflect with the young people on 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Tell them this passage describes how God calls us to love one another.

- Have the young people rewrite verses 4 through 7 of the passage, and in place of the word “love” in each verse, have them substitute the name of someone they know whom the description fits.
- Invite them to consider what the phrase, “to endure,” means in the scripture passage.
- Invite the young people to reflect again on verses 4 through 7 and, in place of the word “love” in each verse, have them substitute their own name wherever the description fits.

Ask the young people to share what they have learned from this experience. Remind them of the early Christians and the love they had for one another. Conclude with the following prayer:

*Gracious God, may your Son, Jesus Christ, help us to grow in his way of love.
Help us to understand how others should be treated and how we should behave.
Give us the grace to love as Jesus did. Amen.*

II. THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Through our interactions with others, we can come to know ourselves better. We come to new insights as we struggle to express our thoughts and feelings. [1879-80]

As we listen to others, we grow in our knowledge of them as well. Our relationships with others widen our experience and can enrich our lives. [1931, 1936-37, 1944, 1946]

Through our relationships with others we make a contribution to the world in which we live. With others we strive to contribute to the common good and build a more just, loving and peaceful society. [1906-09, 1939-41]

Through our relationships with others, we can also come to know God better. [40, 54]

- The gifts and goodness of each person reflect something of the Creator who called that person into being. [41, 48]
- The Gospels promise us that when we relate in a loving way to those who are poor, weak, suffering or in need, we will see the face of God in them. [2443-44, 2463]

Relationships founded on justice, love and mutual respect also help to build up the Church, the body of Christ. [798, 2045-46]

- We, the Church, are called into relationship with one another by God in Christ. The Church is like a family, striving to love and encourage one another. [541-42, 775]
- Through our relationships in the Church we give witness to the world that God is in our midst: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) [738, 767, 2044]

Through our relationships we help to build the kingdom of God, supporting one another in faith, hope and love here on earth as we look forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises in heaven. [1821, 2046, 2818]

III. FAMILY AND FRIENDS IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

A. The Family in the Plan of God

It is God’s will that human life be brought into the world through the human community of the family. Christ himself was born and grew up in the heart of a human family. Our primary understanding of love and relationships comes to us through our experience of family. [531, 533, 2201-03, 2207]

A man and a woman, united by marriage, together with their children, form a family. [NB: The catechist/teacher should discuss the topic of family with pastoral sensitivity toward the actual circumstances of the young people. (CF 1649-51)] [2202]

The family is the most basic unit of society. It deserves to be respected and protected by laws and governments. [2202, 2210-11]

The family is recognized as a basic unit within the Church as well. Through their love, prayer, care for one another and acts of service and witness, the Catholic Christian family is considered to be “the domestic Church.” [2204-06]

As Catholic Christians, we understand that family relationships are characterized by rights and obligations which stem from the natural law, the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ Law of Love, and the teachings of the Church. [2214-17, 2221-29]

- Parents have a sacred duty to respect their children as children of God and as human persons. They are responsible for their children’s moral and spiritual formation and physical well-being, and for providing a home in which love, forgiveness, respect and service are the rule. [2221-30]
- Children have a sacred duty to respect, honor and obey their parents. They also contribute to the harmony of family life by treating their brothers and sisters with patience and kindness. [2214-19]

Our relationship with God is our most important relationship. But the fourth commandment makes it clear that, after God, we should honor our parents and guardians, whom God has given us. [2197, 2232, 2248]

B. Our Experience of Family

It is God’s design that our parents and guardians instill in us the values that will help us live as faithful Catholics. During adolescence, our relationship with our parents is in the process of change. We want to be recognized as maturing individuals, yet we also need and depend on our parents.

At the same time, our parents may also be struggling with our changes. While they desire to help us mature and become more independent and responsible, they also want to protect and help us.

Our relationships with brothers and sisters also change as we grow. By sharing our thoughts, feelings and interests with one another, we develop a deeper respect for and friendship with each individual in our family.

C. Friendship in the Plan of God

Friendship is a gift from God and can be a great blessing. “A friend loves at all times.” (Proverbs 17:17) [374, 1939]

Jesus used the image of friendship to describe the relationship of trust and sharing that he wishes to have with us. “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:15) [1972, 2347]

D. Our Experience of Friendship

During adolescence we find that friends play an increasingly important role in our lives. Our choice of friends can influence us greatly; we may well value their opinions more than those of anyone else. We sometimes outgrow the friends of our childhood; our interests change and we find ourselves choosing new friends who share our newfound interests and have similar capabilities and values.

At this time in our lives, we often develop a keen sense of loyalty to our peer group and its interests. Although we are seeking to assert our independence from our family, we may actually be transferring our dependence from our family to the peer group.

We will go to great lengths to remain part of the group. We are tempted to define ourselves by who our friends are. However, we need to discover and value who we are apart from our friends. We are beloved of God in our uniqueness, with distinct gifts and talents to treasure and share. [356-58]

By accepting ourselves we become better able to be friends with others. [2340, 2347]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Lead the group in the following reflection on relationships in their lives:

- Think of the people who were most important to you when you were six years old.
- Think of the people who are most important to you now.
- Think of why they are important to you.
- In a silent prayer, thank God for each of these people and how they have helped you to grow as a closer friend of Jesus.
- How have you responded to their help?

Conclude by proclaiming Philippians 1:9-11.

IV. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND CHURCH

A. Loved by God

God loves each of us individually and personally. It is the love of God that calls each person into being and sustains that person in being. [301, 356]

In the wonder of God's original creation, our first parents, Adam and Eve, had an immediate knowledge of God's creative and sustaining love. God walked in intimacy with them in the garden and called them friends. [374-6]

However, because of The Fall (Genesis 3:1-19), the human race became confused and lost sight of this love, becoming estranged from God and from one another. [379, 389-400, 416]

Yet, God continues to seek out each and every one of us, to restore that relationship of love which alone can fulfill the deepest longing of the human heart. [410, 421]

In the fullness of time, God sent Jesus to reveal the immeasurable love that God has for each of us. [422, 458]

B. Called into Relationship with God

God invites each of us into the most important relationship of all: a relationship with himself. [27, 44-45, 54]

Our relationship with God is a gift. God freely chooses to be in a relationship with each of us, not because of anything we have done, but purely because God loves us. Even when we sin, God seeks us out and offers us forgiveness and reconciliation. [50-52, 55, 218-19, 1997]

God will never abandon us. Jesus has assured us that in spite of trials and persecutions in this life he is always with us, bringing good out of evil.

Our relationship with God is built through faith and trust. By putting our faith and trust in God day by day, through all the ups and downs of life, our relationship with God grows stronger. [153-55, 163-65]

Our relationship with the Triune God is mediated by Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. "It is God the only Son, ever at the Father's side, who has revealed him." (John 1:18). Jesus is our way to the Father. [65, 425-26, 457-58]

Our relationship with God deepens and grows in the Church. As Catholic Christians we believe that through the Church we realize our calling to live in relationship with God. The Church is not optional to our personal faith. She is a mother, without whom we would not have life. [166, 169, 757, 781]

The five precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. [2041]

- You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.²
- You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
- You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.

² One these days, one should rest from works or activities that would prevent one from worship.

- You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
- You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church. [2042-43]

C. Our Experience of God and Church

How we relate to God and the Church changes as we grow.

- As children we usually mirror the faith of our parents. As we leave childhood and move into adolescence, we may experience new awakenings of motivation and fervor in our relationship with Jesus and the Church. [31, 35, 166, 168]
- Our ways of praying may change and develop. We seek ways of communicating with God that reflect who we are today. [28, 2559, 2569]
- As we mature in faith, questions and searching can help us to deepen our relationship with God and with the Church. [30, 32]

Growth in faith always involves searching. Sometimes our searching and our questions may cause us to think we are losing our faith. In reality our questions can be a sign that we are developing a more mature faith. [27, 30, 33]

V. Social Responsibility

As Christians we are called into a relationship of love with the whole human family. This relationship is built on justice and blossoms forth in peace. [1807, 1877, 1906-09, 2304]

- God created all peoples and Christ died and was raised up for the salvation of the whole human race. Out of love for our neighbors, therefore, we are called to reject all forms of racism and ethnic hatred, and to welcome and celebrate the diverse gifts of the human family. [301, 605, 1931, 1935]
- Certain inequalities of gifts and resources exist among people in the human community. They are part of God's plan insofar as they are an invitation to share and to help one another. But sinful inequalities of wealth and power also exist, which keep people in poverty and misery. We must seek to abolish such sinful conditions by helping the poor and working for social justice. [1932, 1936-38, 2448]
- The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers in our world, loving even our enemies. [1825]
 - We are called to work for peace in our world, helping to alleviate the conditions which lead to war, such as economic injustice and unrestrained use of power. We are called to support the efforts of nations to avoid or put an end to war. [2308, 2317]
 - We are called to work for peace in our neighborhood and city, always opposing violence and supporting the peaceful resolution of conflicts. [2302, 2255]
 - We must also avoid and oppose all social situations that lead to violence, such as participation in gangs, cults, and any groups which thrive on divisiveness or hatred. [1931, 2303]
- Reverence for the Creator and recognition of the wonders of the whole created world call us to protect and cherish the earth and to acknowledge our interdependence with all creatures. [339, 344]
- Love for our neighbors around the world and generations yet to come also demands our prudence in using natural resources. As Christians we are called to be good stewards of creation. [2415-18, 2456]

Social responsibility calls for each person to give his or her gifts for the common good in building the kingdom of God. Each person's gifts are needed. [1913-15]

There is a great joy in building the kingdom of God, knowing we are united with many people all over the world in furthering the mission of Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit. [542, 849-52, 863]

VI. CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING³

The seven themes of Catholic social teaching that guide the faithful in building a just world are:

1. **Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** All human life is sacred from the moment of conception to the point of natural death; the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society.
2. **Call to Family, Community, and Participation:** The person is not only sacred but also social. The ways in which society is organized (e.g., economically, politically) directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.
3. **Rights and Responsibilities:** Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.
4. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. We recall the story of the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) which instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.
5. **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:** The economy must serve the people. Work is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected.
6. **Solidarity:** We are reminded to keep in mind that all people of the world are one human family. Despite the violence and conflict that takes place throughout the world, we are each called to be peacemakers and work for justice.
7. **Care for God's Creation:** We show our respect for God, the Creator of all things, by our stewardship of creation. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation.

³ www.bit.ly/7-themes-social-teaching-USCCB

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

- Read The Last Judgment from Matthew 25:31-46 aloud to the group.
- Invite the young people to reflect and share on the following questions:

How can I welcome the outsider or those who are lonely?

How can I feed the hungry?

How can I help my neighbor in need?

How can I be a good steward of creation?

How can I be a peacemaker?

How can I work for social justice?

- Close with the prayer of St. Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,

Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,

Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.