

WE BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH

Generations of Faith
January 9 and 12, 2011

SESSION FOCUS: This *Professing our Faith* session explores images of the Church (people of God, sacrament, and Body of Christ) and the ministries and mission of the Church - what the Church does (its ministries) and why the Church acts as it does (its mission). This session engages the participants in understanding how the mission of Jesus and the early Church is being lived by the Church today. The session presents the Church as a living community through the lens of six fundamental ministries: community life; evangelization; justice and service to those in need; liturgy, sacraments, and prayer; pastoral care; and teaching/catechesis.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Describe the mission and ministries of the Church today, and connect them with the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ (know-what)>
- Value and appreciate the significance of the Church as the People of God, as a sign of God's presence and action in the world, and as the Body of Christ (know-why).
- Discover practical ways for Church members to live their baptismal call as active participants in the Catholic community (know-how).

BACKGROUND READING:

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 748-810
- *U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults*: (as Mystical Body of Christ) 44, 115, 119, 122, 146, 167, 226, 505; (building up the Church) 254, 376
- *Rediscovering Catholicism* by Matthew Kelly: Chapters 1-5

Increasing your Understanding of the Church

Below are some brief descriptive phrases about the Church. They give you a variety of ideas about what the Catholic Church is. If someone asked you to describe the Catholic Church, which of the phrases would you use? Which of these phrases best express you own understanding of the Church? Place a check beside each descriptive phrase that you would use.

The Catholic Church is...

- a place where we worship God at Mass on Sunday.
- the pope, bishops, and priests.
- people who believe in Jesus Christ and do his work in the world today.
- a human organization that deals with religious issues.
- a sign to us of Jesus Christ's presence today.
- a group of people who care about and accept each other.
- a group of people who serve the needs of others just as Jesus did.
- a community that proclaims the Good News of Jesus.
- people teaching others what it means to live as Catholics.
- people living their faith at home with their families, at school, and at work.

What phrases would you add to this list? Feel free to add any phrases of your own.

There are many images that Catholics have used over the centuries to describe the Church. Three images stand out: People of God, Mystery or Sacrament, and Body of Christ.

CREATING THE IDEAL CHURCH

- First, the Church is sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God by WORD, that is, in preaching, teaching, and catechesis.
- Second, the Church is sent to participate in Christ's WORSHIP of the Father, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church does this especially in the Eucharist. The Church also celebrates and anticipates the coming kingdom in the other sacraments and in its general prayer life.
- Third, the Church is sent to offer WITNESS to the world of what it proclaims and celebrates. Because the Church is a sacrament, it has to practice what it preaches. It is not enough to be the Body of Christ; it must look and act like the Body of Christ. It must look and act like a community permeated with God's saving presence.
- Finally, the Church is sent to provide SERVICE to those in need, both inside and outside the Church. The Church must follow the example of the Lord himself, who ministered to the sick, the poor, the handicapped, the oppressed, the socially ostracized, the sinners, and the dying.

The mission of the Church is expressed and lived through six fundamental ministries: community life; evangelization; justice and service to those in need; liturgy sacraments, and prayer; pastoral care; and teaching/catechesis. Each of these ministries has its roots in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW KELLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Matthew says, "...if the people of this age really are hungering for truth, sincerity, and authenticity, then as Christians we must ask ourselves, Why are they not enthusiastically embracing Christianity? Why, in fact, are so many people so hostile toward Christ and his Church?" (pg. 9)

Matthew says, "Although there are many philosophies influencing the modern schema, I would like to propose that there are three major practical philosophies upon which we have constructed our modern culture...individualism..."What's in it for me?"...hedonism..."If it feels good, do it!"...and...minimalism..."What is the least I can do...?" (pages 16-19) What philosophies do you live by?

Matthew says, "Our desire for happiness is not going to go away. It is part of the human condition. Our quest for happiness is a quest for God. This is the genius of God. Our yearning for happiness is the ultimate and eternal homing device, designed to draw us gently toward our eternal home. Our yearning for happiness is a yearning for union with our Creator. As Augustine pointed out so simply and eloquently, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, Lord." (pg. 33) Where does your quest for happiness lead you?

Matthew says, "Are you thriving? Or are you just surviving? Is the Church thriving? Or is the Church just surviving?...If the Church is not thriving, it is because you and I are not thriving." (pg. 47) What would it take for you to feel like you were thriving?

DEVELOPING THE CHURCH OF THE HOME

As a family or small group, discuss the following:

- When you think of the Church, what images come to mind? What key words would you use to describe the images, or what parts of the images are most important? Where did the images come from?
- In what parish ministries or activities are you involved?

One of the most powerful images of the Church from Vatican II was the Church as the People of God. When we speak of the Church, we are talking about ourselves: people gathered together by the Risen Jesus to celebrate his presence among us and to continue his mission in the world. We are God's community. Using your Bibles, read the description of the first Christian community in Acts 2:42-47 to your family. Then ask yourselves if you have ever thought of your family as a Church.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a pastoral letter to families, describe the family as a domestic Church, or a Church of the home. What might it mean for your family to be a Church of the home? Discuss this as a family or group.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote the following:

"Jesus promised to be where two or three are gathered in his name (cf. Mt. 18:20). We give the name *church* to the people whom the Lord gathers, who strive to follow his way of love, and through whose lives his saving presence is made known."

"A family is our first community and most basic way in which the Lord gathers us,

forms us and acts in the world. The early Church expressed this truth by calling the Christian family a domestic church or church of the home."

"...The point of the teaching is simple, yet profound. As Christian families, you not only belong to the Church, but your daily life is a true expression of the Church."

"Your domestic church is not complete by itself, of course. It should be united with and supported by parishes and other communities within the larger Church. Christ has called you and joined you to himself in and through the sacraments. Therefore, you share in one and the same mission that he gives to the whole Church" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love*, Washington, DC: USCCB, 1994. p. 8).

HOW CAN YOU NURTURE FAITH AT HOME?

So, how do you create a faith-filled family? Let's begin with how your family uses time.

- Think about how your family currently spends time in a typical week. Think about the number of hours your family spends on typical daily activities.
- Draw a circle and make a pie chart of a typical week, indicating the amount of time each day that you spend on activities such as school or work, sleep, sports/active recreation, entertainment/TV, family meals/family activities, religious activities, or other activities.
- After you have completed the chart, discuss the following questions:
 - What are your family's highest priorities based on your use of time?
 - Are there important activities you must make more time for?
 - How might you make more time for those important activities?

Pre-K ~ 6th GRADE LESSON SYNOPSIS

Pre K and K: The Pre-K and K students learned that the Church is a large family that belongs to God and that the Holy Spirit helps the Church family to love. They also learned that each person has special talents to serve others and that every day the Church family follows Jesus. The students also drew a picture of their church and did a project on their parish church.

First Grade: The first graders learned that God invites everyone into his kingdom, that the Church is people who follow Jesus and say "yes" to God's call, and that people in the Church are called to live holy lives, as the saints did. They then heard

the story of Noah and the Ark and learned that the Church shares Jesus' message about God's kingdom. The students then did a project on the Rainbow of God's love and promise and took a short quiz to review what they had learned.

Second Grade: The second grade students learned that grace is sharing in God's life and that the sacraments are holy signs that come from Jesus and give grace. They also learned that: in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you receive God's forgiveness; that this sacrament also celebrates your friendship with God and the Church; that the Church year celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and that the Resurrection is the mystery of Jesus being raised from the dead. After a discussion of the colors of the church year, the students colored a church picture showing which season the Church is celebrating today.

Third and Fourth Grade: The students learned that laity is the name for all of the baptized people in the Church who share Christ's mission but are not priests or consecrated sisters and brothers, and that it is through Baptism that God calls people to serve in special ways. They then did an activity called "People of God" where students uncovered a message to discover some of the roles that the people of God play in the Church. They also read a short biography about a young man named Mattie Stepanek who was born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy. Mattie's "heartsong" is writing poetry. He says that your "heartsong" is the song in your heart that wants you to help make yourself a better person, and to help other people do the same. He says that everybody has one. Students then discussed the different ways they could begin to discover their "heartsongs" and made heart posters telling possibilities of what their "heartsongs" could be. They closed with the thought that all Christians can serve God by spreading love, peace, and justice.

Fifth and Sixth Grade: The students learned that evangelization is sharing the good news of Jesus in a way that invites people to accept the gospel and that we witness every day through good words and actions. They learned that we demonstrate our values through our dress, speech, and behavior; and that the relationship between the Eucharist and the work of evangelization is that Eucharist nourishes the spirit of evangelization. The students then did an activity where they decoded a message that encouraged students to use their God-given gifts to help make disciples of all nations. They then read about and discussed the six Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, and visit those in prison. They closed with the thought that all who are baptized are called to participate in the mission of the Church.