

Fostering Faith Insert for Catechist Formation

The Parish Church: Eucharistic Community of Faith

THEME

The local community is where the faith is lived in the hearts of the members, individually and as a community. Lives of faith flow into the celebration of Eucharist, and grace-filled people live Eucharistic lives.

Completing this study lesson will give the catechist one hour of credit toward catechist certification in the curriculum area of Church.

CATECHIST COMPETENCIES

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to

1. Make the connection between community life in faith and Eucharist.
2. See Eucharist as Source and Summit of the Catholic faith.
3. Help students to bring their lives to the Eucharistic Table and Eucharist into their daily lives.
4. Understand how the structure and roles in the parish help support the faith life of the parish community.

CATECHISM REFERENCES

§ 1324, 1348-55, 1391-1401, 2177-79, 2226

FOCUSING THE STUDY

Local parish

As members of Christ's Church, we find ourselves in a grass roots community. We are individuals. Some of us are living in families. We are multi-ethnic, multi-generational. Our

personal stories blend together as we share in common the story of Jesus and His Church.

We live lives of faith together. We gather in celebrations of thanksgiving and praise. We draw strength from our common prayer to enrich our own lives and those of our families. We ponder the mysteries of our faith and deepen our understanding through education. We reach beyond ourselves to the world.

Through us and in us, the saving work of Christ continues.

Gathering in faith

We call ourselves a church, a gathering, an assembly. *Ekklesia* (assembly) stood for church in ancient times. We gather in Christ's name as we remind ourselves every time we assemble for Mass. So, we call ourselves Christians.

We profess our belief in Him as Son and Savior, in His Father as Creator, and in His Spirit still enlivening our lives and our world. We believe that we are His Church, continuing His mission.

We entrust ourselves to his Lordship over our lives. He has authority over us challenging, leading, and teaching us. We see his leadership embodied in our pastor, in the ordained, and in the special gifts given to each of us to act on His behalf.

As Church, we support each other, need each other, look to each for individual contributions. We are more than the sum of all of our members. We form a common stance in the world in Jesus' name. We act through His Power. We are One, or at least we strive toward unity.



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The wider Church

Our parish and all of the parishes of the Archdiocese make up the local Church of Chicago. The leadership of Christ resides authoritatively in the bishop. Those on the parish level look to him and his delegates for direction and in turn inform him of our own hopes and concerns. His authority and ministry reside in a special way in our own pastor, who is appointed by the bishop.

Beyond the Archdiocese, we identify with the American Church under the leadership of the U.S. bishops.

Finally, we are part of the universal Roman Catholic Church under the authority of the Holy Father.

We look to leaders beyond our parish borders for help. We need to shape our personal transformation in Christ, develop our moral stance on personal and social issues, and understand the ways we can participate in the mission of Jesus and His Church.

Sense of mission

As an Easter people, we share a common baptism. We have encountered the mystery of Jesus in His dying and rising. We celebrate this mystery as a community. It transforms us individually and as a people and challenges us to work for the transformation of our world. We develop our awareness of the content of our faith. We are driven beyond ourselves, commissioned to bring Christ to the ends of the earth. Our own parish (as all parishes do) tries to find the unique ways in which we can contribute to this work of redemption. His grace fills us as we are empowered to contribute to this task.

We believe

We are a community of faith. We find our identity and our destiny in our understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and His relationship with the Father. We fine tune this spiritual awareness by accepting our Scriptures as a primary source. We study the Word, proclaiming it in our assembly and through the witness of our lives. Our young learn this Word through our religious education efforts and in the example we give them. As a people who have a long history of keeping the faith, we embrace what is good and holy in our Catholic Tradition. We pass it on to the next generation as it was handed on to us. We accept the challenge of applying the teachings handed down to us by our pastoral leaders.

We pray

We are a worshipping people. Our individual lives and all that we believe come together as we gather for Liturgy. We begin

this gathering in our homes as we prepare, and in our traveling to our place of worship. We form an experience of who we are as Church as we gradually take our places around the altar table. We unite as we rise and sing our entrance song. As our priest-presider leads us in the Sign of the Cross, we realize once again that we are the People of God.

We proclaim the Word, listening to texts we may have heard often before. We apply the Message to our present lives and to the needs that surround us as if we heard this Word for the first time. We pray for the needs of our Church, our world, and our community from this fresh perspective.

We offer ourselves as surely as we offer the fruits of our hands. Just as surely, this bread and wine are transformed into the Presence of Jesus in our midst. We come to experience once again in a most intimate way that we truly are His People and He is our God.

We are invited to witness and participate in Christ's salvific act of Sacrifice in His death and resurrection. We abide in His Presence and are absorbed in it. From that vantage point, we offer praise and thanksgiving, and pray for everything that needs the Church's prayer.

We share Eucharist together, embracing this act of encountering Christ in the Breaking of Bread which He practiced over and over with the people He met. By doing so, we acknowledge our dependence on each other and on Him.

We are sent forth as a community to carry on His work in the world. Having experienced this Sacrament of Unity, our lives themselves can become sacramental experiences of His presence.

We bond

As God's People, we have a commitment to each other. We support each other in faith through prayer and example. We share ministries together. Realizing that Church is much more than gathering for liturgy, we create a social structure that enables us to plan, learn, and recreate together. We are responsive to each other's needs.

We share faith in our homes. Our households become domestic churches, places where family members can encounter God in their relationships with each other.

We develop a common understanding of our beliefs as we pursue our ongoing formation in faith, both for our adults and for our children.

We bring this togetherness to the times we gather for prayer. Reciprocally, we bring the spirit of community prayer into our relationships.

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We serve

We are called to serve the Lord in each other, in the least of our brothers and sisters, and in the world we inhabit.

Praying for these needs, we are moved to both individual and community action. We are a people of ministries, a Servant Church. The work of Jesus continues through our efforts.

Parish roles

Becoming the Church of Jesus Christ does not happen automatically. Members depend on structures to help them to unite, and to pray, and to proclaim God's word, and to minister to each other and the world.

The People of God

As members of our parish, individually and collectively we are called to live our faith. We depend upon the community for prayer and support. We look to each other and to parish leadership for guidance as we all struggle to conform our lives to the Gospel and to express our faith in good works.

We need the best environment possible for the times we gather for prayer and worship.

We are a learning people. Our parish strives to provide the best homiletics, catechesis, and other resources so we can continually deepen our faith.

We need structures that help gather us together, meet one another, celebrate who we are, and express our faith in action. As the people of God, we want to stand together as a witness to what we believe.



Groups and organizations

As members organize to fulfill these needs, we form groups and organizations to help provide the leadership, planning, education, services, and coordination needed to be the best parish possible.

Some groups serve specific needs. Others exist to coordinate the activities of the parish. Some meet the needs for ongoing leadership and education.

All need to be aware of the ways the Gospel calls us at a particular moment to be Christ's holy Church and to fulfill His mission.

Pastoral Council

Pastoral Councils in each parish have been charged with the task of providing leadership and coordination for the efforts of the parish and its organizations. Individuals and groups support this leadership when they make suggestions to the Parish Pastoral Council concerning the directions of the parish.

The Parish Pastoral Council helps the parish to set goals and objectives and to take ownership of them.

The Parish Pastoral Council helps unify the parish in its pursuits and activities. It challenges parish groups and individuals to be their best. The Parish Pastoral Council collaborates with them to help them achieve their goals. It enables them to work together. The Parish Pastoral Council endorses all of the works and activities of parish groups and organizations that are consistent with the parish vision.

The Parish Pastoral Council heightens the level of communication in the parish.

Pastor

The parish looks to the pastor for leadership. His leadership bears the authority of the bishop whom he represents.

He consults with the parishioners about the parish's direction and needs in a variety of ways. He does this in a special way through the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance Council. (He is a member of both.)

He challenges the parish to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus. As leader, he challenges us all to continually reflect on our faith so we can share a common and authentic vision. He helps all to be aware of the hopes and expectations of the wider Church.

He leads us in prayer.

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He takes care that the parish would serve the pastoral needs of all of its members. He shares that responsibility with members of the staff, parish groups and organizations, and individuals as they take on their many ministries.

Parish Staff

The Parish Staff are individuals who help the pastor with his parish administration. They are Church professionals delegated to perform specific duties and responsibilities according to the job description given to them by the pastor.

The pastor assigns them to leadership roles in the parish, working with the Parish Pastoral Council and the Commissions as well as parish groups and organizations to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.

As a body, they meet regularly with the pastor to discuss the parish's needs and activities. The pastor consults with them to help him with his work as parish administrator.

Commissions

The Parish Commissions enable representatives of similar groups and organizations in the parish to meet regularly to share common interests and concerns. They collaborate on matters that can further the development of the parish.

The Parish Commissions convey their needs and activities to the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Staff. In turn, they work to implement the recommendations and directives given them by the Council, Staff, and Pastor.

In Summary

Together, as God's People, we strive to be the Church founded on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, that is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. Rooted in the past and experiencing the sacramentality of the present, we look toward God's plan for the future and the building of His Kingdom.

As faithful people, we gather to share Eucharist. As a People on a Mission, we bring our Eucharistic faith with us as we go forth to love and serve the Lord and our world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In order to complete this study and earn one hour of credit toward catechist certification, you must respond to the reflection/discussion questions in either of the following ways:

1. Write/type your responses (20-40 words each) and submit them to your catechetical leader.
2. Engage in a formal discussion of the questions (at least 30

minutes) in some forum approved by your catechetical leader; e.g. a catechist meeting, level meetings, catechist pairings, etc.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean for parishioners to share a Eucharistic spirituality?
2. What do you do to bring your life into Eucharist and to bring Eucharist into your life?
3. What are some of the strengths your own parish has in fostering shared faith in the community?
4. What creative ways can you as catechist help your own students to become persons of the Eucharist?
5. What can you do to help your students know some of the persons in your parish who are "making a difference"?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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