

Piety and Patriotism Go Together



High School-Aged Children

This packet includes a number of activities to help your children understand and appreciate the uniquely American ideas in the Declaration of Independence. Many of these activities build on the ones in the Middle School packet.

☆☆☆ Activity 1 ☆☆☆

WHERE DO OUR RIGHTS COME FROM?

Context for This Activity

The U.S. national government and all U.S. state governments are based on the foundation that all people have certain natural rights by virtue of their humanity. Governments do not grant us our natural rights; rather, governments protect rights that we already have. The Declaration of Independence (like other Enlightenment-era documents) says our rights come from an abstract “Creator,” and refers to “Nature’s God.” But the Catholic Church teaches very clearly that our rights flow from our human dignity that comes from being made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, every single human being is equal in rights and dignity. This is a basic restatement of the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as the Declaration of Independence!

To Do with Your Children

Share the key points from the information above, in your own words.

Read aloud, or listen to, a short selection from the Declaration of Independence, available by scanning the QR code or visiting [SophiaOnline.org/DOI-Preamble](https://www.sophiaonline.org/DOI-Preamble): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”



Ask your children to put this phrase in their own words. If needed, define the following words:

- To be **endowed** with something means to have it naturally or to be given it as a gift.
- **Inalienable** rights are rights that can never be taken away. (We cannot be alienated from them.)
- The **pursuit** of something is the attempt to find or capture it.

Share and discuss your children’s ideas together. Then, ask: from where did the Founding Fathers believe we get our rights? *They are the gift of our Creator, or God.*



Provide for your children a clear definition of “rights” — rights are those things to which we have a just claim. In other words, things we can claim are rightly ours. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a “right” to anything that is sinful or harmful to others.

Consider extending with a discussion on things that are commonly considered “rights” but may or may not fulfill the definition as stated above.

☆☆☆ Activity 2 ☆☆☆

ALL HUMANS REALLY DO HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS

Context for This Activity

The American commitment to equality, beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is a cherished part of our national identity as Americans. This idea is also at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945). Since being created in the image and likeness of God gives us human dignity, and our natural rights flow from our human dignity, all people have the same (or an equality of) natural rights — rights that come from our human nature!

To Do with Your Children

Go over the key points from the context above, then scan the QR codes to read aloud or listen to the Declaration of Independence and *Catechism* quotes.

Then ask a series of “what if” questions, designed to lead your children to the understanding that the statement all human beings have equal rights and dignity really means what it says. For example:

- What if someone is not as smart as other people? Does he still have equal rights? *Yes.*
- What if someone is not as popular? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes.*
- What if someone is not as good-looking? Does he still have equal rights? *Yes.*
- What if someone is a different religion, or race, or ethnicity? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes.*
- What if someone is not as healthy as other people? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that euthanasia, or killing someone because she is very ill, is wrong.*
- What if someone is not as young as other people? Does he still have equal rights? *Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that euthanasia, or killing someone because he is elderly and infirm, is wrong.*
- What if someone is not as grown-up as other people? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that abortion, the killing of a baby growing in her mother’s womb, is wrong.*
- Offer your own additional examples as needed.



☆☆☆ Activity 3 ☆☆☆

THE CIVIC IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION

Context for This Activity

The Founding Fathers knew that religion and morality were indispensable for a free and happy society. A 1799 Maryland Supreme Court ruling summarizes this view: “Religion is of general and public concern, and on its support depend, in great measure, the peace and good order of government, the safety and happiness of the people. By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed upon the same equal footing, and are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty.”

In other words, the court was saying that peace and order depend on religion; all Christian religions were to be respected and no single domination was to be favored by the government. Rhode Island took this a step further and permitted religious liberty for all religions, even non-Christian ones.

To Do with Your Children

Go over the key points above, and scan the QR code or visit [SophiaOnline.org/1799-MD-SC](https://www.sophiaonline.org/1799-MD-SC) to read or listen to the quote from the court ruling.

You might wish to point out how the vast majority of religious conflicts in early America were among the various sects of Christianity, and not between people of completely different religions (which may be how we tend to think of religious conflict nowadays).

List some of the ways religion, and especially Christianity, promotes peace, safety, and happiness. Christians are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. Make the point that, when we regard all our fellow human beings as made in the image and likeness of God, it is clear how we must treat them with respect. Of course, individual persons do not always live up to this ideal, but it is the ideal we strive for nonetheless.

Have your children draw a map of their town, plotting the locations and names of different churches and houses of worship. Encourage them to make note of the number of different faiths practiced in their local community. For each different type of faith practiced in your town, as well as every major world religion, do some basic research to learn their core beliefs. Then role-play a conversation with your children where you pretend to be a member of that faith. Discuss how to find common ground between Christianity and that religion, and coexist in a peaceful society.

Work together with your children to come up with a list of virtues a citizen must practice in a religiously-diverse society. For example: charity, respect, kindness, and so forth.



☆☆☆ Activity 4 ☆☆☆

AND HE SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER

Context for This Activity

The Prophet Isaiah describes the Kingdom of God, which Christ will usher in in all of its fullness at the end of time: “to bring all men the definitive order of justice, love and peace” (CCC 672). The world began with Original Justice, and time will end in the perfect justice, love, and peace of Christ.

To Do with Your Children

Read aloud from a Bible Isaiah 11:1-9. Point out that the prophet is speaking here in the future tense: these amazing things will happen in the future. What are we to make of that?

Explain that the *Catechism* helps us understand that this passage describes the Kingdom of God, which Christ will usher in in all of its fullness at the end of time: “to bring all men the definitive order of justice, love and peace” (CCC 672).

Play a video of the Hallelujah chorus of Handel’s Messiah. Videos are available at SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahChorus or SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahFlashMob.



Note: This type of music may be unfamiliar to your children. If that is the case, play it once and allow them to express any reactions, from bewilderment to amusement to dislike. After hearing them out, ask them to listen to it now a second time, putting aside any personal reactions, and this time paying attention to the sheer jubilation, awe, and praise the song expresses.

Ask your children to think of one thing they can do to grow the Kingdom of God in their own hearts. Think of one way you can do the same, and use it as an example if they are having trouble. For each way of growing the Kingdom of God, find a relevant Bible passage. Pray a decade of the Rosary while meditating on each of these Bible passages in turn.

Pray as a family the prayer of Pope St. John XXIII:



Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace, who are yourself our peace and reconciliation, who so often said, “Peace to you,” grant us peace. Make all men and women witnesses of truth, justice, and brotherly love. Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace.

Enlighten our rulers that they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace. May all peoples of the earth become as brothers and sisters. May longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always over us all.