

# **Community-Building Activities**

A horizontal banner with a green, marbled texture, featuring a slight 3D effect with a dark green shadow on the top edge and a lighter green shadow on the bottom edge. It spans across the top of the page, partially overlapping the white background and the light green vertical bar.

## Stand Up

Arrange the participants into pairs. Have the partners sit back to back on the floor.

Ask the partners to link arms and try to stand while keeping their arms interlocked. After one pair has succeeded in standing, have it join with another pair, sit down, link arms, and stand.

Continue combining pairs and then groups until all the participants can stand up as a group.

(This activity is adapted from *Building Community in Youth Groups*, by Denny Rydberg [Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1985], pp. 52–53. Copyright © 1985 by Thom Schultz Publications. All rights reserved. Used with permission.)

## Ha!

Ask the participants to sit in a large circle. Explain that the object of this game is for the participants, without laughing, to pass the word *ha* around the circle.

Designate one participant to begin the game by saying "ha." The person sitting to his or her right must repeat the "ha" and then say another "ha." The third person must say "ha ha" and then give an additional "ha." In this manner the "ha" continues around the circle. The game ends when all the participants, who are trying not to laugh (which will be nearly impossible), have repeated each "ha" that preceded theirs and then added their own "ha."

## **Silent Identification**

Provide each participant with a slip of paper, a pen, and a safety pin. Then ask them to write words or to draw pictures that describe themselves. They should do this silently. Allow about 5 minutes. Then ask the participants to pin their slips of paper on their chests and walk around the room to view one another's papers. Allow about 3 minutes for this step. Then collect the papers and shuffle them. One at a time, hold up each paper and ask the participants to identify the person that paper belongs to.

## Name Anagram

Arrange the participants into teams of four to six. Have one person on each team write each team member's first name across the top of a sheet of paper. Using only those letters, the team must come up with as many words of three letters or more as they can. Determine in advance how much time you want to give them based on the available time in the session plan. The team with the most words wins.

(This activity is adapted from *One-Day Retreats for Senior High Youth*, by Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1997], p. 134. Copyright © 1997 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

## Questions

On slips of paper, write questions selected from the options listed below. Write just one question on each slip of paper. Place the questions in a hat or a box. (If your group is larger than ten, have the participants form teams of six to eight and have a hat or a box and slips of paper for each team.) Have one participant pull out a question and answer it. That participant should then pass the hat to the person on his or her right after answering the question. Continue passing the hat around the group until the allotted time is up or until all the questions have been answered.

- What is one of the most enjoyable times you have spent with your family.
- What are three things that make you angry or frustrated?
- What is one thing that makes you happy?
- If Jesus were here on earth today, what would most distress him?
- If Jesus were here on earth today, what would most delight him?
- Where's one of your favorite places to go with your friends?
- What are two things you would do if you were president?
- What are two secrets for a long-lasting friendship?
- What was the most fun time you had with your friends this past year?
- What is one food you can't stand?
- What are three qualities you want your friends to have?
- What is one thing you could say about death?
- If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?
- Why do you think people go to church?
- My favorite animal is . . .
- I am concerned about . . .
- I get discouraged when . . .
- I feel afraid when I think about . . .
- I feel bored with life when . . .
- My friends and I really have fun when . . .
- Three activities I like to do with my friends are . . .
- A pet peeve of mine is . . .
- When I have free time, I like to . . .
- My favorite television program is . . . because . . .
- My favorite food is . . .
- In school I like to . . .
- Today I feel . . .
- My ideal vacation would be . . .
- My favorite song is . . .
- In ten years I see myself as . . .

(This activity is adapted from *Building Community in Youth Groups*, by Denny Rydberg [Love-land, CO: Group Books, 1985], pp. 67–69. Copyright © 1985 by Thom Schultz Publications. All rights reserved. Used with permission.)

## A Little About Yourself

Choose one of the following questions or statements, and then have the participants introduce themselves by stating their names and their responses to the questions or statements. Select a new question or statement each time you meet with the group.

- What is the loudest noise you've ever heard?
- Name all the places you've lived.
- What is the funniest movie scene you've watched?
- Describe the most extreme weather condition you've been in.
- Where is your favorite place in nature?
- What is your favorite song? (To add some risk, ask the participant to sing a few bars.)
- Describe the most unusual thing that's happened to you.
- What is the best thing a friend ever told you?
- What is the worst chore you've ever had to do?

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## **I'm an Object**

Explain to the participants that the purpose of this activity is to provide them with the opportunity to get acquainted with one another. They will do this by using a nearby object as a vehicle for expressing themselves. Give the young people 5 minutes to search the surrounding area (inside and outside, if appropriate) to find something they feel represents some of their qualities or expresses who they are. Ask them to bring their objects back to the meeting space.

Then invite each participant to show what he or she selected and explain what it represents (for example, "I picked a chair because it is stable and strong, and it supports and comforts others.")

### **Optional Discussion Questions**

- What are some things you learned about the other participants?
- How well do you think the objects they chose express their character?
- Do you think you now know the other participants better?

## Acrostic

An acrostic is an arrangement of words, one to a line, in which certain letters in each line, when looked at in order, spell out a word or a motto. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to one another by using words or phrases that describe themselves to create acrostics of their own names (or nicknames). Have scrap paper and pencils available for those who might need them. Give the participants just a minute or two to create their acrostics. Here are two examples:

<b>D</b> ynamic	<b>T</b> ried and true
<b>I</b> ndependent	<b>O</b> h boy, a boy!
<b>A</b> ble	<b>D</b> iamond in the rough
<b>N</b> o-nonsense	<b>D</b> estined for glory
<b>E</b> nthusiastic	

*Variation.* Have the participants mix up the order of the letters in their names. Then have the rest of the group attempt to figure out each name. Or, to convert this to an affirmation activity, have the participants create acrostics for one another. To do this successfully they must know one another quite well.

(This activity is adapted from *No Supplies Required: Crowdbreakers and Games*, by Dan McGill [Loveland, CO: Group, 1995] p. 15. Copyright © 1995 by Dan McGill. All rights reserved. Used with permission.)

## Interpretation

This is a quick activity to show how everyone reacts differently to the same thing. Each participant should have a pen or pencil and a piece of paper. Tell them you will say ten words, one at a time. After you say each word, they should write down a word or short phrase about that word.

Use abstract words such as *patriotism, faith, education, trust, honesty, responsibility, attitude, honor, and love*.

If the group is small, have everyone share her or his answers with the whole group. Otherwise, form the participants into small groups of four.

## Weather Report

This activity works well when asking strangers to introduce themselves to one another. In addition to having the participants state their names, have them also report on two or three of the following topics. Tell the participants that every answer they give must be from personal experience. Here are the suggested topics:

- the hottest temperature they've experienced
- the coldest temperature they've experienced
- the heaviest snowfall they've seen
- the worst windstorm they've experienced
- the closest they've been to a tornado or hurricane
- the densest fog they've witnessed
- the most beautiful sunset they've seen
- the strangest weather they've experienced

(This activity is adapted from *No Supplies Required: Crowdbreakers and Games*, by Dan McGill [Loveland, CO: Group, 1995] p. 23. Copyright © 1995 by Dan McGill. All rights reserved. Used with permission.)

## Common Matches

This game is designed for groups of sixteen or fewer. If your group is larger, either create additional common pairs or assign some of the following pairs to more than one couple. If you have an uneven number of participants, join the activity yourself or ask another leader to do so.

Before the game, write each of the following words on a separate index card:

- |         |        |        |          |
|---------|--------|--------|----------|
| • Adam  | • Eve  | • cats | • dogs   |
| • east  | • west | • up   | • down   |
| • ham   | • eggs | • over | • under  |
| • sweet | • sour | • salt | • pepper |

Give each participant one index card. Make sure each person or thing named on a card has a match—for example, Adam and Eve or ham and eggs.

When you are ready, invite the participants to mingle to find their "match." When they find that person, have them introduce themselves to each other and wait for further instructions.

After everyone has found their match, give each pair a piece of paper and a pencil. Tell them they will have 3 minutes to find out and write down items they have in common with their partner (they cannot use obvious things like two arms, two eyes). They should come up with as many items as possible.

After 3 minutes, have each pair share with the rest of the group one item (preferably the most unusual) they have in common.

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## When I Was . . .

Ask the participants to sit in a circle. The first person in the circle begins by saying, "When I was zero, I . . ." and completes the sentence with something that happened to him or her at that age. For example, that person might say, "I was born." Continue with the next person, who takes the next age and who might say, for example, "When I was one, I started to talk." The participants can tell a funny story about something that happened to them at that age instead of just a sentence. When the participants are younger than the age mentioned, they can say "When I am . . ."

## Fortunately or Unfortunately

Gather the participants in a circle. Create a simple sentence starter related to the theme of the session you are about to begin, to an event that is about to happen in school, or to any other topic you wish. Tell the participants you are going to begin a story. Explain that you will then randomly select a person in the group and ask her or him to build on what you said by offering just one sentence that begins with "Fortunately . . ." The person to his or her left then adds one more line to the story, this time beginning with "Unfortunately . . ." The story can progress until you choose to end it.

You might want to offer a simple example like this, in your own words:

- I will say, "When I left my house tonight to come to this session, I went into the garage and got into my car." Then I will pick someone who might say, "Fortunately, I left in plenty of time to get to the session." The person next to the person I picked might then say, "Unfortunately, I forgot to put on my shoes." And so on. The story continues until everyone in the group has added at least one line. Or, if the group is quite small, you might continue for a second and even third round. The results are often hilarious.

## Fortune Cookies

Buy a bag of fortune cookies, one with considerably more cookies than you have participants to avoid duplicates or to repeat the activity if you wish. Gather your group in a circle or, if you have more than fifteen participants, into circles of ten or so participants each. Distribute the cookies.

When everyone has a cookie, explain that the participant whose birthday is closest to that day's date will break open his or her cookie. That person will then give his or her name and read the fortune inside the cookie. But that's not all. At the end of the fortune, the participant will add a comment that includes a sentence stem of the leader's choice, preferably one related to the program or that particular session theme.

For example, the sentence stem you propose might be ". . . because God always wants me to . . ." or "ever since my catechist asked me to . . ." or ". . . because being confirmed means . . ." Try the activity a couple of times on your own to get a sense of how to set it up for your group. Consider keeping the bag of fortune cookies on hand so that you can incorporate the activity at any time with little preparation.

## What's Up with That?

Gather the participants in a circle. If the group is larger than ten or so, you might want to break it into smaller groups. In the middle of the group, place any item you wish—an item from your home or from the room you are in—it makes little difference. Beginning with the participant whose feet are the smallest, each young person proposes a use for the item other than the use for which it was designed. Encourage the participants to be as creative—and perhaps as goofy—as they can. If they have not met before or do not yet know one another's names, ask the participants to begin by stating their names and then offering their suggestions.

Let's say, for example, you put a book in the middle of the group. One of the participants might look at it and respond, "My name is Tom, and I think the book would make a nice skating rink for ants."

## Four Questions

Develop four questions around a topic you choose. Invite each participant to answer the first question and elaborate on it. Then invite each participant to answer the second question. Continue the process until all the participants have answered all four questions. See how the following series develops the subject area of "warmth":

- Where were you living between age seven and twelve, and what were the winters like?
- When you were in middle school, what was your favorite sweater like?
- What was the center of warmth in your life when you were a child? (This can be a place in the house, a time of year, or a person.)
- When did God become a "warm" person to you and how did it happen?

## The Perfect Vacation

Have the participants form small groups of six or so. Then invite the young people to individually think and dream of their perfect vacation. Use the following questions to help them develop their ideal vacations:

- Where would you go?
- What transportation would you use?
- Who would you visit along the way?
- What would you do with your free time?
- What would you bring home with you?

Now have the members of each small group share their ideal vacations with the other members of the group, and then ask them to combine ideas to create the ideal group vacation.

## Imaginative Questionnaire

In groups of six or so, invite the participants to describe their spiritual condition right now in one of the following ways:

- Choose a color and explain.
- Choose a weather condition and explain.
- Choose a number from one to ten.

Regather the participants and invite a sampling of responses from them.

## Pop Quiz

To quickly learn details about the participants that can be used as the basis for a sharing experience, one of the best approaches is the pop quiz. Here are possible models:

### Fire Drill

Invite the participants to write ten items they would grab and take with them if their house caught on fire. They can assume that family members and pets are safe. After a minute or so, invite the participants to form groups of four and share with the other members of their small group the three most important items on each list and why those items are the most important. Consider a variation of this idea by using other scenarios, such as taking a trip into space or a going on a camping trip.

### Family Fun Times

Invite the participants to quickly write nine or ten things their family enjoys doing together, such as camping, playing ball, eating popcorn, and so forth. Ask them to note, beside each activity, any of the following symbols that apply to that activity:

- \$—if it requires more than \$10
- T—if it requires traveling more than 100 miles
- O—if it brings your family closer together

When the participants are finished, invite them to circle their three favorite activities. Ask them to share, either in small groups or in the large group, details about the activities they circled.

## Artistic Discussion Starters

### Magazine Collage

Provide the participants with several pictorial magazines or daily newspapers. Ask that each young person tear out titles, pictures, words, slogans, and want ads that portray him or her in some way. Offer examples such as the following:

- the concerns in your life at the moment
- the important things in your world
- your hopes and dreams for the world

Then provide each participant with a sheet of construction paper or newsprint and glue. Invite them to create a collage by pasting their tear-outs to the newsprint.

Once the participants have created their collages, invite them to form small groups of six or so and share their creations with one another, explaining why they chose the words and images they did.

### Clay or Play-Doh

Provide each participant with a piece of clay or Play-Doh about the size of a golf ball. Ask them to make an object that symbolizes themselves in some way, such as a box, an animal, or a free-form piece of sculpture. Then invite the participants to form groups of six or so and explain to the others in their group why they created the symbol.

### Wire Sculpture

Provide the participants with baling wire (available from farm-supply stores) or pipe cleaners and invite them to each make a sculpture that describes their spiritual life at the moment. Then divide the participants into small groups of six or so for sharing about the meaning behind their sculptures.

## Mystery Person

Arrange the participants into small groups of six or so. Provide each participant with a blank slip of paper and a pen. Then ask them to answer the following directives:

- Name a color that reveals your personality.
- Name an animal that portrays the way you see yourself.
- Name a song that illustrates your philosophy of life.

Ask the participants to fold the slips of paper and place them in a bowl in the center of their small group. Invite one person in each group to take out a slip of paper, read the clues aloud to their small group, and then invite the rest of the small-group members to try to guess which group member the clues describe. Finally, the mystery person confesses and explains the last answer. Continue the process until all the slips have been read.

## Roll of the Die

Before the session, write on a sheet of newsprint six questions that will invite discussion about the session topic or that will help the participants get to know one another. Be sure to number each question. Hang the newsprint on the wall. Arrange the participants into small groups of eight or so. Give each group a die. Invite one person in each small group to roll the die and share his or her response to the corresponding question with the other members. Several rounds can be played. If a person rolls the same number more than once, he or she simply rolls again for a new number.

### Variation

Give each participant two "choice" tokens (small pieces of paper with the word "choice" on them, or pennies, or poker chips). If a person rolls the number for a question she or he does not wish to answer, that person can instead play a "choice" token and choose any other question to answer.

## Lottery Draw

Assign each participant a lottery number consisting of three digits. Then call out a number from zero to 9, and ask a question. Every person in the group who has that number appearing in any of the three digits of their lottery ticket shares their responses with the group. When sharing is finished, call out another number and continue in the same manner.

## Four Corners

Gather the participants into the center of the room, and explain to them that you will read a choice statement that includes four options for responses they can make. Each person must choose one of the responses and then go to the corner you indicated. After everyone has gathered in the appropriate corners, each person introduces herself or himself to one other person who is standing in the same area. You then will read a question and the partners will share their responses with each other. After a brief time for sharing, the participants will gather again in the center of the room, and you will read a different choice statement, also including four options for responses. Several rounds can be facilitated, with different choice statements and questions each time. Here are examples of choice statements and sharing questions:

- Choice for dessert: ice cream, apple pie, cheese cake, or fudge brownie
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Choice for a free Saturday: hiking, watching a movie, reading a book, or wandering the mall
- Whom would you like to interview from history, and what one question would you ask?
- Choice of season for year-round (assume no school): spring, summer, winter, or fall
- If you could go on a free ten-day trip for two, where would you go, whom would you take?
- Choice of career: medicine, education, law, or other
- If your picture and "words to live by" were to appear on the cover of *TIME* magazine, what would the words say?

## **Autograph Hunts**

Make copies of the handout 1CB, "Autograph Hunt," one for each participant. Add creative categories to the handout that might be unique to your group of participants. Provide each young person with an autograph sheet and a pen or pencil. Instruct the participants to collect as many signatures as they can in the allotted time. No one is allowed to autograph more than one item per sheet. The first one to fill up his or her sheet, or the person with the most signatures at the end of the allotted time, is the winner. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

# Autograph Hunt

1. I used mouthwash this morning.

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2. I have two bathrooms in my house.

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3. I can speak another language somewhat fluently.

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4. I have lived in four or more cities, towns, or communities in my life.

---

5. I have been yelled at for spending too much time in the bathroom.

---

6. I have been in the cockpit of an airplane.

---

7. I like opera and/or classical music.

---

8. I like to paint or draw.

---

9. I have been to Hawaii.

---

10. Find someone who uses your brand of toothpaste.

---

11. I have used an outhouse.

---

12. I have never been to a drive-in movie.

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13. When I went waterskiing, I got up the first time.

---

14. I know what *charisma* means.

---

15. I prefer reading to watching television.

---

## Who's on My Back?

For this activity, gather blank nametags, a container to place them in, and markers. As the participants arrive, have them fill out a nametag and put it into the container. Be sure they write their first *and* last names on the nametags. Have the participants form a circle (if the group is too large for one circle, have the participants form multiple circles, and make sure each circle has one nametag container) and tell them you are going to pass around the container with the nametags in it. Each participant is to take one nametag out of the container, look at it, and make sure it is *not* her or his own. The names on the tags are not to be shared with anyone.

Now instruct the participants to place the nametags they drew from the container on the back of the person to their right, making sure that the name they place on that person's back is not that person's. Tell them that their task now is to determine who is on their back. The only way they can do this is to ask people questions that can be answered with only yes or no. For example, they can walk up to a person and ask, "Do you know the person on my back?" or "Does the person on my back have red hair?" or "Is the person male?" or "Is the person on my back wearing blue?" After a participant determines whose name is on his or her back, he or she should walk up to that person and ask, "Are you on my back?" If the response is yes, that person should take the nametag off the back of the person who asked the question and put it on. The questioner then puts his or her hands on the shoulders of the person he or she just found and follows that person around the room as the human chain of questioners grows and grows.

## Confusions

You will need one copy of handout 2CB, "Christmas Confusion," for each participant. Handout 2CB is a sample you can use, but feel free to be creative. Design your own tasks. A good rule of thumb is seven to ten tasks. Design the tasks around the idiosyncrasies of your community or base them on a holiday theme. Give each participant a copy of the confusion sheet and a pen or pencil and tell the participants they have about 5 minutes to complete their sheets.

# Christmas Confusion

- Find seven other people to recite in unison with you the names of Santa's reindeer. Have them write their initials here:
- Find five other people and, with them, turn into a human Christmas tree. Then sing a chorus of "O Christmas Tree." Have them write their initials here:
- Find two other people and together sing the first verse of "We Three Kings." Have them write their initials here:
- Find three other people and together demonstrate, on the floor, how to make snow angels. Have them write their initials here:
- Find a partner and together make up a reindeer game and play it. Get someone else to watch. Have them write their initials here:
- You are the ghost of Christmas past. Ask another participant to remember a favorite Christmas memory and share it with you. Have the person write his or her initials here:
- Find three other people, make a sleigh, get in the sleigh, and sing a chorus of "Jingle Bells" while you go dashing through the snow. Have them write their initials here:

## Lenten Word Scramble

Make copies of the word scramble worksheet provided on handout 3CB, "Lenten Word Scramble," one for every two participants. Form the group into teams of two and provide each team with a scramble sheet and a pen or pencil. Instruct the pairs to work together on the scramble. The answer key to the scramble is as follows:

### People:

USSJE = JESUS  
TEEPR = PETER  
LISCIDEPS = DISCIPLES  
SAUDJ = JUDAS  
RAMY = MARY

### Places:

SEDRET = DESERT  
YVALARC = CALVARY  
MASURJELE = JERUSALEM  
DERANG = GARDEN

### Actions:

TAFS = FAST  
NAEPENC = PENANCE  
ISN = SIN  
INLITACCEINORO = RECONCILIATION  
RARYPE = PRAYER  
VECESRI = SERVICE  
TRICUHEAS = EUCHARIST  
VESIGROFESN = FORGIVENESS

### Events:

TAREES = EASTER  
HDATE = DEATH  
RSERONIRUTEC = RESURRECTION  
OODG AFDYIR = GOOD FRIDAY  
TALS PUSREP = LAST SUPPER  
ETLN = LENT  
OYLH YHTUASRD = HOLY THURSDAY

### Symbols:

MALSP = PALMS  
EHASS = ASHES  
SROCS = CROSS

# Lenten Word Scramble

## People

USSJE                    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 TEEPR                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 LISCIDEPS            \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 SAUDJ                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 RAMY                  \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## Places

SEDRET                \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 YVALARC              \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 MASURJELE           \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 DERANG               \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## Actions

TAFS                    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 NAEPENC              \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 ISN                     \_ \_ \_ \_  
 INLITACCEINORO     \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 RARYPE                \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 VECESRI               \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 TRICUHEAS            \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 VESIGROFESN        \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## Events

TAREES                \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 HDATE                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 RSERONIRUTEC        \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 OODG AFDYIR          \_ \_ \_ \_ \_     \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 TALS PUSREP           \_ \_ \_ \_ \_     \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 ETLN                    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 OYLH YHTUASRD       \_ \_ \_ \_ \_     \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## Symbols

MALSP                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 EHASS                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 SROCS                 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

## 60-Second Interview

On a sheet of newsprint, list the following categories: name, family, school, free-time activities and interests, travel experiences, likes and dislikes, something I've always wanted to do. Post the newsprint somewhere in the room. (Or create a "Reporters Notes" handout that lists those categories.) Ask the participants to find a partner (someone they do not know, or do not know well) and sit down next to her or him. Tell all the participants that they will have 60 seconds to "interview" their partners. They may use the posted categories as a guide but can also ask other questions. Allow 1 minute for the interviews, and then have the participants introduce their partners, one at a time, to the group.

## Forced Choice

Invite the participants to stand in the center of the room. Say something like this:

- I'm going to read pairs of words. Those of you who think the first word best describes you, stand on this side of the room [indicate which side of the room], and those of you who think the second word best describes you, stand on that side of the room. You may not remain neutral; you must choose one of the two words.

Begin each round with the question "Which of the following choices best describes you?" Then choose one of the sets of pairs in the following list to call out. Remind the participants that they are not to choose the thing they *like* the best but rather the thing that *describes* them best. After each "forced choice," have the participants take turns telling the other people on their side of the room why that word best describes them. Or, if the group is evenly split, have the participants meet individually with members of the opposite side and explain their reasons to one another.

### Categories

- |                                       |                               |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • parakeet or eagle                   | • sleeping bag or waterbed    |
| • crocodile or frog                   | • fall or spring              |
| • grandfather clock or sports watch   | • noon or midnight            |
| • rap music or elevator music         | • football or badminton       |
| • tuba or violin                      | • television or book          |
| • Washington, D.C., or Hollywood      | • diet soda or the real stuff |
| • New York City or Small Town, U.S.A. | • preparation or luck         |
| • plan ahead or spur of the moment    | • dog or cat                  |
| • snapshot or videotape               | • business or pleasure        |
| • happy or sad                        | • snowflake or hailstone      |
| • David or Goliath                    | • Mickey Mouse or Goofy       |
| • river or lake                       | • camping tent or hotel suite |

After ten or so forced choices, form groups of no more than six to discuss the following questions:

- Which choices were easiest for you? Which were most difficult?
- What did you discover about the group through this activity?
- How did you feel when you were in the smaller group? How is that like the way you feel when you stand up for something that only a few people in your peer group agree with?
- How is being a Catholic like being in the smaller group? the larger group?
- How did you feel when you were in the larger group? How is that like the way you feel when you're in the majority among your peers?

## What Happened?

On 3-by-5-inch cards, write events that happen in teens' lives, one per card. Here are some examples::

- I got accepted to college.
- I did not (or did) get asked to the big dance.
- I'm having trouble with friends pressuring me to take drugs.
- I'm going to Florida on spring break.

Make enough cards so that everyone in the group will have one. Gather the participants and tape one of these significant events on each person's back. Say something like this:

- The object of this activity is to determine what's written on the card taped to your back. You may ask each person in the group one yes-or-no question to determine the event listed on your card, but don't be obvious in giving away other people's events. Mingle with the group and treat one another as if each person is really dealing with the event listed on his or her back. For example, if someone's card states, "My boyfriend (or girlfriend) just broke up with me," you'll want to comfort that person.

When all the young people have correctly guessed their events, gather in circles of no more than seven and have them tell whether the events listed on their cards have actually happened to them. Then have the young people take turns answering the following questions in their groups.

- What was difficult about this activity?
- How did you feel as you tried to guess your event? When in everyday life have you felt similar feelings?
- How did group members react to the event taped on your back? Is that the way you would want to be treated if the event actually happened to you? Why or why not?
- How can we apply the way God treats us in tough times to the way we treat others?

## Who's Your Neighbor?

Gather the young people in a circle. Ask a participant one of the following questions about the person seated to her or his right. The participant must answer the question as he or she thinks that person would answer it. (The point of this activity is not to have the participant necessarily know the right answer, but to have fun guessing.) Once the participant has responded, allow the person to his or her right to give the correct answer. Encourage the person to explain in detail the correct answer. Continue twice around the circle in this manner, asking different questions of each individual.

- In what sport does he or she most enjoy participating?
- What was the best vacation he or she ever had?
- What is his or her favorite television show?
- Given an afternoon totally unplanned, what would he or she do?
- What musical instruments can he or she play?
- Is he or she a "morning" person or an "evening" person?
- What is his or her favorite summer activity?
- What sort of items does he or she collect?
- If he or she could visit any spot in the world, what would that be?
- Who is his or her favorite teacher? Why?
- What does he or she like about himself or herself?
- Of what is he or she proud? Why?
- What would he or she do with a million dollars?
- What is something that really bores him or her?
- What gives him or her the most satisfaction?
- If he or she could be anybody (past or present), who would that be?
- What is something that he or she is looking forward to doing in the next six months?
- What present would he or she like to receive?
- What does his or her parent do for a living?
- Of what is he or she afraid?

## If I Should Die

Gather the participants in a circle. Go around the circle and ask each young person to answer the first question. Repeat this process for each of the five following questions.

- If you were to die tonight, what would have been
  - a highlight of your life?
  - the person who influenced you the most?
  - the best compliment you ever received?
  - a low point in your life?
  - one of the nicest things someone ever did for you?

Allow the others to ask questions to clarify or expand each individual's response.

## Affirmation Awards

This community builder can be done with participants have spent some time together. It doesn't have to be an extended time; a daylong retreat would be enough time. Gather ribbon, scissors, thin cardboard, glue, gold seals, crayons, markers, and other craft items. Form the participants into two groups, and have each group choose a facilitator. The facilitators should record the names of the people in their groups and then exchange lists. Tell the young people they will be creating awards for each individual in the other group. The awards must be affirming and focus on positive qualities. Offensive humor, put-downs, and personal inside jokes are not allowed.

Have each group go into a different room to brainstorm award ideas for each individual in the other group. After the groups have completed their lists of names, distribute the craft materials so that they can begin making the awards. While they are making the awards, ask the groups to decide how they are going to present the awards.

Reunite the groups and have each group present its awards one at a time, explaining why each award was created the way it was.

## Nominations

This community builder can be done with participants who have spent some time together. Form the young people into small groups of no more than ten. Distribute to each participant a pencil or pen and a copy of handout 4CB, "Nomination Form." Proclaim 1 Cor. 12:12–27. Allow a few moments for the participants to think about the Scripture reading. Then invite each participant to complete the handout by nominating someone in his or her small group to one of the body parts noted on the handout. Then invite discussion among the small-group members as to why they chose to place each group member in the category they did.

# Nomination Form

Please write your nominee's name next to the body part.

- **Eye** has the ability to perceive, understands what is happening around him or her.

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- **Ear** listens in a caring manner; people come to him or her with their problems.

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- **Mouth** is able to articulate and express well, has good speaking ability.

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- **Head** coordinates others, administrates, and organizes.

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- **Foot** encourages action, gets a group moving toward completing the tasks at hand.

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- **Hand** gives physical assistance and help, serves others with joy.

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- **Heart** has compassion and affection for others, is empathetic.

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- **Funny Bone** is humorous, fun loving, and jovial.

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- **Brain** is a contemplative thinker, finds the solution to problems.

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- **Skin** holds the group together, is a peacemaker.

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## Wall of Stars

Cover a wall with newsprint and have tempera paint handy. Have each young person put her or his hand in the tempera paint and make a handprint somewhere on the wall and autograph it. Be sure to leave blank spaces, so that new youth participants can add their handprints and autographs to the wall. This activity can also be used as a way of identifying the gifts of individuals and the need for sharing in community. Lead the youth through a reflection on their giftedness in God's eyes, and then ask the participants to write one of their gifts on the palm of their handprint. Or, after a discussion of sharing in community, each person can write one thing she or he has to offer the community, such as patience, listening, care, or humor). If the young people do this activity at the beginning of ninth grade and each year thereafter, they enjoy comparing those first prints over the years to the size of their hands as they grow!

## Gumdrop Tower

For this activity, gather one bag of gumdrops, one box of wooden toothpicks, and one bag of uncooked spaghetti.

Arrange the participants into teams of four to six. Give each team a supply of gumdrops, toothpicks, and spaghetti. Keep extras handy if needed.

Tell the teams they have 10 minutes to build a tower as high as they possibly can. The tower must be able to stand without human support. To make the activity more difficult, don't allow the participants to talk to one another.

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## **Dress the Mummy**

Arrange the participants into teams of four to six. Ask one person on each team to be the mummy, and give each team two rolls of toilet paper. Ask the team members to circle the mummy and pass the toilet paper to one another while wrapping the mummy in it. Give the teams about 5 minutes to complete this task. Then invite the leaders to decide which team has created the best mummy design.

## Labels

This game is a form of charades. Prepare labels using the suggestions below or use your own. If your group is larger than ten, form small groups of six to eight. Place a label on each participant's back (adhesive nametags work well). Explain that one at a time, each participant is to show his or her back to the other members of the group. Those members then have to act out what's on that participant's back until he or she guesses correctly. The pattern continues until everyone has guessed his or her assigned identity.

Some suggestions for labels are horse, doctor, baseball, guitar, surfboard, monkey, skateboard, kitten, Fourth of July, merry-go-round, dentist, alligator, football, piano, roller coaster, bicycle, dog, basketball, Thanksgiving, secretary, drums, car, tennis, fish, Easter, trumpet, train, Saint Patrick's Day, ping-pong, vacuum cleaner, elephant, teapot, toaster, clock, blender, spaghetti, cook, soccer, tuba, soup, rabbit, volleyball, harp, carpenter, pizza, Valentine's Day, hamburger, dragon, popcorn, hockey, water, Easter egg, Christmas tree, bear, computer, clown, principal, God, church, Bible, giraffe, mechanic, Santa Claus, pancakes, Nintendo.

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## Gum Art

Give each participant a piece of bubble gum, a toothpick, and an index card. Allow the participants 10 minutes to chew their gum, place it on the index cards, and then, using only the toothpicks as tools, design something from the gum. The person with the best and most creative design is the winner. If the group is large, have several categories of winners. A few ideas are "most ingenious," "most creative," and "What is that?"

## Candy-Color Connections

For this activity, gather a source of upbeat music, candy that comes in a variety of colors (such as Starburst candy), and a fun prize. Select four different colors of candy, and give one piece of candy to each participant; be sure to distribute equal numbers of each color. Each color designates a team. If the group is small, use two colors. Have the young people form teams according to the candy colors. Invite them to eat their candy.

Explain that you will give each team a task and that each team will try to be the first to complete its task. The team that completes its task first wins a point for that round, and the team that accumulates the most points by the end of the activity wins the game. Play upbeat music while the teams are working. Assign one of the following tasks to each team:

Have team members line up according to . . .

- birth month (beginning with January)
- initial of first name (alphabetically)
- number of buttons on clothing (fewest to most)
- initial of last name (alphabetically)
- hair length (shortest to longest)
- number of letters in first name (fewest to most)
- telephone number (in numerical order)

Assign teams different tasks from the list for subsequent rounds, and continue as long as you'd like.

Award a fun prize to the winning team.

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## Stop-n-Speak

For this activity have some music CDs or tapes on hand as well as a CD player or a tape player. This activity requires twelve or more participants. If necessary, include an adult leader to ensure an even number of participants. Form two groups of equal numbers. Have one group stand in a circle and face out. Instruct the other group to form a larger circle around the first group and face in. Explain that each person in the outer circle must face one person in the inner circle.

Play music and have the circles move—the outside circle should move clockwise, and the inside circle counterclockwise. When the music stops, have each participant pair up with the person standing opposite him or her. Tell the pairs to talk with each other about one topic you give them from this list:

- full name
- number of siblings
- birth order
- best friend
- an embarrassing moment
- best vacation
- a prayer request

Repeat the process, with the participants moving and talking with new partners about each new topic. Create additional topics if you wish.

After the participants have discussed the last topic, have everyone sit in one large circle. Ask the participants to share with the whole group something they learned about another person.

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## Heads Up, Thumbs Up

Choose four or five participants to be the thumbs-down players in this activity. The rest of the participants will be the thumbs-up players, each with eyes closed and one arm extended with the thumb up. Each thumbs-down player selects one thumbs-up player and turns that person's thumb down. Because the person each selects is important, the thumbs-down players must make sure that no one is peeking. After all the thumbs-down players have selected someone, the players whose thumbs have been turned down try to guess who turned their thumbs down. If they guess correctly, they switch places with that person. Play as many rounds as you wish. On each round, try to encourage the thumbs-down players to select thumbs that haven't been turned down so that all the participants feel like they are part of the game.

## Alphabet Search

Have the participants form small groups of six to eight. Ask each group to list objects they are wearing. The object of the game is to compile a list of at least twenty-six words, with the first letter of each word representing a different letter of the alphabet. The first group to get all twenty-six letters wins.

## Pulse

Invite the participants to stand or to sit in a circle with you and hold hands. Begin by squeezing the hand of the person on your left. This is called the "pulse," and it should be passed to the left around the circle until it returns to you. Keep track of how much time it took for the "pulse" to return to you. At first, the pulse will take up to a half-minute to make its way around the circle, but with lots of practice and intense concentration, the time can be reduced. Play this game several times during a long event.

# Quieting and Focusing Activities

## Integrated Breathing

Instruct the participants to stand with their feet parallel. Have them join their hands with their fingers interlaced and their arms hanging in front of them. Then ask them to begin inhaling slowly, raising their arms above their heads. They then should bring their hands to the back of their necks and push them together, making a stretch on top of their chest. Finally, have them exhale slowly, returning their arms to the original position. Emphasize the importance of keeping their bodies and arms relaxed and concentrating on breathing. Repeat at least three times.

## Ball Toss

Have the participants stand and form a circle. They should all face the inside of the circle so that they are looking at each other. Toss a foam ball or beanbag to a participant and ask him or her to share a response to the question "What is the most important concept you have learned so far?" Continue the activity until everyone has caught the ball at least once and explained an important concept of the materials that have been covered in this session or a previous session.

## **Human Humming Machine**

The goal of this activity is to get all the participants humming. Begin by raising an object such as a piece of paper. Tell the participants they should begin with a quiet hum and the higher you raise the object, the louder they should hum. Also tell them that when you lower the object, their humming should get softer. If you drop the object, everybody has to be silent. Use this activity to quiet a group.

# Acknowledgments

## Community-Building Activities

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