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# THE CHURCH

*Out of Focus*

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

Christ promised us that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against His Church, the Catholic Church. But He didn’t promise the “gates of hell” wouldn’t try. We live in a time where there is a lot of confusion about our Church: Is the Church trustworthy? Is the Church relevant in the 21st century? Does the Church have answers to today’s big questions? The answer to all of these questions is YES!

In this session Fr. Leo walks us through some of the misconceptions and different ways our views of the Church can become skewed. Once Fr. Leo brings us through the “distractions,” we will be able to see the beauty and goodness of the Catholic Church. Teens will discover how the Church furthers education, influences science, and helps the poor all over the world—not to mention the millions upon millions of people the Church has been able to share the Gospel and sacraments with over the past 2,000 years!

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video clips prior to your gathering. Below is the outline for the session. Use the time allotments as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
10 minutes	 CONNECT	Do a word association activity that allows teens to express their perceptions of the Church.
60 minutes	 DISCUSS	Watch and discuss the following video scenes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 1: Our perceptions of the Church can be out of focus.</li> <li> Scene 2: Three things skew our perception: the world, the flesh and the devil.</li> <li> Scene 3: The Church is God’s Kingdom, and she has done great work in the world.</li> </ul>
20 minutes	 COMMIT	Watch and discuss the last video scene: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 4: We must become theologians and change our perceptions of the Church.</li> </ul> Then ask teens to make a commitment to study so they can understand the Church better.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Bibles
- » Teen Sheets
- » Pens or pencils

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



## LEADER TIPS

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- » Because the world and the media do not paint the Church in a positive light, teens can have a very negative reaction to things related to the Church. In order to change their perceptions, it is very important that teens feel they are being heard and that their perceptions are not dismissed. Have the intention of doing more listening and affirming in your group as you tackle this topic.
- » It is possible that the Church sexual abuse scandal may come up in discussion during this session. The abuse scandal broke in 2001, so many teens have not known a Church before the scandal. Everything they know about priests is what the world has told them post-scandal. Make sure not to dismiss the scandal—it was an awful thing with many victims—but also be prepared to address it should the topic arise. Our priests are great men who give their lives in service to others. This needs to be communicated while also not dismissing the scandal and the hurt that it caused.
- » Review the word list for the Word Association game; make adjustments or additions to the list appropriate to your group size and demographics.



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### WORD ASSOCIATION

**SAY:** Welcome to the first night of our new series, “The Church.” This is going to be a great series! But before we get into the session, let’s do a little exercise. Have you ever heard of Word Association? It’s easy: When I say a word, you tell me the first word that pops into your head. I want emotional responses—not simply word connections. For example, if I say “broccoli” and you say “green,” that isn’t much fun. If I say “broccoli” and you say “gross,” then I get an idea of how you feel about broccoli.

*Give each person one word, starting with the first word on this list. If you have a larger group, have two people respond simultaneously, or mix up the words and use them again. Keep a quick pace.*

- » Apple
- » School
- » Lebron James
- » Soldier
- » One Direction
- » Disney movie
- » Monster
- » Authority
- » Priest
- » Church
- » Mass
- » Holy

## INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** Today’s topic is on the perceptions that we have with the Church. People’s reactions to the Church and her role in our lives can vary. We are going to be tackling this topic over the next several weeks, and we want to start with addressing how we understand the role of the Church in our lives.



## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** Let's open in prayer, starting with a verse from the *Catechism*:



*"The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men."*

—CCC 775

**PRAY:** O almighty and eternal God! Who through Jesus Christ has revealed Your glory to all nations, to preserve the works of Your mercy, that Your Church, being spread through the whole world, may continue with unchanging faith in the confession of Your name. Amen.



## DISCUSS

**SAY:** Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, "There are not more than 100 people in the world who truly hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they perceive to be the Catholic Church."

Let's watch Scene 1 of this session.



*Watch Scene 1. This segment will last approximately four minutes. When the scene has finished, discuss the following questions.*

» What do you think are some of those wrong perceptions that Archbishop Fulton Sheen is talking about?

**SAY:** *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* is a book written by Philip Jenkins, distinguished professor of history and religious studies at Pennsylvania State University. Jenkins, a member of the Episcopal Church, demonstrates that you can publicly make statements that are anti-Catholic with no consequences. On the other hand, if you say anything racist, misogynistic, anti-Semitic, or homophobic, there will be severe consequences.

» Why do you think it is culturally acceptable to be anti-Catholic?

*(Anti-Catholicism has its origin in the Protestant Reformation. Protestant churches formed as a result of rejecting what they believed to be errors and excesses in the Catholic Church. Protestants developed strong positions against the Pope, priests, and many of the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church even to the point of believing that the Catholic Church was the anti-Christ. As a result, there is a sad history in the United States of Catholics not being welcomed, forbidden to be in politics, forced to pay heavy taxes, and the Mass/Sacraments/Catholic schools even being outlawed. This deep mistrust of the Catholic Church has persisted to the present day. It is also the case that there are many cultural Catholics who don't necessarily know and love their Catholic faith. So, rather than defend the faith and correct misconceptions, cultural Catholics often have difficulty trusting the Church as well and in that sense perpetuate the problem.)*

» What do you think we should do about so much misunderstanding and sometimes even hatred toward the Catholic Church?



*“Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”*

—1 Peter 3:15

**SAY:** Let's continue the session with Scene 2.



Watch Scene 2. The segment will last approximately three minutes. When the scene has finished, discuss the following questions.

**SAY:** Fr. Leo challenges us to “question authority” with our questions about the faith.

- » Name a time in your life when you knew someone who had a misunderstanding about something related to our Church. What caused that misunderstanding?
- » What do you think would be the result if Catholics did a better job telling non-Catholics our story?
- » When it comes to questions you have about the faith, who or what is a source that you feel comfortable going to in order to have your questions answered?
- » Why is it so important to “quest the Author” of our faith?  
*(If we do not know the author, we cannot know the original message of what the author communicated.)*

**SAY:** Let's continue the session with Scene 3.



Watch Scene 3. The segment will last approximately five minutes. When the scene has finished, discuss the following questions.

**SAY:** A culture is the very way of life of a people. It encompasses music, values, art, principles, etc. No institution in the history of mankind has contributed more to human civilization and culture than the Catholic Church. Many of our daily practices have been inspired by the Catholic Church, which has been instrumental in everything from inventions to education, the sciences to the arts. No one has done more for the sick and the poor than the Catholic Church.

Compare and contrast this understanding of the Church with the comments you've heard people make (including our own responses in the beginning of the session). It is clear that the Church has contributed more to the good in the world than any other institution.

- » Why do you think there is such a gap between people's negative impressions of the Church and all of the positive things that the Church does?
- » What positive impressions has Catholicism made on you?
- » How would you respond to someone who says that the Church...
  - **Is irrelevant,**  
*(True, for an atheist and/or a relativist, the Church is irrelevant. If there is no God and no truth then what need is there for a Church. However, if there is a God who wants us to live according to the truth, the Church is not only relevant but a necessity.)*
  - **Is a bunch of myths and fictitious stories, or**  
*(Jesus of Nazareth is not a myth or fictitious story. In fact, the details of His life and ministry are documented more thoroughly than those of any other person in the ancient world. He claimed to be God. For you, is He a liar, a lunatic, or is He Lord?)*
  - **Contributes nothing to society?**  
*(The Catholic Church contributes to society in so many ways but suffice it to say that the Catholic Church is the largest single charitable organization in the country.)*





# COMMIT

**SAY:** Let's watch the final scene of this session.



Watch Scene 4. The segment is about five minutes. At the end of the scene, have the following discussion.

**SAY:** Fr. Leo says we need to *Ora et Labora*: pray and work. In what ways can you pray and work to understand the Church better?

One of the most important things in communication and building a relationship with someone is, as St. Francis of Assisi prayed, to "seek first to understand." It pleases God when you try to understand Him and His will for your life.

» If Jesus were sitting with us right now, what would you ask Him?

*Thank everyone for sharing. Then continue.*

**SAY:** Let's go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and each share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the room asking everyone to share briefly.*

**SAY:** I want to go around the circle again, starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

*Take a minute and go around the room again.*

**SAY:** For a Christian, studying is one of the most important things that we do. We cannot know and understand Christ unless we quest the Author and understand what He has given us. Our Church is rich with teachings, tradition, and history. One of the places where we see this is in the Liturgy. In the Liturgy, every movement, gesture, and prayer has a particular meaning.

This week, I want you to observe the Mass on Sunday. I want you to pick out something in the Liturgy that you do not understand, and then I want you to seek the answer. Find out what that gesture, vestment, or prayer means. Ask the pastor to answer your question, or find it from another source.

Then, come back next week and share about your experience.

# CLOSING PRAYER

Let's close with a prayer.

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, look upon our community of faith, which is the Church of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Under the leadership of the Holy Father and the Bishops, keep us faithful to Christ's mission of calling all men and women to Your service, so that there may be "one fold and one Shepherd." Untwist our misconceptions of the Church and open our eyes to see the Kingdom as You have created it. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## NOTES

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THE CHURCH  
SESSION 2



KEYS TO THE  
KINGDOM



# THE CHURCH

## *Keys to the Kingdom*

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

“Why the Church?” They may not say it aloud, but by their reluctance to attend Mass and their obvious boredom when anything “religious” is brought up, many teens make it clear that church isn’t at the top of their favorite activities list. Many teens want to know what religion has to do with Jesus and why we need the Church at all.

In this session we will discuss how we can know that the Catholic Church is the one true Church that Jesus established. Teens will also explore the role of the Pope and the bishops of the Church so they can understand and trust that the Catholic Church continues to teach authoritatively in Jesus’ name. By the end of the session, the teens will have a better understanding of why they need to belong to the Church if they are to enter into the great, dynamic, and beautiful love story that Jesus began when He was on earth, and continues even to this day.

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video clips prior to your gathering. Below is the outline for the session. Use the time allotments as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
20 minutes	 CONNECT	Get teens thinking about truths in their lives with an activity called “State Your Case.”
45 minutes	 DISCUSS	View the following video scenes and discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 1: Ask the question, “Why the Church?”</li> <li> Scene 2: Jesus demonstrates his plan for the Church by giving Peter the keys to the Kingdom.</li> <li> Scene 3: The story of Eliakim shows us God’s plan for the authority that Peter and the popes would have in the Church.</li> </ul>
25 minutes	 COMMIT	View the final video scene and discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 4: The Church helps us to become the people that God has called us to be.</li> </ul> Invite teens to commit to prayerful Communion this week, and then close in prayer.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Teen Sheets
- » Pens or pencils
- » Bibles

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.

## LEADER TIPS

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- » There is a lot of doctrinal content to discuss in this study. Make sure to keep the discussion moving so that you leave plenty of time to get through all four video segments.
- » We often include possible responses after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. Let group members respond first; share the answers in parentheses as needed.
- » Encourage parents to purchase the talk *Set All Afire: Why the Church Still Matters!* Go to Lighthouse Catholic Media for the download or CD.  
<http://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/set-all-afire-why-the-church-still-matters>



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### STATE YOUR CASE

*Welcome everyone to the discipleship group, and ask them to gather in a circle.*

**SAY:** I will give you a series of claims, and you tell me if you believe each one to be true or false. But here's the catch: you need to tell me why you believe what you do.

Here are the rules:

- » No more than 30 seconds per response
- » Only one response per person per question
- » State "I agree" or "I disagree" and explain
  - "The best things in life are free."
  - "A little white lie never hurt anyone."
  - "It doesn't matter if you win or lose; it's how you play the game."
  - "Education is the key to success."
  - "If you don't like someone, you probably don't know them well enough."
  - "Everyone should have their heart broken at least once in their life."
  - "The more you give, the more you get."
  - "Love without truth isn't love."

*Go around the circle and give everyone at least one turn.*

**SAY:** Thanks for sharing your opinions and experiences on these statements. Some things in life are more subjective than others, but we use our knowledge and first-hand experience to state our case for a particular position.

You might have heard people question the Church and whether or not the pope has authority in our lives. Just like the claims in our activity, they might make a claim like this: "The Church is OK for some people, but it's not necessary for following Jesus." We'll talk about this in this session.

# INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** Today we are going to answer the question, “Why the Church?” If Pope Francis were sitting with us to state the case for the Church, he might say: “Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom to Peter and his successors so the Catholic Church could authoritatively teach and minister in His name.” The question “Why the Church?” leads to many other questions: “Why authority?” “Why the pope?” “Why the bishops?” “Why the Vatican?” These are the questions we want to address in this session.

## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** As we begin our session, let's start with a prayer.

*Have teens turn to Matthew 16:15-19, and ask for a volunteer to read the passage aloud.*



*“[Jesus] said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”*

—Matthew 16:15-19

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, we pray that You would open our minds and hearts and help us to understand the authority of the Church. Grant us the gifts of understanding and knowledge so that we may grow as disciples of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask all of this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.





# DISCUSS

**SAY:** Let's watch the first video segment.



Watch the first video segment. The video will last about two minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

**SAY:** This first scene poses a really great question. Many of us can get on board with Jesus and believing in a God who loves us. But why the Church? Is the Church really necessary for following Jesus? This is the question that we are going to get into today.

- » How would you respond to someone who says that they love Jesus but hate religion?
- » What would you say to someone who says that the Church isn't necessary in order to be a follower of Christ?

Most non-Catholic Christians believe that the Bible is the only authority that teaches God's truth for our lives.

- » Do you think there is a problem with relying on the Bible alone in determining God's truth? *(The Bible has to be interpreted correctly. Since the Reformation, 30,000 denominations have formed, all claiming to be following the Bible alone and yet believing different things. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are not considered to be Christian even though they claim to follow the Bible. They believe that the Bible does not support the doctrine of the Trinity and therefore believe Jesus is not God. The Holiness Snake Handlers actually worship holding live venomous snakes because of their interpretation of Mark 16:18: "They will be able to handle serpents." Many Christians don't believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist, despite the fact that Jesus says so several times in John 6:25-70. The Catholic Church teaches that God has given us the Church to officially interpret the Bible [CCC 889-892])*

The early Church was persecuted. People became Catholic at great risk. The early Catholics had to really consider the claims of Jesus and count the cost of following Him in the Catholic Church. They had to ask themselves if their faith was worth dying for.

Father Walter Ciszek was accused by the Soviet secret police of being a Vatican spy. He was sentenced to 23 years of hard labor in Siberia. When he was released in 1963, he wrote a book about his experiences there, called *He Ledeth Me*. He writes: **"I have seen...prisoners deprive their bodies of needed sleep in order to get up before the rising bell for a secret Mass....We would be severely punished if we were discovered....The Masses were held in drafty storage shacks and sometimes outside huddled in mud or slush. In these primitive conditions, the Mass brought us closer to God than anyone might conceivably imagine."**

- » Why do you think the Mass was so important to these prisoners?

**SAY:** Let's continue with the second video segment.



Watch the second video segment. The video will last about three minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

**SAY:** The Catholic Church is the only Church that has as its founder Jesus Christ. For example, the founder of the Lutheran Church was Martin Luther, and the founder of the Presbyterian Church was Jean Calvin. Protestant Christians will say the Catholic Church was man-made and that it became something that Jesus never intended. But Chris, our presenter in the video, tells us the Church is like an acorn of a maple tree and that Jesus' proclamation about Peter reveals several things:

- » Jesus had a plan for the Church.
- » Jesus had a plan for authority and structure in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- » Jesus was building on the foundation of Peter.

In 1799 when Pope Pius VI died, Napoleon is reported to have said, "The Papacy is finished!" The history of the Church is full of accounts of kings, emperors, and dictators who tried to destroy the papacy and thus the Church.

- » What are some reasons you think the Church has been able to withstand all these threats over the past 2,000 years, especially when you consider that the longest known empire lasted just under 600 years?
- » How does the presenter's explanation give you confidence about the faith that you can put in the teaching authority of the Church?
- » What is your understanding of the basic hierarchy of authority in the Church?  
(Pope › Cardinals › Bishops › Priests › Deacons › Laity)



## ACTIVITY

### PETER AND ELIAKIM

Have the teens open their Bibles to Isaiah 22:20-22.

**SAY:** When Jesus gave Peter the keys and used the language of "binding and loosing," He would have triggered the memory of the Jews. They were very familiar with the story of Eliakim in Isaiah 22, and Jesus was intentionally reminding them of this story to make His point. Let's read about it.

Ask one of the teens to read the story from Isaiah out loud.



*“In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”*

—Isaiah 22:20-22

- » What are the similar words that you see between this story of Eliakim and the proclamation of Peter in Matthew 16?

**SAY:** We are going to unpack this some more as we get into the next video.



Watch the third video segment. The video will last about five minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Did you catch the connection between Eliakim and Peter? Eliakim was not the king—the Scriptures say that he was a servant of the king. The keys to the Kingdom of David were given to him, and with those keys he was given authority over the land. Eliakim was to act like a “steward of the kingdom,” in place of the king. He had the authority of the king until the king returned to his kingdom.

- » How does understanding Eliakim’s position in the kingdom of David help you to understand Peter’s role in the Kingdom of God?  
*(In the same way that Eliakim wielded the authority of the King and watched over the Kingdom until the King returned, so was Peter given the same authority. Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom so that he could rule and take care of the Kingdom until Jesus returns).*
- » When Jesus gives the keys of the Kingdom to Peter, what is he asking Peter and his successors (our popes) to do?  
*(Jesus gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom so that he could rule and take care of the Kingdom until Jesus returns).*

Papal infallibility is something that is greatly misunderstood. There are some that believe that papal infallibility means that the pope is a perfect human being. This is not the case. The Church’s doctrine on infallibility pertains to the Magisterium’s inability to teach something that isn’t true as it pertains to faith and morals. The Catholic Church’s teachings have remained consistent for 2,000 years.

- » Why is it so important that Christ placed authoritative figures and hierarchy into His Church?  
*(Authority is needed for unity, and unity is needed for God’s work of salvation in the world. It is important to realize a title of the pope: Servant of the Servants of God. This emphasizes that the Pope’s authority is expressed in servant leadership. There is only one Church that is able to bring 5 million young people together with their spiritual father at a World Youth Day Mass.)*

» How would you respond to a friend who made the following comments?

- The Pope takes attention away from Jesus.
- The Pope has too much power, and power corrupts. There have been corrupt popes, so why would you trust his authority?  
(There have been 266 popes; most of these popes were scholarly and holy men of God. There have been some popes with moral shortcomings. But even the corrupt ones did not alter the teachings. The Holy Spirit protects the Church from teaching error.)



**LEADER TIP:** For more information, search “What about the bad popes?” at [www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com) to hear a great radio interview on this question. Find it here: [www.catholic.com/video/what-about-the-bad-popes](http://www.catholic.com/video/what-about-the-bad-popes)



## COMMIT

**SAY:** I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the room, asking everyone to share briefly.*

**SAY:** Now let's go around the circle again, starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

*Take a minute and go around the room again.*

Jesus gave us the Church, and he gave the Church authority so that His teachings and message would not become confused over the centuries. When we reject this authority, we miss a huge part of the gift that He has given us. Let's watch the final scene.



Watch the fourth video segment. The video will last about five minutes. At the end of the segment, make the closing statement.

**SAY:** This scene challenges us to open ourselves to everything that the Church is so that we don't starve ourselves. Did you know that we can offer our Holy Communion for special intentions? I'm going to give you a special intention and teach you how to do this practice.

This week, if you are in a state of grace and as you are receiving Jesus in Holy Communion at Sunday Mass, I want you to pray that Jesus unleashes all of the graces of this sacrament in your heart. I want you to pray that He reveals the Church to you in all of her Glory and helps you to understand and follow the Church in Her guidance and wisdom.

## JESUS ASKS

**SAY:** Jesus asked this question of his followers in Scripture. Let's take a minute and silently consider how you would respond to this question.



*"Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand?"*

—Mark 4:21

» How does Jesus' question relate to the Church?

*(Just as a light is made to be a light in the darkness and guide others – so is the Church a light in a dark world. A light is not meant to be hidden, put away and not used.)*

## CLOSING PRAYER

**SAY:** Let's close in prayer.

I want to ask each of us to share something we are grateful to God for.

*Give everyone a chance to share, and then pray an Our Father.*

Let's remain quiet as we think about some things we would each like to ask Jesus' forgiveness for.

*Allow a minute for quiet reflection.*

Together, let's pray:

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

*Allow time. Then together pray a Glory Be.*

Finally, I would like each person to share a concern for yourself or someone else in which you would like the help of the Holy Spirit.

*Allow time; then continue.*

Let's end with a Hail Mary and ask Mary for her intercession that we may be as devoted a disciple as she is.

*THE CHURCH  
SESSION 3*



**COMMUNITY**

*PART 1*

# THE CHURCH

## Community – Part 1

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# SESSION OVERVIEW






In this session we will start to examine what the Church actually is. Most of us grew up with the idea that the Church is just the building where we go for Mass on Sundays, but she is *so much more*. The Church is the family of God, and we all are a part of this family.

Like earthly families, God's family has certain characteristics that define it and ancestors that preceded us. In this session, we'll unpack the mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ and point out some of the defining characteristics of God's family—the four marks of the Church.

This topic of the Church as community is broken into two sessions. Scenes 1 and 2 are covered in this session, and Scenes 3 and 4 are covered in Session 4.

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video clips prior to your gathering. Below is the outline for the session. Use the time allotments as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
20 minutes	 CONNECT	Lead your group in the opening activity, "Community Web," to generate discussion and also emphasize that no one is insignificant.
50 minutes	 DISCUSS	Watch and discuss the two short video segments.  Scene 1: More Than a Building  Scene 2: The Four Marks
20 minutes	 COMMIT	Discuss how they can apply what they've learned to their daily lives, make commitments to pray the rosary for non-Catholics, and close in prayer.



## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Bibles
- » Teen Sheets
- » Pens or pencils
- » A ball of yarn (or several balls of yarn knotted together, depending on the size of your group)

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



## LEADER TIPS

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- » Note that there are two video segments in this session , scene 1 and 2. The second part of this topic will take place at your next small group session.
- » Consider watching the “dinner scene” of the movie *The Blind Side* with your group. It’s part of the discussion during this session. Find it online here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=agidYAqGOI8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agidYAqGOI8)
- » We often include possible responses after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. Let group members respond first; share the answers in parentheses as needed.



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### COMMUNITY WEB

Invite everyone to join you in a circle, standing. Then show the ball of yarn.

**SAY:** Let's do a little experiment with this ball of yarn. I will start by holding onto the end of this yarn and then throwing the yarn ball to one of you. When you catch the yarn, you need to answer this question:

» What do you think Jesus would look like if He walked among us today?

After you answer the question, while holding onto a section of the yarn, you'll then throw the ball of yarn to someone else and they will answer the question. We'll keep this going as we answer more questions, but be sure to try and throw the ball of yarn to someone new each time.

Once everyone has answered the first question, keep the yarn-tossing going but use the following questions:

» If God agreed to do one thing to prove He exists, what would you want Him to do?

» Where do you feel closest to God?

» If your teacher said to your class that "God is dead," how would you respond?

After teens have answered all the questions, stop throwing the ball of yarn and ask:

» What is the yarn doing for us physically?

*(It's connecting us and allowing each of us to contribute to a cool looking web.)*

Have one or two members of the group drop their hold of the yarn. Then ask:

» What happens to the group when someone drops the yarn?

*(It becomes less close, looser knit; it makes something cool fall apart and become kinda messed up and deformed.)*

**SAY:** No one is insignificant. Just as you are necessary to create and maintain the pattern of this web, you are necessary to the Church. The *Catechism* says: "God has... willed to make men holy and save them, **not as individuals without any bond or link between them**, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness." (CCC 781).

# INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** Today’s topic is on the Church as a community. Though, this community is very different from how “community” is commonly understood. You have probably heard of a virtual community, or international community, or even a community center. The word *church* comes from the Hebrew word *qahal* (sounds like ka hell), which means “called community.” Throughout history, God has been calling a people to Himself. In the Old Testament, we read about God calling the people of Israel. In the New Testament, the community of people God has called is the Church. The question we want to consider in this session is this: What exactly has God called us to?

## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** I want to open our discussion together with a story from Scripture and a short prayer. Please open your Bibles to Acts 9:1-8.

*Have a teen read the following:*



*“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.”*

—Acts 9:1-8

**PRAY:** Jesus, thank You for laying down Your life so that we can be members of Your Church. Come into our hearts today and show us what the Church really is. Help us to see that we are actually a part of Your Mystical Body. Open our hearts to see that apart from You we can do nothing, but with You we can do all things, just like You taught Your disciples at the Last Supper with these words: *“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5).



# DISCUSS

**SAY:** The story from Acts 9 is the powerful conversion of Saul from Tarsus. He was a Pharisee, studied under the famous Jewish rabbi Gamaliel, and he had a great zeal to prevent Christianity from spreading and corrupting his fellow Jews. As he was riding to Damascus to arrest Christians, he had this amazing encounter with Christ. Jesus asked him: “Why do you persecute me?” You can imagine this was difficult for Saul to understand because he wasn’t persecuting Jesus, only His followers. However, after his conversion he came to understand what is meant by “the body of Christ.” He wrote: “So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

Let's watch the first video segment of this session.



*Watch the first video segment. The video is just over two minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.*

In this segment we learned that the Church is more than a building; it is a mystical communion with Christ and one another. But “mystical communion” can be a little difficult to comprehend.

The movie *The Blind Side* is about the inspiring story of Michael Oher. Michael’s mother was an addict incapable of caring for him and his eleven siblings, and his father was murdered in prison. He had to repeat two grade levels and attended eleven different schools in nine years. Michael alternated between foster care and periods of homelessness in his difficult childhood. Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy invited Michael to live with them and eventually adopted him into their family. They provided for his needs and gave him everything he needed to succeed. Most importantly, the Tuohy family loved him unconditionally. Michael became an All American football player in college and currently plays in the NFL.

» **How is this similar to our relationship with God?**

*(Our sin has separated us from God and as a result we have become spiritually homeless. As a communion of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God is like a family. He has given us the Church as the means to invite us into this family. This is “mystical” because it is a mystery—truth that we are not capable of fully understanding.)*

» **Can anyone share an experience where they were welcomed into someone else’s family and made to feel like they were part of that family?**

» **Where have you heard this: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity”?**

*(This occurs at the preparation of the gifts during the Mass, when the priest or deacon pours wine into the chalice and adds drops of water.)*

- » Father Mark was asked by a student: “If you could summarize the meaning of life in one sentence, what would it be?” Father responded: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” What was Father Mark trying to say?

*(CCC 460 explains it like this: The Son of God became man so that man could become a son of God. Jesus has made it possible for the Holy Trinity to live within us. This is sanctifying grace. This is our share in divine life. When we cooperate with grace, we become more like Jesus.)*



*“No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who ‘labor and are heavy laden.’”*

—CCC 1658

**SAY:** Let's continue with the second video segment.



Watch the second video segment. The video is about five minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

In this segment we hear that God is our Father. In fact, there is mention of God being called “father” over 150 times in the New Testament. Listen to this inspiring story that might help us understand the image of God as father.

In 1989 there was a great tragedy in Armenia when a magnitude 8.2 earthquake killed over 30,000 people. There was a father who rushed to his son’s school. When he arrived he saw only a pile of rubble and distressed parents in mournful sobbing. He made his way to the east corner of the school where he knew his son’s classroom had been. With nothing but his bare hands, he started to dig. He was desperately pulling up bricks and pieces and wall-plaster. He heard someone growl, “Forget it, mister. They’re all dead.” He looked up, flustered, and replied, “You can grumble. Or you can help me lift these bricks.” Only a few pitched in, and most of them gave up once their muscles began to ache. But the father kept digging...four hours...twelve hours... eighteen hours...twenty-four hours....Finally, into the thirty-eighth hour, he heard a muffled groan from under a piece of wallboard. He seized the board, pulled it back, and cried, “Armand!” From the darkness came a slight shaking voice, “Papa...!?” They found fourteen of the thirty-three students still alive. Everybody standing there heard him as he turned to his friends and said, “See, I told you my papa would come get us.”

- » In what ways do you think Armand’s father is like our heavenly Father?  
*(Our heavenly Father desires that we spend eternity with Him, and He will do everything that He can to save us. First Timothy 2:4 says that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”)*
- » What has our heavenly Father done to save us?  
*(He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us from our sin. Jesus does this through His one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The Church teaches the truth of Jesus so that we might know how to live, and the Church gives us the grace of Jesus so that we might have the power to live according to that truth.)*

- » Out front of a Catholic Church a sign read, “Interested in going to heaven? Apply here for flight training.” What would you say to someone who looks at this sign and says, “The Church isn’t necessary to be saved; I can be just as close to God by hiking in the mountains every Sunday morning”?

*(Acts 4:12 says this about Jesus: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” Can it not be said then that this verse would apply to the Church, since the Church is the body of Christ? It has always been God’s plan to call a people to Himself. We are to be saved as a body. If the Church were not necessary for salvation, then Jesus would have not gone through all the trouble to establish her. In addition, God wants us to come together in community and be fed by His body and blood. You can’t receive that hiking in the mountains.)*

- » If the Church is necessary for salvation, what happens in the end to non-Catholics?

*(There are many souls who strive to be good or virtuous as they understand it, just as there are Catholics who act in an unholy way. Catholic Christians cannot judge who is saved or not saved. We can only share that God has communicated to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition the surest means of salvation, and that is found in the Catholic Church. We know that God desires everyone to be saved. In the Catholic Church, He has given us Himself, which we call sanctifying grace. We receive this grace through the sacraments given to us by Christ. However, there is also actual grace. This is God’s assistance and is always available through prayer and the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture. God may act to save whomever He wants, as He is not bound by the sacraments He offers mankind. We should pray for those non-Catholics, whether Protestants or non-Christians, that God may offer them sanctifying grace in a manner that is granted by Him. However, in unison with this, we must be attentive to our duty and mission to invite and encourage mankind to enter into the life of the Catholic Church so that they enter into a relationship with God in this life.)*

- » A girl said to her Catholic friend, “I find it hard to believe that the Church is Christ’s Body when I see how some Catholics act.” Her friend replied, “I felt the same way until I realized I shouldn’t blame Mozart because of how some musicians play his music.” What do you think she meant by that statement?

*(The Church has both a divine dimension and a human dimension. The Church would have never lasted 2,000 years if it did not have this divine element. Why? Because the human dimension of the Church will always struggle with sin. This includes not only its membership but its leadership as well. However, that does not change the fact that the Holy Spirit gives us divine life in the sacraments and prevents the Church from teaching error regarding faith and the moral life. God gives us the grace to grow in holiness but will not force holiness upon us. He requires our cooperation.)*

**SAY:** One Sunday morning, an elderly African chief was present at Mass when he began to cry. He was remembering images from his childhood, when he would watch warriors from his own Ngoni tribe wash blood from their spears and bodies after fighting warriors from the Senga and Tumbuka tribes. The reason that he was overwhelmed with emotion was that at this particular Mass there were members of all three tribes worshipping together. That morning, at the celebration of the Eucharist, the old chief understood as never before what the Church was all about: God’s plan for the human race.

» How is this story a living demonstration of the four marks of the Church?

- **ONE:** *It is the mission of the Church to reconcile God to man and man to one another. This brings about our unity. We are one in that we are all God's beloved sons and daughters. As St. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus united these tribes in His Church.*
- **HOLY:** *Sin divides us. The Church gives us the grace to overcome sin and that which divides us. Growing in holiness is growing to love as God loves. The grace of God gives us the power to love our enemies.*
- **CATHOLIC:** *The Catholic Church is a universal gift to mankind. Catholic missionaries brought the faith to Africa, which brought about this reconciliation. The Church is universal—the hope for the world. Jesus has asked us to share this gift, to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).*
- **APOSTOLIC:** *Jesus handed His teaching and ministry on to the Apostles, and the Apostles to their successors. In addition, He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who would guide them in teaching the truth (John 16:13) and give them the power to forgive sins (John 20:23). The bishops are the successors of the Apostles. The Church could not be one, holy, or catholic if she was not apostolic.*



## COMMIT



## ACTIVITY

**SAY:** Let's go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and take time for each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.*

I want to go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that you heard tonight that has made an impression on you.

*Take a minute and go around the room again.*

## JESUS ASKS

**SAY:** Jesus asked this question of his followers in Scripture. Let's take a minute and silently consider how we would respond to this question.



*"Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"*

—Luke 24:26

*(after a few minutes of silence, then propose the following.)*



*"The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation..."*

—CCC 766

For your challenge this week, I'd like you to pray a rosary for Christian unity with the intention that non-Catholics may come to see that the Catholic Church is God's plan for the human race. If you haven't prayed the rosary before, we have information on your Teen Sheet that will help you.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**SAY:** As we close in prayer, I want to ask each of you to share something you are grateful to God for.

*After everyone has had a turn, yourself included, pray an Our Father together.*

I want you to remain quiet as you think about where you have fallen short as a disciple of Jesus over the past week.

*Allow time. Then pray the following together as a group.*

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

I would like each of you to share a concern for yourself or someone else in which you would like the help of the Holy Spirit.

*After everyone has shared, pray a Glory Be together.*

Let's end with a Hail Mary and ask for Mary's intercession, that we may be as devoted a disciple as she is.



*THE CHURCH  
SESSION 4*



**COMMUNITY**  
*PART 2*

# THE CHURCH

## Community – Part 2

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

Last session we learned that the Church is more than a building—it is the family of God and the hope for the world. The characteristics of God’s family are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. In this session we will look at the life of the early Church and especially how *“they devoted themselves...to the breaking of the bread”* (Acts 2:42). We’ll discuss what the Church means when she says the Eucharist is *“the source and summit of the Christian life”* (CCC 1324).

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video clips prior to your gathering. Below is the outline for the session. Use the time allotments as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
20 minutes	 CONNECT	Get teens into discussion with an activity called "Headlines."
50 minutes	 DISCUSS	View the following video scenes (which are a continuation from last week’s Scenes 1 and 2), and discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 3: Life of the Church, Then and Now</li> <li> Scene 4: An Invitation to the Table</li> </ul>
20 minutes	 COMMIT	Share highlights of the discussion, challenge teens to pray a rosary this week for Catholics who have stopped attending Mass, and close in prayer.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Bibles
- » Teen Sheets
- » Pens or pencils (optional; for note-taking)
- » A current Sunday newspaper with plenty of sections

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



## LEADER TIPS

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- » For more information on the Mass, encourage parents to purchase the talk *The Mass Explained* by Fr. Larry Richards at Lighthouse Catholic Media.  
[www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/speaker/fr-larry-richards](http://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/speaker/fr-larry-richards)
- » We often include possible responses after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. Let group members respond first; share answers in parentheses as needed.



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### HEADLINES

**SAY:** I have brought a recent newspaper and here are some of the headlines.

*Share a headline from the following sections: nation/world news, local news, sports, family/lifestyle, entertainment, business, religion and advice.*

**SAY:** We'll use the newspaper for this activity. I'll explain by demonstrating my own responses. If this newspaper had been covering the events of my life this past week, these might have been the headlines:

*As the leader, model how to share in this activity. Briefly share about your own week from several categories:*

- » *front page news: most exciting or challenging news from the past week*
- » *family news: parents, siblings, children, home life*
- » *sports news: personal fitness, games, kids games, favorite team*
- » *entertainment news: movies, television shows, books, music, outdoors activities*
- » *business news: job, career plans, professional goals*
- » *religious news: church, prayer, something you learned about God*
- » *advice: an issue you would like some advice on*

**SAY:** I want to encourage each of you to share the headlines from your life this past week. Who would like to start?

*Allow time for everyone who would like to share. Remind teens to just share "headlines" so it doesn't take too long.*

# INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** The Acts of the Apostles gives us something similar to a headline as it describes the first century church: *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”* (Acts 2:42).

What is really special is that a headline accurately describing the Catholic Church today would read the same way! In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is divided into 4 parts: 1) The Profession of Faith (apostles’ teaching); 2) The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (breaking of the bread); 3) Life in Christ (fellowship); and 4) Christian Prayer (prayers). In this session we are going to focus on what the Church calls the source and summit of our faith: the Eucharist (the breaking of bread).

## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** Let’s open our discussion together with a story from Scripture and a short prayer. Please open your Bibles to Acts 2:41-47.

Ask for a teen to volunteer to read the passage:



*“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

—Acts 2:41-47

**PRAY:** Jesus, You tell us that unless we eat Your flesh and drink Your blood, we will have no life in us. But if we eat Your flesh and drink Your blood we will have eternal life and You will raise us up at the last day. We pray for the faith to truly believe in Your real presence and to grow in our practice of receiving You at Mass and adoring You in the Blessed Sacrament.



# DISCUSS



Watch the video segment. The video is just over four minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

**SAY:** In this segment we learned the four areas in which the people of the early Church devoted themselves. The first is the apostle's teaching. The apostle's teaching is the teaching of Jesus.

Invite a teen to read John 18:37 from his or her Bible.



*"Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered: 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'"*

—John 18:37

- » Does anyone remember what Pilate's response was?  
(*"What is truth?"*)
- » In what ways is Pilate's response similar to our society today?  
(*There are so many different ideas, beliefs, and values today that it leads many people to think we cannot know the truth with any certainty. In other words, they think that we are all just guessing; therefore, truth differs from person to person. This is called relativism.*)
- » Pope Benedict XVI said the greatest problem of our time is a "dictatorship of relativism." What do you think he means by this?  
(*Dictatorship represents absolute, even oppressive, rule. Relativism says there is no absolute truth. So a dictatorship of relativism is the idea that there is absolutely no absolute truth and there is no room for the idea of absolute truth. This has led to a growing effort to silence Catholics, who claim God has given us moral truths to live by.*)

- » Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a philosopher well known for his statement “God is dead.” He wrote, “There are no eternal facts, as there are no absolute truths.” His ideas influenced Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Though he likely would not have supported how the Nazis acted on his ideas, it is the case that ideas have consequences. If you had the chance to prevent these consequences and go back in time to convince Nietzsche that there are eternal facts and absolute truths, what would you say? What would you tell him about Jesus?

*(Jesus wanted to give the world the truth. He was often called rabbi, or teacher, and spent a lot of time with the Apostles, revealing to them teachings that they were to bring to others. He says in John 8:31-32: “If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” In fact, after He rose from the dead, He spent an additional forty days with them to ensure that they would continue His teaching and build His Church. He promised them the Holy Spirit and said in John 16:13: “When he comes, however, being the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.” And in Matthew 28:19-20, He commissioned the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, to go and teach all that He had taught them: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to carry out everything that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, til the close of the age.”)*

**SAY:** One of the most important teachings of the Apostles is Jesus’ real presence in the Eucharist.



**LEADER TIP:** Consider showing the 6:30-minute video from youtube.com titled "Miracle of Lanciano Italy." The video demonstrates the scientific evidence of a host turning to flesh and the wine turning to blood nearly 1,200 years ago in Lanciano, Italy. The host exists to this day.

**SAY:** We see belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at the very beginning of the Church.

- **ST. PAUL:** “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” —1 Corinthians 10:16
- **ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH:** “They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His graciousness, raised from the dead.” —Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ch. 6. circa 80-110 A.D.

- » These are just two of many examples of writings from the early Church where the teaching on the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is emphasized. Despite this evidence, many Christians, even Catholics, have trouble believing it. Why do you think that is?

*(We read in John 6:66 that even many disciples of Jesus could not believe this and they left him. It takes faith to believe that God, Who is all powerful, would humble Himself in such a way. In addition, many non-Catholics and some Catholics have difficulty with calling the Mass a “holy sacrifice.” They believe that Jesus’ sacrifice happened once and for all on Calvary. Catholics believe this, too, but we believe we are able to be present at Calvary at each and every Mass. The Catechism says: “The Eucharist...makes present the sacrifice of the cross” (CCC 1366).)*



- » St. Augustine gave this encouragement when receiving the Eucharist: “Behold what you are; become what you receive.” What did he mean by this?

*(What do we behold? The Body of Christ. We are the Body of Christ. What do we receive? All of Jesus—His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. When we receive Jesus, we are made new. Have a teen read 2 Corinthians 5:17 from his or her Bible: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”)*



Watch the video segment. The video will last about two minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

**SAY:** In this segment we learned that when we are missing from the table—the Mass—we diminish the dynamic of the church family. In other words, our absence affects others.

- » The Mass is called the “liturgy,” which means “work of the people.” In a sense, when we go to Mass, we are going to do some work. What do you think that work is?

*(The Mass is Jesus’ work. The Catechism says, “Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church” (CCC 1069). The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to share in Jesus’ work.)*

- » A teenage son told his father that he did not want to go to Mass because he did not get anything out of it. The father simply replied: “Son, love isn’t love until it is given away.” What do you think his dad was trying to say?

*(The Mass is not about what we get but rather what we give. We offer worship to God by giving ourselves in the prayer of the Mass. In the Mass the work of redemption is continually being carried out. Our participation in the Mass contributes to this work of redemption in the world. Therefore, we not only go to Mass to show our gratitude to God for all His blessings in our lives, but we go to unite ourselves to Christ in His prayer and sacrifice for the salvation of souls. The stakes are high! This is why our presence matters!)*



# COMMIT



## ACTIVITY

**SAY:** I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.*

**SAY:** Let's go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that you heard tonight that has made an impression on you.

*Take a minute and go around the room again.*



## JESUS ASKS

**SAY:** Jesus asked this question of his followers in Scripture. Let's take a minute and silently consider how we would respond to this question.



*"Do you believe that I am able to do this?"*

—Matthew 9:28

» What situation in your life could Jesus be referring to when asking this question of you?

*Take a couple of minutes of silence for the teens to reflect, then continue.*

**SAY:** Thanks for sharing so openly with our group tonight. I'd like to send you home with a challenge for this week. Here it is: Pray a rosary for Catholics who have stopped attending Mass so they might come to understand how much the Church needs them.

*Ask teens if they have any questions about the challenge, and remind them that it's noted on their Teen Pages.*



# CLOSING PRAYER

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**SAY:** I want to ask each of you to share something you are grateful to God for.

*Give everyone a chance to share, including yourself, and then pray an Our Father.*

**SAY:** I want you to remain quiet as you think about where you have fallen short as a disciple of Jesus over the past week.

*Allow a minute for quiet reflection.*

Together, let's pray:

**PRAY:** Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

**SAY:** And finally, I would like each of you to share a concern for yourself or someone else in which you would like the help of the Holy Spirit.

*Pray a Glory Be.*

**SAY:** Let's end with a Hail Mary and ask for Mary's intercession that we may be as devoted a disciple as she is.

*THE CHURCH*  
*SESSION 5*



# BE CHURCH



# THE CHURCH

*Be Church*

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

In our previous studies, we talked about how the Church is not a building but rather a community—not simply a “what,” but rather a “who.” Now we’ll explore how each of us can respond to that truth.

St. Paul gives the perfect imagery of this reality in his first letter to the Corinthians. He teaches that Christ’s Body is made up of each one of us. Every person ever created has a role to play in the Body of Christ. No one can be repeated, and every part matters. St. Francis of Assisi responded to God’s call for him to rebuild the Church with living stones. His example teaches us that we are each a living stone that builds up the Church.

## SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video segments prior to your gathering. Below is the outline for the session. Use the time allotments as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
20 minutes	 CONNECT	Lead your group in the opening activity, "More Than Just a Name," and affirm them in their individuality.
50 minutes	 DISCUSS	View the following video scenes and discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Scene 1: The Who Is You</li> <li> Scene 2: We Are Living Stones</li> <li> Scene 3: Food for the Journey</li> <li> Scene 4: Discerning the Call</li> </ul>
20 minutes	 COMMIT	Share highlights of the discussion, challenge teens to perform an act of service in the parish in the coming week, and close in prayer.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

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- » Media device to show video segments
- » Bibles
- » Teen Sheets
- » Pens or pencils (optional; for note-taking)
- » A book of baby names and their meanings (or search the Web for the meanings of the names of teens in your group, and print out the list); or see the Leader Tip in the activity about using smartphones

## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

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- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



## LEADER TIPS

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- » Make sure you affirm each member of your group in the "More Than Just a Name" activity.
- » Encourage parents to purchase the talk *Set All Afire: Why the Church Still Matters!* Go to Lighthouse Catholic Media for the download or CD.  
[www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/set-all-afire-why-the-church-still-matters](http://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/set-all-afire-why-the-church-still-matters)
- » We often include possible responses after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. Let group members respond first; share the answers in parentheses as needed.



# CONNECT



## ACTIVITY

### MORE THAN JUST A NAME

*Gather teens and show the book on baby names or the list you downloaded.*

**SAY:** Our parents put a lot of thought into naming each of us. You may have heard stories at home of how your name was chosen. I am going to pass around this baby name list [book], and I would like you to look up the name of the person on your right and read the origin and meaning of that person's name to the group. We'll then take a minute to share how we've seen the meaning of that person's name show forth in his or her personality, characteristics or even life events.



**LEADER TIP:** As an alternative to bringing in a book or list of names, let teens use smartphones or tablets to look up names on [www.behindthename.com/](http://www.behindthename.com/).

*After everyone has participated, continue.*

In Scripture we find that names are significant. For example, Jesus' name means "God saves." His name speaks to the mission of His life.

- » In what ways, if any, do you think the meaning of your name speaks to the mission of your life?
- » If Jesus were to follow you around all day tomorrow, what would you do differently?

## INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** In our previous studies, we talked about how the Church is not a building but rather a community—not simply a "what," but rather a "who." We also talked about the life of the early Church. Now we'll explore how each of us can respond to that truth.





## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY:** I want to open our discussion together with a passage from Scripture and a short prayer.

Have a teen from the group read the following:



*“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”*

—1 Corinthians 12:12-20

**PRAY:** *“Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”* —St. Teresa of Avila



## DISCUSS

**SAY:** Let's start with the 1st video segment.



Watch the first video segment. The video is just over two minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Edith Stein was raised as a Jew but became an atheist.

- » Since atheism is a worldview that gives no hope or meaning to life, what do you think are some reasons people embrace atheism?

» How would you interpret this quote?

*“In some awful, strange, paradoxical way, atheists tend to take religion more seriously than the practitioners.” —Jonathan Miller*

*(You should know that there are atheist groups on many college campuses and they are public about their atheism and want to convince others to join them. They perpetuate ideas that became popular in the Age of the Enlightenment, like “religion is superstition that keeps people ignorant and therefore it must be removed from society.” In other words, religion is bad. However, an organization called The Fixed Point Foundation did a nationwide campaign to interview these college-age atheists. Most of them were raised in a church and were consciously rejecting Christianity more for emotional reasons rather than intellectual reasons. This shows that faith is an 18-inch journey—from the head to the heart. It is about a relationship with a person: Jesus Christ.)*

**SAY:** But, Edith sincerely pursued truth and read many books by Christian intellectuals. However, it was not until she read the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila that she came to faith in Jesus.

» What do you think it was about the autobiography that was different from the other books about Christianity she had read?

*(Jesus says in John 13:35: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The saints are the greatest lovers in the history of the world. They grew so close to Jesus and they had such a profound experience of the love of God that His love spilled over from their life into the lives of others. People are drawn to this love. St. Teresa wrote about her powerful experiences in prayer and the love of God overflowing from her life, and this grabbed the heart of Edith Stein. The life of St. Teresa removed all her doubts. The beautiful part of the story is that Edith grew to know and love Jesus like St. Teresa of Avila—and she also was canonized a saint.)*

» There is a saying that “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” How does this relate to what we are talking about?

*(People encounter the love of Jesus for them through His followers. We are His hands and feet. God has designed it that we would first come to experience His love through our parents. Sadly, this does not always happen. However, Jesus has called His Church to go out into the world and love people just as they are. If they know how much we care for them, they are more likely to be open to our faith.)*

» Is there someone, either a saint or another historical figure or someone living today, whose love for Jesus and heroic generosity has inspired you?

» **SAY:** Let's watch Scene 2.



Watch the second video segment. The video is about three minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

John Wooden is one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time. He took a struggling UCLA basketball program to ten national championships in twelve years. He didn’t have the most talented or tallest players, but they were exceptional as a team. Wooden told his players: “We don’t have to be superstars or win championships...All we have to do is learn to rise to every occasion, give our best effort, and make those around us better as we do it.”

» How can this quote be applied to the Church?

*(In our baptism we became the Body of Christ. In other words, we have become a team. God has given us all different gifts with the intention of them being used on the team, and it is only as a part of the team that our gifts reach their potential and bear fruit. Bottom line: We accomplish far more as a team. It takes humility and maturity to understand this and live it.)*

» In what ways can our discipleship group function better as a team?

» St. Francis is credited with saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.” How did St. Francis preach the Gospel with his life?

*(Francis took the words of Jesus seriously: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Matthew 25:45). Motivated by this, Francis developed a deep love for the outcasts of society, and by serving them he saw that he was serving Jesus. For example, one day he came upon a leper and embraced him even though he had a dreadful fear of leprosy. Though Francis’ family was wealthy, he embraced poverty so he could be in solidarity and service to the poor. Francis has had many imitate his example throughout the centuries as Franciscan communities formed and continued his mission.)*

» In 1224, while he was praying, St. Francis received the stigmata. Though very rare, this is a supernatural phenomenon that even occurs today. For example, St. Padre Pio had the stigmata for 50 years of his life. Why do you think God gives the stigmata to some people? *(This is perhaps the most dramatic example of being in the Body of Christ. Jesus desires that we are so closely united to Him that we can generously offer Him all of our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings for the sake of others. The stigmata is a powerful reminder of Jesus’ invitation to unite our suffering with His. In other words, pain and suffering are not meaningless. Jesus’ pain and suffering conquered sin and death.)*

Ask for a teen to read 1 Peter 2:4-5:



*“Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

—1 Peter 2:4-5

» What do you think it means to “offer spiritual sacrifices” to God?

**SAY:** Let's continue with Scene 3.



Watch the third video segment. The video will last almost four minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

There is a similar story in the lives of Edith Stein, St. Francis of Assisi, and Sr. Miriam. They each believed worldly things would satisfy the longing in their heart. That changed with their courageous decision to give their ambitions and dreams to Jesus. When they encountered the love of Jesus, they immediately got serious about following Him. In this scene we learned that getting serious about our faith is making sure we receive good nutrition for our souls.

» What would you say to someone who says: "I believe in God but I'll get serious about my faith later on. Right now I am young and want to have fun."

One way that you can get serious about your faith is to develop the habits of the saints. In a previous study we talked about the acronym H.A.B.I.T.S. Let's go back to that and talk about how or if you have been able to set these habits in motion.

**H** – stands for Holy hour (setting aside time every day for prayer)

**A** – is Accountability (friends that help you pursue Christ)

**B** – stands for Bible (study, meditation and memorization)

**I** – is Invest in your parish (tithe and service)

**T** – is to Tell others about Jesus

**S** – is Sacraments (frequent Eucharist and Confession)

» What habits have you been doing the best with?

» What habits do you need some help?

» Would you be willing to have someone in the group check in with you this week about a habit you need to improve in?

**SAY:** Let's finish up the video segments with Scene 4.



Watch the fourth video segment. The video is about four minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

It is a great joy for me to facilitate the discussion and faith sharing in this group. My prayer is that our group not only helps you grow closer to Jesus but that you also grow in discernment. Discernment begins with the desire to do the Lord's will in your life. Our ability to discern God's will grows as our prayer life grows. This is why reading Scripture is so important. God will speak to you in His Word. As you read Scripture, be attentive to what is going on in your heart—thoughts, memories, desires, or other feelings. Ask the Lord what He wants you to understand from these movements in your heart. This is often how God will direct your steps!

- » Can anyone give an example of being really inspired by an experience in prayer and/or reading the Bible?
- » Has God been putting a passion in your heart for a particular ministry in the Church?



## COMMIT

**SAY:** I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

*Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.*

Let's go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that you heard tonight that has made an impression on you.

*Take a minute and go around the room again.*



## JESUS ASKS



*"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?"*

—Mark 8:19

**SAY:** Jesus multiplied the small generous offering of a boy to feed 5,000. What could he do with your gifts?

*(Let's take a minute and silently consider how you would respond to this question.)*

Thanks for sharing so openly with our group tonight. I'd like to send you home with a challenge for the week. Now that you've considered what you could do with your gifts, I'd like you to perform an act of service in the parish this week. Take some time now to think about what commitment you can make, and jot a reminder to yourself. Your Teen Sheet has some ideas.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**SAY:** Let's close in prayer. We'll start by each sharing something we are grateful to God for.

*Share something you're thankful for to get the group started. Give everyone a chance to share, and then lead the group in an Our Father.*

I want you to remain quiet as you think about where you have fallen short as a disciple of Jesus over the past week.

*Pause for a minute or two. Silence is a good thing.*

I would like each of you to share a concern for yourself or someone else in which you would like the help of the Holy Spirit. As each one shares, we will answer as a group with this prayer: Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

*After everyone has shared, pray a Glory Be together.*

Let's end with a Hail Mary and ask for Mary's intercession, that we may be as devoted a disciple as she is.

*Thank everyone for coming and remind them of their commitment for the week.*