

LEADER

THE 5 W'S

WHO * WHAT * WHERE * WHEN * WHY

of Our Catholic Faith AND HOW WE LIVE IT

Edited by Mary Carol Kendzia



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Introduction

Here you are, about to lead a study group in “The 5W’s of Our Catholic Faith.” Who might you encounter in this group of seekers who will join you on this journey of faith?

You may find cradle Catholics in their forties, fifties or sixties, wondering where they fit in with the Catholic Church at this point in their lives. Or you may come across young adults who are developing a career or starting a family, hoping to find a renewed sense of place within the Church. Perhaps there will be non-Catholics curious about the Catholic faith. Maybe you are working with teens or college students entering a new phase of their lives and seeking answers about this faith of ours.

No matter where you or the session participants are in the faith journey, this book has much to offer. Composed of simple, brief overviews, it looks at the basic tenets of the Catholic faith—the Church, your faith journey, Scripture, Jesus Christ, sacraments, Christian living, and prayer—presenting highlights and key points in each of these areas.

Each session in this ten-part study brings participants to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding about the Catholic faith. The approach used in this series touches on critical themes and topics in a simple yet engaging manner, and offers questions for further reflection or discussion.

You’ll discover who built up the Church from the early Christian communities through today, and what makes the Church unique among Christian denominations. When did key moments occur in the Church, and where did its growth take place? Why do we gather for Mass on Sunday, and how do traditional practices such as saying the rosary and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament fit in with the modern Church?

Perhaps most important is the “how” of this book: How do I fit in with the people of God? How does Jesus’ directive to “Go, make disciples of all” fit into my life? How do I read and understand Scripture in a way that can enrich my faith? How do my everyday choices reflect my Catholic faith? How do I practice contemplative prayer?

There are several options for presenting the ten sessions:

- Present a session once a month for ten months, say, from September to June.
- The sessions can be set up during Advent and Lent, once a week during the four weeks of Advent and the six weeks of Lent. (Note: You could start the Advent sessions during the week before Advent begins so you don’t end too close to Christmas.)
- The topics can be used for intergenerational gatherings, one or two at a time depending on how frequently the gatherings are held. The content can be enhanced with corresponding catechetical material from the children’s religious education program.
- Use as supplementary or core material for confirmation classes.
- Several sessions can be used for a weekend retreat, for example, three, four or five sessions used for a full-day gathering; two to three sessions for a 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. meeting; or for a full weekend retreat, two sessions on Friday evening, and four each on Saturday and Sunday. (You might consider eliminating

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the individual opening prayers and readings from these longer meetings, choosing instead something that will set an appropriate tone for the event.)

With all of these settings, keep in mind the importance of allowing time for socializing. While some participants may come simply for the education, most will appreciate the opportunity to speak with the others who are gathered there. Especially with longer meetings and certainly with a retreat, think about providing refreshments, maybe even a meal, if appropriate.

Before beginning the sessions, it would be helpful to have a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) on hand. In the guides for each of the sessions, you'll find several catechism quotes that support the material found in the session. Reading these quotes and perhaps the surrounding text in the catechism will give you the catechetical basis for the session content and a better understanding of the material being covered.

The sessions are laid out in an easy-to-use format and are designed to run for an hour and a half to two hours:

- A suggested opening song is given, which usually can be found in one of the more commonly used Catholic hymnals from OCP, GIA, or World Library. You can also pick another hymn if you would like, or play an instrumental piece. Music quiets the group and sets the tone for the content to come.
- An opening prayer follows, which you or a participant can read, or which can be read aloud by the group.
- Next is a brief Scripture passage that illustrates the topic for the session. You'll need a copy of a Bible so the passage can be read aloud. Following the reading, invite students to reflect for a few minutes on the reading they have just heard. Usually, ten to fifteen minutes is enough for this opening section.

The content of each session follows the opening and is divided into four sections. Take a few minutes to read over the section before going forward to discussion. Then you can proceed directly to the **HOW We Live It** questions.

The timing for each section is flexible, depending on your needs, and can stretch from ten to thirty minutes per section. If you choose to have more time for each section, you may want to use the catechism quotes and other supporting material to add to the reflection and discussion. **Liguori Publications** offers books, pamphlets, and newsletters for additional study on many of the topics in this book. Visit **Liguori.org** today to browse our store online.

The *Leader Guide* offers a few additional questions for reflection and discussion if the ones found in the session are not sufficient or appropriate for your group. Guide comments so each participant has the opportunity to speak and so no one person dominates the conversation. Encourage active listening by all participants. Be respectful of different ideas, and understand that most questions and comments will come from the sincere heart of a seeker.

When the content has been covered, move on to the closing prayer. Give participants a chance to pray for individual needs, and be mindful of any current events or situations that can be incorporated into this closing prayer. Bless those gathered, sending them forth with the light of Christ in their hearts and spiritual food for the journey.

As you use this book to take a deeper journey into the Catholic faith, you take with you the wisdom of many fellow travelers with years of experience and insight. The Catholic faith is a multifaceted jewel. May it illuminate your heart, mind, and soul as you discover the richness it has to offer.

SESSION 1

We Are the Church

Preparation

Have ready a Bible, a candle, matches, and a cross or Christian icon. Set these up on a small table in front of the room where the group will meet, or in the center if you are using a circle format.

Optional

Prepare some simple refreshments for the group to share either before or after the session.

Have music playing quietly in the background on a CD or iPod as participants arrive and settle in.

Opening *TEN MINUTES*

When everyone is seated, light the candle. Begin with the suggested opening song or use one of your choosing. Or you can go directly to the opening prayer found in the session and have everyone read it aloud together.

Scripture Reading

Acts 2:42-47

Ask a member of the group to read, or you can read it aloud to the group. Once the passage is read, direct group members to silently reflect for a minute or two on what they have just heard. This also serves as a centering and quieting exercise for participants.

Supporting catechism quotes for Session One:

"By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.... It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be effected and grow according to Christ and maybe to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer."
1 (CCC, 898) LG 31 #2

The apostles' ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: "he who receives you receives me." 2 (CCC, 858) Matthew 10:40; see Luke 10:16.

"The Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that kingdom." 3 (CCC, 768) LG 5.

We Are the Church

Follow this format for sections 1-4

ALLOW FIFTEEN MINUTES FOR EACH SECTION

Take a few minutes for the group to read through the section, then move to the **HOW We Live It** questions. Allow each person a minute or two to contribute, and give each group member the opportunity to speak.

Additional questions for reflection and discussion

- *Why do we need communal worship in addition to personal prayer? For example, what would happen to the strength and quality of a family that never shared a meal together?*
- *The faith journey of the early Church has parallels to our personal faith journeys, with periods of uncertainty, trial, periods in which mistakes were made and those of tremendous growth. Where do you see your life paralleling that of the early Church?*
- *How do you feel about the role of the laity in the Church today? Where do you see yourself fitting in?*
- *What are some of the challenges facing the Catholic Church (and many other Christian churches) today; for example, materialism, medical and technological advances that do not respect human life in all its stages, the widespread practice and acceptance of abortion, and so on?*

Closing Rite

FIVE MINUTES

Conclude the lesson by reciting the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Ask the participants for spontaneous prayer.

When finished, you can offer this brief blessing to the group:

Watch over us and bless us, O God, as we go out to share your love and the Good News of Jesus Christ with all whom we meet in our everyday lives.

Concluding Prayer: O God, we thank you for the gift of Church. Help us see ourselves as valuable members of the body of Christ, each with unique gifts and talents that we bring to the community of faith. Open our eyes to the beauty of your work in all people and in all places, and grant us the grace to grow in faith and love. Amen.

SESSION

1

We Are the Church



WHO is the Church?

WHAT was religion to the early Christians?

WHERE did the ethics and morals of Christianity originate?

WHEN did the Eastern church separate from Rome?

WHY does the Church continue to be a sign of Christ's presence in the world?

Opening Song: "Sing a New Church," by Dolores Dufner, OSB, or a hymn of your choice

Opening Prayer: God of all creation, you have called us to this community known as the Catholic Church. Bless our work during this session today, that we may come to better understand who we are and where we come from as members of this Church. Open our minds and our hearts to your word, and to the words of those gathered here with us today. Inspire us with your spirit, and guide us in the way of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Reading: Acts 2:42–47

Spend a moment in quiet reflection.

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Founded by Christ

The word “Church” has many different meanings. For Catholics, however, Church is more than a building, or a group of people, or a liturgy. The truth is expressed at the beginning of Mass: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

It is here that our unity as Christians lies. For the Church is people: people united, not by something, not a building, or a hierarchy, or a group, but by someone.

The Second Vatican Council points out that the Church shines forth as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 4). The Church is the community of all those who have been drawn into the life of God. The Church is the continuing presence of Christ leading people to the vision of God. The Church is a people with one “soul”—the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts.

We are made in the image and likeness of God, and since God is “community” (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), we need community.

Because the Church is made up of human beings who are not perfect, it is to be expected that the Church will be less than perfect. Jesus knew that those who would represent him were subject to failure. Peter denied him three times, but Jesus, after his resurrection, gave Peter a threefold commission to care for his flock (John 21:15–18). The apostles ran away when Jesus was arrested, and yet he appeared to them after his resurrection and sent them to preach the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:16–20).

The early Church had all the problems found in churches today. There were liars and hypocrites (Acts 5:1–11). There were complaints of unfairness (Acts 6:1). There were those who used religion for personal gain

(Acts 8:9–24). There were disagreements about doctrine (Acts 15). There were conflicts among Church leaders (Acts 15:36–41). There were sermons that failed to make an impact upon the preacher’s audience (Acts 17:22–34), and sermons so long that they put people to sleep (Acts 20:7–12). There were questions about pastors’ salaries, disorder at worship ceremonies, scandal, and neglect of the poor (1 Corinthians 5–11). There were all the problems that arise when people try to follow Jesus and fall short of the mark because of human weakness and sin.

Of course, there were also heroes (Acts 7), holiness (Acts 2:42–47), and generosity (Acts 4:32–37). If there were laws and leaders, it was because no society can exist without them (Acts 6:1–7). If there were rituals, it was because these were faithful responses to Christ’s will (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). If there were times when the followers of Jesus failed him, there were also times when they were heroic in professing his

Gospel (Acts 4:1–22).

Jesus came to draw us into the “community love” of the Trinity. He lived, died, and rose to bring all people into one family (John 10:16–18). At the Last Supper, he asked us to love one another as he loves us (John 15:12). He prayed that we would be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17:20–21). He formed the community of believers into the sign of his continuing presence on earth. He said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).

*“You are
the body
of Christ.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

HOW We Live It

- *What are some of the communities that influence and nourish your life, for example, family, friends, coworkers, neighborhood, parish, or civic groups?*
- *How do you feel about the fact that the Church is an imperfect body of people?*

From the Beginning

The descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is celebrated as the “Birthday of the Church.”

After Jesus ascended, the disciples went to the upper room and prayed. They must have wondered what would be expected of them and how they could possibly perform the commission Jesus had given them. In spite of doubts and fears, the mighty power of God became manifest when all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4).

Paul was called by God to preach to the gentiles. In Paul’s missions, he preached the Good News of Christ first to the Jews, but if they rejected him, he went to the gentiles. Paul ran into many conflicts, some from Jews who regarded him as a traitor, some from those who made their living from idol worship, but he also gained many converts.

As Christianity grew, it started to reach many cultures that looked at Christianity from different perspectives.

For the Christian community of converted Jews, religion was primarily a “way of love.” God had compassion and tenderness, qualities our culture usually attributes to the feminine. In fact, the Hebrew term for “word”—as in Jesus, the word of God—was feminine in gender. Religion was primarily a life lived in love, and Jesus was the divine model of this way of life.

For the Greek mind, so interested in philosophy, Christianity had to be understood in terms of metaphysics. Jesus was the wisdom of God, a being itself made flesh, and the communicator of divine wisdom. This community placed great emphasis on creeds and dogma.

Rome, with the great tradition of justice and law, gave Christianity an inheritance of morals. Christ was the greatest of all lawgivers. As a result, ethics and morals became central. For these Christians, Jesus was the perfect man. Greeks and Romans had problems reconciling Jesus as human being and Jesus as God.

The early Church also had to contend with discord

inside. Many Christians denied their faith to save their lives during the persecution of Christians in the early centuries of the Church. Then when persecution subsided, they would want to return to the Church. The decision over what to do with them divided many Christian communities, although the approved approach was to accept them back as penitents.

The Church was also threatened by heresies, including those who claimed to have secret knowledge of God, and others who believed that the end of the world was at hand. These are issues with which we still struggle today.

Despite persecution and doctrinal wrangling, the life of the Church developed. Converts, after lengthy instruction, were baptized, usually by immersion in a river. The ceremony of the breaking of bread, the Mass, bound the Christian community together in the real flesh and blood of Jesus.

Bishops, who received their power to rule from the apostles, offered sacrifice and directed the Church in their particular locality. If the Christian community was large enough to warrant it, the bishop would ordain presbyters (priests) to assist him. Deacons, besides instructing, saw to the various charities of the Church and distributed the Eucharist.

In 303, Diocletian unleashed perhaps the most frightful persecution that the Church had ever suffered. Thousands of Christians in Asia Minor, Africa, and Greece were mutilated or killed. This persecution lasted through his two successors. Then, in 312, the western emperor, Constantine, who had become a Christian, successfully defeated Diocletian’s successor, and in 313 decreed the edict of Milan, granting general religious tolerance in the empire.

HOW We Live It

- ***What does Christianity offer to you that you can’t find anywhere else?***
- ***In what ways are Catholics persecuted for their beliefs today?***

As Christianity grew, it started to reach many cultures that looked at Christianity from different perspectives.

The Church Continues to Grow

Freed from the constant anxiety of persecution, Christians in the fourth century had the leisure to ponder the truths of God's revelation made through Jesus Christ. Many great thinkers—like Saints Ambrose, Basil, and Gregory Nazianzen—expanded the Church's understanding of God.

In the fifth century, the Roman Empire began to collapse as barbarian tribes invaded. At first, Roman Christians were reluctant to have anything to do with their conquerors. Eventually, however, they began to feel the call to convert and civilize the invaders. Many of these missions resulted in mass "conversions" ordered by a newly baptized ruler.

To bring the newly converted to a deeper knowledge of Christianity, monasteries and parishes were founded. The austere life and education of the monks helped instruct the people, while parishes made Christianity the center of community life. Social service was almost completely up to the Church. In rural areas, the monasteries were the center of civilization.

Charlemagne was crowned as holy Roman emperor in 800. He promoted Christianity but renewed the problems of church-state ties. Nobles appointed bishops, often choosing someone who would support their interests rather than the Gospel. Priests were appointed by the local landowners and had little or no training. Those in religious orders became more interested in material possessions and vices than the Gospel.

In the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Saint Bernard and others brought reform to religious orders, stressing a return to a life of prayer. The same centuries saw the flowering of the great universities, Gothic architecture, and extraordinary scholars like Hildegard of Bingen. She not only ran an abbey but had considerable influence with state and Church leaders.

In 1054, divisions between the East and West led to separation of the Eastern Church from Rome. This was also the time of the Crusades. The motives for these Crusades were not merely, or even mostly, religious, but boredom, greed, and the desire for power.

The highlights of the thirteenth century came from

great saints like Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare, Saint Dominic, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Francis and Dominic changed the way Christianity was preached. Monasteries had been preserving the teachings of the Church, but many had lost contact with the people who would benefit from their learning. Francis and Dominic went out to the people to preach and lived a life of poverty among them.

The fourteenth century brought confusion to the Church when the popes moved from Rome to Avignon in France and when two or three men claimed to be pope at the same time. In the fifteenth century, corruption among many Church leaders and interference by the secular authorities increased. Many saintly Catholics, including Saint Catherine of Siena, called for renewal.

In 1517, Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, called for an end to the abuses in the Church. He wanted reform in the Church, not to break away, but poor communications, stubbornness on both sides, and interference by secular authorities led him to a "protestant" position. Division followed division, and Christianity has since been split into many hundreds of churches.

Social service and everyday spirituality were the focus of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Saint Francis de Sales wrote books that called laypeople to holiness. His good friend, Saint Jane de Chantal, met him when she was a widow raising three children, managing an estate, and caring for an invalid father-in-law.

At the same time a new heresy, Jansenism, appeared. Jansenism is a philosophy that said Jesus died for a select few. It promoted fear of receiving the sacraments or getting close to God. Even after this teaching was condemned by the Church, the spirit of Jansenism continued to be influential. One person who argued against this approach was Saint Alphonsus Liguori. He wrote books for the person in the pew and for theologians trying to revive the love of God in hearts frozen by pessimism.

HOW We Live It

- *What will happen to the Catholic Church in the future? That depends on you. Write down the next part of the Catholic Church's story.*

A Community of Faith

The Second Vatican Council, a gathering in Rome of all the Catholic bishops of the world in the 1960s, restated Catholic beliefs for the modern world and instituted many changes in worship and structure, encouraging Catholics to renew their efforts to follow Christ. The laity were called to new involvement: "It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, # 31).

The role of laity is evident not only in the workplace and the home but in the Church, too. Ministries, at one time the exclusive province of the priest, have been properly distributed to the people of God.

Catholic Christians continued to give selflessly of their lives to advance the cause of peace and to end suffering. Dorothy Day, cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement, and Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity in the streets of Calcutta, worked heroically to make God's love vivid to the poor. Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife and Olinda in Brazil, won a People's Peace Prize for his commitment to the poor.

El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot and killed while celebrating Mass in the cathedral in San Salvador. He is considered a champion of the impoverished of Latin America. Prior to his death he spoke out forcefully on behalf of El Salvador's disenfranchised poor, criticizing the wealthy and powerful for policies and practices that marginalized the indigent.

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another."

ROMANS 12:5

There are many challenges facing the Church today: materialism, atheism, the effects of new technology, the unstable condition of the international political scene, a shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, just to name a few. And all its members are human, as fallible as the apostles. Yet, the Church is still the body of Christ, and we can trust that he will continue to guide and strengthen the Church.

Saint Paul writes, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith" (Romans 12:5–6). Parents raising their children, students attending class, adults at their jobs, priests in their ministries, the elderly in nursing homes...all are the body of Christ.

Throughout its history, the Church has been the means through which millions of people in every age, and of every class and every race, have come to know Jesus Christ and his life-giving message. At times in the Church's history some of her members have been unfaithful to the spirit of God. But the spirit always remains faithful to the Church. That's why the Church continues to be a sign of Christ's presence in the world and to proclaim his message of love, forgiveness, dignity, joy, hope, and peace.

HOW We Live It

- *Who is a spiritual role model for you?*
 - *As a member of the body of Christ, which "part" are you? Why?*
 - *How can you make Christ present in the world through your daily life?*
-

SESSION 1
We Are the Church

**Conclude the session by reciting
the Apostles' Creed:**

*I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of
God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the
living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.*

Concluding Prayer: O God, we thank you for the gift of Church. Help us see ourselves as valuable members of the body of Christ, each with unique gifts and talents that we bring to the community of faith. Open our eyes to the beauty of your work in all people and in all places, and grant us the grace to grow in faith and love. Amen.