

VOCATION AWARENESS LESSON

GRADE FOUR

SAINT JOHN NEUMANN, C.S.S.R.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER (Redemptorists)

Objective: Through the life of Saint John Neumann, students will gain an understanding of vocation to the priesthood.

Materials: Story of Saint John Neumann (provided), art supplies

Instructional Focus:

- I. Students will listen to age appropriate adaptations of the following vocabulary/definitions which are taken from the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.
  - Vocation- the call each person receives from God; everyone has been called to holiness and eternal life, especially in Baptism. Each person can also be called more specifically to the priesthood or religious life; to the married life; and to the single life.
  - Priest- a baptized man ordained through Holy Orders who with the bishop exercise the pastoral mission of the Church. They serve God's people in the work of sanctification by their preaching, teaching and offering the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the forgiving of sins. (A priest may be ordained as a diocesan priest or as a member of a religious community.)
  - Holy Orders- the sacrament in which a bishop ordains a man to be conformed to Jesus Christ by grace, to service and leadership in the Church. A man can be ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop.
  - Religious or Consecrated Life- a permanent state in life into which certain men or women freely commit themselves to a life of special service to Christ, marked by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

As a class, the students will:

- read the “Story of Saint John Neumann”
- discuss the “Story of Saint John Neumann” in light of vocabulary
- identify and discuss the hardships that Saint John Neumann found as a priest in North America.

Students will create an intercessory prayer to Saint John Neumann about a hardship in their life.

Students will:

- share their prayers about Saint John Neumann
- partner with another student to create a poem or illustrate a scene from Saint John Neumann’s life.

II. Students will:

- present projects to class
- review vocabulary as a class

Optional Activity: Vocation Collage, “My Call from God”

- Students are assigned to small groups and discuss:
  - how God is calling now
  - how they accept God’s call
  - how they will accept God’s call in the future?
- Student groups create a vocation collage, “My Call from God.” Students will need a sheet of white paper, crayons, markers, scissors, glue and magazines.
- Collages are displayed in classroom.

Resources used for the lesson and story of Saint John Neumann

Shrine of Saint John Neumann website: [www.stjohnneumann.org](http://www.stjohnneumann.org)

Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio, *Saints and Feast Days: A Resource and Activity Book*, Loyola Press, 2004. Those who have purchased this book may reproduce its contents for use in educational settings.

## THE STORY OF SAINT JOHN NEUMANN (1811-1860)

He was so short that people laughed when they saw him riding his horse, for his feet did not reach the stirrups. He was not very good-looking. He was a quiet man, not one to charm a crowd or be the center of attention. He was not a Church leader who pleased influential people; however, John Neumann was a true servant of God.

Born and educated in Bohemia, John spoke six languages; studied botany and astronomy as well as theology. He entered the seminary; however, since there were many priests in his country, he could not be ordained there. He came to the United States in 1838 – with one suit of clothes and one dollar in his pocket. The bishop of New York ordained John and sent him to the German-speaking people who were clearing the forests around Niagara Falls. John traveled on horseback from mission to mission, visiting the sick, teaching catechism, and training teachers to take over when he left. He was busy but lonely, and felt the need for community life. So John entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (C.Ss.R), more popularly known as the Redemptorists. As a novice, he was moved so frequently that he wondered if the order really wanted him. Finally, they allowed him to make his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He eventually was made the superior of the American branch of the order. John felt unqualified, but under his direction, the Redemptorists became leaders in the parochial school movement. He served as a parish priest in Baltimore until he was made bishop of Philadelphia in 1852. There was, however, great opposition to this appointment. The influential, wealthy Catholics of Philadelphia wanted a bishop who was a gentleman. The Irish wanted a bishop who was an Irishman. Some people wanted a bishop who would overlook their unchristian behavior. John received a very cold reception when he went to Philadelphia. While it hurt him deeply, John decided that he would just be himself and do the best job that he could. His resolution, however, did not stop their criticism.

He also found himself confronted by the Know Nothings. This political group was determined to deprive foreigners and Catholics of their civil rights. They burned convents and schools. John became so discouraged that he wrote to Rome requesting a transfer, thinking someone else might do a better job in Philadelphia. He was told to stay at his job and he did.

In eight years the number of Catholic schools in Philadelphia grew from two to one hundred. John brought in many teaching orders of sisters and the Christian brothers. For the German immigrants he published two catechisms and a Bible history in German. He also wrote many articles for Catholic newspapers and magazines. Bishop John Neumann died suddenly while walking down Vine Street in Philadelphia. After his death people began to praise his many hidden virtues. This unassuming, often unpopular man who worked so hard for God was declared a saint in 1977. His feast is celebrated on January 5.