

JOAN OF ARC

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- An assortment of props for the ice breaker
- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: MAKE WHAT YOU WILL OF IT

Bring in a series of random objects (chair, coat hanger, shoe, etc.). Clear a “stage” area and have your teens take seats as an audience. Bring out one of the objects to be used as a “prop”. One at a time, the teens must take the object with them to the stage and act out a brief skit that uses the object in an innovative way. The skit only needs to last long enough to show what the prop is supposed to be (typically a few seconds). When your teens have exhausted the possibilities for the first object, pull out the next one.

For example, a chair might be turned sideways and used as a car; it might be placed on one's head and used as an oversized hat; it could be an old-fashioned computer, an oddly shaped cake, a newly discovered animal, etc.

FOR SMALL GROUPS, YOUR TEENS MAY TAKE MANY TURNS PER OBJECT. FOR LARGER GROUPS, YOU MAY NEED TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH PERSON CAN GET ON STAGE SO THAT EVERYONE WHO WANTS A TURN CAN HAVE ONE.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order for service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: WE HAVE LIMITS, GOD DOES NOT

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- Do you like change or is it hard for you? Why?
- In what sorts of situations do you have a hard time imagining that God could bring about change?
- Similarly, are there people that we think God wouldn't be able to use for his purposes? What about *you*?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don't otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *Some people love change and find it energizing. Some people hate change and find it scary. Most people fit somewhere in between. Change means we may have to let go of things that we feel comfortable with, but it also opens up new possibilities. Though we may have a limited capacity to adapt, looking forward with faith and hope can help us to make the most of the changes we encounter.*
- *Your teens may find this question challenging, so this might be a good time to share something as leader. Perhaps you have a hard time imagining that God could intervene in a political process to end a conflict, or bring healing*

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to a sick loved one. Though we know that “with God all things are possible”, we often encounter situations in life where we feel overwhelmed and struggle with an “anemic” faith.

- Again, though we know that God is able to do anything, we are often limited in our own imagination. We might have a hard time imagining that God could really use someone because they are rebellious, young, lacking in experience and talent, etc. But scripture and history remind us that God really can use anyone – perhaps even someone like you.

THE LESSON: FAITH TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

Lessons 13-42 follow a slightly different format from previous lessons. The story of the saint being studied is interspersed with verses from scripture that provide added perspective. You may prefer to read the lesson text aloud together as a group, or ask the teens to read it silently to themselves.

*“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;
 God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”
 (1 Corinthians 1:27)*

Joan was born in 1412, the daughter of a peasant farmer, and grew up in a small village in the north-east of France. She had no formal education and could not read or write, but she was intelligent and virtuous, with a very strong faith. Joan lived at a time when continuous war was being waged between the French and the English over who would rule France – a conflict which had begun in 1337 and would go on to last for more than a hundred years.

When Joan was in her early teens something unusual happened. She began to hear voices, telling her to save the city of Orléans from the English (who at that time controlled much of France), and to see the French heir, Charles VII, crowned. Joan identified the voices as being those of three saintly ambassadors sent from God, and she was determined to do as they asked.

*“If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,
 ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move.”
 (Matthew 17:20)*

It was no easy task for a peasant girl to gain an audience with the French heir to the throne, but Joan was resilient and resourceful. At each stage of her journey she met with people who did not believe her story, but she never wavered in her conviction. She made predictions which came about. She recognized Charles VII, though he met her in disguise. And she was found faultless after enduring a three-week theological examination.

Joan had been set the task of bringing about an end to the siege of Orléans. She was 17 years old at this time, but she held high the banner which she carried into battle, and the troops were inspired by her presence. Under her influence the speech and conduct of the soldiers was checked, and many of them began to spend time in the churches praying. Against the odds, the battle was won and the siege of Orléans was ended, though Joan was injured in the fight. Not long after this Charles VII was crowned.

Joan’s voices had told her that she did not have long to live, and now that she had fulfilled her mission she intended to return home, but she was prevented from doing so. She had become a rallying symbol for the French troops, and they did not want to let her go. But then it happened that Joan was captured. She found

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herself in the hands of the English, who imprisoned her, accused her of heresy, and finally burned her at the stake. In her last moments of life, Joan asked for a cross, which she then held before her, insisting on the divine origin of her voices, and calling out the name of Jesus. She was then only 19 years old.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”
 (Proverbs 3:5,6)*

Many have been unsure as to how to think about Joan’s life and death. The Church came to the conclusion some years after these events had passed that she had been a young woman of faith and courage, who obeyed God in accordance with the understanding that she had, and suffered a great deal as a result. It is for these reasons that she is honoured as a saint.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS” | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, “JOAN OF ARC”.)

Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- In what ways would you consider Joan weak or at a disadvantage?
In what ways was she strong?
- Why do you think people doubted her?
If you were one of Joan’s “doubters”, what would it have taken for you to believe?
- What can we learn from Joan’s example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Joan was young, illiterate, a peasant, and a woman. All of these factors would have put her at a disadvantage and made it unlikely that she would have accomplished what she did. But God does not always choose or use the people we expect him to. Joan was strong in other ways. She was devout in her faith and she was fully committed to obeying what she believed to be God’s plan for her.*
- *People doubted Joan because of all the things that made her “weak”: She was a young, illiterate peasant girl. They also doubted the veracity of the voices that she heard. Besides this, what she proposed seemed preposterous. And yet, these people were ultimately convinced and then saw her “mission impossible” fulfilled.*
- *Joan is a model for us of many things. Her faith and courage were remarkable, as was her determination and willingness to suffer in order to carry out the task which she believed God had set for her. Once elevated to a position of trust, Joan also had the ability to influence others, and this influence was for the better, encouraging the soldiers in faith and good conduct. In the end, as throughout, Joan clung to the cross, knowing to whom she belonged and was returning.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU’LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

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Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Joan that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections, *and* share your reflections and your plan of action with a friend.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

*O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Joan, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.* (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)

CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", the final prayer in the booklet.