

# WHERE Do I Fit In?



Because Jesus became one of us, we know we are never alone. Not only is God present with us every step of the way, but as members of a faith community, we also help and support one another.



by Annie Azrak

## I Am Not Alone

Last summer my parents packed their bags and left for a two-week vacation. This was the first time that I was left alone to watch over my sister, who is an adult with special needs. On the very night my parents left for their vacation, a tremendous rainstorm engulfed our area. I found myself driving through deep, fast-moving water. I had to stop the car. When I called my sister at her apartment, she spoke through panicked sobs. "My apartment is flooding, and I don't know what to do!" she cried. "I am so scared!"

I was overcome with worry and questions. I thought, "How do I get to my sister?" I was stranded in my car, miles from her, and I knew that she needed my help and assurance. I felt completely helpless and alone. I closed my eyes and asked, "God, what do you want me to do?" Just then my phone rang. The caller was my good friend, and she volunteered to take my sister to her home until I could arrive. I felt relieved.

I remembered a joke about a man caught in a flood. As the water lapped at his knees, a boat came by. "Get in!" the crew shouted. "No, thanks," said the man. "God will save me." As the water reached his waist, a helicopter hovered overhead and threw him a rope. "Don't bother," the man shouted. "God will save me any minute now." Finally, the water swallowed him, and he drowned. At the gates of Heaven, he asked Saint Peter, "Why didn't God save me?" Saint Peter replied, "He sent you a boat and a helicopter! Were you expecting a chariot of fire?" Help had been there the whole time—the man just didn't take it.

**ANNIE AZRAK** is a premedical student who hopes to treat those who do not have access to medical care.

I used to think that it was up to either me or God to fix problems. But when I reflect on that rainstorm, I see that God does not want me to face every challenge alone. Neither does he want me to wait around, expecting a miracle. God answered my prayer when the phone rang. My experience taught me that God wants us to turn to him for help, but he wants us to turn to one another too.

Reflect

### Living for Others

The writer understood her experience when she remembered a joke about a man in a flood. Tell a short anecdote or make up a joke of your own that illustrates how God provides people to turn to for help. Write your notes on the lines below. Then write your anecdote or joke on another sheet of paper.

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# WHERE Do I Fit In?



by Jim Cruise

We are all created by God with a distinct and wonderful purpose, ultimately to live with him forever. But because of the effects of Original Sin, we can be easily distracted from this goal and follow the temptations that lead us away from God and others. Through the Church and the sacraments, God continually offers us the grace to reorient our lives to him and to a loving relationship with others in our lives. This is the true path he calls us to.

## Answered Prayers

When I was in seventh grade, I wanted to make the basketball team in the worst way. All of my friends were trying out, and I wanted to be with them. For months I begged my dad for a basketball hoop. He finally gave in, and I practiced hard on the lopsided cement driveway. Almost every day I was dribbling, shooting, and passing the ball with friends.

Team tryouts lasted for three days. I missed the first two days because I was sick in bed with a fever. I had only one more chance to make the team, but I wasn't the only one. A kid named Benny also missed the first two days.

I did my best in the tryout, but Benny was a much better player than I was. Afterward, I walked home because I wanted time to pray. I begged God to let me make the team. I said Our Fathers and Hail Marys all the way home. When I reached home, I went to my bedroom and started reading the Bible. I had never read the Bible on my own before. I was hoping for a miracle.

The next day we gathered in the gym to hear Coach Wagner announce who had made the team. My friends whooped and cheered as each of their names was called. Benny's name was called. Mine wasn't. I didn't make the team. I was devastated. I didn't understand. I had prayed so hard.

Coach Wagner took me aside afterward and encouraged me. He urged me to consider another

**JIM CRUISE, the "Spoon Man," is a Catholic evangelist who performs his musical interactive comedy routine all over the country.**

sport and suggested the swim team. I took his advice and discovered I really liked swimming. I also made a good friend named Bill who became my best friend. Many years later I was the best man at his wedding.

In retrospect, not making the basketball team wasn't the catastrophe I thought it was. My prayers *were* answered—just not in the way I wanted them to be. Instead, God led me to a lifelong friend and the discovery of a new talent.

Reflect

### Becoming You

Describe how God answered a prayer in either an expected or unexpected way. Copy the boxes below on a separate sheet of paper. Then add your ideas to each one.

<b>My Prayer</b>
↓
<b>What Happened</b>
↓
<b>How God Answered My Prayer</b>

# WHERE Do I Fit In?



It can be hard to make a place for yourself in the world. You may not always be welcomed, and sometimes you might be altogether rejected. A sense of belonging can make all the difference. God always makes a welcoming place for you.



by Cara Mia Cicciarelli

## I Belong Wherever I Am

Every summer our family spent a vacation at Pennellwood, a 100-year-old family camp in the woods of southwestern Michigan. The camp was a hot, sticky, mosquito-filled place—and wonderful. Pennellwood consisted of 20 screened-in cabins, a lodge for meals, a few activity centers, and a “lake” that was really a dammed-up river. Pennellwood was closed off from the outside world, a little nook of unchanging charm from decade to decade. We would trade in our cell phones and video games for fishing poles and outdoor games of Capture the Flag. We forgot about TV shows that went unwatched and text messages that went unanswered. Young people wandered freely without causing parents any concern because once the dinner bell rang, we would surely appear, ready to heap our plates with comfort food. At the end of each season, we gathered to sing and tell stories around a bonfire. The sense of community was very strong, and I never felt more comforted than I was at those campfires.

After Pennellwood’s final season of operation, our close summer community disbanded. That first summer without the campground, the weeks dragged on and on for me. I felt hollow without the familiarity of lazy days full of camp activities and the cool lake waters. I felt as if a part of me was auctioned off along with our beloved cabin.

I began looking for other places where I could feel the acceptance, love, comfort, and freedom that I had found at Pennellwood and now missed. I discovered that if I looked for God’s presence in my ordinary life at school, while doing chores, or while spending time with friends, I could reclaim those feelings.

When I paused to notice the beauty of nature, the goodness in myself or others, or the bonds of my community, I knew that Pennellwood lived on in my heart. God lets me know that I belong wherever I am, and that he is present with me—anywhere.

Reflect

### Always Welcome

On a separate sheet of paper, write an e-mail message to a friend that either describes a time when you felt God’s welcoming presence or a time when you needed to respond in a certain way to rediscover God’s presence and love.



To:	Becca
Cc:	Mary
Subject:	My Trip to Pennellwood

**CARA MIA CICCARELLI** is a high school student who enjoys the fine arts, including vocal and dance studies.

# WHERE Do I Fit In?



Even small experiences that seem insignificant at the time can shape the person you are becoming. Who or what helps you to discover the person God intends you to be?



by Claire Colombo

## How Do I Discover My Real Identity?

Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

*Ephesians 4:25*

It happened when I was in the first grade. Winter was over, spring was on its way, and Sister Theresa Margaret wanted us to take down the snowflakes we'd taped to the windows back in December. She was very clear. "Children, when I say 'Go,' I want you to get up, find your snowflake, remove it, and return to your seat. No talking, no running, no grabbing."

Sister's orders threw me into a panic. December was ages ago! I had no idea where I'd taped my snowflake. The class sprang into action at Sister's "Go!" Everyone found their snowflakes easily because each one had its artist's name printed on the front. But mine was nowhere to be found. My heart thumped wildly. Where was my snowflake?

Then I remembered what happened on snowflake-hanging day. I had been unable to find a spot on the glass so Sister helped me. We taped my artwork to the window—with my name against the pane!

I looked around. Everyone was back in his or her seat—except me. I had not followed Sister's directions. I had not retrieved my snowflake. "Claire Miller!" she snapped. "Come here!" I was about to receive a consequence. I was paralyzed with fear.

**CLAIRE COLOMBO is a freelance writer and educator who lives in Austin, Texas, where snowflakes are never a problem.**

Suddenly, though, I heard myself speaking—shy, awkward me, speaking with confidence, explaining the mix-up. "You helped me hang my snowflake," I was saying, "and my name ended up facing the pane." I tried to put it delicately, without blame. After several moments, Sister walked to the window and dislodged the single remaining paper snowflake. Sure enough, there was my name, facing the wrong way. Nevertheless, I did receive a consequence—a good one! Sister handed me the snowflake and gave my shoulders a little squeeze. "Thanks for telling the truth," she said.

To this day, I consider myself a truth-teller. I write for a living, which is all about telling the truth—even when it's hard to tell. At those moments, I feel Sister Theresa Margaret's arm around my shoulders. "Go on, Claire," she says. "It's who you are."

Reflect

### Who Are You Meant to Be?

Who are you becoming? Use your own photographs or pictures from magazines to make a collage on poster board that represents you. Cut out words or phrases that help explain your ideas and add them to your collage.

Session 9 > Jesus Grew in Wisdom, Age, and Grace

# WHERE Do I Fit In?

It's not always easy to find your way. You may struggle to do or say the right things. At times you may feel as if you don't know the way to go. Or you may take a wrong turn and lose your way. At these times, it is important to cultivate an attitude of hope and try to be a light to others, as Jesus is for us.

by Regina Kazanjian



## Being a Light to Others

Many people I respect and love have a passion for apologetics, which is the art of forming solid arguments for faith. I am not scornful of this—it's a worthy pursuit. But one of my greatest personal pitfalls is striving to be good enough on my own. I'm ashamed to face God until I've pulled everything together, until I look worthy, until I've cleared this or that problem out of my life. It's a bottomless hole because I never can be perfect on my own. I begin to believe that if I know all the right facts, I can craft a flawless argument and convince everyone to join my side. Ironically, this makes me hesitate to even bring up subjects of faith with my friends because I tell myself that my arguments just aren't "right" yet.

I have an even greater problem in my discussions with those who don't share my faith. I concentrate on making myself a "perfect witness." If I've been talking about the joy of Christ, I mistakenly feel that now I have to be happy all the time. I think that my listeners may be watching me now, and I can't let myself slip up and undermine my own argument!

Thankfully, I've come to realize that the key to being a light to others is to humbly accept that the light is not mine—it is just a reflection of God's own light. A reflecting object must be oriented toward its light

source. The goodness I know, the truth I see, or the love that's changed me is constantly streaming from God, the source of all goodness and beauty. It's impossible for me to figure out God and be perfect. However, he has called me to keep my eyes fixed on him, to never hide my love for him, and to be open about his work in my life.

### Lighting a Way

A single flame casts a dim light. Dozens of flames may illuminate an entire space. God doesn't expect you to be a perfect person, but he invites you to share his light with others.

Show how you share your light with the world. Hold a flashlight and stand in a circle with your group in a darkened room. Think of one way in which you have been a reflection of God's love and care to others. After sharing your idea, turn on your flashlight. Notice the growing brightness in the room as each person speaks and then adds his or her light.

**REGINA KAZANJIAN is an undergraduate student at the University of Cincinnati.**

Session 10 > Celebrating Advent and Christmas

Reflect