

Teaching Guide for
Being Catholic

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Introduction



THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

The Discovering Program is composed of fourteen courses. *Being Catholic* focuses primarily on membership in the Roman Catholic church. The course asks young adolescents to consider consciously what being Catholic means to them. Specifically it provides students with an opportunity to clarify, reflect on, and respond to their Catholic identity. *Being Catholic* may be easier for students to understand and appreciate if they have previously participated in other Discovering courses such as *Learning to Communicate* and *Understanding Myself*. Refer to the program coordinator's manual for additional help in deciding when to use this course.

The six session plans of this course are each designed for a 1-hour meeting. If your group is scheduled to be together for more than an hour, the sessions can be extended with the optional approaches suggested at the end of each session plan. Also consult these approaches as alternative strategies if your teaching style or the students' learning style calls for changes.

Being Catholic has been successfully taught to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. However, as you set up your schedule, note that its materials and concepts might overwhelm your students if the course is presented too intensively, as in a day of recollection. Therefore, plan to offer *Being Catholic* as six 1-hour sessions or as three 2-hour sessions. Sessions 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6 can be effectively combined because their nature and content are compatible.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

BACKGROUND

The Young Adolescent and This Course

Most middle school and junior high students are at an age and stage of development in which group membership is a primary means of shaping personal identity. *Being Catholic* offers young people an opportunity to focus on their membership in one particular group to which they belong—the group called Roman Catholic.

The National Catholic Educational Association's *1995 National Assessment of Catholic Religious Education* surveyed 9,275 Catholic eighth graders who attended parish religious education programs, and reported the following statistics:

- Eighty-four percent agreed that being Catholic was important to them, 8 percent were not sure, and 5 percent disagreed.
- Sixty-seven percent agreed that going to Mass was important to them, 17 percent were not sure, and 13 percent disagreed.
- Fifty percent always attended weekend Mass, 28 percent sometimes attended weekend Mass, and 19 percent never attended weekend Mass.
- Eighty percent always received communion when they attended Mass, 9 percent sometimes received communion, and 8 percent never received communion.
- Sixty-three percent agreed that they wanted to know more about their religion, 22 percent were not sure, and 10 percent were not interested in knowing more about their religion.

Statistics such as these suggest that many young adolescents will be open and responsive to a course like *Being Catholic*.

According to Fr. James Heft of Dayton University, in Ohio, the task of adolescents is to discover their real self within a community of care. Rather than *experiencing an identity crisis*, young adolescents are engaged in the task of *shaping an identity*. Young adolescents are concerned about their identity as a person, but they can only reflect on or articulate that identity in the context of their relationships with others. They tend to define their worth as a person through competition and comparison with their peers,

and they often evaluate their own value by the number of friends they have. Thus a key question of identity, “Who am I?” is embedded in a more immediate question that preoccupies young adolescents, “With whom do I belong?”

The personal identity of the students in your religious education program is actually shaped by many relationships:

- They are members of a family; they have parents and possibly brothers and sisters.
- They are students in a middle or junior high school.
- They are participants in a religious education program.
- They may also be dancers, musicians, athletes, or collectors.

In addition, the students’ identity is influenced by broader agents such as socioeconomic status, geographic location, and ethnic background.

Catholic identity clearly contributes to the personal identity of many young people. For some students their identity as a Catholic plays a large role in shaping their personal identity; for others it plays a rather minor role. To a greater or lesser degree, Catholic identity shapes the way these young people relate to God and to one another. Catholicity shapes how they believe and what they believe, and determines how and with whom they worship. Every parish has a stake in the Catholic identity of its young people, for each young person’s Catholicity affects the community, just as the community affects each young person.

The Theology of This Course

The basic questions that shape religious identity are: How is God revealed to us? and How do we respond? The Catholic answer to the first of these questions is, God is fully revealed to humanity in and through the life and paschal mystery of Jesus. The fullness of revelation found in Christ is then expressed and passed on through the Scriptures (that is, the *written* transmission of the word of God) and the wisdom of our community that we know as the Tradition of the Catholic church (that is, the *active* transmission of the word of God). The Scriptures and Tradition are therefore two expressions of one revelation in Jesus Christ. These expressions are handed on to each generation of believers, forming a single reality. Together and equally, the Scriptures and Tradition form the basis of the Catholic church’s faith convictions and religious practices.

In answer to the second question—how do we respond to the revelation of God?—Catholics would say that we respond most fully to the revelation of God by living as faithful disciples of Jesus within the Catholic community.

In the context of four broad areas, we can distinguish the religious identity of the Catholic denomination from that of other Christian denominations: beliefs, liturgical practices, organizational structure, and sociopolitical responses. Within each of these four areas, we can find specific components that are either unique to Catholic identity or expressed in unique ways by Catholics. The following characteristics of Catholic identity have endured throughout history and around the globe:

- *Universality.* Catholics are a united people whose mission is to extend the gospel of Jesus to all people in all cultures at all times.
- *Tradition.* Catholics hold the past in respect and consider it a source of wisdom and belief. They believe that throughout the church's history, the spirit of God has guided it to articulate dogmas and doctrines that are true to the message of Jesus. At the same time, Catholics are open to the future and to its wisdom.
- *Celebration of the human condition.* Catholics celebrate the human. They do not view the human condition as essentially sinful. Although Catholics view the human condition as wounded, they proclaim it to be essentially good, not evil. Therefore, Catholics are not afraid to have fun and to honor the various aspects of their humanity.
- *Sacramentality.* Catholics believe that God is often found in, communicated with, and represented through symbols and signs. Catholics have their own religious "language," that is, their own symbols and rituals, their own unique sacramental life.
- *A drive toward rationality.* Catholics see faith and reason as partners, not as enemies. They believe that reason enhances faith, and faith enlightens reason.
- *Shared leadership.* Catholics have organized themselves in such a way that leadership is clearly defined and well structured—from the pope, who is the bishop of Rome and is considered the successor of Saint Peter, through the local parish council president, education administrator, board of education member, liturgical committee leader, and so on.
- *The communion of saints.* Catholics believe that they can join in prayer and petition with their fellow believers, both those who are living and those who have died.
- *A commitment to justice.* Catholics are concerned about oppressed and disadvantaged people. Throughout history countless Catholics have been involved in the political, economic, and social issues of their day.

Thus, the church, like a person, has a kind of constant personality, character, or ethos that identifies it in any given time and place. That character is conveyed, expressed, or passed down through the ages, through changing characteristics or behaviors. Some call these less durable traits carriers. Carriers of Catholic identity are affected by the culture of the times. Examples of such carriers are the following:

- Many generations ago the belief in and practice of indulgences was a meaningful component of Catholic identity; today few Catholics think about indulgences.
- Abstention from meat on Fridays was for a long time a meaningful carrier of Catholic identity. In recent decades, other than during lenten abstinence, meatless Fridays began to hold very little meaning for most Catholics. Interestingly, and an indicator of how the carriers of faith can shift and evolve, recent discussions in the church suggest a possible renewal in the practice of meatless Fridays.
- Older Catholics remember when the Latin Mass was a powerful carrier of identity; the Latin Mass is a carrier of identity for relatively few younger Catholics.

Some carriers of Catholic identity have exerted a powerful attraction for many. Because carriers of Catholic identity are not essential to the church's faith and worship, however, they can and must change as the church journeys through time. With the arrival of new cultural developments, some old carriers may fade in importance and new ones are born. For example, the contemporary church's responses to social issues such as abortion, nuclear war, welfare reform, and the economy have become for many people meaningful carriers of their Catholic identity.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves as a valuable source of information on these issues as they are explored in this course. The content of sessions 1 and 2 of the course, which invite an exploration of the church as an assembly gathered in faith, is treated in numbers 748 to 780. Sessions 3 and 4 of the course explore the church as a sacramental assembly; part 2 of the *Catechism* provides rich background on that theme, including an extensive treatment of the sacraments. Sessions 5 and 6 of the course focus on the church as a people called to service, which the *Catechism* discusses in numbers 781 to 798 and 2044 to 2046. Additionally, the *Catechism* can help you respond to questions the students raise during the session meetings or in the question box suggested for sessions 2 to 6.

Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required of the students as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives the students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.
- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet's attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Being Catholic* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

Prayer Experiences

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during most sessions. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Teaching Strategies

Each session in this course is designed to help students clarify, relate to, or respond to one or more of several abiding characteristics of Catholic identity. Although the learning strategies stay relatively concrete, the themes of Catholic identity discussed in each session require some level of abstract thinking. Your students will be challenged to stretch both their mind and their imagination. Research affirms that the use of religious imagination is an important element in developing religious identity (see Andrew Greeley, *The Religious Imagination*). Therefore, this course uses imagery, storytelling, symbolism, and rituals—all designed to spark both the thinking and the imagination of the students.

The students with whom you work will naturally have questions about the church. One major benefit of this course is that it can provide young people with a forum in which to articulate and discuss such questions. Students may wish to digress from the session material to discuss further questions of related but more personal interest. When the digression seems clearly related to the material at hand and responsive to your students' needs, permit it to run its course. If some students occasionally take the discussion far off the track, gently call them back to the central theme, perhaps by initiating the next step in the session procedure. If you notice that any students lack the background knowledge necessary for participating fully in this course, you may want to meet with them separately for some tutorial work.

Additional Optional Exercise

For any one of sessions 2 to 6, consider inviting two or three high school juniors and seniors to visit the class. Ask each visitor to spend from 3 to 5 minutes talking about how his or her active participation in the church has changed since he or she was in the seventh or eighth grade.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Being Catholic*

Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students reflect on the ways in which the church has helped to shape their personal identity
- that they identify and clarify the essential carriers of Catholic identity
- that they experience a fuller sense of participation in the Catholic community

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Being Catholic* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

Session 1: “We Value Our Roots”

The students will do the following:

- review and describe their personal history
- examine the historical development of the Catholic church
- identify similarities between their history and the history of the Catholic church

Session 2: “We Believe”

The students will do the following:

- identify their favorite aspect of Catholicism
- articulate their understanding of basic Catholic beliefs
- recognize distinguishing characteristics of their Catholic identity
- clarify their personal beliefs

Session 3: “We Express Our Faith Through Symbols”

The students will do the following:

- clarify the meaning of symbols in contemporary youth culture
- recognize the meaning of the church’s symbols and symbolic actions
- participate in a prayer service using symbols that reflect their experience of Catholic identity

Session 4: “We Dance”

The students will do the following:

- articulate their understanding of what being religious means
- identify how the sacraments celebrate God’s presence among us

Session 5: “We Each Play a Part”

The students will do the following:

- describe characteristics of a meaningful group
- identify the church’s ministries of servant leadership
- identify their image of the Catholic church

Session 6: “We Are Called to Care”

The students will do the following:

- identify real-life examples of people in need
- examine the Catholic tradition of caring for those in need
- determine ways of responding to people in their life who are in need

RESOURCES

- Deedy, John. *The Catholic Fact Book*. Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1986.
- Dues, Greg. *Catholic Customs and Traditions: A Popular Guide*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992.
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Trans. United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Washington, DC: USCC, 1994. Provides the clarity you need for this course.
- Saint Anthony Messenger Press. *Catholic Update Sourcebook and Youth Update Sourcebook*. Cincinnati: Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1995.
- Turpin, Joanne. *Catholic Treasures New and Old: Traditions, Customs, and Practices*. Cincinnati: Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1993.



SESSION

1

We Value Our Roots



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

Objectives

The students will do the following:

- review and describe their personal history
- examine the historical development of the Catholic church
- identify similarities between their history and the history of the Catholic church

Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 6 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. a welcome and an assessment (10 minutes)
- B. an introduction (5 minutes)
- C. the student booklet activities “Welcome!” and “My Story” (15 minutes)
- D. the student booklet activity “Who Am I?” (10 minutes)
- E. a comparison of personal life stories and the church’s life story (10 minutes)
- F. a closing prayer (10 minutes)

BACKGROUND

To begin their participation in this course, the students are welcomed and then asked to complete a confidential assessment of their current understanding of and attitude toward the Catholic church. The assessment is not a test, but rather a tool to help you and the students appraise their knowledge about the church. They will be invited to complete this assessment again at the end of the course, to measure how their understanding has deepened as a result of this course.

After the initial assessment, the students get in touch with their Catholic identity by comparing their personal history to the history of the Catholic church. To help them reflect on their life story as well as to establish a good rapport with them, you share elements of your own life story. This approach helps them see that just as their individual history shapes their emerging identity, so too does the history of the church shape its identity.

Most junior high students enjoy a good story. The student booklet story “Who Am I?” represents the church as a person with a long, colorful, and amazing past filled with positive and negative experiences. After the students read the story and identify the person as in fact the church, they try to make connections between their personal life experiences and events in the life of the church.

The students then engage in a writing exercise using a feature in the student booklet called the Catholic identity treasure chest. This feature provides a way for the students to identify elements in the church that have personal meaning for them and that make them proud or glad to identify themselves as a member of the Catholic church. The session closes with a simple litany of some of the saints, heroic figures who emerged throughout the history of the church.

PREPARATION

Materials Needed

- copies of handout 1–A, “I Am Catholic,” one for each student
- pens or pencils
- a large envelope
- a poster displaying photographs of yourself
- slips of paper, at least two for you plus two for each student
- a cap (like a baseball cap or ski cap)
- student booklets, one for each student
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- blank name tags, one for each student
- markers, one for each student
- a recording of instrumental music, and a tape or CD player (optional)
- a Bible, a pillow or a Bible stand, a table and a cloth, a cross or a church statue, a live plant or other item from nature, and a pillar candle and matches (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)

Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step B.* Prepare to share your life story, and create a poster of photographs of yourself, as described in step B.
- For step D.* Familiarize yourself with the “Who Am I?” essay on pages 4 to 5 of the student booklet and with the annotated version of that essay in the Notes section at the end of this session plan.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

Teacher Prayer

Part 1, “The Profession of Faith,” of the *Catechism* deals with God’s revelation to people and the faith by which the church responds to that revelation. It quotes Saint Joan of Arc, who in reply to her judges sums up the faith of the church and offers us an insight into the faith of a profound believer:

“About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they’re just one thing, and we shouldn’t complicate the matter.” (No. 795)

As you prepare to help young people understand what being Catholic is about, prayerfully reflect on Saint Joan of Arc’s sentiments and ask yourself these questions:

- What is the simplest way to describe what being Catholic means to me?
- How do I experience Jesus within the Catholic church?

In your own words, let God know the deepest hopes you have for the students who will join you for this course on being Catholic.

PROCEDURE

A. Welcome and Assessment (10 minutes)

1. Welcome everyone and explain that the main goal of this course, *Being Catholic*, is to help everyone in the group come to a better understanding of their Catholic faith and their membership in the church.

2. Pass out copies of handout 1–A, “I Am Catholic,” and pens or pencils. Explain that this assessment is meant to help each person evaluate his or her current knowledge about the Catholic church. Make sure everyone understands that this is not a test. Assure them that their answers will not be shared or discussed, and that the assessment is for their own information. Emphasize that they need not worry about incorrect responses.

Announce a 5-minute time limit and ask the students to begin. Monitor the time, making sure that no one is rushed.

3. Afterward collect the assessments and put them in a large envelope and seal it. Tell the students that they will take this assessment again at the end of the course to measure the knowledge they have gained.

Note: Save the sealed envelope filled with assessments for use in step D of session 6.

B. Introduction (5 minutes)

Before the session. Prepare to share your life story with the students. Use the instructions from this step description and the questions from “My Story” on pages 2 to 3 of the student booklet to guide your presentation. To accompany your presentation, create a poster of photographs of yourself throughout your life. Try to include photos of yourself as a junior high student.

To help the students get in touch with their life story, share some elements of your own. Do not explain why you are beginning this way and do not mention the church at this point. Simply tell the students that you would like to share with them some thoughts about your life. State that they will also have a chance to think and talk about their own life.

Begin the story of your life journey with reflections on your grandparents. Then tell the students a little about your immediate family background, your grade school days, and your present life. Keep this sharing short, but be specific enough about what has happened to you so that your autobiography will be seen by the students as uniquely your own. Stress how you have grown and changed and how you continue to do so.

While telling your story, show the students a poster of photographs from your life. It will be best to have the students gather around so that all can see the photos at the same time; passing the poster around will tend to be too distracting and disruptive.

Conclude the story of your life by giving two words that best describe it so far. For example, you might use words such as *scary*, *exciting*, *fun*, *challenging*, and *joyful*. Write each word on a separate slip of paper and put the slips in a cap.

Note: Keep the cap with your slips of paper in it handy for steps C and E of this session.

C. Booklet Activities: “Welcome!” and “My Story” (15 minutes)

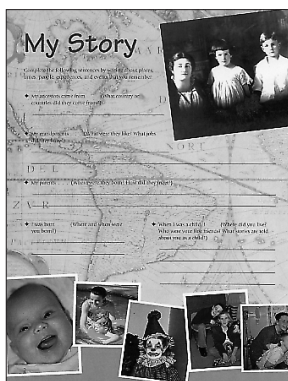
1. Distribute the student booklets and blank self-adhesive labels. Tell the students to write their name on the label and stick it on the cover of their booklet. Mention that they will use their booklet during each session.



Booklet page 1

Add that you will collect the booklets at the close of each session, and that the young people will be able to take them home after the last session.

2. Direct the students to “Welcome!” on page 1 of the student booklet. Read that introduction to the course. Then give the students blank name tags and markers. Instruct them to write on their tag the name they go by as well as two or three words that identify their place of birth and their main interests. For example, a student might write, “Juan, New York City, hockey, computers.” Ask the young people to wear their name tag for the remainder of the session.



Booklet page 2

3. Have the students turn to “My Story” on pages 2 to 3 of the booklet. Read the directions there and explain that this is the students’ opportunity to write and tell their own life story. Assure them that this activity is for their personal reflection; they will be asked to share only the written responses they wish to, and they need not share any of their responses.

Point out the list of words at the bottom of page 3 of the booklet. Emphasize that for the last question in this booklet activity, the students should select just two words that describe their life, as you did earlier.

Give the students 5 minutes to complete “My Story.” As they work on this activity, circulate and offer help where needed.

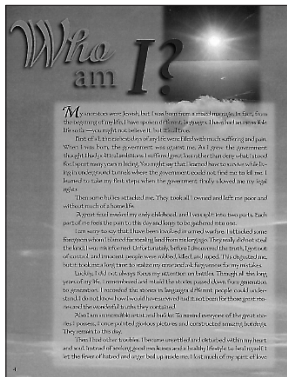
4. When time is up, help the students share their stories, by asking questions like the following:

- ▶ You have probably heard many of your family stories. How far back in your family tree do these stories go?
- ▶ Did anyone’s mom and dad meet in an unusual place?
- ▶ What is the topic or focus of a story that you like to tell over and over about yourself? about some family member?
- ▶ When you think about the fifth grade, what one descriptive word or what particular event comes to your mind?

Make sure the questions you ask can be answered simply and quickly. The students will likely be reluctant to talk at length at this point. Therefore, do not expect or seek a lot of discussion. Instead lead this as a kind of brainstorming activity. Do not pressure anyone to respond; if the students are hesitant about sharing, move on.

5. Give each student two slips of paper. Ask the young people to write on each slip one word from the two that they chose to describe their life on page 3 of the student booklet. Produce the cap with your two slips of paper from step B of this session, and direct them to put their papers in it when they are done. Tell the students that later in this session, they will use these words again.

Note: Keep the cap filled with slips of paper handy for step E of this session.



Booklet page 4

D. Booklet Activity: “Who Am I?” (10 minutes)

1. Direct the students to “Who Am I?” on pages 4 to 5 of their booklet. Announce that this represents both a life story and a riddle. Challenge the students to guess who the story is about as you read it aloud to them. They should call out their guesses whenever they wish.

At the end of the reading, if no one has realized that the story is about the Catholic church, give the young people a clue by saying, “This story is about a group of people rather than about an individual.” If they still cannot guess the answer, provide some of the bracketed information from the presentation notes at the end of this session plan. Finally, if no one guesses correctly, tell the students the answer. Suggest that they write this answer on the line provided in their booklet.

2. Conclude the story of the church by making the following observations in your own words:

- ▶ Just as each of you has a life story to tell, so too does the church.
- ▶ Just as each person’s story will continue, so too will the Catholic church’s story. Many new chapters remain to be written.
- ▶ Just as each of you has had ups and downs, happy times and sad times, so too has the church.
- ▶ Part of your life story is lived out within the story of the church.
- ▶ Because you belong to the Catholic church, your participation affects the life of the church, and the church affects your life. The church’s story is part of your life story too.

3. Following these comments invite the students to share questions or observations. Then proceed to the next step.

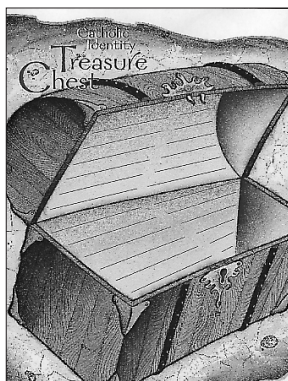
E. Exercise: Comparing Personal Life Stories with the Church’s Life Story (10 minutes)

Invite the students to reflect on the story that you read to them about the church’s development and to think of words that might apply to the church’s history. Remind the students that earlier they wrote words to describe their own life. Pass around the cap containing the descriptive words you and they wrote on slips of paper. Ask each student to draw out two slips from the cap. Then call on volunteers to read to the rest of the group the words they drew and to explain how those words might also apply to the church’s story.

If the students need prompting, draw a slip of paper from the cap and explain how that word applies to the story of the church. For instance, if you draw the word *confusing*, explain how the church’s story might be considered confusing because of the many facts, events, and people in it.

Note: Not every word the students draw will readily or obviously describe the church. Remember that the point here is to help the students rec-

ognize that much that describes an individual life can also describe some aspect of the church's life.



Booklet page 6

F. Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Observe that in its remaining sessions, *Being Catholic* offers an opportunity for the students to explore how Catholic identity is unique and special. Add that the students will have opportunities to discuss their feelings and thoughts about being Catholic and that they can do this best in an atmosphere of respect and openness.

2. Feel free to elaborate on the hopes you have for this course and why you think this time spent together is worthwhile. Share your thoughts about the importance of reflecting on the uniqueness of being Catholic.

3. Point out the Catholic identity treasure chest on page 6 of the student booklet. Invite the students to write somewhere in the space provided the one aspect of the Catholic faith that they most value, respect, or enjoy.

4. Announce that you will end this session with a simple prayer. If you would like, play instrumental music conducive to reflection. Gather the students around the enthroned Bible and light a candle. Ask them to quiet themselves. Invite them to remember the Christians who have carried the Catholic faith to this day, and to slowly make the sign of the cross over themselves to show their belief in the Christ for whom their forebears lived and died.

5. After the students have made the sign of the cross, lead the following simple litany of saints, which follows the chronology of the church's history:

► *Leader.* The early church's disciples and martyrs, including Saints Peter, Paul, Andrew, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, Stephen, Ignatius, Lawrence, Perpetua, Felicity, and Agnes . . .

All. Pray for us.

Leader. Saints of the fourth and fifth centuries, including Gregory, Augustine, Basil, and Benedict . . .

All. Pray for us.

Leader. Saints of the twelfth century, including Dominic, Francis, and Catherine of Siena . . .

All. Pray for us.

Leader. Saints of the sixteenth century, including Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross . . .

All. Pray for us.

6. Close by leading the students in making the sign of the cross again. Gather the student booklets as the young people leave.

OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

For step A. If you prefer a more active approach to start the session, consider this exercise: Ask everyone to stand. Tell them that you will pose a question, and they are to sit down if they cannot answer it. Explain that you will ask some of those standing to provide the answer to the question. Then you will ask everyone to stand again, and you will pose another question. Proceed in this fashion for a few minutes, asking questions such as the following:

- ▶ Who can name the father of one of their grandmothers?
- ▶ Who can name the city in which their mom was born?
- ▶ Who can name the hospital in which they were born?
- ▶ Who was born in another state and can name it?
- ▶ Who is not sure what state they live in now? (Just kidding!)
- ▶ Who has a stepbrother or stepsister the same age as they are and can name him or her?
- ▶ Who has lived in at least three different states so far and can name them?

For step C or D. Invite the pastor or another member of the parish who knows its history well to give a 10-minute presentation on that history.

For step D. List on newsprint the significant phrases written in brackets in the Notes section at the end of this session plan. Ask the students to share what they know about some of them. Then add your own comments.

For step D. After identifying that it is the church that is described in “Who Am I?” direct the students to make banners that show the church’s journey. Divide the group into small teams and assign each team one era from the story in the student booklet. Then ask each team to make a banner showing at least one aspect of the era it was assigned. Post the banners around the room you meet in and keep them up for the remainder of this course.

Note that this option will take additional time, and you will need to adjust the session plan to accommodate it.

For step F. Point out to the students that during this course they will need to keep the following three guidelines in mind. Stress that when they forget these guidelines, you will remind them.

- ▶ Everyone deserves respect, so no put-downs are allowed.
- ▶ One person speaks at a time; everyone else listens.
- ▶ Everyone makes an effort to contribute positively to each activity.

Write these three guidelines on newsprint and keep them to post for subsequent sessions as a reminder.

For step F. For part 5 of this step, consider adding to or adapting the litany of saints by consulting similar litanies found in prayer books and in the liturgy for the Easter Vigil. Also consider including in this litany the patron saint of your parish as well as the patron saints of the students (being sure to cover all the students).

NOTES

“Who Am I?” from pages 4 to 5 of the student booklet is reprinted here with bracketed references indicating the historical event, person, or persons described. Carefully review the bracketed material as preparation for guiding any discussion triggered by the reading.

Who Am I?

My ancestors were Jewish, but I was born from a mixed marriage [of Jews and Gentiles]. In fact, from the beginning of my life, I have spoken different languages. I have had an incredible life so far—you might not believe it, but it's all true.

First of all, the earliest days of my life were filled with much suffering and pain. When I was born, the government was against me. As I grew the government thought I had political ambitions. I suffered great loss rather than deny what I stood for [during times of martyrdom]. I spent many years in hiding. You might say that I learned how to survive while living in underground tunnels [the catacombs] where the government could not find me to kill me [during the Roman persecutions]. I learned to take my first steps when the government [Emperor Constantine] finally allowed me my legal rights.

Then some bullies attacked me. They took all I owned and left me poor and without much of a home life [during the barbarian invasions].

A great feud marked my early childhood, and I was split into two parts [during the East-West Schism]. Each part of me feels the pain to this day and longs to be gathered into one.

I am sorry to say that I have been involved in armed warfare. I attacked some foreigners whom I blamed for stealing land from me long ago [during the Crusades]. They really did not steal the land; I was misinformed. Unfortunately, before I discovered the truth, I got out of control, and innocent people were robbed, killed, and raped. This disgusted me, but it took me a long time to realize my error and ask forgiveness for my mistakes.

Luckily, I did not always focus my attention on battles. Through all the long years of my life, I remembered and retold the stories passed down from generation to generation [by medieval monks, nuns, and laypeople]. I recorded the stories in languages different people could understand. I do not know how I would have survived had it not been for those great stories and the wonderful truths they contained.

Also I am an incredible artist and builder. To remind everyone of the great stories I possess, I once painted glorious pictures and constructed amazing buildings [during the Renaissance]. They remain to this day.

Then I had other troubles. I became unsettled and disturbed within my heart and soul. Instead of seeking good medicines and a healthy lifestyle to heal myself, I let the fever of hatred and anger boil up inside me. I lost much of my spirit of love and care. Because of me many people were judged guilty of crimes, and even tortured and killed [during the Inquisition]!

Eventually I experienced another painful loss. It happened like this: I felt out of sorts, confused, and out of balance. I felt as if one part of me was arguing with the rest of me—like you feel when you have a headache or a stomachache. I needed tender loving care, but I received harsh treatment instead. And again some part of me was lost. So again I experienced a separation [the Protestant Reformation], and it felt like I was being torn apart.

You know, when I look back on that event in my life, I still feel bad. That great loss made me re-examine my life and think about how I was carrying out God's will for me and the mission Jesus had given me long ago. I learned a hard, hard lesson. I learned how important it is to be true to myself and to my mission [during the Counter-Reformation].

I know that God has always been on my side, but I also know that I have to remember always to be on God's side, with all my being and in all I do.

You have probably gone through times when you wanted to change your ways so that they would match your truest and best inner self. Maybe you decided it would help if you began by dressing differently. Well, I went through a time like that recently. I went on a retreat, and I made some decisions about how to express myself and how I will live in loving and generous and honest ways [during the Second Vatican Council].

The changes I have made are exciting and a bit frustrating, but I love my life. It has been incredible so far. Throughout all of it, even though I failed sometimes, I have tried to remember and live by the words Jesus himself addressed to me at the very beginning of my existence: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Who am I?