

# The Faith First Learning Design

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The *Faith First Legacy Edition* is concerned with Catholic faith, religion, and belief. Its goal is to transform children and bring them to a deeper relationship with God through an exposition of their Catholic heritage—its beliefs, moral code, rituals and practices, and life of prayer. It offers a systematic process of faith reflection that helps young people make important connections between their increasing knowledge of the Catholic tradition and their daily lives.

*Faith First* incorporates the unique spiral approach to learning outlined in the previous article on pages 8 and 9. It helps children think about faith and life in increasingly complex ways as they grow. It encourages them to remember the events of their own lives and of the Church's heritage of faith and apply them to the choices they make in the future. *Faith First* stimulates imagination by constantly inviting young people to imagine the world that God intends and to work as partners with God in making God's reign a reality.

Take a look at the following features of the *Faith First* learning design, and see how they can be utilized together to have a transforming effect on the lives of the children in your school.

## Opening Lesson

The opening lesson sets the stage for the coming year of faith growth. It begins with an activity to help the teacher and the students get acquainted with one another's interests and life experiences. The two-page activity that follows forecasts the grade-level content and allows teachers to see what the students already know about some of the key concepts that will be covered.

## Unit Structure

Each student text is divided into four units—We Believe, We Worship, We Live, We Pray—treating the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Each year the students encounter lessons of increasing complexity based on the same timeless truths of Catholic belief. Each unit begins with a unit opener that allows the teacher to activate the children's prior knowledge of the unit content. The unit review at the end of each unit's work concludes the learning module and affords the teacher and the children a quick check of progress in knowledge and thinking before moving on.

## Liturgical Lessons (We Celebrate)

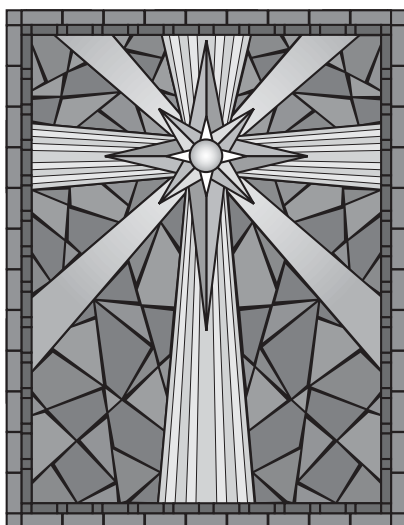
*Faith First* offers additional opportunities each year for children and their families to explore and celebrate the seasons of the Church's year through a section entitled "We Celebrate." These two-page lessons offer background, activities, and prayer experiences that are easily incorporated into the regular weekly lessons. They are a vital part of the *Faith First* learning design.

## Sacred Scripture

Stories or familiar verses from Sacred Scripture are included in every *Faith First* lesson. In addition, each text includes from one to three special Scripture chapters per unit. These unique chapters explore in greater depth an important story or passage from Scripture related to the unit theme. Through a consistent process students will be provided with an in-depth study of over thirty key passages from Sacred Scripture in the eight years of *Faith First*. In each case, the chapter will conclude by encouraging the same life connections and opportunities for prayer as the doctrine chapters in *Faith First*.

## Prayer Experiences

In order to make the signs, symbols, and gestures of the Catholic prayer tradition known and loved (see NDC, 87), *Faith First* concludes each chapter with a prayer experience rooted in the tradition. Over the years, children will be exposed to the many prayer forms of the Catholic Church.



## Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategies in *Faith First* lessons are structured to help children build meaning as teachers guide them through the chapter content. *Faith First* uses a simple, three-step process: Engage, Teach and Apply, and Connect. (Page 104 of this manual offers a summary sheet explaining each of these three elements.) On each of the Teach and Apply pages, teachers begin by focusing children on the day's topic through a Faith Focus question. The learning design then leads them through a consistent process of discovery, reinforcement, and integration. The wraparound teaching plan

provides teachers with a simple path through the content, and teaching tips at the bottom of the guide pages clarify concepts and help the teacher make connections.

## Activities

Each teaching spread in *Faith First* includes an integrating activity. The final pages of the chapter make an explicit connection showing how the Church lives the chapter message and then, through a structured activity, challenges the young people to do the same by answering the question “What difference does faith make?” Students are then challenged to make a faith choice to guide their behavior throughout the next week.

## Reviews and Tests

Each chapter concludes with a one-page chapter review to check understanding and offer the students a chance to express what seemed most significant to them in the week's lessons. Teachers who wish to use the two-page chapter tests in the *Faith First Assessment Tool* booklets may choose to assign the chapter reviews in the student book as a test preparation assignment for homework. The *Assessment Tools* booklet also includes a four-page test for each unit. Both chapter and unit tests include a section called “Living Our Faith” that helps learners internalize their new

knowledge in a way that allows for explanation, empathy, and interpretation. In grades 5–8, each chapter and unit test also includes a special multiple-choice section that models the style of testing used in A.C.R.E. and other standardized diocesan tests.

## Cross-Curricular Connections

*Faith First Legacy Edition* includes a special extension feature at the end of each unit. The opening page of the feature highlights a principle of Catholic Social Teaching and presents a related present-day dilemma. On the next page students choose from among three response projects related to social studies, creative arts, language arts, or math and science. The cross-curricular feature helps students see that religion is related to all facets of life.

## FaithFirst.com

*Faith First's* award-winning Web site offers religion teachers a wealth of resources to reinforce and extend classroom learning. Children can access online chapter reviews and e-mail the results to their teachers. Teachers can download activity worksheets, classroom plays and skits, and liturgical year activities. The site offers an online lesson planning tool that draws together all the resources on the site for each chapter in *Faith First* to help teachers enrich the learning design each week.