



iBelieve Session 1: I believe



Song – I Believe in Jesus by Marc Nelson

I believe in Jesus
I believe He is the Son of God
I believe He died and rose again
I believe He paid for us all

And I believe He is here now
Standing in our midst
Here with the power to heal now
And the grace to forgive

I believe in You, Lord
I believe You are the Son of God
I believe You died and rose again
I believe You paid for us all.

And I believe You are here now
Standing in our midst
Here with the power to heal now
And the grace to forgive

Prayer – Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died and was buried;
He descended into hell;
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
The holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And life everlasting.

Scripture – Hebrews 11:1, 3

“To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It is by faith we understand that the universe was created by God’s word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.”

Activity 1 | Why do you believe something??

The idea of this activity is to get the group thinking about how they know things, and why they believe things. This gives a foundation for exploring the Creed as a statement of our beliefs – not all of the things in it are possible to understand, logical, or ‘provable’, but they are things that we believe as part of our Catholic faith.

Ask the group to stand in the middle of the room. Explain to them that you’re going to read out some statements, and they have to decide whether it is something people ‘know’ to be true, or something people ‘believe’ to be true. If they ‘know’ it, they need to move to the left side of the room, and if they ‘believe’ it, they need to move to the right. If they’re unsure, they can stay in the middle. After everyone has moved, ask a few people why they have moved to that place. You may find that there is sometimes a blurry line between ‘knowing’ and ‘believing’; this is fine and a good chance to explore their answers.

Encourage participants to think about it for themselves, and to not just go where their friends go!

Possible statements (please adapt these and add your own, to suit the group):

- You are currently in the church hall/wherever you are
- Vegetables are good for you
- It’s good to shower every day
- Parents should be obeyed
- The Earth moves around the sun
- God loves us
- etc

Briefly pull out some of the key points – sometimes we know things to be true without direct proof, and sometimes we need to accept things on faith. As we explore the Creed, there will no doubt be moments where you struggle to understand, or question your belief. This is ok, and is all part of the process of developing a better understanding of the Catholic faith.

Activity 2 | Why do you believe something??

Background – The word creed comes from the Latin meaning ‘I believe’. Therefore, a creed is a statement of what we believe, a ‘formula of faith’ according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Both the Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed are very old. Church councils in the fourth century were held to help define and agree on the beliefs of the church. Their role was to preserve, guard and hand down the faith to future generations. The Creeds were agreed at these councils – one of the meetings was held in Nicea, giving its name to the Nicene Creed.

The Apostles’ Creed however, is traditionally supposed to be much older. A long-standing theory is that straight after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they each contributed one line and created what we recognise as the Apostles’ Creed.

Ask the group what they think it means to believe something. Ask if a belief can easily change or if it’s fixed and solid. Ask if they can come up with any examples of a belief.

Explain that we as Catholics, we have a set of beliefs that we all sign up to. We say these beliefs out loud every time we go to Mass when we say the Creed. Explain a little about where the Creeds came from, using the notes above. Say that we’re going to spend a bit of time going back to basics with the Apostles’ Creed.

Print out copies of the Apostles’ Creed, with spaces between each phrase. Cut it up between the lines, and give a set of phrases to each small group. Get them to reassemble the phrases in the right order. You can stop at this point, making sure they’re in the right order and explaining that we’re going to explore the key parts more closely over the coming sessions.

If you choose to go deeper at this stage, give each group a number at random (maybe they can pick scraps of paper out of a bag or something like that). At this point they will have all of the statements of the Creed laid out in front of them. When they are given a number each group will have to find the statement that corresponds to that number and they will have to tell the rest of the group what it means, or what they know about it. This could include key stories from scripture that they associate with it, particular prayers that include it, or just keywords that they think are associated. Reassure them before they start that you don’t expect them to be polished theologians and that whatever they can share about the statement will be interesting and valuable.

Give them 3-4 minutes to prepare what they are going to say and then let everybody listen to each group. Do what you can to create a safe environment so that people don’t feel embarrassed if they don’t know much about their statement. After each group has had their turn the leaders can offer a little bit more information or gently correct the groups, where necessary.

Explain that over the next weeks and months we will be exploring the elements of the Creed more closely, and that once we have completed the sessions, hopefully they will have new insights into the beliefs that they profess, and a stronger sense of faith.

Tool | Guided scripture meditation

It is very important to get the atmosphere exactly right for meditation and to prepare people properly for what they are about to do. You need to be able to use a comfortable space. People will need to lie on their backs, for about 10-15 minutes in stillness and silence, so your room must be carpeted, warm and quiet. It should also be large enough so that the people you have can lie down separately and without touching one another.

Ideally, you should be able to dim the lights (assuming your youth group meets in the evening and it's dark outside - otherwise, don't worry) or otherwise create some soft, chilled-out lighting. Consider candles, and incense.

Background music is also a must. It should be quiet enough so that you can be heard over it as you lead the meditation and it should be something which is smooth (i.e. Doesn't suddenly break out into a dramatic loud part) and soothing.

Having got the room right, you need to properly brief and relax the young people. If there is anybody who you think won't be able to handle it at all, then it may be worth considering an alternative - either for that person or the whole group.

Here is a suggested way to relax and calm the group before beginning:

- Get everybody to lie down on their backs in their own space on the floor.

Make sure that nobody is touching anybody else and that nobody is hidden. Encourage them to split up from the people they might be tempted to be next to. Remember, *it's a completely personal thing, with no communication with others at all.*

It is quite important that young people are lying on their backs rather than on their sides or their fronts. Unless they are on their backs, they will probably need to adjust their position during the meditation.

- Once they are all still and on their backs, tell them that you are going to count down from 15 and that once you reach the end, you will need everybody to be completely still and calm. Remember to speak in a soothing, calm, gentle tone of voice throughout. During the countdown you can start the background music. Start it very gently.
- Tell them to block out all the sounds in the room and to concentrate only on your voice. Explain that you are going to be reading a meditation based on a story from the Gospels. The invitation is to focus on the images that come into their heads and on the questions that are posed.

Once they are calm, quiet and relaxed, read the meditation slowly. Try not to sound like you're reading from a script.

After the meditation, tell the group to stay where they are with their eyes closed. Keep the music going for a few moments. It's not a good idea to snap people quickly out of a meditation, but rather to do something like this:

(leave 5-10 seconds after each)

Keep your eyes closed for a few moments... | ..gently wiggle your fingers and your toes.. | ..and now, slowly, open your eyes.. | ..and in your own time, sit back up.. |
After everyone has sat back up invite the young people to share briefly how they found the experience.

MEDITATION: THE CALMING OF THE STORM

It is a beautiful morning. The sun is shining and it's warm. You can feel the warmth of the sunshine on your face. You are walking down a hillside towards the shore of a lake. At the water's edge you can see a fishing boat with a group of people gathered around it. You move closer to the group and see that it is the Apostles. They are gathered around somebody standing in the boat. You look and see that it's Jesus. Jesus looks over to where you are standing and calls your name, inviting you to come with them. They are going to cross over to the other side of the lake. Climb into the boat with them.

The Apostles cast off from the shore. They pass you a rope and ask you to help them raise the sail. The rope feels rough in your hands and to start with the weight of the sail is heavy. Looking around you at the Apostles faces you can see that they all feel the weight of the sail too, but despite this you can see that they are all very happy, and working together you soon raise the sail.

The boat is now halfway across the lake. Suddenly the wind starts to blow very strongly. You look up and see storm clouds gathering overhead, they close over the sun and it becomes very dark. The apostles have dropped the sail for fear that the strong wind will break the mast, and you are now being cast about at the mercy of the waves. The waves are now higher than the side of the boat, and as they break against it they fill the boat with water and you are in danger of sinking.

Look at the Apostles faces, you can see that they are all very afraid. How does this make you feel? (Pause).

Then you look for Jesus, and see that he is asleep in the stern of the boat with his head on a cushion. His face is very calm and peaceful, how does this make you feel? (Pause).

The Apostles wake Jesus up. You hear them say "Master, do you not care? We are lost!" Then Jesus stands and says to the wind "quiet now!" He says to the waves "Be calm!" Suddenly, the storm stops. The wind drops, the clouds part and the sun shines through. You can feel the warmth of the sun on your face again. The waves grow lower and soon the lake is calm again.

Jesus looks steadily at the Apostles and says "Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?" Look at the apostles faces, you see that they are amazed at what has just happened. Then Jesus looks directly at YOU. He smiles and his voice is gentle. He says "Don't be afraid, have faith!" He motions for you to join him in the stern of the boat. Go and sit with him.

Jesus looks at you steadily and says "Do not be afraid, do not worry. Think instead of the birds. God cares so greatly for the birds of the sky that he feeds them. They have no need to sow or reap. Think of the flowers. God cares so greatly for the flowers of the field, that he clothes them. They have no need to work or spin. YOU my child are worth so much more than the birds or the flowers. God cares so greatly for you that every one of the hairs on your head has been counted!"

Jesus tells you that you do not need to be afraid because he is always with you. He tells you that there will be many stormy times in your life, but have faith in him because throughout the storm his peace will be with you, and that after the storm the sun always comes out. So do not be afraid instead have faith in him, and be at peace. Feel Jesus' peace flow into you as he says these words (Pause).

Take some time to share with Jesus all that is in your heart, all your fears and worries. Tell him all the things that you think are keeping you from fully having complete trust in him (Pause).

The boat has now reached the other side of the lake. The Apostles jump out and pull it ashore. It is time to go. Thank Jesus for your time together and say your goodbyes. As you move away you see a crowd of people start to gather around Jesus. Perhaps they too have come to hear Jesus' message, to 'not be afraid'.

Activity and guided meditation adapted from 'three one', available to download from catholicyouthwork.com