


LIGUORI CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROGRAM

Journey of Faith



FOR TEENS

INQUIRY LEADER GUIDE



Journey of Faith for Teens, Inquiry Leader Guide (826306)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists

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Welcome to Journey of Faith!

Liguori Publications is dedicated to providing parishes with quality resources like *Journey of Faith*. Since 1993, *Journey of Faith* has established itself as a trusted and beloved program for catechists to guide participants through the RCIA process. As the Catholic Church takes on the challenges and graces of each generation, *Journey of Faith* has been carefully developed to help you meet the changing needs of adults, teens, and children who are inquiring about and seeking initiation into the Catholic Church—ever ancient, ever new.

The *Journey of Faith* program is cohesive, comprehensive, and flexible. *The Word Into Life* provides you with the *Lectionary* texts from Sunday Mass, and the forty-eight catechetical lessons and corresponding *Leader Guides* create a practical and attractive formation process for today's team leaders, catechists, and participants. All the materials are referenced to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and have been granted an *imprimatur* from the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

Unbaptized children over the age of seven are to be considered catechumens. Liguori offers any child or teen needing formation or sacraments *Journey of Faith for Children* and *Journey of Faith for Teens*. With the exception of the *Word Into Life* volumes, all *Journey of Faith* products are available in Spanish under the title *Jornada de fe*.

We hope you enjoy using *Journey of Faith* and find it enlightening and engaging for all. To see our entire collection of sacramental preparation titles, parish subscriptions, formation and spirituality books, and more, please visit Liguori.org to contact us for a copy of the latest catalog.

—The editors

An Overview of the RCIA

The Historical Development

The decision to become a member of the early Christian community bore serious ramifications. Becoming Christian meant a break with one's background and often required fracturing relationships with the non-Christian members of one's family. In many cases, this decision meant a willingness to suffer persecution or even death, as seen in the example of the martyrs Perpetua and Felicity. Perpetua, a noblewoman of Carthage and mother of an infant son, and Felicity, a pregnant slave woman, both refused to denounce Christianity and were subsequently martyred during the public games in the amphitheater around AD 200.

Just as the decision to become a Christian was not made lightly, the formation process wasn't quick or easy. Catechumens—those in the process of preparing for baptism—were invited into a step-by-step journey of three or more years with the community before achieving full membership. During this process, they were expected not only to begin to accept Christian beliefs but also to begin to live the Christian life. The community shared their faith with the catechumens and celebrated each step along with them.

One period of this preparation has remained throughout the centuries: the season of Lent. Originally this time was one of immediate preparation for baptism, which was celebrated at the Easter Vigil. During Lent, the entire Christian community, especially the catechumens, devoted themselves to prayer, fasting, and self-scrutiny. For those already baptized, it was a time to remember and renew their original commitment.

During the solemn Easter Vigil, the catechumens—now called the elect—received the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) and were welcomed into the community. As a rule, this initiation was celebrated at the Easter Vigil only. Formation of the newly baptized did not end with the rites of Holy Saturday night, however, but continued with further instruction and daily living out of Christian values.

This process began to change in the fourth century, when periodic persecution of Christians was replaced by tolerance. Because of the favor many emperors showed toward it, Christianity became fashionable, and many people began entering the catechumenate

for social and political reasons. As a result, the pattern and standards for formation gradually transitioned to the point where, by the fifth century, the rites of initiation were separated into the three sacraments we know and celebrate today. Infant baptism became the norm, and the catechumenate vanished.

The Church published the first *Roman Catechism* in 1566, following the Council of Trent. This book of teachings was presented in question-and-answer form and was used for instruction of the faithful. Such catechisms later became the foundation for what came to be called "convert classes." Using a teacher-student model, the priest would meet with interested parties and assist them in memorizing certain prayers and learning the material in the catechism. The duration of the process, the material to be covered, and the format were left to the priest or parish custom, with few outside directives given.

Successful completion of these classes meant either baptism or formal reception into the Catholic Church. This event was usually celebrated in a private ceremony, with only close family in attendance. Those received into the Church would be confirmed by the bishop at the cathedral or would receive the sacrament in their local parish whenever the bishop came to confirm the schoolchildren. Follow-up for the new Catholics, if any, might consist of being sent to a formal course in liturgy, Scripture, dogma, or morality.

Following World War II, a call for a change in the formation of new Catholics came from the Church in Africa. They began to use the ancient form of the catechumenate to provide stability in formation and a period of time for faith to mature. The Second Vatican Council in the 1960s called for a thorough revision of all the rites (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*], 4), and a committee was formed that engaged in a formal study and revision of the methods leading to baptism or reception into the Catholic Church. This study resulted in the promulgation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) in 1972.

Thus the catechumenate was restored: a process of formation, sanctified by various liturgical rites that mark progress in the journey of faith and culminate in full membership in the Catholic Christian community. An integral part of the revision is that the whole process and its rites are to be celebrated with and in the context of the local parish community and diocese.

Q2: What Is Faith

Catechism: 142–165, 302, 854

Objectives

Participants will...

- Understand faith is given freely by God and helps us understand God's love.
- Realize that having faith does not mean ignoring science or rational thought.
- Recognize that for faith to grow it must be practiced both alone and in community.

Leader Meditation

John 14:1–4

Read the Scripture passage, then think about the strength of your own faith. When you pray, do you believe your prayers are being heard? Do you trust that God is intimately involved in your life, even with all its difficulties and imperfections? Most important, do you see the face of God in the questioning, doubting, and sometimes challenging young people you teach?

Leader Preparation

- Read the lesson, this lesson plan, the Scripture passage, and the *Catechism* sections. "The Characteristics of Faith" (CCC 153–165) may help you to answer questions posed by your class, especially how faith relates to science.
- Be familiar with the vocabulary term for this lesson: faith. The definition can be found in this guide's glossary.

Welcome

As participants arrive, welcome any new inquirers and sponsors. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Ask for any questions or comments about last week's lesson that may have come up during the week. Begin promptly.

Opening Scripture

John 14:1–4

Ask a volunteer to light the candle and read aloud.

Following the reading, allow a moment of silence, and then welcome any comments or reactions to the words.

Finally, ask for any special intentions. Before beginning the discussion of the lesson handout, ask participants, "**How easy is it for you to 'take things on faith?'**" Allow time for responses.

Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by [God].

CCC 153



Journey of Faith



Q2
INQUIRY

In Short:

- Faith is a virtue freely given by God.
- Faith, science, and reason coexist.
- Faith grows when we're alone and part of a community.



What Is Faith?

Some people love to get lost in an adventure. Their journeys can last years and cover miles. They thrive on not knowing what will come next, who they'll meet, or where they'll end up. They don't care if they head off into their journey unprepared—planning lessens the adventure.

Other people aren't quite as ready to leave everything to chance. They make plans, figure out what they need to pack, and trace exactly where they'll go. They don't leave room for the uncertain—they don't have room on their adventure for the unexpected.

- Do you think either of these ways is the best way to travel? Why or why not?
- What's the purpose of going on a journey?
- What kind of journey has your own life been?



Life is a process. A journey is a process, too. Both involve growth, change, and development. When we're on a journey, we don't stay in the same place, at least not for long. We move on.

We choose new roads. We discover new things. We grow in wisdom and understanding. We mature. We are always in process.

The Journey of Faith

Faith means having certainty in God and all his works and is more certain than all human knowledge. However, having faith doesn't mean never asking questions or ignoring empirical facts. Actually, as your faith grows, so does your desire to know more about God. Faith is a grace we can't have without God, but it's also a human act. So while God can give us the grace and courage to live and act with faith, it's still up to us to take those steps (CCC 156–162). When we have faith, we live each moment knowing that God loves us, even when life seems to tell us otherwise. To have faith means to trust that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God.

Faith is also a process. It's the most important process and most important journey of our lives because it brings us closer to God. The more we live our faith, the closer we get to God. Being close to God brings us an inner joy and peace that can't come from anything else. We all want to feel close to God, yet the process of getting there may seem difficult, if not impossible.

Let's take a deeper look at what it means to have faith in God.

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?...No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us."

Romans 8:35, 37

CCC 142–165, 302, 854

TEENS

The Journey of Faith

- Discuss what the process of faith entails.

Suggested responses may include: asking questions, desiring to know more about God, taking steps to live like Jesus, trusting that God loves us, and more.

- Emphasize that this process never ends, faith is always growing, and we will never be finished with our faith formation on earth.

- As you go over the reflection questions for this section, also discuss how faith in God is different from, or similar to, having faith in people or things.

Ask participants to pick one of the following passages with a partner, group, or on their own and share what they learned about faith. You may need to direct them to a particular page number until you cover lesson Q5 *The Bible*.

- Mark 9:23
everything is possible when you have faith in God
 - Matthew 21:22
whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive
- Remind participants that God answers our prayers in his own time and often in ways we don't expect. So while God does answer all our prayers, he may not give us exactly what we want.
- 1 Peter 1:8–9
because we have faith we will experience salvation
- Remind participants that having faith isn't passive. We must live out our faith actively, not just claim it in words only.


Our Personal Faith

Have participants answer the reflection question on their own, or if you have time do the following activity as a group. Make a list of circumstances that might make us doubt God or our faith. Then make a list of ways we can use our faith to help us in those scenarios.

Suggested responses include: After the death of a loved one we can reach out to a priest, youth minister, or other spiritual guide with questions or frustrations. We

INQUIRY

- What are some other things you've had faith in?
- Has that faith paid off? Why or why not?



The good news is, you're not alone. There are a lot of people of faith out there, and they're struggling to live like Jesus, too. If you're able to tune out noise from the rest of the world, you'll see you're not in this alone.

JOURNEY OF FAITH

The teachings of the Catholic Church on faith come largely from Scripture.

Take a few moments and look up the following passages in your Bible. Then briefly write or discuss what each passage means:


Mark 9:23 Matthew 21:22
1 Peter 1:8–9

Our Personal Faith

Because faith involves trust in something that goes beyond our human understanding, it can be very difficult to accept. As a teen, you're transitioning into the adult you will become. That's a process filled with questions and doubts, a time when you question nearly everything you once believed to be true. You'll question your parents and society—their wisdom, their values, and their beliefs. You might even find yourself looking around and wondering, "Isn't there anyone else I can ask?"

It can be tempting to trade in these questions for answers, to want these mysteries of faith to be solved. You might think that having faith means you're no longer allowed to ask questions or that you have to give up your own opinions to blindly follow some Church authority. Rest assured, having faith doesn't mean we stop asking questions; it means we live like we are loved and desired by God—and that we treat others like they are, too.

When we become people of faith, we take on the values of Jesus Christ. But while living like Jesus leads us to a more authentic life, it isn't an easy lifestyle. It can seem like the world values beautiful people and expensive things over values like simple living, chastity, and sacrifice.




- Are there circumstances where you find it difficult to live your faith? How do you handle them?

Sometimes even when we do have faith, we don't always feel sure of our beliefs. We shouldn't judge our closeness to God by how we feel. God is just as close to us when we're depressed, irritated, or stressed out as when we're joyful and carefree. When we're going through tough times, we can feel like God is very far away. But God's perfect love for us is always there, even in times of doubt and trouble. We cannot hide from the love of our Lord.

When we question God, we may not receive the answers we want. But that doesn't mean God isn't listening or that he doesn't care about us. God reaches out to us in our ordinary, everyday lives. God wants us to become the thinking, creative, feeling people we were created to be, and sometimes that means struggling with our faith or changing part of how we live.

In the future, when you start to worry about this thing, pray: "I give the burden to God, I relax and let go." Then take a deep breath and as you breathe out, know that God is taking your burden and working on it.

- How do you handle times of fear, mistrust, or a lack of faith?
- Think of something that you're trying very hard to control in your life. Perhaps you struggle with a particular classmate, school subject, or family member. It could be a person, a situation, anything. Write it down.
- What about that situation can you give up and turn over to God?



can read Scripture passages about life after death, or talk to our loved one in prayer.

After the end of a relationship or friendship we can share our doubts, concerns, or frustrations with God in prayer. We can seek forgiveness for anything we did wrong from both the other person

involved and God (through prayer or, in a special way, the sacrament of reconciliation).

Growing Our Faith

After reading this section, brainstorm other ways participants might be able to grow their faith or opportunities in the four listed categories that are specific to your parish. *(If you have a parish youth group, youth choir, or special youth Mass let your participants know about it and when and where it meets.)*

Ask participants to share any questions about the faith, or common arguments they hear against the faith. Try to answer those questions as a group. *(If there are questions you can't answer, try to find answers for the next class.)*

INQUIRY
JOURNEY OF FAITH

Called to Faith

"Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains."

Acts 9:1-2

For some, the gift of faith comes in surprising ways. One day, a man named Saul was making a journey to the town of Damascus. All of a sudden he was blinded by a flash of light and heard a voice from heaven. "He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'" (Acts 9:4). He went from someone who persecuted Christians to a follower of Jesus Christ himself and a great teacher, spreading the story of Jesus throughout his part of the world. God even changed Saul's name to Paul as a sign of his new identity as a follower of Jesus (Acts 9:1-19).

For most of us, our faith beginning isn't as dramatic. God is like a quiet gardener who knows where the "good soil" lies within us better than we do. God plants the first small seed. But if we want our faith to grow, we have to be active about it. Once you ask God for the gift of faith, God gives it to you freely. But we can't just ask God to give us the gift of faith and be done with it. We have to nurture the faith he gives us. We can't expect our faith in God to grow if we do nothing.

There's another important element in Paul's story, too. Once he found faith, he didn't keep it a secret. He went out and told other people about Jesus. He spread his faith to others. You might not be called to be a missionary or an evangelist like Paul, but you are called to share your faith in some way. And the more you share your faith, the stronger it will grow.

Growing Our Faith

Here are some things you can do to nurture your faith:

Read

Reading Scripture (the Bible) and other spiritual writings introduces you to the great wisdom of others. Spiritual reading gives you the knowledge and strength to resist the temptation to put other things before God—like money, power, popularity, physical beauty, or drugs.

Pray

For faith to grow, you must pray on your own and with others. If we want to get to know God, we must spend time talking with God. This means making time for quiet moments. Finding time to pray is sometimes the most difficult aspect of prayer.

Live

This is another challenging part of growing in faith. If you want to live authentically, the way you live your life must match your religious ideals. You may have friends who pressure you to do things that make you feel uncomfortable or that you know are wrong. Having faith means avoiding behaviors that would lead you away from God.

Get Involved

The Catholic sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist will bring you into the life of the Church, the community of believers. As you live, work, and play with others, you come to know God, and you bring God to others. We belong to our community, and belonging helps our faith grow.

• What have you learned about your faith so far that you are most excited to share with others?



Called to Faith

If time allows, read the full account of Saul's conversion in the Bible (Acts 9:1-19).

Discuss why God might have chosen to speak to Saul and urge his conversion.

Ask participants what about Saul's story stands out the most to them and why.

Discuss the ways God plants seeds of faith in us.

Suggested responses include: putting inspirational people in our path, reading a relevant Scripture passage at the right time, and so forth.

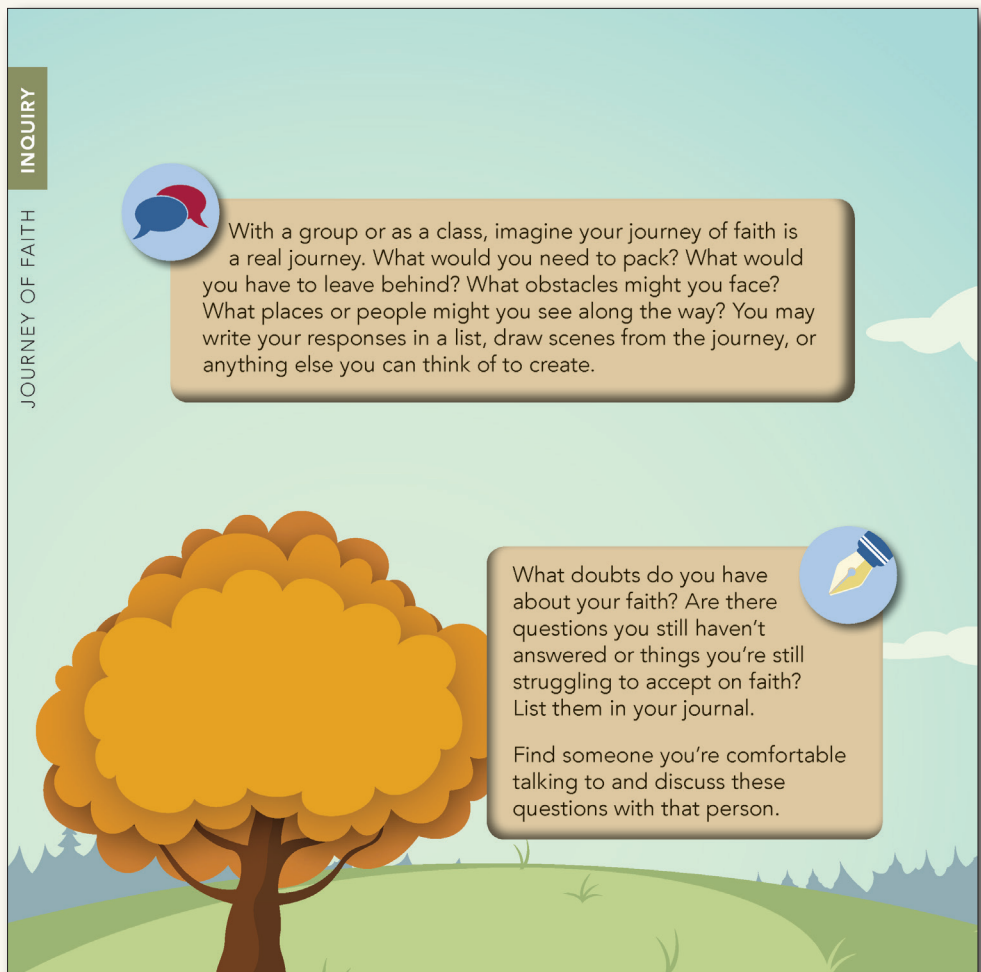
Ask participants what they are most excited to share about their faith. Share what excites you most about your faith, too.

With a group or as a class, imagine your journey of faith is a real journey. What would you need to pack? What would you have to leave behind? What obstacles might you face? What places or people might you see along the way?

Encourage participants to be creative here. They could draw pictures, create a comic, write a short story....They don't just have to write a list—although that's fine, too! You can also create a bag of your own to show as an example that includes a Bible, journal, prayer book, religious statue, and so on.

INQUIRY

JOURNEY OF FAITH



With a group or as a class, imagine your journey of faith is a real journey. What would you need to pack? What would you have to leave behind? What obstacles might you face? What places or people might you see along the way? You may write your responses in a list, draw scenes from the journey, or anything else you can think of to create.

What doubts do you have about your faith? Are there questions you still haven't answered or things you're still struggling to accept on faith? List them in your journal.

Find someone you're comfortable talking to and discuss these questions with that person.

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Journaling

What doubts do you have about your faith? Are there questions you still haven't answered or things you're still struggling to accept on faith? List them in your journal. Find someone you're comfortable talking to and discuss these questions with that person.

Closing Prayer

Read aloud *The Prayer of a Seeker*:

Dear God, I'm walking this road without a map in my hand. Once I knew where I was headed on this journey, but now, I'm not so sure. Anyway, all I've got are a few directions scribbled down, some advice on how to read the road signs, maybe a place up ahead to ask the way when I get lost. Help me set my feet toward you. Steer me to those who will guide me wisely. Send me true companions along the road. Teach me that feeling lost may not be cause for panic but may lead to new and challenging paths. Let me know that you are always walking with me. Amen.

Looking Ahead

For next week, have participants think about faith as understanding God's love and how that might apply to the idea of the Trinity (God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Ask participants to think this week about their relationships with each member of the Trinity.

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The Catechumenate: A Period and A Process

Since the early Church, generally “the catechumenate” referred to the entire process of Christian conversion and initiation. It spanned multiple years and involved formal instruction, acts of penitence, and public rites that confirmed the community’s approval as well as the catechumen’s changed status.

Today, the term *catechumenate*, and *catechumen* in some respects, refers to a specific stage within the typical RCIA process. The rite of acceptance has been called a “first step,” even though most participants take part in a period of inquiry as well as unknown years of personal discernment before contacting a Catholic parish (RCIA 42). While the rite of election technically “closes the period of the catechumenate proper,” catechumens (then the *elect*) and candidates continue to meet for months and have not yet been fully initiated (RCIA 118; see also *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, 6).

The period of the catechumenate remains at the heart of the RCIA process. Team members, catechists, and participants should take advantage of all its benefits and allow it to progress naturally. It may be best to extend the length of this period rather than rushing through or shortchanging the participant’s needs and experiences, especially when an inquirer enters the process later than others, Lent arrives early, or there are exceptional circumstances.

While the catechumenate is distinctly reserved for more formal instruction and presentation of essential doctrine, it is also a time for participants to practice and apply their faith. The Church identifies four goals for the catechumenate (RCIA 75). During this period, participants will:

1. receive a “suitable catechesis...planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage....This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation...” (see also Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church [*Ad Gentes*], 14, from the Second Vatican Council).
2. “become familiar with the Christian way of life..., learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, ... and to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation.”
3. participate in “suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God’s blessing....

At Mass they may also take part with the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist.”

4. “learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church....”

Throughout the catechumenate, catechumens and candidates will undergo “a progressive change of outlook and morals” (AG 13). RCIA leaders and sponsors can be catalysts for this spiritual transformation by providing opportunities for reflection, interaction with the community, and by supporting their study with clear and accurate information. Many features of the *Journey of Faith* program and materials assist you in achieving those goals.

Prior to the rite of election, leaders, sponsors, and participants themselves should observe an increase in the participant’s understanding and ownership of his or her Catholic Christian faith. The signing of names into the *Book of the Elect* signifies the fuller “yes” to Christ and Church that began in his or her heart at the rite of acceptance.

Rites Belonging to the Catechumenate

Celebrations of the Word of God

The catechumenate, indeed the entire RCIA process, is connected intrinsically to the liturgical year. The Church’s recommendation that it last at least one year is to ensure that catechumens experience the fullness of the paschal mystery as reflected in the liturgy.

Many RCIA groups attend the Sunday Liturgy of the Word together. Others meet during the week to proclaim and reflect on the upcoming readings. You may combine these celebrations with the catechetical sessions or keep them separate. However you structure your RCIA process, maintaining a connection to the seasons of the Church year and regularly, prayerfully breaking open the Scriptures are vitally important. *The Word Into Life*—available in three volumes for Sunday cycles A, B, and C—provides the full text of the readings along with commentaries and questions for an RCIA audience.

Model for a Celebration of the Word of God

1. *Song.* The celebration opens with an appropriate hymn or chant.
2. *Readings and Responsorial Psalm.* A baptized member, ideally a trained lector, proclaims a reading or two from Scripture. As in Mass, the first or Old Testament readings are followed by a psalm, either sung or in a call-and-response format.
3. *Lesson.* The RCIA director, pastor, or another trained catechist briefly explains and applies the readings.
4. *Concluding Rites.* The celebration closes with a prayer or one or more of the optional rites below (RCIA 85–89).

Optional Rites

Catechumens and candidates can be nourished by other liturgical rites during this period. The Church offers texts and guidelines for minor exorcisms (petitions for strength in the challenges of faith and struggle against temptation), blessings, and anointings, which may occur on their own or conclude a celebration of the word (RCIA 90–103). Speak to your priest or deacon about when and how these might benefit your particular group.

Also, you will need to determine what rites are appropriate for the period of enlightenment and how they will fit into the weeks leading up to the Easter Vigil. The presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer can be moved to late in the catechumenate if necessary, but the priest, deacon, or DRE should ensure that the catechumens are ready beforehand. If the rites of election and/or calling are celebrated by the bishop elsewhere in the diocese, both the parish and participants will benefit from the *rite of sending*. In this rite, the local pastor and community preliminarily approve and celebrate the participants' readiness (see RCIA 106–17, 434–45, 530–46). It demonstrates their present, though distant, love and support and strengthens the catechumens and candidates for their return and entrance into the Lenten season.

The Rite of Election

The rite of election is a major milestone in the catechumens' RCIA journey. Usually occurring on the first Sunday of Lent, catechumens' publicly pledge their fidelity to the Church and sign the *Book of the Elect*. Baptized candidates participate in the *rite of calling the candidates to continuing conversion* or in a combined rite. These rites are similar, but do not include any signing.

The *Journey of Faith* program provides a basic outline to the rite of election in lesson C1: *The RCIA Process and Rites* and spiritual preparation through Scripture and reflection in lesson E1 *Election: Saying Yes to Jesus*.

"Before the rite of election the bishop, priests, deacons, catechists, godparents, and the entire community [should] arrive at a judgment about the catechumens' state of formation and progress" (RCIA 121). This doesn't mean an interview or exam is needed; however, pastors who have not attended the RCIA sessions may want to briefly speak to you about the group.

This is a good time to gather the team members' and sponsors' feedback and experiences with the catechumens. Recording and sharing particularly meaningful input or stories can serve as a testimony to the individual's faith as well as to the power of the Spirit working in and through your parish RCIA.

The bishop ordinarily admits catechumens and candidates to their respective rites and presides at the ceremony. Whether or not the rite of election is celebrated in your parish, encourage all team members, sponsors, and close family and friends to attend. Prepare the catechumens by reviewing the steps or rehearsing the responses ahead of time. The steps of the rite are listed below.

1. The rite, held within a Mass, begins with the Liturgy of the Word.
2. After the homily, the celebrant calls the catechumens forward by name, along with their godparents.
3. He addresses the assembly and asks the godparents if these men and women are "worthy to be admitted" (RCIA 131). He asks if they have "sufficiently prepared...faithfully listened to God's word... [and] responded." The godparents answer, "They have."
4. He asks the catechumens if they wish to enter the Church. They answer, "We do."
5. After their names are signed in the *Book of the Elect*, the celebrant declares that they are members of the elect. He exhorts them to remain faithful and "to reach the fullness of truth" and their godparents to continue their "loving care and example" (RCIA 133).
6. The community offers intercessions for the elect.
7. The celebrant prays over the elect and dismisses them before continuing with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

C13: Christian Moral Living

Catechism: 1776–1832

Objectives

- Discover morality is based on natural law but ordered by Christ.
- Recognize disciples are called to form their consciences according to Church teaching.
- Reflect on personal choices and behaviors with an eye toward conversion and expressing greater love for God and others.

Leader Meditation

Proverbs 3:5–6

It can be easy for us to look at other people and think, “Well, at least I’m not doing that.” But when we “trust in the LORD” we have to do more than rely on our own interpretations of right and wrong. We have to interpret the world the way Jesus sees us. It’s often the most difficult situations and the hardest choices that require us to rely on ourselves the least and God the most. When have you needed the Church to help you make difficult choices? Has it been hard to follow the Church’s teaching in these moments?

Leader Preparation

- Read the lesson, this lesson plan, the Scripture passage, and the *Catechism* sections.
- You may also want to have the Ten Commandments visible somewhere in the room for this lesson or have your Bible open to Exodus 20:1–17.
- Consider using the song “Restless” (Audrey Assad and Matt Maher, from *The House You’re Building*, Sparrow) for your closing prayer.
- Be familiar with the vocabulary terms for this lesson: commandments, conscience, free will. Definitions are provided in this guide’s glossary.

Welcome

Greet participants as they arrive. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Solicit questions or comments about the previous session and/or share new information and findings. Begin promptly.


Opening Scripture

Matthew 22:34–40

Ask a volunteer to light the candle and read aloud. Allow a few moments for silent reflection. Before beginning your discussion of the lesson handout, discuss with participants **why might it be easier to just obey the rules than live and act with love.**

The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart. CCC 2072





Journey of Faith

C13
CATECHUMENATE

In Short:


- Morality is ultimately ordered by Christ.
- We are called to reflect on personal choices.
- We are called to form our conscience.

Christian Moral Living

Evan was very close to getting his first “A” in math, a subject he had always found difficult. Two days before his final exam, he saw a copy of the test sitting on his teacher’s desk while she was out of the room. Evan was tempted to look at the first few answers so he could go into the test with confidence, even though he knew that was still cheating. But if he knew a few questions in advance, he would have a much better chance of getting that “A”....Evan was torn.

When Carrie joined her friends near the lockers before school, she heard them saying cruel things about a girl who was new to the class. At first, Carrie just listened to their comments, but soon she was joining the conversation, too. It made her feel like she was part of the group. But she also knew these stories about the new girl weren’t true. Carrie started feeling guilty. She wanted to be part of the group and if she said something or stopped hanging out they might start talking about her. But how would the new girl feel if she ever found out about the lies her classmates were spreading?

- What would you do if you were Evan or Carrie?
- What would you tell a friend in a similar situation?



“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.”

CCC 1776

We are faced with moral decisions every day. These decisions, or our choice to not do anything, develop our moral character. Who you are is defined by the decisions you make or don’t make when you’re asked to choose between right and wrong, between standing up or bowing out. Jesus tells us how important our actions are:

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

Matthew 7:24–27

Building your moral house on rock when you’re young gives you a strong foundation as you move into adult life. When you choose the right and honest thing consistently, it becomes a habit, and that makes it easier for you to choose the right thing the next time you’re faced with a similar option. When we form the habit of choosing honesty, truth, and love, those actions become the ones we default to when facing a problem.

CCC 1776–1832

TEENS

Christian Moral Living

- After reading the introductory section, ask participants to respond to the reflection questions. Then ask if there would be other circumstances under which their response might change.
- Discuss ways we can build or destroy our moral character; ask participants for examples.

Suggested responses include: We build our moral character by choosing what we know is right even if it isn’t the popular choice, staying honest even when we might get in trouble, acting out

of love for other people, refusing to spread rumors, and so on. We destroy our moral character when we lie or refuse to be accountable for our choices, when we gossip or spread rumors about other people, when we choose to do things we know are wrong, and so on....

- Discuss the relationship between freedom (our free will) and responsibility.

Suggested responses include: Having free will means that we aren’t forced to do the right thing. We can choose to do right or wrong and there is no determined path set for us. But we have the responsibility to use that free

will in a way that builds up our community and our Church....

Discuss what happens when we act in our own self-interest instead of as followers of Christ.

Suggested responses include: We can degrade our own moral character, we can lead others into bad choices, we present Christianity in a negative light, and so on....

- Emphasize how choosing to not do anything can also be a choice that affects our morality (for example, when we let someone be bullied by not taking part or standing up to stop it).

Our Conscience

- Ask the participants to describe how their consciences have developed as they have matured. You can ask the following questions to prompt discussion: Do they think about moral questions the same way? Do they spend more time asking about circumstances before making a judgment?
- Brainstorm ways you can make time to step back and listen to your conscience when faced with a difficult decision.

Suggested responses include: quiet reflection or contemplation, prayer, journaling, and so on.

- Give participants time to quietly reflect or journal on the reflection questions presented in this section before moving on.

CATECHUMENATE

If we fall into the habit of lying, cheating, or deceiving others to get what we want, we are building our houses on sand.

"The education of the conscience is a lifelong task....The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart."

CCC 1784

JOURNEY OF FAITH

This is where faith can get difficult. Believing in Jesus and understanding the faith are easy in comparison to actually living like Christ. As small children, it's easy to know right from wrong. But when you're faced with more complex moral issues, what's right or wrong may not be as clear, or we know what's right but struggle to follow through with those actions. Plus, the pressure we can feel from the world or friends or family members to make certain decisions makes the task of choosing right or wrong even more difficult.

Because God loves us, we have a free will. Having a **free will** means we have the freedom and power to make choices, to act or not act, to choose how we respond. God won't step in and stop us from making a wrong choice. We have to do our best to discern (make a well-informed decision) what's right and what's wrong; what's the will of God and what's selfish desire.

- How do you make difficult choices?
- Do you ever avoid making choices because you aren't sure what's right or wrong?

Our Conscience

"A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator."

CCC 1783

We might have an image of conscience being a little angel and a little devil hovering over each shoulder while telling us what to do or not do. But our conscience is actually a part of who we are. **Conscience** is what enables us to "recognize the moral quality of a concrete act" that we're thinking about doing, in the process of doing, or have already done (CCC 1778). Conscience gives us feelings of peace when we make moral decisions or unrest when we make poor moral choices.

- Write about a time when you felt contentment and joy because you did the right thing.
- Write about a time when you felt uneasy or anxious because you did the wrong thing.

It's important to get into the habit of listening to our conscience, and to be sensitive to how we feel after we have made a difficult choice. Our conscience is subtle. It softly urges us to act as God would want us to act. When we are aware of our consciences and act on what it tells us, we are building that firm foundation written about in Matthew's Gospel.

Unfortunately, we can also get into the habit of ignoring our consciences. We can also miss the quiet voice of our consciences if we don't take time to be quiet and listen. When we're constantly surrounded by the noise of the world, we can miss the gentle voice of conscience inside us. This is where a strong prayer life can help us stay on the right path. Without the quiet and solitude necessary for prayerful reflection and clear thinking, it can be very difficult to discern right from wrong when we are faced with moral decisions.

- What are some ways you can step back from the world and get in touch with your conscience?

Conscience and the Bible

"In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross."

CCC 1785

Once we decide to take the time (or make the time) to come to know God's will, we can begin our search with sacred Scripture. Jesus promises us, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (John 14:23). These are wonderfully reassuring words. They tell us that if we make Jesus the center of our lives and use his words and actions as our guide, we will know the best way to live. We will not be perfect. We'll fail sometimes and make bad choices, but Jesus won't give up on us. He dwells within us and will work to bring us back on track.

The moral teaching of Jesus includes understanding and obeying the **commandments** of the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments were accepted by the Jews in Jesus' time as God's will. They were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1–21; Deuteronomy 5:1–21). They have remained the standards of morality for generations.

After the Israelites escaped from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the commandments to keep them from falling into a worse form of slavery—slavery to sin. When we lie, steal, or take another's life, we can't be truly free. We can't experience full human joy. The great value of the commandments can be seen if we ask ourselves the simple question, "What would the world be like tomorrow if everyone kept the Ten Commandments?"

• How do you think the world would be different if everyone followed the Ten Commandments?



The Moral Teachings of Jesus

[Jesus said] "But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly."

Mark 7:20–22

Jesus did more than affirm the Ten Commandments. He challenged us to aim for an even higher standard—a morality based on love. Jesus questioned old beliefs that allowed hatred and revenge. He told us it was not enough to follow the law if our hearts were full of anger and hatred.

Jesus was urging us to move beyond legalism—obeying a list of laws—to a morality that truly fosters love. When we choose to obey the speed limits, we should do so out of respect for the safety and well-being of others—not simply because it's the law and we don't want a ticket. When we choose to avoid saying something untrue about another person, we should be motivated by our love and respect for the children of God—not just the need to obey the Ten Commandments.

Conscience and the Church

Catholics believe that we have another resource to help us form good consciences—the teachings of the Church. Jesus is present in his Church and has given its leaders the authority to speak and act in his name. New Testament Christians looked to their leaders for guidance in moral questions, like when the Corinthians wrote to Paul for advice (1 Corinthians 7:1). All New Testament letters offered moral guidance, and some gave rules of conduct in matters of Church organization, relationships with one another, and daily life.

Since then, the Catholic Church has provided moral leadership for its members through laws and instruction from pastors, bishops, and popes. Church leaders strive to understand and teach how the Gospel applies to modern life.

adhere to its teachings and interpretations of the law as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- Participants may have questions about whether or not they can dissent from Church teachings because they feel the Church is wrong about a particular point. It is important to distinguish between the three levels of Church teaching: dogma, definitive doctrine, and authoritative doctrine. We cannot dissent Church dogma or definitive doctrine without separating from the Church. While it is possible to dissent from authoritative doctrine, that dissent must still come from a place of submission of will and intellect to God and the Church. This kind of dissent is only possible in very rare circumstances.
- Refer to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, 25. Dissent is possible, but only if a person has sufficient expertise to study the matter thoroughly and has discovered important reasons, that the person believes were unknown to the pope, that would cause him to alter his decision. If such be the case, the person may suspend his or her assent until the pope has made a final decision.
- You may also refer to Pope St. John Paul II's apostolic letter *Motu Proprio Ad Tuendam Fidem* and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei."
- As you conclude the lesson, discuss tools that human beings have to help them make good moral choices.

Suggested responses include: the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, the teachings of the Church, the influence of family, the influence of responsible friends, the virtues and gifts of the Spirit [CCC 1828, 1830].

The Moral Teachings of Jesus

- Emphasize that Jesus takes the Ten Commandments a step further when he gives the two great commandments (in today's reading)—both based on love of God and neighbor rather than simply following the letter of the law. Read section 1778 in the *Catechism* and ask participants to reflect on what it says.

Conscience and the Church

- Emphasize for participants that following the teachings of the Church is not about simply not sinning or finding a loophole in a teaching we, personally, find

difficult to accept. The ultimate goal of our lives as Christians, and the teachings of the Church, is to live more like Christ on earth and to prepare for eternal life in heaven. This means there will be times we have to let go of our personal opinions and embrace Church teachings—even if that process is painful or confusing for a time.

- If participants have additional questions or you'd like to spend more time covering this topic, see CCC 143–152, which talks about a free submission to the whole truth revealed by God, and CCC 85–95, which discusses in more detail the Magisterium of the Church and our duty to

Forming Your Conscience

With a partner, make up a scenario that would require you to make a difficult choice. Work through steps one through four under “Forming Your Conscience” and come up with a way to handle that scenario. Share with the rest of the group. *(An example follows.)*

Scenario: You’re at the store and, after reviewing your receipt, you notice the cashier didn’t ring up one of your items but included it in your bag. Do you go back and pay for the item or consider it a bonus and do nothing?

1. *After prayerful reflection, you might begin to think that leaving without paying for an item, even if you had every intention to, is still taking something you didn’t pay for.*
2. *The Ten Commandments say stealing is wrong, but is this really exactly the same as stealing? Following the spirit of this commandment, however, would require you to go back and pay.*
3. *Church teachings would tell you that taking something that doesn’t belong to you, no matter how you got it, isn’t the moral thing to do. It would also tell you that you should respect the cashier and do what you can to help correct the mistake.*
4. *Solution: While you haven’t actually done anything wrong yet, keeping the item knowing you didn’t pay for it and that you haven’t attempted to make things right would be the immoral choice. You should return to the store, explain the situation, and pay for the item.*

CATECHUMENATE

JOURNEY OF FAITH

Catholics trust that Church leaders continue to be guided by the Holy Spirit. As we seek to make good moral choices, it’s important to know the moral teachings of the Church and, more importantly, to understand the reasons behind these teachings. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a great place to start if you have questions on Church teaching, but your sponsor or parish priest can be great resources, too.

Forming Your Conscience

When we are faced with moral decisions, there are several steps we can take to make sure our consciences are well-formed:

1. Take the time or make the time for prayerful reflection. Make sure you can hear the small voice within.
2. Know and understand the Ten Commandments, and then ask yourself, “What would be the morally right thing to do?”
3. Know and understand the teachings of the Church. If a Church teaching is confusing, don’t be afraid to discuss that issue with a priest or well-informed Catholic.
4. If you make a mistake, seek forgiveness and grow from what you’ve learned.

With a partner, make up a scenario that would require you to make a difficult choice.

Work through steps 1 to 4 under “Forming Your Conscience” and come up with a way to handle that scenario. Share with the rest of the group.

Recall a time when you did something wrong that you later regretted.

If you were faced with that situation again, how would you respond?

Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C13 (826290)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehauer, CSSR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

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Journaling

Recall a time when you did something wrong that you later regretted. If you were faced with that situation again, how would you respond?

Closing Prayer

Dim the lights and have the participants gather in comfortable positions. Keep the candle lit. Play a recording of "Restless" as a closing prayer.

Looking Ahead

Before next class, ask participants to think of some moral issues we struggle with today that didn't exist for the early Church. Where can we look for guidance on these issues? Where can we find guidance on modern-day issues?

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LIGUORI CHRISTIAN INITIATION PROGRAM

Journey of Faith



FOR TEENS

ENLIGHTENMENT AND MYSTAGOGY LEADER GUIDE

Journey of Faith for Teens Enlightenment and Mystagogy Leader Guide (827150)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists

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Third Edition

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Enlightenment and Mystagogy: A Review

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

Since the earliest centuries, the Church has set aside the season of Lent as a particular time for repentance, conversion, and preparation for the sacraments. The RCIA process and celebration of baptism is centered on the Easter Vigil, with the rites of election and calling, scrutinies, and entire catechumenate scheduled in relation to that feast (RCIA 17, 20–26; CCC 1168; CIC 856).

Because repentance and conversion require personal and internal preparation, the *Journey of Faith for Teens, Enlightenment* lessons focus on guided, prayerful reflection. The lessons will assist the participants in their internal preparation for the sacraments, and encourage them to live out their faith in hands-on ways.

“[Enlightenment] is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance” (RCIA 139).

While the elect do not fully possess the graces and gifts of discipleship during the period of purification and enlightenment, they should feel ownership of their Christian faith. Baptized candidates, as members of the Christian Church, should begin to identify themselves as Catholic and express their faith in keeping with sacred Tradition.

The sessions and events during the enlightenment period should enable participants to experience Lent along with the parish community, who is also undergoing spiritual renewal and preparing to celebrate the paschal mystery more deeply (RCIA 138). At the Easter Vigil, the faithful will renew their baptismal vows as the participants profess their faith in Christ and the Catholic Church. This unity and integration will grow throughout the period of mystagogy, which usually corresponds to the Easter season.

Rites and Sacraments During the Period of Enlightenment

The enlightenment and purification period begins with the rite of election. Please refer to the *Catechumenate Leader Guide* and other *Journey of Faith for Teens* materials for details.

The Scrutinies

Rather than examination, interrogation, or harsh judgment, “the scrutinies...are rites for self-searching and repentance,” designed “to inspire in the elect a desire for purification and redemption” (RCIA 141, 143). The prayers and intercessions encourage the elect to strive for the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:24–28). Through the exorcisms, they “are freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil” (RCIA 144). Having previously been instructed in the nature of sin and expressed their desire and commitment to receive the sacraments of initiation, participants are strengthened and sent forth to make their discipleship a reality.

The questions, activities, journal prompts, and other material in these guides help to prepare each participant for this stage in their faith journey. The bishop or priest will “question the candidates individually” in the formula for the profession of faith at the Easter Vigil (RCIA 224–25). Should a participant express doubts or concerns about their conversion, meet with him or her privately to determine what additional support can be provided.

The Presentations

The *Presentation of the Creed* should be celebrated during the week following the first scrutiny and, whenever possible, within a Mass so that the faith community may be present (RCIA 157; CIC 837). It prepares the elect to memorize the Creed, for the *Recitation of the Creed* (see Preparation Rites), and to profess their faith on the day of their baptism (RCIA 148).

During the *Presentation of the Creed*:

- The prescribed readings, which replace the regular weekday readings, are proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word (RCIA 158).
- After the homily, the priest calls the elect forward to receive the words and mysteries of the Creed. The Nicene or Apostles’ Creed may be used, depending on the parish’s tradition (RCIA 160).
- The priest begins to recite the Creed and the assembly joins in.
- The priest prays over the elect and dismisses them prior to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If they are to stay, he reminds them that they cannot participate fully, but that they remain “as a sign of our hope that all God’s children will eat and drink with the Lord...” (RCIA 163).

E1: Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

Catechism: 422–429

Objectives

- Compare reactions to Jesus' life and teachings throughout the Gospels and history.
- Connect Jesus' universal invitation to discipleship to the signing of the *Book of the Elect* in the rite of election.
- Practice self-examination.

Leader Meditation

John 21:1–19

Jesus Christ has made you a fisher of young men and women. The participants in your class are the fish in your net, the net you dropped at the Lord's command, the net you hauled up and have carried to shore. It is time to present the fish to the Lord. The Lord asks Peter if Peter loves him. The first time Peter says "yes," Jesus tells Peter to feed the Lord's lambs. The second time, the Lord tells Peter to tend to the Lord's sheep. The third time, the Lord says to Peter to feed his sheep. In doing these things, Peter will act on his love for Jesus Christ. You are like Peter. You will bring the sheep to the Lord, and he will invite them to say "yes" to him. Pray for the necessary grace to lead the participants well and for sufficient grace that they will respond with a firm "yes."

Leader Preparation

- Read the lesson handout, this lesson plan, the Scripture passage, and *Catechism* sections.
- Be familiar with the vocabulary terms for this lesson: discipleship, testimony, *Book of the Elect*. Definitions are provided in this guide's glossary.

Welcome

Greet participants as they arrive. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Solicit questions or comments about the previous session and/or share new information and findings. Begin promptly.

Opening Scripture


John 21:1–19

Ask a volunteer to light the candle and read aloud. Share with participants that this lesson is all about Jesus inviting us to become his disciples. He is offering us the opportunity to say yes to him, to do his will, and to love his people. Before beginning your discussion of the lesson handout, ask participants ***what it means to truly be one of Jesus' disciples.***

"From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to 'evangelize,' and to lead others to the 'yes' of faith in Jesus Christ."

CCC 428





Journey of Faith

In Short:

- Christians have reacted in many ways to Jesus' message of discipleship throughout history.
- As members of the elect, you are called to discipleship.
- As you grow in your faith, you will be asked to engage in self-examination.

• Have you ever said "no" to something only to find yourself saying "yes" to it later? Briefly describe the situation and what changed.

Jesus invited many to become his disciples and to carry on his mission after him. As the Gospels tell us, many responded enthusiastically—including some Galilean fishermen, tax collectors, and women. People from every walk of life accepted Jesus' call to come and follow him.

Not everyone said "yes" to Jesus, though. **Discipleship**—being a follower of Jesus—isn't easy. It requires a big commitment and saying "yes" to things not everyone was ready for. While being a follower of Jesus comes with all the blessings of eternal life, it's a decision that can't be made without some understanding of what it means. It's better for us to give an authentic, thoughtful "yes" to God than a halfhearted "yes" that means we just go through the motions.

• Can you think of some reasons people give for saying 'no' to their faith? Why did you choose to say 'yes'?

Election: Saying "Yes" to Jesus

Maria is twenty years old and the mother of an active two-year-old boy. She works forty hours a week but still struggles to make ends meet. She left high school during her senior year.

Maria's parents begged her to remain in school, and her favorite teacher tried to convince her of the benefits of hitting the books and toughing it out. But Maria wasn't convinced. Working in the real world seemed to be the smartest choice. She'd still learn, but she'd also be making money and getting work experience.

Now Maria is beginning to wonder what would have happened if she'd said "yes" to finishing high school. It will be difficult to go back to school now that she's a mom with more adult responsibilities, but she feels called to say "yes" to this opportunity now. It won't be easy, but she still has her family's support for a new life experience she knows will help her.

Rite of Election: An Opportunity for Commitment

"From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him...to lead others to the 'yes,' of faith in Jesus Christ. But at the same time the need to know this faith better makes itself felt."

CCC 429

ENLIGHTENMENT

TEENS

Rite of Election: An Opportunity for Commitment

- Ask participants to think about how they've responded to God's call in their lives so far. If you have time, share your own experience of saying yes (or no) to God's call as you grew in your faith.
- Discuss as a group why some people may say "not yet" to God's call. Use the story of St. Peter as an example; why did Peter deny God only to give a wholehearted yes later.

Suggested responses may include: We may not fully understand our faith yet, we may be letting a bad experience with a person influence how we see faith, we may secretly be afraid of what happens if we say yes, etc.

Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

- Give participants a chance to read the introduction to the lesson handout on their own and think about their answer to the reflection question. Ask any participants who feel comfortable sharing to do so. Think about this reflection question yourself and share any relevant experience with the group.
- Discuss what it means to be a disciple and why true discipleship might be difficult in today's world.

Suggested responses include: Pressure to fit in with secular society, fear of being made fun of, fear of standing out or being singled out, etc.

- Discuss the reflection question together. Emphasize to participants that while faith does not require total understanding, and isn't measured by our understanding, we can't give a wholehearted "yes" to a faith we don't understand in any way.

"I will, but first..."

- Discuss with participants why it's tempting to tell God "yes, but first..."
- Ask participants why we shouldn't wait to give God our "yes."

Suggested responses may include: The timing may never be perfect, like the apostles we have to serve God where we are, God may be calling us where we are for a reason, etc.

"Some of Jesus' teachings are just too hard to follow."

- If you have time, read the story of the Samaritan woman in full (John 4:4-42). Discuss with participants what about Jesus' message would have been easy to say yes to and what would have been difficult.

Suggested responses include: He promises the woman living water, he proves he is a prophet and offers her salvation, he asks her to give up the beliefs she's known, he asks her to go out and tell others about him.

ENLIGHTENMENT

JOURNEY OF FAITH

On the first Sunday of Lent or close to the beginning of Lent, the catechumens celebrate the rite of election. Election comes from a word that means choose, and the whole ceremony reflects this theme. God has chosen us and called us. How have you responded to that call?

After the Church community hears **testimony**, that is, public statements from the catechumens and their sponsors on how the catechumens have chosen to respond to God's call, the community is then asked to accept those catechumens who are ready to receive the sacraments. The catechumens say "yes" by stating their desire to join the Church and then writing their names in the **Book of the Elect**.

The rite of election begins the stage of purification and enlightenment, the final stage of the journey for catechumens and candidates. You've asked questions about the Church, and you've become part of the community. Now it's time for you to examine your life and to think about what Christ asks of you.

At the time of Jesus, some said "yes" to his call, while others said, "no, not yet." What made the difference?

Today Christ has called you. How will you respond? As you reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, have you ever used any of the following excuses when you felt Jesus' call?

"I will, but first..."

"Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God."

CCC 2548

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both describe Jesus' invitation to potential disciples who say they desire to follow him but not just yet: "Lord, let me go first and bury my father" (Matthew 8:21). In Jesus' time, this meant "let me come after my father is dead." In Luke's Gospel, the hesitant disciple says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home" (Luke 9:61).

To us, Jesus' response may seem cold and harsh: "Let the dead bury their dead....No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60,62). But what the Gospel writer is trying to tell us is that we can't follow Christ only when it fits into our schedule. We aren't true disciples of Jesus if we live as disciples only when it's safe and convenient. We have to follow the Lord's commands when we're out with our friends and when we're at home with our parents. True followers of Christ aren't part-time, only-when-no-one's-looking disciples.

When we accept Jesus' call we must do so enthusiastically, making it our top priority. The Galilean fishermen "left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Matthew, the tax collector, "leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him" (Luke 5:28). Our family, relationships, hobbies, and activities, all take on their true meaning in our lives only when following Christ is our first priority.

"Some of Jesus' teachings are just too hard to follow."

"The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just."

CCC 1733

When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, he said many things that would have been hard for her to hear (John 4:18). But Jesus promised her "living water" that would keep her from ever thirsting again.

The Samaritan woman could have reacted with embarrassment, resentment, or anger. Jesus was asking her to radically change her life. But she didn't get upset or defensive. She ran back to her town to tell people Jesus was the Messiah. While the truth is often difficult for us to hear, we, like the Samaritan woman, must be open to receiving it.

"But I have so much stuff."

Of all Jesus' conversations with would-be disciples, maybe the one we can relate to best is the one with the rich young man who asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?...? Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:17–22).

In this conversation, Jesus is telling us that it's not good to become too attached to things. If we look to our stuff for happiness, we will always be aching for something more, something that really matters.

The rich young man couldn't let go of the false security of his possessions. He wasn't sure that he would find in Jesus, and within himself, something more valuable than his wealth.

This story challenges us to ask ourselves, "What things do I hold on to that may keep me from following the Lord? What do I own that is more important to me than God? More important than other people?"

"I do not know him."

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came when, after his arrest, his closest friends ran away. Peter, who had sworn he would die with Jesus, denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Many of Jesus' disciples thought he would lead Israel to glory and bring about an earthly kingdom. They weren't prepared for the truth of the cross.

It's easy to understand how frightened they were! None of the Twelve, except perhaps John, attended Jesus' crucifixion or burial. Just when Jesus needed them the most, they ran away and locked themselves in a room because they were afraid.

But not everyone ran in fear. "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25). No matter what the danger, these women stayed by Jesus. These brave women stayed by him and later went out to the tomb to anoint his body (Matthew 28:1–10).

• *Is it easier for you to follow Jesus when it's the popular decision or your prayers are being answered the way you expect? Why?*

• *Have you ever said "no" to a cross Jesus asked you to bear? Why? Is it a decision you'd change if you could?*



Our Response to Jesus' Call

Jesus must have felt very sad as he listened to all these excuses, as he watched all the would-be disciples turn and leave him. Many of them almost said "yes," but out of fear or attachment to things, they said "no" to the only one who could give lasting purpose and direction to their lives.

Our prayers and practices during Lent help us discover the strengths and weaknesses of our own responses to Christ's call. There is a little bit of the *would-be* disciple in each of us. It's difficult to give an unconditional "yes" to Christ—to embrace the cross that he asks us to carry with him. But Jesus didn't abandon his disciples. He sent them the graces they needed to say yes again. God won't force us into discipleship, but he will answer when we say, "yes, but help!"

ENLIGHTENMENT

JOURNEY OF FAITH

"But I have so much stuff."

- Discuss with participants why it's difficult to let go of material security.

Suggested responses include: We feel secure when we have lots of physical things, material success is judged on how much money or stuff we have, etc.

- Discuss with participants why we need to let go of this false security before saying "yes" to God.

Suggested responses include: We have to trust in God as our security, we can't be attached to things of this earth, etc.

"I do not know him."

- Give participants time to answer the reflection questions on their own.
- If you have time, ask participants why fear may cause people, like St. Peter, to deny their faith.

With a partner or as a group, list as many excuses for following Jesus as you can think of in two minutes. Then pick a gift or fruit of the Holy Spirit that helps overcome that excuse, and explain how. (Gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are listed in sections 1831–32 of the CCC.)

Suggested responses include:

An attachment to earthly goods and possessions could be countered by generosity.

Frustration that God is taking too long to answer our prayers could be countered by patience.

ENLIGHTENMENT

JOURNEY OF FAITH

With a partner or as a group, list as many excuses for following Jesus as you can think of in two minutes. Then pick a gift or fruit of the Holy Spirit that helps overcome that excuse, and explain how. (Gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are listed in sections 1831–32 of the CCC.)



What keeps you from following Christ more completely or consistently? Use the excuses discussed in the lesson to help you evaluate yourself as honestly as possible.



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Journaling

What keeps you from following Christ more completely or consistently? Use the excuses discussed in the lesson to help you evaluate yourself as honestly as possible.

Closing Prayer

End with a few moments of silence and ask for petitions. Close with this prayer:

Lord, God our Father,
It is a blessing to know that you are our Lord, Creator, and Savior. You love us with an eternal love. It's difficult to comprehend this kind of love. You have given us the gift of free will, knowing that we may choose to walk away from you or we may choose to receive this love and say yes to it. Give us the grace to say yes, for it's our heart's desire to love you, to know you, and to serve you. Amen.

Take-Home

Ask participants to really think about their response to the journal prompt this lesson and spend the time between now and the next session to try and turn any "not yet's" into "yeses."