



# DESERT-ED

A Life Night on Lent

## LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

### GOAL FOR THE LIFE NIGHT

The goal for the night is to help the teens understand how the season of Lent calls us out of the garden and into the desert with Christ for a time of preparation and purification. This night will also help the teens experience through the five senses the changes that happen during Lent within the Church.

### LIFE NIGHT AT A GLANCE

This night is a good way to help the teens understand why our Church has this season called Lent. The night begins by breaking the teens up into small groups to make 30-second commercials advertising Lent. The commercials lead into a teaching on our call to desert spirituality specifically during the season of Lent. The teens will break back into small groups to discuss their own Lenten journey. The teens will gather back together in the Church that is set with the Lenten decorations for a reflection using the five senses on the changes and themes in our Church during the season of Lent. The night will end with prayer and giving teens a vial of sand to remind them what the season of Lent means for their lives.

### ENVIRONMENT

The environment for the night will show the contrast of a garden and a desert. Focus the main decorations of the environment at the front of the room. Divide the front of the room in half; one side will be a garden scene and the other will be a desert scene. The goal of the garden side is to make it look as full of life as possible. Have big trees and plants lining the back of the garden with bright, colorful flowers scattered throughout. To add extra effect, add a water feature, running throughout the garden, whether a small fountain or small stream. Among the trees of the garden have a large stone that represents the tomb of Jesus. The stone can be made out of crepe paper and textured to look like a rock. The desert side should be barren and desolate. Rocks, cactus, sand – use anything and everything to convey desert. Have sand covering the ground and a large cross in the middle draped with a purple cloth and crown of thorns.

### GATHER *20 Minutes*

#### WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS (5 min)

Welcome all the teens to the night and introduce the teens at Life Night for the first time.

#### 30 SEC LENT COMMERCIALS (15 min)

Begin by introducing the night and explaining that the season of Lent is not the most popular within the liturgical year. Tell the teens that God and the Pope got together and decided to do a marketing campaign to help restore Lent's popularity. The Pope has asked for the teen's ideas. Break the teens up into small groups with one Core Member in each group. The groups will have 10 minutes to come up with their own 30-second commercial for Lent. The skits should include the typical Lenten things such as no meat on Fridays, giving something up for 40 days and the color purple. Let the teens be as creative as possible with the commercials. Have a few groups present their commercials. If time allows, let all groups present.

#### PROCLAIM *10 minutes*

This talk will help the teens understand that during Lent we are called out, like Christ, into the desert for a time of preparation. It will also look at fasting, prayer and almsgiving as ways to help us prepare for Easter.

#### LENT: GARDEN VS. DESERT

- Begin by asking the teens to give you characteristics of a garden and then a desert.
- How many of you after listing all those characteristics of a desert would rather live in a desert than in a garden?
- Deserts are very unforgiving. They are next to impossible to navigate and can quickly become deadly if you haven't been trained on how to survive. The conditions and weather of a desert are extreme and unpredictable.
- A garden on the other hand is calm, inviting, and sheltered. You could sit by a stream and rest in the coolness of the breeze and get lost in the colors of the flowers and sounds of the birds.

#### LENT: LED OUT TO THE DESERT

- Why would anyone choose to go to the desert if they could just stay in the garden? For the same reason Jesus was led to the desert by the Holy Spirit: preparation and purification.
- Read Matthew 4:1-11

CATECHISM REFERENCES:  
CCC 538-540  
CCC 1160-1169

SCRIPTURES:  
Exodus 12:46  
Numbers 21:8-9  
Zechariah: 12:10  
Matthew 4:1-11

John 18-19  
Romans 6:5-11  
Revelation 1:7

- In preparation for His ministry the Spirit led Jesus out to the desert. Jesus shows us that taking time to be in the desert is just as necessary as our time in the garden. The garden is only half of our spiritual journey.
- If you are like me, you're probably thinking "Thanks but no thanks. I'll stay right here in the garden. It's much easier than the desert... cooler, safer, less risk."
- During the season of Lent, the Church joins with Christ in those 40 days and nights in the desert. She calls us out of the garden to the desert for a time of preparation and purification for Easter; the climax of the Church's celebration and our Christian lives.
- We prepare our hearts and our lives by getting rid of the things like sin, pride or fear that stand in the way of giving ourselves completely to Him. We ask God to purify our hearts through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and works of mercy to make them ready for Christ's Resurrection.

### MAKING THE MOST OF THE DESERT: FASTING, PRAYER AND ALMSGIVING

- The Church gives us three different ways to help us on our journey in the desert: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Let's look at each one.
- *Fasting:* Fasting is abstaining from food or some type of activity or possession as an expression of penance and prayer as well as an expression of our dependence on God. We fast because we have so many other things in our lives that take the place of God and get in the way of us hearing or seeing God in our daily lives. When you are trying to decide what to fast from this Lent really take time to pray about what is keeping you from the Lord. Try and go beyond just chocolate or soda. If you spend hours on the computer or playing video games, fast from those activities during Lent and give that time to God in prayer. Our fasts are not just meant to last 40 days but continue beyond the season. As Catholics, we all are all called to abstain from meat during the Fridays of Lent as well as fast from food on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
- *Prayer:* During Lent we are called to deeper prayer. Often in our prayer lives we get distracted by how busy

we are and forget to make time to pray. Lent gives us the opportunity to refocus our lives by getting rid of the busyness (fasting) and enter more fully into our relationship with God. Lent also helps us realize that we are nothing without God and in desperate need of Him. Lent is a perfect time to start praying the rosary or reading Scripture daily. We can pray by attending Mass during the week, or by learning to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

- *Almsgiving:* Does anyone know what almsgiving is? (Let a few teens answer) Almsgiving means giving assistance to the needy or poor for Christ's sake. Almsgiving is an act of self-sacrifice that does not glorify us, but Christ. During Lent we are called to these acts of service as a way to purify our minds and hearts and focus on the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for each of us on the cross. This kind of charity isn't just for adults; there are things we can do as teens to serve and help the poor. For example, if you choose to fast from Starbucks, you can give the money you would have been spending on over-priced coffee to the St. Vincent DePaul Society or local homeless shelter.

In the end, Lent isn't just about not saying the "A" word or giving up chocolate. Lent is our invitation into deeper relationship with our Lord. Our time in the desert is what will allow us to fully appreciate the garden of Easter.

### BREAK *25 minutes*

#### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (25 min)

Return to the small groups the teens were in for the commercials and discuss the following questions:

1. What is the hardest part about entering fully into Lent?
2. Do you have a hard time holding to your Lenten fasts? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways you can live prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent this year? Have the teens give specific ways they can do each this Lent.

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### SEND 20 Minutes

Gather the teens back together in the church. Recap the night and remind the teens that the desert of Lent is just as necessary for our spiritual journeys as the garden. Although the Spirit leads us into the desert during Lent, the Lord will bring us out. We have the promise of the coolness of the garden, the Resurrection. We are brought out of the desert of Lent into the garden of Easter to celebrate and rejoice, and how much sweeter and more beautiful is the garden when we've really taken time to endure the conditions of the desert.

The Church in her wisdom gives us many different ways to pray through the season of Lent and uses our senses to help us fully enter in. To end the night, spend time praying the senses of Lent. Have a different teen or Core Member present each sense of Lent by asking the Lord to help us enter more fully through that sense. Be creative in the ways that you make each sense come alive for the teens in prayer. Between each prayer have your music minister play the chorus of a song like "Take My Life" by Chris Tomlin or "40 Days" by Matt Maher.

For example:

**Touch:** Have a bowl of ashes on the altar. Explain that we use ashes to remind ourselves of our mortality and sinfulness. Invite the teens to come forward and touch the ashes.

*Lord, you mark us with ashes to remind us who we are. We pray that this Lent, when marked by a sign of our mortality you would give us the strength to feel your hand guiding our lives to our ultimate end.*

**Sound:** Read Isaiah 40:3-5. Ask the teens to be silent for a few moments and listen for the voice of God speaking to them in this passage.

*Lord, we long to sing your praises. As we listen to your Word this Lent, help us enter into the mystery of your Passion. Help prepare us by your Word so that we may be fully ready to sing your glory at your Resurrection.*

**Sight:** Have one teen bring forward a large purple cloth and cover the altar with it. Explain that the color purple is one of repentance but also royalty.

*Lord, during this season, we are reminded of the need of repentance in the colors of Lent. As we seek to follow you more completely, move our hearts to see your face and ask for forgiveness. Help us see others as you do, especially in the poor. We look to the cross as your example of great love and reconciliation.*

**Smell:** In a small bowl, burn several pieces of paper. Ask the teens to close their eyes and smell the smoke and fire.

*Lord, you call us out into the desert for a time of purification. Just as fire purifies gold, we ask you to purify our hearts and remove any stain of sin separating us from you. Rid us of all imperfections. Send down the fire of your Holy Spirit to be our guide and protector.*

**Taste:** Place several small crucifixes on the altar and ask the teens to come forward and venerate the cross by kissing it.

*Lord, on the cross you gave your life as a sacrifice that we might live abundantly. We offer back to you a sacrifice this Lent. Help us make our fasting a sacrifice of praise. We offer our bodies back to you. Give us the strength to endure the temptations to be lazy in our sacrifices as we seek to unite more fully with the sacrifice of the cross.*

End the night with invoking the intercession of Mary for our Lenten journey. Close with the Hail Mary and Ave Maria.

As the teens leave, give each one a vial of sand to remind them of the need to prepare fully for Easter. Ask them to place it somewhere they will see it everyday during Lent.