

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF FAITH

AN RCIA MANUAL

**For use in RCIA Ministries
And Religious Education Programs**

In the

Archdiocese for the Military Services
United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. How to Use this RCIA Manual

III. Sequence of RCIA Themes

IV. RCIA SEGMENTS

V. MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

INTRODUCTION:

“Jesus Christ is the answer to the question that is every human person.” These words invite us to journeys of faith, hope and love in which we discover Christ as the “Way, the Truth and the Life.” The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (**RCIA**) offers a similar invitation to adults seeking initiation into the Catholic Church, Catholics completing sacramental initiation and returning Catholics.

The Introduction to the RCIA notes that the Rite is designed for adults “who after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God’s help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time receive the sacraments fruitfully.” (RCIA, Introduction, 1) To facilitate this preparatory journey of faith and conversion this RCIA Manual is designed as a resource material for use by Military Chaplains of the Archdiocese for the Military Services of the United States of America.

OBJECTIVES:

The RCIA Manual offers a systematic presentation of the content of faith as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in a sequence of segments that may be used by pastors and RCIA leaders over the course of an RCIA program.

The overall goal of these segments is to provide RCIA participants with a substantial introduction to the tradition of the Church’s teachings and beliefs. The goal of this Resource is to inspire a “living, conscious and active faith” in the lives of RCIA participants. Each segment is designed to invite participants to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in and through their study, reflection and discussion of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Pastors and RCIA leaders are offered a content-based pastoral resource to assist in their proclamation of the mystery of Christ to inquirers and catechumens making their RCIA journeys of faith and conversion towards the sacraments of initiation.

HOW TO USE THIS RCIA MANUAL:

This Manual contains 21 segments for use over an RCIA process in parishes and faith communities throughout the Military Archdiocese.

Each segment contains the following materials to assist the Pastor/RCIA leaders' presentations:

- **Theme** based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (or CCC)
- **Opening Prayer / Scripture reading**
- **Instructor's Summary Statement**
- **Discussion Questions**
- **References and Quotations** from CCC, Scripture and documents
- **Suggestions for further reading and Closing prayer**

The Pastor/RCIA presenter may use one segment per session or adapt these segments to individual parish needs and the parish RCIA schedule. The segments may be used in the order provided for the *Catechumenate* stage or as the presenter sees fit for the various stages of the RCIA

References, quotations and suggestions for further study provide the presenter with resources that may be handed out to participants as necessary. References to the *Catechism* will use the abbreviation CCC.

STAGES OF THE RCIA:

- **Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate stage** – Inquiry into the Church followed by *Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens*.
- **Catechumenate stage** – Conversion and growth of catechumens' faith through celebrations of the Word, study and prayer leading to the *Rite of Election*.
- **Enlightenment/purification stage** – Immediately precedes the elects' initiation, usually the Lenten season. An intense time of reflection marked by the *Scrutinies*.
- **SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION at the Easter Vigil**
- **Mystagogia stage** – Post-baptismal phase during which newly baptized experience the fullness of the Christian life particularly in the Sunday Eucharist.

SEQUENCE OF RCIA THEMES

SEGMENT 1 – Human Search for God

SEGMENT 2 – Revelation and Faith

SEGMENT 3 – Creation

SEGMENT 4 – Church – Body of Christ, People of God

SEGMENT 5 – Sacred Scripture – God’s Word Among Us

SEGMENT 6 - Salvation History

SEGMENT 7 – Jesus Christ – Word Made Flesh

SEGMENT 8 – I Believe in One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church

SEGMENT 9 – Last Things – Judgment, Mercy, Purgatory

SEGMENT 10 – Sacraments - Overview

SEGMENT 11 – Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation

SEGMENT 12 – Eucharist – Source and Summit of the Christian Life

SEGMENT 13 – Sacraments of Healing – Reconciliation and Anointing

SEGMENT 14 – Ten Commandments – Christian Moral Life

SEGMENT 15 – Building a Culture of Life

SEGMENT 16 – Mary and the Communion of Saints

SEGMENT 17 – The Liturgical Year, Lectionary, and Liturgy of the Hours

SEGMENT 18 – Church Tour, Sign of the Cross, Mass Responses, Creed

SEGMENT 19 – Liturgy of the Word for the Sundays of Lent

SEGMENT 20 – Liturgy of the Word for Easter Vigil

SEGMENT 21 - *Mystagogy* – Post-baptismal themes

SEGMENT ONE

THEME: HUMAN SEARCH FOR GOD

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice” Psalm 105:3

“You are great, O Lord and greatly to be praised; great is Your power and Your wisdom is without measure...You encourage us to delight in Your praise, for You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1,1

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

To be human is to search for God. Throughout history down to the present moment human beings have given expression to their search for God in religious beliefs and practices. God has given us minds to search for the truth and hearts that long for unconditional, forgiving love. These basic human desires are fulfilled in God who is truth and love.

Your faith journey that brings you to the RCIA is *your* journey toward God through His Son, Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is also *our* common journey to truth, happiness, and love in the context of the Christian community.

- ❖ All of us desire to live a fully human life.
- ❖ As human beings we are *religious* beings. The desire for God is written on every human heart because we are created *by* God *for* communion with God
- ❖ The dignity of every human being rests on the fact that we not only seek God but we are invited to enter into a personal relationship with God
- ❖ Only in God do we find the truth and happiness that we never stop searching for. To find truth and happiness in God is to find the fulfillment of our human desire for truth, love and happiness.

(CCC 27)

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during the weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How has your personal faith journey led you to the Catholic Church?
1. Discuss ways in which human beings tend to look for happiness apart from God? (CCC, 29)
1. How can we know that our search for true human happiness is with God? (CCC, 27 – 30)
1. Where do we find evidence of God's desire for human happiness? (CCC, 31 – 35)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Acts 17: 26-28

Romans 1: 19-20

Acts 14: 15-17

Wisdom 13: 1-9

“The desire for God is written on the human heart, because we created *by* God and *for* God; and God never ceases to draw us to himself. Only in God will we find the truth and happiness we never stop searching for.”
(CCC, 27)

“The Church teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason. Without this capacity, humanity would not be able to welcome God's revelation. Human beings have this capacity because they are created “in the image of God.” (CCC 36)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, *Man's Capacity for God*, articles 27 - 49

Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 4-18

Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Religious Freedom, Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*

CLOSING PRAYER:

Our Father

SEGMENT TWO

THEME: REVELATION AND FAITH

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.” Psalm 8: 1

“We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1: 2-3)

“It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature.” (cf. Ephesians 1:9; 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4).

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

By natural reason, we can know God exists with certainty on the basis of the created world. Revelation is the love and knowledge of God that we cannot possibly arrive at by our own powers of reason. Out of divine love, God has chosen to reveal Himself to the world. God’s self-manifestation is the personal revelation of the mystery of His plan of salvation. The plan of divine revelation begins with creation and is perfectly fulfilled in the sending of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world.

Your faith journey in the RCIA is an invitation to understand and accept the revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. By revealing Himself God wishes to make each of us capable of responding to Him, of knowing and loving Him far beyond our own natural human capacity. Faith is the human response to God who reveals.

- ❖ By love, God has revealed Himself to humanity. Divine revelation provides the answers to the questions that human beings ask about the meaning and purpose of life (CCC 51-53)
- ❖ God reveals Himself in order to invite and receive us into His company. God's will is that humanity should have access to the Father, through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ God's revelation is manifested in words and deeds that have an inner unity. The stages of revelation begin with the creation of the world and continue with the covenant with Noah, the call of Abraham and the people of Israel. (CCC 54 - 67)
- ❖ God revealed Himself fully by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ in whom he has established his covenant forever.
- ❖ What Christ entrusted to his apostles, they handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations till Christ's return in glory.
- ❖ Scripture and Tradition make up the single deposit of divine revelation (CCC, 74 – 84)
- ❖ Faith is our personal and free assent to the whole truth of divine revelation (CCC 88-95). Faith is a gift from God, it is an ecclesial act, and it is necessary for our salvation (CCC 142 – 184)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during the weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Why do we need God's revelation? (CCC, 36 – 38)
2. How is God's revelation experienced in everyday life?
3. What does it mean to say that faith is our personal, free and ecclesial response to God's revelation? (CCC 179-181)
4. What is the nature of Christian revelation? (CCC 51 – 53)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Ephesians 1:9

Colossians 1: 15

1 Timothy 1: 17

“God desires that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4); of Jesus Christ. Christ is proclaimed to all the nations and individuals so that his revelation may reach to the ends of the earth (CCC, 74).

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. The task of interpreting the Word of God is entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.” (CCC 85)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, 50 – 184

Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 1-10

CLOSING PRAYER:

Psalm 8: 1 - 9

SEGMENT THREE

THEME: CREATION

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Genesis 1: 1-2, 27-28

“How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have wrought them all” Psalm 104: 24

“O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.” Psalm 8:1

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

The Bible begins with these words – “In the beginning...God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The first three chapters of the first book of the Bible address questions about creation: its origins and destiny in God, its beauty and order, the creation of human beings, the drama of sin and the hope of salvation.

The origins of the world and human race are one of the most basic riddles of human existence. Science has studied these questions and enriched our knowledge of the universe, and the development of life. Science offers theories on when and how the universe arose and human beings appeared. However there remain questions beyond the scientific ones.

What is the meaning and purpose of our origin? Why do we exist at all? What is our origin and where are we going? If the world was created out of God’s goodness, why is there evil? Questions about our origin and our end are inseparable. They determine the meaning and orientation of human life.

What we believe about the creation of the world and of humanity and of our relationship with God, the Creator is of vital importance. It points us to the foundations of the Christian life.

- ❖ The creation of the world by a loving God is the foundation of “all God’s saving plans” (CCC 280). Creation begins the history of salvation that culminates in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The first three chapters of Genesis teach the truths of creation: its origin and its end in a loving God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man and woman, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation (CCC 289)
- ❖ We believe that God created the world freely and out of love to make his creatures share in his goodness and happiness. The world is not the product of chance or blind fate (CCC 295)
- ❖ Creation is ordered and it is good; With creation God does not abandon creatures to themselves. God creates out of nothing giving existence to the world and at every moment He sustains and upholds creation in being (CCC 299 – 301, 319 – 320)
- ❖ Man and woman are created as the crown of creation – we are created as material and spiritual beings. We are body and soul, and we are created in the image of God.
- ❖ The existence of physical and moral evil is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus who died and rose to overcome evil (CCC 324)
- ❖ Original Sin is “a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature is not totally corrupted; it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it” (CCC 405, 396 - 401)
- ❖ Due to Original Sin humanity is subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence.” (CCC 405)
- ❖ Sin is humanity’s rejection of God’s love. Sin breaks the bonds of friendship with God and with one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during the weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

- 1, What does it mean to be “created in the image and likeness of God?”
2. How is the biblical understanding of the creation of the world and human beings different from other worldviews? (CCC 285)
3. How do scientific theories of evolution relate to the Bible? (CCC 283 – 289)
4. What effect does sin have on us as individuals? On our relationship with others?
5. What is God’s response to human sinfulness?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Genesis 1- 3; Psalm 104 and Psalm 145
Romans 5:12 - 20; 8: 18-23; Colossians 1: 12-20

‘Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure, etc. Only in the knowledge of God’s plan for humanity can we grasp that sin is an abuse of freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving Him and one another” (CCC 387)

“The account of the Fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man*. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents” (CCC 390)

“Original Sin...is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted; it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin – an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence.” (CCC 405)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, *The Creator* 279 – 324; *The Fall* 385 - 421

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1 - 18

CLOSING PRAYER

Psalm 145

SEGMENT FOUR

THEME: THE CHURCH – THE PEOPLE OF GOD, THE BODY OF CHRIST, and TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“It is He that made us, and we are His; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” Psalm 100: 3

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” 1 Peter 2:9

Psalm 100; Psalm 117:22; Acts 2: 43 - 47

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

We are essentially social beings. The human response to God’s revelation in faith draws us into a community of believers. For God invites each of us into a personal relationship of faith, hope and love in the context of a community of believers. God chose the people of Israel to be his own and strengthened them on their journey to salvation.

Jesus inaugurated the Church by preaching the Good News of salvation in Him. He gathered apostles and disciples around Him who learned a new way of life. The apostles with Peter as their head were sent forth to preach, teach and serve the community of believers in the name of Jesus. The Church is born primarily from Jesus’ total self-giving for our salvation on the cross. We believe that it is in and through the Church that the saving work of Christ continues in the here and now, and in every time and place.

We receive the new life of faith from the Church, our “mother and teacher in faith.” The Catholic Church is a universal (*catholic*) institution that is primarily a community of love, grounded in faith in Jesus Christ and inspired by the hope of eternal life. It is a visible institution and a spiritual community. Three biblical images of the Church: the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

- ❖ We are created as social beings. We need one another to understand and grow in our relationship with God. In the Bible God forms a community of believers who become the visible image of divine love. To accept the gift of faith is to be united to God, the giver of all gifts and to all those who accept that same gift. (CCC, 738)
- ❖ In the Old Testament God chose the Israelites to be His people. (CCC, 761 – 762, 778)
- ❖ In the New Testament, Jesus calls his disciples to form a community of faith as the people of the New Covenant. Jesus inaugurates the Church through his preaching and teaching and in His total self-giving on the cross (CCC, 763 – 766)
- ❖ Today this community of faith, hope and love is continued in the Catholic Church. The Church is a mystery that is both visible and spiritual, human and divine, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ (CCC, 771, 779)
- ❖ The Church is the “sacrament of salvation,” which is to say that the Church is the “sign and instrument” of our union with God and of our union with one another. (CCC, 774). The Church is the “visible plan of God’s love for humanity” (CCC 775 – 776)
- ❖ We are members of the People of God by faith and baptism. In our common faith in Jesus Christ we form “one family and one People of God – a priestly, prophetic and royal people (CCC 781 – 786)
- ❖ The Church is the Body of Christ. In the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist “Jesus Christ, once dead and now risen, establishes the community of believers as his own Body.” In this one Body of Christ, there is a diversity of members, functions and gifts. Christ is the head of His Body, the Church (787 – 796)
- ❖ The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit is the source of the Church’s life, of her unity in diversity, and of the riches of gifts and graces given to the faithful through the Church.
- ❖ By daily imitating the example of Jesus the faithful are called to holiness of life. The “Universal Call to Holiness” is addressed to all the members of the Church – laity, clergy and religious.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Why is belonging to a community of faith so necessary in our personal relationship with God?
2. In what ways is the Church considered a mystery of faith?
3. How is Jesus Christ at the center of our understanding of the Church?
4. What is the significance of the images of the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Acts 2

John 10: 1-10

Matthew 21: 33-43

1 Corinthians 3:9

Ephesians 2: 19, 22

Galatians 4: 26

“Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.”

Eucharistic Prayer III

“The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures. To fulfill the Father’s will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church “is the reign of Christ already present in mystery.” (CCC, 763)

“The Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ. She is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.” (CCC 779)

“Christ is the light of humanity...the Church has no other light than Christ’s; according to a favorite image of the Church Fathers, the Church is like the moon, all its light reflected from the sun.” (CCC, 748)

“The Church is born primarily out of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross. “The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus.” For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the “wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.” (CCC, 766)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church,*” 748 – 870

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1-51

Saint Augustine, *Sermon*, 71, 20, 33

Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father

SEGMENT FIVE

THEME: SACRED SCRIPTURE – GOD’S WORD AMONG US

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Psalm 119: 97 – 108

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” Psalm 119: 105

“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the faithful of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3: 14-17

“When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in believers” 1 Thessalonians 2: 13

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY:

Christianity is a religion of the “Word of God,” a living and incarnate word. In the books of Sacred Scripture God speaks to humanity in human words that is the “speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, 81). Just as the Word of the eternal Father, Christ Jesus became like us, so are the words of God expressed in human words in the Sacred Scriptures.

The Church honors the scriptures as she honors the Lord’s body. The Church presents to us the *one* bread of life, taken from the *one* table of God’s Word and Christ’s body at the Eucharistic altar. In Sacred Scripture the Church constantly finds nourishment and strength, wisdom and hope, for believers welcome it not as a human word, “but as what it really is, the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2: 13)

The Bible, meaning “the book” is the most significant sacred text in the history of the world. Translated into more languages than any other book it is a storehouse of sublime teaching, sound wisdom for human life, and a treasury of prayers containing the mystery of our salvation. It is the written record of God’s faithful love in the face of human sinfulness. We approach the Bible with an attitude of faith and prayer.

- ❖ God is the author of Sacred Scripture “written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and handed down as such to the Church.” (CCC, 105)
- ❖ God inspired the human authors of the sacred books to teach humanity the truths of divine revelation. God chose sacred authors who “made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more” (CCC, 107)
- ❖ Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the biblical authors record true accounts of salvation history, the messages of the prophets, the Wisdom sayings, the teachings and ministry of Jesus and the experiences of the first Christians.
- ❖ The books of the Bible “firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures” (CCC, 107)
- ❖ To interpret the Scriptures correctly the reader must attend to what God wanted to reveal to us and to what the human authors wanted to affirm. Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written. (CCC, 109 – 110). The Church watches over and interprets the Word of God.
- ❖ The Church offers *three* criteria for interpreting Scripture: “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture,” reading Scripture within the “living Tradition of the whole Church,” and the “analogy of faith,” or the coherence of truths of faith among themselves (CCC 112 – 114)
- ❖ The Church distinguishes between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual sense. The spiritual sense of Scripture is further divided into the *allegorical*, the *moral*, and the *anagogical* (CCC 115 – 119)
- ❖ The list of sacred books is called the “canon” of Scripture. It includes **46** books for the Old Testament and **27** books for the New. (CCC 120)
- ❖ The four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – occupy a central place in the Church’s life because “they are our principal source for the life and teaching of Jesus, the Incarnate Word” (CCC124 – 127)
- ❖ The books of the Old Testament have permanent value in that the “Old Covenant has never been revoked.” The unity of the two Testaments flows from the unity of God’s plan for our salvation. The Old Testament prepares for the New Testament and the New fulfills the Old (CCC 128 – 130)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Why is it important for Christians to read and reflect on the words of the Bible?
2. How can you make the Bible part of your daily prayer and reflection?
3. What are the various meanings or “senses” of Scripture?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

John 1: 14

Romans 1: 16-17

1 Corinthians 10:11

Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:12

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” St. Jerome (CCC, 133)

“All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ” (CCC 134)

“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword”
Hebrews 4: 12

“The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word.” Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*Sacred Scripture*,” 101 - 141

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Chapters II to VI

CLOSING PRAYER

Psalm 119: 89 - 105

SEGMENT SIX

THEME: THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Psalm 77: 11 – 14

“I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.” Psalm 77: 11

“Sing to the Lord, bless his name, tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations; his marvelous works among all the peoples” Psalm 96: 2-3

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY:

As Christians we believe that God's plan to save humanity is revealed in and through the events of human history. God is not a remote, distant being nor is He a pure philosophical abstraction. Rather Christians believe in a personal God who is love. And we believe that God, out of relentless love, chose to reveal Himself in a series of unfolding historical stages recorded for us in the books of the Bible. We call this biblical and historical record of God's words and actions the “history of salvation,” or “salvation history.”

The drama of the divine-human relationship unfolds in the history of salvation as God, over and over again, invites human beings into a **covenant relationship** with Him and with one another. This divine invitation of salvation extended to the human race from the beginning of the world continues to the end of time in spite of humanity's acceptance or rejection of that divine offer of love.

Salvation history unfolds *gradually* over thousands of years as God's love, forgiveness and mercy is revealed in successive stages. The plan of salvation begins with the creation of the world and continues with God's covenant with Abraham, the giving of the Law to Moses and the Exodus of the chosen people of Israel, and the subsequent sending of prophets and kings. Each stage of salvation history prepares humanity for the perfect fulfillment of God's saving plan in the person and mission of his Son, Jesus Christ.

- ❖ God is revealed to humanity gradually. He prepares humanity to welcome by stages his salvation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. (CCC, 53)
- ❖ In the beginning God made himself known through the creation of the world. He invited Adam and Eve to a personal relationship with him. Although they disobeyed God and lost divine friendship, God continued to invite them into the communion, peace and happiness for which they were originally created. (CC, 54-55)
- ❖ Once the unity of the human race was broken by sin, God's plan of salvation was revealed in historical stages, part by part. First, God made an everlasting covenant with Noah (Genesis 9: 16) after the Flood. (CCC, 56-58)
- ❖ Then God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. To gather the scattered human race into one people God called Abram from his country and family and makes him Abraham, that is the "father of many nations." Abraham is our "father in faith," because he believed the promises God made to him.
- ❖ God then called and formed a nation of Israel, the People of God as His own chosen people. God invited this one people to recognize Him and serve Him as the one living and true God (monotheism). The history of salvation recorded in the Old Testament traces the journey of the Israelites as they accept or reject God in fidelity or infidelity to the covenant. (CCC 62)
- ❖ God liberated His people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt in the central event of the **Exodus**. At Mount Sinai, God establishes a covenant with Moses and gives Israel the divine law of the Ten Commandments. The commandments are an expression of being in a covenant relationship with God. (CCC, 62-63)
- ❖ God sends the prophets to the people of Israel and their message prepares them for the future hope of salvation. The prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, among others, proclaim a radical message of salvation from sin and from their infidelities. The promise of salvation will include all nations. (CCC, 64)
- ❖ Salvation history reaches its perfect fulfillment in the life and mission of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God made man. What was spoken in promise to the prophets in successive stages, God has now spoken all at once by giving us His Son who inaugurates the New Covenant (CCC, 65).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How is God's faithfulness and love revealed in the history of salvation?
2. Why did God *gradually* prepare humanity over thousands of years for the revelation of his Son in Jesus Christ?
3. What connections or parallels do you see between your faith journey in the RCIA and the biblical history of salvation?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Hebrews 1: 1-3

Ephesians 1: 3-10

Genesis 3: 15

Romans 2: 6-7; Romans 11: 17-18, 24 - 28

Psalms 105; Psalm 136

"After God had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets, "in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Hebrews 1: 1-2)
Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 3-4

"Even when he disobeyed and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death...Again and again you offered a covenant to man"
Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer IV, 118

"The Word of God dwelt in man and became the Son of Man in order to accustom man to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in man" Saint Irenaeus (CCC, 53)

"O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good...to Him who alone does great wonders, for His steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 136: 1 - 4

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*Stages of Revelation*” 54 - 73

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Chapters I

CLOSING PRAYER

Psalm 150

“Praise the Lord for his mighty deeds, praise Him for this sovereign majesty” Psalm 150: 2

SEGMENT SEVEN

THEME: JESUS CHRIST – THE WORD MADE FLESH

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“But when the fullness of time has come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as children of God” (Galatians 4: 4-5)

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...and from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace” (John 1: 14, 16)

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

“God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The heart of Christian belief is the Incarnation (God becoming human) of the person of Jesus Christ who we believe is the redeemer of the world and the center of human history.

All the promises God made throughout the history of salvation – to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Moses and David, to the prophets and kings of Israel – come to fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The history of salvation reaches its completion and perfection in the person of the “Word Made Flesh,” Jesus Christ who is the Son of God.

As the Word of God made visible in human form, Jesus Christ fully reveals God’s love and saving plan for humanity. In Christ each of us discovers our full Christian dignity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the ‘Word made flesh.’ In the life, death and resurrection of Christ we understand the deepest meaning and purpose of our existence as children of God.

The Word was made flesh so that we might know God’s love and be reconciled to God who “loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 John 4: 10). Not only is Jesus Christ a great teacher, prophet, liberator and founder of the Christian faith. He is the Incarnation of God, the “invisible made visible,” true God and true man, God’s only Son.

- ❖ Central to Christian faith is belief in the mystery of the “Incarnation” by which the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. In the Incarnation, God the Father reveals the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 461 – 463).
- ❖ The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus is part God and part man. Nor is he a mixture of the divine and the human. Jesus became truly man while remaining truly God: He is true God and true man. The Incarnation is the mystery of the union between the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ, the “Word made flesh.” (CCC 464)
- ❖ Jesus is the one mediator between God and man. During the early centuries the Church had to defend and clarify this central Christian belief against numerous opposing views (CCC 464 – 469)
- ❖ The Gospels give us the record of the whole life of Christ from his birth, his miracles and teachings, his examples of love and compassion, to his passion and death on the cross and his glorious resurrection.
- ❖ The “Word became flesh” in Christ to be our model of love, forgiveness and holiness. “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15: 12). To be a disciple of Christ is to love God and to imitate Jesus’ actions as we follow his teachings of love, mercy and compassion for others.
- ❖ The names given to Jesus tell us about his mission and his work for our salvation: “Jesus” means “God saves” (CCC, 430 – 435); the word “Christ” means “Messiah” or the One Anointed and chosen by God (CCC, 436 – 440); the title “Son of God” reflects his divine origin and identity; and the name “Lord” indicates his divine power over the world. (CCC, 446 – 451).
- ❖ The Church believes that the “key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in Jesus Christ” (CCC 450)
- ❖ The chief mysteries of Christ’s life are his birth, the “Paschal mystery” of his sufferings and death on the Cross, and his victory over sin and death in the resurrection. (CCC 512 – 658)
- ❖ “The whole of Christ’s life was a continual teaching: his silences, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection are the fulfillment of divine Revelation” (CCC, 561)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and not merely as a wise teacher or liberator, so central to Christianity?
2. How can you deepen your personal relationship with Christ? How can you grow in your understanding of Jesus' life, his teachings and his saving death and resurrection?
3. "Who do you say that I am?" is Jesus' question to his disciples. Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) How would you answer Jesus' question – "Who do you say that I am?"
4. If God assumed human nature in the Incarnation of Jesus, what does that say about the dignity of our human nature?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

1 John 1: 1-4

Philippians 2: 5-8

Hebrews 10: 5-7

Acts 8: 37

I John 2: 23

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped at, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Philippians 2: 5-8

"Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued out of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom" (St. Leo the Great, *Christmas Sermon*, 1)

“Human beings cannot live without love. They remain beings who are incomprehensible to themselves if love is not revealed to them, if they do not encounter love, if they do not experience it and make it their own...This is why Christ “fully reveals man to himself”...in Christ we find again the greatness, dignity and value that belongs to our humanity.” Pope John Paul II, *Redeemer of Man*, 10

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*I Believe in Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God*” Part One, Chapter Two, 422 - 682

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Chapter I

Pope John Paul II, *The Redeemer of Man, Redemptor Hominis*. Encyclical Letter, March 4, 1979

CLOSING PRAYER

John 1: 1

1 John 1: 1-4

SEGMENT EIGHT

THEME: ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 2: 43-47

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common...attending the temple together and breaking bread...and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” Acts 2:44-46

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

In the words of the Creed we profess “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” These four characteristics or “marks” of the Church indicate the essential features of the Catholic Church, her origin and her mission in the world. The Church does not possess these characteristics; rather we believe that it is Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes his Body, the Church, “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”

The word “Church” (Latin *ecclesia*) originally meant a convocation or assembly gathered for a religious purpose. In Christian usage the word “church” refers to the worshipping community, the local community or “parish” and the entire universal community of believers. (CCC, 751 – 752)

In the Old Testament God called the chosen people of Israel to be his holy people. The first Christians saw themselves as a continuation of that assembly. God created the world for communion with divine life and the Church is that community founded by Jesus Christ through which we grow in communion with God and with one another. In the Church, God now calls together all people into one community of faith, hope and love.

The Church was inaugurated by Jesus’ preaching and teaching and by his choice of twelve apostles with Peter as the head of the community. Ultimately the mystery of the visible and invisible reality of the Church is born from Jesus’ total self-giving on the Cross.

- ❖ Jesus Christ makes the Church “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Only in fidelity to Jesus’ teachings and his saving mission can the Church realize fully each of these qualities (CCC, 811-822)
- ❖ The Church is “ONE” because of her founder and source: Jesus Christ. But from its very beginning, the ONE Church is marked by a diversity that comes from the variety of gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Among the Church’s members there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. (CCC 813 – 815)
- ❖ The oneness of the Church is held together by “bonds of unity” or visible bonds of communion which are: above all charity, the profession of one faith received from the apostles, common celebration of the sacraments, and apostolic succession through Holy Orders (CCC, 815)
- ❖ The “sole Church of Christ is that which our Savior entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and pastor it...this Church, constituted and organized as a society in this present world, *subsists* in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by bishops in communion with him. Elements of sanctification and truth are also found outside its visible confines.” (CCC, 816)
- ❖ From the beginning divisions arose in the Church. Through the centuries large communities of Christians became separated from full communion – for which people of all sides were to blame. These divisions in the Body of Christ are a wound to Christian unity and contrary to the will of Christ. (CCC, 817-822)
- ❖ The Church is the “HOLY” People of God made holy by Christ, her founder. While holy the Church is composed of sinful members who are constantly in need of conversion. (CCC, 825 – 827)
- ❖ From time to time the Church *canonizes* saints, in whom the holiness of the Church shines. In canonizing saints the Church recognizes God’s sanctifying power in the lives of holy men and women and offers them to us as models of Christian living. (CCC, 828 – 829)
- ❖ The Church is “CATHOLIC” meaning universal. Christ is present in the Church and she proclaims the fullness of faith to all peoples and is present everywhere in the world. (CCC, 830 – 856)
- ❖ The Church is “APOSTOLIC” in that she is founded on the faith of the apostles. She continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the successors of the apostles, the bishops, assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Pope (CCC, 857 – 865)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Share new insights you have gained from your understanding of the “marks” of the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”
2. Just as we honor people of heroic virtue and extraordinary abilities in society, we honor the saints as “heroes of holiness.” Discuss examples of Christian saints, men and women, whose lives are models of Christian living for you.
3. On the eve of his passion and death Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples: “that they may all be one. As you Father and I are one, may they also be one in us” (John 17:21). Discuss the importance of efforts towards Christian unity among believers today?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

John 17: 21

Acts 2: 43- 47

Ephesians 4: 3-5

Matthew 16: 18

“The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect. In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired. Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state – though each in his own way – are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect” (CCC, 296)

“You are the eternal Shepherd who never leaves his flock untended. Through the apostles you watch over us and protect us always. You made them shepherds of the flock to share in the work of your Son...” (Roman Missal, Preface of the Apostles, I)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*”
Articles 811 – 870.

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen
Gentium*, Chapter I, articles 1-8

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, On the Eucharist in its
Relationship to the Church, Chapters 3 and 4, articles 26-46

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father

SEGMENT NINE

THEME: “LAST THINGS” –

Judgment, Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, Divine Mercy

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Cor 2: 6-12

“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him. Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 2: 9-10

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay...we know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8: 19-23

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

God desires that “all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). God’s desire for the salvation of every human person is the basis for our reflections on death, judgment, heaven, purgatory, hell, and eternal life with God. Only in light of God’s unfailing offer of friendship and covenant love do we best understand Catholic beliefs about the “Last Things.” In light of Jesus’ victory over death in his resurrection we have the certain hope of our eternal union with God.

Created by God each one of us was made with the capacity to be in relationship with God, in communion with God and with one another. Heaven is our ultimate destiny. During our earthly existence we grow in our relationship with God through prayer, reflection on God’s word, the sacraments, and through our imitation of Jesus’ example of love and service. Our ultimate destiny is eternal communion with God and with those united in Christ before God.

The mystery of our future eternal communion with God is beyond human understanding or description in human language. The contemplation of God in his heavenly glory, called the “beatific vision” is the ultimate destiny of each one of us.

- ❖ Each person receives a “particular judgment” at the moment of death. Based on our love of God and neighbor we are granted entrance to heaven into communion with God, or to a period of purification, or to eternal separation from God. (CCC, 1021 – 1022)
- ❖ Those who die in God’s grace and friendship enter into “heaven” which is the ultimate end and fulfillment of our deepest human longings for happiness. In heaven we enter into perfect communion with our Creator – what we were created for in the first place. Heaven is perfect existence with the Most Holy Trinity, it is communion of life and love with Christ and all those who believe in Him and remained faithful to Him. ((CCC, 1023 – 1029)
- ❖ The mystery of blessed communion with God and those united in Christ is beyond human understanding and description. Scripture describes heaven in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise. (CCC, 1027)
- ❖ All who die in God’s friendship but are still imperfect in their love for God are assured of eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to be prepared to enter God’s presence in the joy and light of heaven. (CCC, 1030)
- ❖ The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification or cleansing of sins based on certain texts of Scripture that speak of a cleansing fire – 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Peter 1:7 (CCC, 1031)
- ❖ The Catholic practice of praying for our deceased loved ones particularly for those undergoing the purification of *purgatory* is drawn from scripture (2 Maccabeus 12:36). From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers so that our departed loved ones through purification may attain the joy of heaven. (CCC, 1032)
- ❖ Through our own free choices we can refuse to accept God’s love and forgiveness. If we reject God’s love by remaining in mortal sin (willful turning away from God) we separate ourselves from God forever by our own free choice. The state of “definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the community of the blessed is called “hell.” (CCC, 1033). By choosing against God during our earthly life we exclude ourselves from His eternal presence in heaven. “God predestines no one to go to hell” (CCC, 1037)
- ❖ It is our responsibility to make use of our freedom and to pursue the path of daily conversion in view of our eternal life.

- ❖ At the end of time, God's Kingdom will come in fullness. The "Last Judgment" or general judgment will come when Christ returns in glory...we shall know the ultimate meaning of creation...and that God's love is stronger than death." (CCC 1038-1041)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Newspapers and television broadcasts daily surround us with accounts of suffering, violence and death. How do Catholic beliefs in the "Last Things" help us better understand the mystery of human suffering and death?
2. What new insight(s) have you gained from your reflection on the "Last Things?"
3. Discuss ways in which Catholic beliefs in eternal life differ from popular or contemporary understandings of life after death.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Luke 16:22; 23: 43
Matthew 16: 26; 22:13; 25:13, 31-46
John 14:3
1 John 3:2
1 Corinthians 13:12
2 Corinthians 5:8
Philippians 1:23; Ephesians 1:10
1 Thessalonians 4:17
Hebrews 9: 27; 12:23
1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 1: 9-10
2 Peter 3:13
Rev 2:17; 22:4-5

“Go forth, Christian soul, from this world
in the name of God the almighty Father,
who created you,
in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God,
who suffered for you,
in the name of the Holy Spirit,
who was poured out upon you.
Go forth, faithful Christian!”

Prayer of Commendation, OCF

“Father accept this offering
from your whole family.
Grant us your peace in this life,
Save us from final damnation,
And count us among those you have chosen.”

Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I, 88

“But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God...we must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is: also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ. “

Pope John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering, 13.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*I Believe in Life Everlasting*,” Articles 1020 – 1060

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, article 48

Pope John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering, Salvifici Doloris*, Apostolic Letter, February 11, 1984.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father

SEGMENT TEN

THEME: SACRAMENTS – AN OVERVIEW

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Luke 24: 13-49 (Emmaus)

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

During his earthly ministry Jesus preached and taught with authority and performed powerful healings and miracles through which he forgave sins and healed the wounds of sin. In the sacraments of the Church, Christ now **continues** the saving works he performed during his earthly life. In the sacraments the Church offers to each of us the saving power of God in Jesus Christ for the healing of our whole person - soul, mind and body as we daily journey in faith with the community of believers.

The seven sacraments of the Church are baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, confession and reconciliation, holy orders, matrimony, and anointing of the sick, Over the centuries the Church discerned that among the many sacramental celebrations there are **seven** sacraments that were instituted by Jesus himself.

In every sacramental celebration we are led to God, the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Each of the sacraments of the Church were instituted by Christ so that we may continue to participate in the divine life of grace and forgiveness he brings. Christ Himself works in and through the visible rites and symbols of bread, wine, oil, and water taken from the world of creation. Christ is the guarantee of the sacramental graces that transform us into children of God.

The minister – bishop, priest, or deacon and the assembly together participate in the sacramental celebrations that make present the mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection – His Paschal Mystery. Every sacramental celebration invites us to participate in the mystery of our dying and rising with Christ.

- ❖ A sacrament may be defined as an “efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.” (CCC, 1131)
- ❖ Jesus Christ now lives and acts in the Church through the sacraments by which we are invited to participate in the mystery of His life, death and resurrection (CCC, 1076). We say the sacraments are *efficacious* because it is Christ himself at work in them: it is he who baptizes, he who forgives sins, he who acts in the sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each offers (CCC, 1127 – 1129)
- ❖ The word “liturgy” means the “participation of the People of God in the “work of God.” Through the liturgy Jesus Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church. (CCC 1069)
- ❖ In the sacraments the Church “celebrates above all the Paschal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation. The mysteries of Christ’s life are the foundations of what he would offer in the sacraments, through the ministers of the Church, for what was visible in our Savior has passed over into the sacraments (CCC 1114 – 1116)
- ❖ The sacraments are “by the church” and “for the church.” The Church is the primary sacrament or sign of Christ’s saving actions. The sacraments are “for the Church” in that they “make” the Church since they manifest the mystery of our communion with God (CCC, 1117 – 1121)
- ❖ “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify us, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally to give worship to God. They not only presuppose faith but they also nourish, strengthen and express it. That is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” (CCC, 1122 – 1126)
- ❖ The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist are called the “**sacraments of initiation**,” because they are steps toward union with Christ and the Church. The sacrament of reconciliation (confession) and the sacrament of anointing are called “**sacraments of healing**” as they heal soul, mind, and body. The “**sacraments of service**” are holy orders and matrimony, given for the service of the Church and the world.

- ❖ Sacraments express and shape the unity of the Church. For that reason they may only be received by Catholics.
- ❖ We celebrate the sacraments with signs and symbols (CCC, 1145 – 1152), with words and actions (CCC, 1153 – 1155), with singing and music (CCC, 1156 – 1158) and in liturgical time – Sundays and throughout the Liturgical Year (CCC, 1163 – 1171)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How can the sacraments help you to grow spiritually?
2. What is the relationship of personal prayer and personal reading of scripture to participation in the Church's sacraments?
3. What part will the sacraments play in your spiritual life?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Ephesians 1: 3-6

John 6: 32; 20: 21-23

1 Peter 3:21

“The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 14

“Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations...by his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes.” (CCC, 1088)

“For it is in the liturgy, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist that “the work of our redemption is accomplished,” and it is through the liturgy especially that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 2

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “*The Celebration of the Christian Mystery*,” Part
Two, Article nos. 1066 - 1209

Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,
Chapter One.

CLOSING PRAYER

Luke 24: 13-49 (Emmaus)

SEGMENT ELEVEN

**THEME: SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION –
BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION AND EUCHARIST**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Matthew 3: 13-17

John 3: 5

Romans 6: 1-11

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

From the first moments of Christianity new members were received into the Christian community through sacramental rites of initiation. The *catechumenate*, developed by early Christians during the first four centuries of the Church's existence, was an extensive educational, spiritual and liturgical journey of initiation. The RCIA is a recent recovery of the ancient *catechumenate* that culminates in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were the sacramental rites through which new members – infants, children and adults – were initiated into a new life of faith, hope and love of Christ as members of His body, the Church. Continuing the ancient tradition of initiation today new members are welcomed into the Catholic Church through the sacraments of Christian initiation.

The sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist – are the *foundations* of every Christian life. Through the sacraments of initiation the faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

By means of the sacraments of Christian initiation, we receive the unique graces that come with being in communion with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments of initiation fully incorporate us into the Body of Christ, the Church.

- ❖ From the time of the apostles initiation into the Christian community took place through a journey of conversion in several stages. The *catechumenate* that was developed to initiate new members into the Church culminated at the Easter Vigil when the catechumens received the sacraments of initiation (CCC, 1229 – 1233)
- ❖ Baptism as the sacrament of faith is the basis of the whole Christian life. Through baptism we are freed from the effects of Original Sin and reborn as children of God through water and the Spirit; we become members of Christ's Body, the Church. (CCC, 1262 – 1271).
- ❖ Baptism is necessary for salvation as affirmed by Jesus, “no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being begotten of water and the Spirit.” (John 3: 5) Jesus also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28: 19-20)
- ❖ The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To baptize means to “immerse” or “plunge” into the water symbolizing the catechumens' burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as a “new creature.” (CCC, 1214). The sign of the cross, the baptismal water, the anointing with sacred chrism, the white garment and candle all signify the baptismal graces (1234 – 1245)
- ❖ “Incorporated into Christ by Baptism we are configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with an indelible spiritual mark of his belonging to Christ...Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated (CCC, 1272 – 1274)
- ❖ The sacrament of Confirmation is a spiritual seal of the Holy Spirit that completes the sacramental graces received in Baptism. The effect of Confirmation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it was given to the apostles at Pentecost. (CCC, (1302 – 1305)
- ❖ Confirmation gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ. (CCC, 1303)
- ❖ The essential rite of Confirmation consists of anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of hands, and through the words, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. (CCC1299 – 1300; 1312 – 1314)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by RCIA teams to guide large or small group discussion during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How can you prepare spiritually for the sacraments of initiation?
2. What role does faith play in baptism? (CCC, 1253 – 1255)
3. Discuss the meaning of the sacramental symbols and rites of Baptism and Confirmation. (CCC, 1234 – 1245; CCC1297 – 1301)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Matthew 3:13; 28: 19-20

John 3:5; 20: 22-23

Acts 2: 1-12; 38

Romans 6: 3-4

Galatians 6:15; 3: 27

2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:12

“It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe...the catechumen or godparent is asked: “What do you ask of God’s Church?” The response is “Faith!” (CCC, 1253)

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” Romans 6:3-4

“All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by water and the Holy Spirit
you freed your sons and daughters from sin
and gave them new life.
Send your Holy Spirit upon them
To be their helper and guide,
Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of right judgment and courage,
The spirit of knowledge and reverence
Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.” *Rite of Confirmation*, 25

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “The Sacraments of Initiation,” Articles 1212 - 1321

Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 64 –
65

CLOSING PRAYER

Acts 2: 32-38

SEGMENT TWELVE

THEME: EUCHARIST – SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Luke 22: 14-20

Psalm 104: 13- 15

“Bread from the earth, and wine to gladden our hearts...so that our faces gleam with oil, and bread fortifies our hearts” Psalm 104: 15

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The sacrament of the Eucharist as the “summary of our faith,” completes sacramental initiation. We believe that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” in that the Eucharist is the culmination of God’s saving actions in Jesus Christ and of our worship and union with Him who leads us to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. All the other sacraments are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it.

The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word *eucharistein* meaning “thanksgiving.” Jesus gave thanks at the Last Supper, at which he instituted the Eucharist, and then offered his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving once for all on the Cross. In the Eucharistic memorial of his sacrifice on the Cross He pours out graces of salvation on us who unite ourselves to Him as sharers in his Body and Blood to form one single body.

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood that perpetuates and continues His sacrifice on the Cross through the ages. He entrusts to the Church the memorial of his death and resurrection in this sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present.

At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit become Christ's Body and Blood. In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body he gave up for us on the cross, the blood he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of our sins."

- ❖ The Eucharist completes sacramental initiation. As the "repeatable sacrament of initiation" it is the "source and the summit of the Christian life." All the other sacraments are oriented toward the Eucharist for it contains Christ Himself whose presence heals, restores and forgives us. (CCC 1322 – 1327)
- ❖ The word Eucharist means "thanksgiving." The *Catechism* lists several terms to describe the Eucharist: Lord's Supper, Breaking of Bread, Eucharistic assembly, memorial of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection, the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, the Most Blessed Sacrament, Holy Communion, and Holy Mass. (CCC, 1328 – 1332)
- ❖ Jesus instituted the Eucharist so that He might continue to abide with us and so that we might partake of the saving mystery of his passion, death and resurrection. Jesus' command to "do this in memory of me" is faithfully carried out by the Church from the very beginning to the end of time. The Eucharist is the center of the Church's life. (CCC, 1337 – 1345)
- ❖ The *memorial* of the Eucharist is not merely a recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for us...when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover and it is made present (CCC, 1362 – 1364)
- ❖ The Eucharist is a sacrifice in that in it Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross. The Eucharistic sacrifice *represents* the sacrifice of the cross...the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice* (CCC, 1365 – 1372)
- ❖ The Eucharist is SACRIFICE, THANKSGIVING, MEMORIAL AND PRESENCE (CCC, 1356 – 1372)
- ❖ As the Paschal Banquet, the Eucharist unites us with Christ and with one another in the Body of Christ, the Church. The Eucharist makes the Church (CCC, 1382 - 1405)

- ❖ We believe that in the Eucharist Christ is present “body and blood, soul and divinity...truly, really and substantially.” By the consecration of bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of Christ’s body and of the substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change is called “transubstantiation.” (CCC1373 – 1376) At every Eucharist Christ offers himself for our nourishment and strength to unite us with Him and lead us to God in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Mass or the “liturgy of the Eucharist” has two parts that together form “one single act of worship”: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (CCC, 1346 – 1355)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. What are the key events in the Passover meal of Jesus at his Last Supper? (Read Luke 22: 7-20; Matthew 26: 17-29; Mark 14: 12-25)
2. What does it mean for you to “fully, consciously and actively” participate in the Eucharist?
3. What is the connection between the Eucharist and our daily lives?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Luke 22: 7-20

Matthew 26: 17-29

Mark 14:12 – 25

John 13: 1-17, 34-35

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; Acts 2: 42-46; 20:7

“The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, just as the announcement of the Jesus’ Passion scandalized them...the Eucharist and the Cross are stumbling blocks...(Jesus) invites us to discover that only he has “the words of eternal life” and that to receive in faith the gift of the Eucharist is to receive the Lord Himself.” (CCC, 1336)

“It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God’s. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered.” (CCC, 1375 from St. John Chrysostom)

“The Church and the world have great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease.” Pope John Paul II, *Dominicae cenae*, 3

“I would like to rekindle this “Eucharistic amazement” ...to contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the program which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium...To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened...Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Lk 24:31). Pope John Paul II, *On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church*, 6.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, “The Sacrament of the Eucharist,” article nos. 1322 – 1418

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 1963

Pope John Paul II, *The Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003.

CLOSING PRAYER

Luke 24: 13 – 35 (Emmaus)

SEGMENT THIRTEEN

**THEME: Sacraments Of Healing –
Reconciliation And Anointing
Sacraments Of Service - Holy Orders And Matrimony**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“If you, O Lord should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But with you is found forgiveness, that You may be revered” Psalm 130: 3-4

Mark 2: 1-12 (forgiveness and healing of the paralytic)

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation we receive the new life of Christ. But the weakness of human nature and our inclination to sin continues to remain and affect our lives. The Church offers us the sacraments of healing to assist in our daily journeys of conversion and reconciliation.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus forgave sins and healed those who were physically and spiritually broken. Those he forgave were healed, renewed in faith and restored to health of mind and body. The Church continues even today, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the healing work of Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Through the sacraments of service – Holy Orders and Matrimony, those already baptized and confirmed receive particular vocations in service of God, the Church and the human family. Those who receive Holy Orders are consecrated or set apart in Christ’s name to “feed the Church by the word and the grace of God.” And husbands and wives who receive the sacrament of Matrimony are strengthened and blessed for the dignity and duties of the sacrament of marriage.

- ❖ When Jesus forgave sins he also pointed to its effects: the reconciliation of sinners with God and with the community of

- believers. He gave the apostles his own power to forgive sins and the power to reconcile sinners to God and to the Church. (CCC 1443 – 1445)
- ❖ Only God forgives sins. Jesus willed that the Church be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation he won for us on the cross with his blood. He entrusted the power of absolution to the apostles and instituted the sacrament of Penance by which the baptized are offered a new possibility of conversion, forgiveness and healing.
 - ❖ Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return to God with all of our heart, a turning away from sin and the resolution to change one's life with hope in God's mercy and grace. (1430-1433)
 - ❖ The sacrament comprises two essential elements: the actions of the penitent who undergoes conversion in the Holy Spirit, namely contrition, confession and penance; and God's action through the Church's mediation. Penance is a liturgical action (CCC1480- 1484)
 - ❖ The “confessor” (the priest) is not the master of God's forgiveness but its servant. He forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ so that when he says, “I absolve you,” the “I” is that of Christ. The “sacramental seal” of penance means that every priest who hears confessions is bound to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins confessed to him. What the penitent has made known to the priest remains “sealed” by the sacrament. (CCC 1466 – 1467)
 - ❖ The sacrament of Reconciliation restores us to God's grace and friendship, and reconciles us with the Church. (CCC 1468 – 1470)
 - ❖ Individual confession and absolution is the ordinary way for the faithful to be reconciled to God, the church and one another (CCC, 1484)

 - ❖ The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick strengthens the baptized when they experience grave illness or old age. The sacrament unites the sick person to the suffering of Christ and strengthens them to endure the sufferings of illness or old age. (CCC 1499 – 1532)
 - ❖ The celebration of the Anointing of the Sick consists in the anointing of the forehead and hands of the sick person accompanied with a liturgical prayer asking for special graces of strength, peace and courage.

- ❖ Holy Orders as a sacrament of service is the sacrament of “apostolic ministry” through which the mission that Christ entrusted to the apostles continues to be exercised in the Church. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. (CCC 1533 – 1600)
- ❖ In the service and person of the ordained minister, Christ, the high priest, is himself present to the Church. The priestly ministry reaches its summit in the priests’ celebration of the Eucharist which is the source and center of the Church’s unity.
- ❖ All the baptized are a priestly people sharing in the priesthood of Christ. Based on this common priesthood the sacrament of Holy Order is another participation in Christ’s mission where the task of the ordained minister is to serve in the name and person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community. (CCC 1591)
- ❖ The sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred on by the laying on of hands followed by a prayer of consecration. Ordination imprints an indelible sacramental character. The Church confers Holy Orders on baptized men following Christ who chose men to be the twelve apostles and their successors. (CCC1572 – 1580)

- ❖ The sacrament of marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman who form an intimate communion of life and love. Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament at Cana (John 2: 1-11) (CCC 1601, 1612 - 1617)
- ❖ God himself is the author of marriage. Since God created man and woman their mutual love is an image of God’s love for humanity. As a sacrament of the Church marriage is not a purely human institution but comes from the hand of the Creator (CCC1603 – 1605)
- ❖ The spouses, as ministers of God’s grace, mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant and the source of their love and the strength to mutual fidelity. (CCC1621 – 1637)
- ❖ Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. Spouses are given the grace to love each other with the love which Christ loved his Church. The grace of this sacrament perfects the love of spouses, strengthens their unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (CCC, 1661)
- ❖ Unity, indissolubility and openness to life are essential to marriage (1643 – 1654)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Why do we need a sacrament of reconciliation after baptism?
2. How does the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick continue the healing ministry of Jesus in the Gospels?
3. How is the sacrament of marriage as a covenant different from the understanding of marriage as a contract?
4. How is the ordained priesthood related to the common priesthood of all the baptized? (CCC 1142, 1547)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Reconciliation:

Mark 1: 15; 2: 1-12

Luke 7: 48; 15:18

John 20:19, 22-23

Anointing of the Sick:

Luke 6: 19

Mark 1: 41; 3:10; 6:56

Matthew 10:8; 25: 36

Holy Orders:

Hebrews 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 10:14

Acts 1:8; 2:4

John 20: 22-23

1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1: 6-7

Matrimony:

Genesis 1: 27-28; 2: 18-25

Mark 10:9; John 2: 1-11

Ephesians 5: 25, 32

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Sacraments of Healing – CCC 1420 – 1498

Anointing of the Sick - CCC 1499 – 1532

Sacrament of Holy Orders – CCC 1533 – 1600

Sacrament of Matrimony - CCC 1601 - 1666

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, *Christus Dominus*, and *Gaudium et Spes*, articles 47 – 52 (The Dignity of Marriage and the Family)

Pope John Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 1984

-----, I Will Give You Shepherds, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1992

-----, Consecrated Life, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996

-----, Lay Members of Christ's Faithful, *Christifidelis laici*, 1988

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father

SEGMENT FOURTEEN

**THEME: Ten Commandments –
Christian Moral Life**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 19: 16-21

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

To be human is to be faced with moral choices: “to do what is good and avoid evil.” The sacraments of initiation, healing and service strengthen us with the wisdom and strength to choose what is good and avoid evil. Our free will and intellect are manifestations of our being made in the image of God.

Living according to the Ten Commandments bears witness to our dignity as human beings made in the image and likeness of God. The Commandments are not impositions on our freedom nor are they a list of do's and don'ts. Rather the Ten Commandments are the divine invitation to grow in authentic freedom and shape our lives in accordance with God's plan for humanity.

“Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” is the question posed to the Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus' answer is our challenge as well: “if you would enter life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19: 17) In striving to live the Ten Commandments we respond to our human desire for happiness that God has placed in our hearts as we are confronted with decisive choices. The Ten Commandments teach us to love God above all things and to loving service of neighbor.

The Ten Commandments take on their full meaning within God's covenant of love, mercy and forgiveness. They express the implications of belonging to God and the Christian community of the Church. Living a Christian moral life is our response to God's love and our cooperation with the plan of God in human history.

- ❖ Incorporated into Christ by baptism, a Christian is “dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.” (Romans 6:11). To follow Christ and be united with him is to strive to be “imitators of God as beloved children, and to walk in love” by conforming our thoughts, words and actions to God’s commands. (CCC1694 – 1696)
- ❖ Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and free will we are ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude or happiness. Human freedom and the power of reason or the intellect are manifestations of the divine image. (CCC 1701 – 1715)
- ❖ The Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3-12) are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. They respond to our natural human desire for happiness. God has placed this desire in each human heart in order to draw us to God who alone can perfectly fulfill it. (CCC 1716 – 1728)
- ❖ Human freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act based on one’s responsibility. True human freedom is to act at the service of what is good and just. (CCC 1731) Freedom makes us moral subjects such that actions chosen freely through a judgment of conscience can be morally evaluated as good or evil. (CCC 1749)
- ❖ The right to exercise our freedom in moral and religious matters is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. Authentic freedom is not freedom *from* personal responsibility, but freedom *for* love of God and neighbor (CCC 1738)
- ❖ Conscience is a law inscribed by God on the human heart that calls us to love and to choose good and avoid evil. Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act and assumes responsibility for it. (CCC1776 – 1782)
- ❖ A well formed conscience judges according to reason, the will of God in the Word of God and the moral teachings of the Church. The education of conscience is a life-long task guided by the light of the Word of God, prayer, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the witness and advice of others and the teachings of the Church (CCC 1783 – 1785)
- ❖ The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and neighbor. The first three commands concern love and fidelity to God, while the other seven speak of love and forgiveness of neighbor as an expression of love of God. (CCC, 2067)
- ❖ What God commands he makes possible through divine grace. When we believe in Jesus Christ, participate in the sacraments and persevere in daily prayer and reflection on God’s word we draw on divine grace and the strength to live according to the commandments. (CCC 2074)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How does living the Ten Commandments become an expression of your love for God and neighbor?
2. How do the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3-12) reveal the goal of human existence? In what way do the Beatitudes respond to your desire for happiness that God has placed in your heart?
3. Discuss ways to form your conscience in an ongoing way as you persevere on your journey of faith?
4. Reflect on the obstacles, challenges and difficulties you face in following the commandments. How can you rely more on divine wisdom and strength when faced with moral decision?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Matthew 5: 3-12, 17

Matthew 22: 37-40

Romans 2: 1:32; 2: 14-16

Romans 12-15

1 Corinthians 12-13,

Colossians 3-4

Ephesians 4-5

Galatians 5: 22-23

“Man is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of man, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness.” Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 13, 2

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, Part Three, Section One, Life in Christ - 1691 – 2051.
Ten Commandments – 2052 - 2557

Documents of Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, articles 1-15

Pope John Paul II, The Splendor of Truth, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993

CLOSING PRAYER

Matthew 19: 16-21

SEGMENT FIFTEEN

**THEME: Building A Culture Of Life
And Social Justice**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Psalm 139

Jeremiah 1:5 – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you”

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

Respect for the dignity of the human person involves respect for the rights that flow from that dignity. Created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26) all human beings are endowed with rational souls, all have the same human nature and same origin and destiny. Redeemed by Jesus Christ, all are invited to enjoy equal dignity as children of God.

The Church affirms the sacredness and dignity of the life of every human person. The church teaches that we are human beings from the moment of conception to natural death. Our origin and destiny is in God our Creator.

Social justice can become a reality only when the transcendent dignity of each person is respected, safeguarded and promoted. During the past century the Church has articulated a systematic body of moral teachings on social issues. This body of social teaching constitutes an essential part of Christian moral life based on the Gospel demands of love and justice.

In Catholic social teaching the Church develops principles to evaluate social structures that serve the good of the person and the common good. The Church’s moral and spiritual guidelines are offered to us to guide both personal morality and as a means to evaluate just or unjust social structures.

- ❖ The equality of human beings rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it (CCC, 1934 – 1938)
- ❖ Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow individuals or groups to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of every human person. The person represents the ultimate end of society. (CCC 1929 – 1933)
- ❖ Socio-economic problems can be resolved with the help of all forms of solidarity: solidarity among the poor, between rich and poor, among workers, between employers and workers and solidarity among nations and peoples. Solidarity, or “social charity” is a direct demand of the Gospel. The Christian virtue of solidarity involves the sharing of both material and spiritual goods. (CCC 1939 – 1942)
- ❖ When Jesus proclaims the coming of God’s kingdom he speaks of salvation from sin and injustice (Luke 4: 14-21). Throughout his ministry, Jesus speaks against the unjust practices of the Pharisees and tax collectors. The Beatitudes ((Matthew 5: 3-12), the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29 – 37), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19 – 31) show Jesus’ concern and compassion for the poor and the outcast. By healing the sick, the abandoned and the poor Jesus teaches us the value of each human life.
- ❖ From its conception, the child has the right to life. Direct abortion and intentional euthanasia are grave contradictions of the dignity of human life and the respect due to God, our Creator. Because it should be treated as a person from conception, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed like every other human being. (CCC 2258 – 2330)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Discuss the scriptural basis for respecting human life and dignity.
2. What are the consequences of affirming the dignity of every human person?
3. What part could you or do you play to promote social justice and the dignity of human life?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Exodus 20:13, Deut 5:17

Matthew 5: 43-44; 25: 40

Matthew 6: 33

Galatians 3: 28

Ephesians 2:14

“All things are of your making, all times and seasons obey your laws, but you choose to create man in your own image, setting him over the whole world in all its wonder” *Preface V for Sundays in Ordinary Time*

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel; or in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race, and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” Introduction to *Justice in the World*, 1971

“What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment in history are strictly and responsibly in debt.” Pope John Paul II, On Social Justice, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987

“Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatibly with God’s design” Universal Catechism, 1934-1935

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, 2258 - 2330

Pope Leo XIII, On the Condition of Labor, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891

Pope Pius XI, On the Fortieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*,
Quadragesimo Anno, 1931

Pope John XXIII, Peace on Earth, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963

Pope John Paul II, On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life,
Evangelium
Vitae, 1995

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the
Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*

CLOSING PRAYER

Luke 10: 29-37 - Parable of the Good Samaritan

SEGMENT SIXTEEN

THEME: MARY AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Luke 1: 26 – 38 (Annunciation)

Luke 1: 46 – 55 (*Magnificat*)

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

What the Catholic tradition believes about Mary and the saints is based on what is believed and taught about Jesus Christ and the Church. Jesus Christ as the Son of God is fully human and fully divine. And Mary, the Mother of the Son of God occupies a special and unique place in God's plan of salvation in Him.

From ancient times to the present day Catholics honor the unique role of Mary, the woman chosen to be the Mother of our Redeemer, with a special reverence and devotion. We do not adore or worship Mary, as adoration and worship is given only to God, to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit. We venerate her singular example and prayerfully request her intercession for us.

Mary, who at the message of the archangel Gabriel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body gave birth to the Son of God in our world. She conceived, gave birth to and nourished Jesus, she presented him to God in the temple, and shared in her divine Son's sufferings on the cross. Through her "yes" to God and her faith in the Word of God she occupies a unique place in salvation history, in the Church and in the lives of believers. Therefore we consider Mary our Mother and the Mother of the Church in the order of grace and faith.

The Church also presents to us exemplary models of faith and discipleship throughout Christian history in the "Communion of Saints." The Church does not "make" or "worship" the saints, rather she recognizes the lives of saintly men and women through the ages as examples of faith, hope and love worthy of our imitation as we journey in faith.

- ❖ God chose the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of his Son, Jesus Christ. Throughout the Old Testament the role of Mary was prepared by other holy women (488 – 489) Throughout the liturgical year the Church celebrates feasts to honor the Blessed Mother of God. The Church fosters veneration and devotion to Mary, not worship or adoration.
- ❖ Mary is hailed by the archangel Gabriel as she who is “full of grace” It was only fitting that the Holy Spirit prepared Mary to be capable of welcoming in her heart and in her body the inexpressible gift of God in Jesus Christ (CCC 721 – 726).
- ❖ At the Annunciation the archangel Gabriel hails Mary as “full of grace.” The Virgin Mary “cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation.” Her “yes” to God was uttered in the name of all human nature so that by her obedience she becomes the New Eve, mother of the living. (CCC 511)
- ❖ Because of the unique and special role Mary plays in the plan of redemption, the Catholic tradition holds that she was enriched with gifts appropriate to such a role. From the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of Original Sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life. This doctrine is celebrated in the feast of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed on December 8, 1854 by Pope Pius IX (CCC 490 – 493)
- ❖ At her death Mary, preserved free from all stain of Original Sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory. This doctrine of Mary’s Assumption is an anticipation of the resurrection of all believers, and is celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption, proclaimed in 1950 by Pope Pius XII ((CCC 491, 966)
- ❖ Because of her unique role in bearing Jesus, the Son of God into this world, the Church also holds that Mary “remained a virgin in conceiving and giving birth to her Son.” Mary’s virginity manifests God’s absolute initiative and divine power in Mary who conceives Jesus Christ “by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 496 – 507)
- ❖ The “Hail Mary” is a prayer that echoes the unique role of Mary in the plan of our redemption. The “Rosary” is a meditative prayer that is a compendium or summary of the entire Gospel. By praying the Rosary we join with Mary in contemplating the mysteries of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. (CCC 971, 2673 – 2679)

- ❖ The “Communion of saints” is the Church, broadly speaking. Specifically the term “communion of saints” has two meanings: the community of all those who are baptized into Christ and who are now “pilgrims” on earth, the dead who are being purified to enter the presence of God, and the community of the saints - those holy men and women who are models of holiness, of faith, and love. (CCC 946 – 962)
- ❖ The Church does not “make” saints. Rather in canonizing a saintly man or woman, the Church publicly recognizes his or her exemplary cooperation with God’s grace and his or her life of virtue, holiness and love. The saints remind us of our heavenly goal and destiny in God. They are examples for all of us to follow on our faith journeys to God. All of us are called to holiness of life, to greater love and witness to Christ.
- ❖ In liturgical feasts and prayers, Catholics ask Mary, our Mother, and the saints to intercede to God on our behalf. The “Communion of saints” reflects our belief in the power of intercessory prayer. (CCC 2634 – 2636)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Discuss the role and place of Mary, the Mother of God, in the Church and on our daily journeys of faith?
2. Name one or more saint(s) from the Christian tradition who serve as models of holiness and faith for you?
3. What are some ways the saints witness to Christian discipleship and values?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Luke 1: 26 – 28; 34-38

Matthew 1: 18-25

John 16: 14-15; 19: 26-27

1 Cor 1: 17

Hebrews 3:6

“The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the Redeemer. Redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, the beloved daughter of the Father, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 53

“The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church approves within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honored, the Son...is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments observed.”

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 66

“To ask catechumens: “Do you wish to receive Baptism?” means at the same time to ask them: “Do you wish to become holy?” It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Pope John Paul II, *At The Beginning of the New Millennium, Novo Millenio Ineunte*, 31

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, chapter VIII, Our Lady, articles 52-69

Pope John Paul II, Mother of the Redeemer, *Redemptoris Mater*, March 1987

_____, The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 2002

CLOSING PRAYER

Hail Mary

SEGMENT SEVENTEEN

**THEME: THE LITURGICAL YEAR, THE LECTIONARY
AND THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Evening Prayer

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The “Liturgical Year” is the annual cycle or calendar in which the Church relives the saving events of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The major events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are arranged in historical sequence so that we might liturgically relive the meaning of those saving mysteries in a prayerful way. By observing the liturgical calendar the Church sanctifies time itself.

In setting the events of Christ’s life within a liturgical calendar the Church offers Christ’s redeeming power to us in a *sacramental* way. What Jesus once accomplished in his ministry on earth is now through the ministry of the Church made present to us throughout the liturgical year.

The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) draws catechumens and the whole Christian community through a journey of conversion celebrated in the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. Catechumens are initiated into the Christian community through their liturgical experience of resurrection and new life at the Easter Vigil.

The “Liturgy of the Hours” or the “Divine Office,” is the public and daily prayer of the entire Church that sanctifies the whole course of each day by the praise of God. The Word of God is read and meditated in the liturgical celebration so that it becomes prayer thus permeating and transforming the time of each day with prayer.

- ❖ In the liturgical year the various aspects of the one Paschal mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection unfold over the course of the calendar year. This is also the case with the cycle of feasts surrounding the mystery of the Incarnation (Annunciation, Christmas, Epiphany) that make present for us the beginning of our redemption. (CCC 1171)
- ❖ The central event of the liturgical year is the Easter Triduum – the three days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. “Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the resurrection of Christ fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of the Easter Triduum, the entire year is transfigured by the liturgy.” CCC 1168
- ❖ The liturgical year is divided into two major seasons: Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter/Pentecost. The liturgical moment of Ordinary Time occurs between them. Each season has a time of preparation and celebration, a time of conversion and rejoicing
- ❖ The Christmas season begins with *Advent* as a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation for the Messiah's coming. The feast of Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ followed by four other feasts: the Feast of the Holy Family, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, Epiphany, and the Feast of Jesus' Baptism.
- ❖ The Easter season begins on *Ash Wednesday* with Lent as a time of spiritual renewal, fasting and almsgiving. For catechumens Lent is a time of spiritual preparation in anticipation of the sacraments of initiation. The Easter Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil lead us through the events of our salvation in the Passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.
- ❖ The changing focus of each liturgical season is visible in the vestments and decorations used in churches. Liturgical colors vary from the Advent tones of purple to vibrant colors of gold or white. In Ordinary Time the color green is used to reflect the liturgical season.
- ❖ Other cycles in the Church's year include the cycle of saints and martyrs, the daily and Sunday lectionary cycle and the cycle for holy years. In the cycle of saints the Church celebrates feast days and holy days in honor of Mary, the Mother of God and the saints.
- ❖ “Holy days of obligation” in the liturgical year are: Christmas, Solemnity of Mary, Ascension Thursday, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Assumption of Mary, and All Saints Day

- ❖ Sunday is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. It symbolizes the new creation begun in the power of Christ's resurrection. (CCC 2174)
- ❖ Sunday Mass or the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day is at the heart of the Church's liturgical life because it is the day when Christ's paschal mystery is celebrated by the faithful. It is the foremost holy day of obligation in the Church. (CCC 2174 – 2188)
- ❖ The "Liturgy of the Hours" is the public prayer of the Church that flows from and leads to celebration of the Eucharist. Through our participation in the prayers of the day – Morning Prayer, Noon Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, each part of the day is made holy by the praise of God and the study of God's word. (CCC 1174 –1178)
- ❖ The Lectionary is the cycle of selections of readings from the Bible for Sundays, major feasts and daily readings. By following the three year Sunday lectionary cycles (A, B and C) or the two year daily cycle (years 1 and 2) Catholics hear extended segments of the Bible during liturgical worship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How has your appreciation of the Church's liturgical year grown during the RCIA?
2. What is the importance of Sunday, as the Sabbath or Lord's Day?
3. How can you incorporate the Liturgy of the Hours into your daily prayers?
4. How might the lectionary readings assist in your daily or weekly study of the Bible?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Psalm 118: 24

1 Thessalonians 5: 17

Ephesians 6: 18

Exodus 20: 8-10; 31:15

Deuteronomy 5: 12-15

“Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the “Feast of feasts,” the “Solemnities of solemnities,” just as the Eucharist is the “Sacrament of sacraments.” Saint Athanasius calls Easter “the Great Sunday” and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week “the Great Week.” The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subjected to him.” Universal Catechism, 1169

“We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day (after the Jewish Sabbath, but also the first day) when God, separating matter from darkness, made the world; and on this same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead.” Saint Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, A.D.155

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Chapter V, “The Liturgical Year,” articles 102 – 111.

Universal Catechism, CCC 1168 – 1178

Pope John Paul II, *The Day of the Lord, Dies Domini*, May 31, 1998

CLOSING PRAYER

Compline or Night Prayer

SEGMENT EIGHTEEN

**THEME: CHURCH TOUR, SIGN OF THE CROSS,
MASS RESPONSES, CREED**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

1 Peter 2: 4-5

Psalm 122

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The word “Church” comes from the Greek *kuriakos* meaning “of the Lord.” The church building is not simply a gathering place but signifies and make visible the Church in a particular place, the dwelling place of God with humanity reconciled and united in Jesus Christ.

The Church is a house of prayer where the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, where the faithful assemble for sacramental celebrations and where the presence of Jesus is worshipped and revered. Finally, the church is the *house of God*, a symbol of that eternal home prepared by God for all those who are journeying in faith.

Liturgical signs and gestures such as the “Sign of the Cross,” and the Mass responses of the faithful are sacramental signs that signify the people’s full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist.

From the very beginning of Christianity, summaries of Christian faith or “Creeds” were developed and handed down from generation to generation. The “Creed” begins with the words “I believe” and it is a symbol of faith, a sign of recognition and communion among believers, and a summary of Christian beliefs. The first “profession of faith,” in the recitation of the Creed is made at Baptism.

- ❖ A Church, “a house of prayer in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, where the faithful assemble, and where is worshipped the presence of the Son of God our Savior, offered for us on the sacrificial altar for the help and consolation of the faithful – this house ought to be in good taste and a worthy place for prayer and sacred ceremonial.” In this “house of God” the truth and the harmony of signs that make it up should show Christ to be present and active in this place” (CCC 1181)
- ❖ “In its earthly state the Church needs places where the community can gather together. Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage.” (CCC 1198)
- ❖ In church the community “celebrates public worship to the glory of the Holy Trinity, hears the Word of God and sings his praise, lifts up her prayer, and offers the sacrifice of Christ sacramentally present in the midst of the assembly. These churches are also places of recollection and personal prayer. (CCC 1199)
- ❖ “To enter into the house of God, we must cross a *threshold*, which symbolizes passing from the world wounded by sin to the world of the new Life to which all are called. The visible church is a symbol of the Father’s house toward which the People of God is journeying...for this reason, the Church is the house of *all* God’s children, open and welcoming. (CCC 1186)
- ❖ In the sacred space of a church prominence is given to some of the following areas: the altar, the tabernacle, the sacred chrism, the priests’ chair, the lectern or ambo, the baptistery, and the confessional. (CCC 1182 – 1185)
- ❖ Sacred images – icons, statues and paintings of saints, and stained glass are all meant to move the faithful to contemplation on the Word of God and on the mysteries of Christ through visible images of beauty. Just as the invisible God was made visible in Jesus Christ, Christian images make visible invisible mysteries of faith. (CCC1159 – 1162, 2500 – 2503)
- ❖ The *Liturgy of the Word* is an integral part of sacramental celebrations. To nourish our faith the signs which accompany the Word of God are emphasized: the book of the Word (a lectionary or book of the Gospels); its veneration (procession, incense and candles), the place of its proclamation (lectern), and the responses of the

- assembly in acclamations, responsorial psalms, litanies and the Creed (CCC 1154)
- ❖ The Order of Mass is composed of the *Liturgy of the Word* and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. The Eucharistic celebration moves from the gathering of the assembly to the *Liturgy of the Word*, the presentation of the offerings (*Offertory*) to the *Eucharistic Prayer* and Communion. (CCC 1345 – 1355)
 - ❖ The Church begins liturgical prayers with the “Sign of the Cross,” i.e. in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and ends with the word “Amen,” which comes from the same root as the word “believe.” The word “Amen” expresses faithfulness, belief, and trust in God’s faithfulness towards us. (CCC 1061 – 1065)
 - ❖ From the beginning, the Church of the apostles expressed and handed on her faith in brief formulas or summaries. Essential elements of faith in Jesus Christ were summarized into Creeds, intended specially for candidates for baptism. They are called “Creeds” because their first word in Latin is usually *credo* (“I believe”). (CCC 185 – 188)
 - ❖ The first profession of faith is made during baptism and renewed at Sunday Eucharist. Since baptism is given “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the faith professed in baptism is articulated in terms of the three divine persons of the Trinity. (CCC 189 – 192)
 - ❖ Among all the creeds, two occupy a special place: The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed (CCC 193 – 197)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. Discuss the value and importance of the Church as a sacred space?
2. How do liturgical responses and gestures help to focus our attention on the Mass?
3. How does our profession of faith in the Creed affect our daily lives?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

1 Peter 2:4

Romans 6:17; 19

1 Cor 15: 3-5

2 Cor 6:16

Heb 13:10

Matthew 38:19

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, CCC 1179 – 1193

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2002

CLOSING PRAYER

The Creed

SEGMENT NINETEEN

(NOTE: For Archbishop Edwin O'Brien's Lenten and Easter streaming video messages please check the AMS Website in the weeks before and during Lent)

THEME: LITURGY OF THE WORD FOR THE SUNDAYS OF LENT

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18 (Gospel for Ash Wednesday)

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The Lenten season, beginning on Ash Wednesday, is a time of spiritual purification and renewal. During Lent the entire Christian community is invited to return to God with our minds in renewed prayer, our bodies in Lenten sacrifices of fasting and almsgiving, and our hearts in renewed service of God and neighbor. Our Lenten observances draw us into the central mystery of our redemption: the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

For catechumens Lent marks the start of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, the stage referred to as the "Period of Purification and Enlightenment." The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names closes the period of the *catechumenate* and signifies the Church's acceptance of the catechumens, founded on their election by God, in whose name the Church acts. The names of "the *elect*," as they are now called, are enrolled in the book of those chosen for sacramental initiation as a pledge of fidelity and their election by God. The celebration of certain rites, such as the *Dismissal of the Elect* after the Sunday Gospels are proclaimed, the *Scrutinies*, and the *Presentation of the Creed* invite the *elect* to purify their minds and hearts in preparation for Easter.

The Lenten Gospels guide the *elect* through this time of intense spiritual preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. By their reading, reflection and discussion of scripture, the *elect* are invited into a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

❖ **First Sunday of Lent (Cycle C – 2004): Luke 4: 1-13**

Lent is a time of purification and renewal when we throw off the weight of sin and old and destructive habits that cling to us. In the Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent we follow Jesus into the desert as he overcomes his temptations with faith in God and obedience to the will of his heavenly Father. In our reading and reflection on the Gospel we are challenged to root our lives in faith so that we might overcome the difficulties and temptations we face.

❖ **Second Sunday of Lent (Cycle C – 2004): Luke 9: 28-36**

From the wilderness of desert temptations we follow Jesus to the mountain of his transfigured glory in this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus is the Son of God who fulfills the promises of the Old Covenant.

In the Bible, mountains are often places where God reveals his awesome presence. In this Gospel Jesus takes his disciples up on a mountain and is transfigured before their eyes. Before they witness the agony and suffering of the Cross, the disciples are given a foretaste of the glory of the resurrection. We too are given a glimpse into the victory and power over sin and death that is ours to claim from the power of his self-sacrificial death on the cross. We are invited to deeper faith in the future victory of His resurrection.

❖ **Third Sunday of Lent (Cycle C – 2004): Luke 13: 1-9**

The Church once again invites us to turn away from sin and love of self to love of God and neighbor. God's faithfulness and patience calls us to return with all our hearts and minds fully confident in divine forgiveness and healing.

In today's Gospel a group of people report to Jesus the recent news of a violent massacre of Galileans by Pontius Pilate. Jesus takes the occasion to teach the people about the need for repentance. He also challenges the idea that those who died were more sinful than others. Jesus' call to repentance and trust in divine mercy and forgiveness is given to us as well through the parable of the landowner that follows (vv. 6-9)

❖ **Fourth Sunday of Lent (Cycle C – 2004): Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32**

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one the most well known of Jesus' parables. This Gospel story might be familiar to us but during this Lenten season we are called to ponder its meaning anew. Like the "Prodigal Son" all of us have wandered away from God. Like the father in the parable, God is full of mercy and forgiveness seeking out and welcoming back his children.

How often we set limits to God's mercy and forgiveness in our own lives. This parable invites us to set aside the limits we put on God's love and accept his boundless and unconditional mercy in our minds, our hearts and our attitudes. Being reconciled to God and to one another frees us to live the life of grace we receive in Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

❖ **Fifth Sunday of Lent (Cycle C – 2004): John 8: 1-11**

The last of the Lenten Sunday Gospels confronts us once again with the mercy of God that is the basis of our Lenten journey of repentance and conversion. Like the woman caught in adultery, our sinfulness leaves us in need of divine forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus' enemies seek to trap him by asking him to judge the woman without the man who was part of the adultery. Jesus' reply goes to the heart of the matter – the person without sin should cast the first stone of condemnation. The irony is that Jesus, being without sin, is the only one who could meet that challenge. Yet he refuses to condemn the woman but forgives her and sets her free. As we conclude the Lenten season may we too experience the freedom and healing that comes when we accept God's mercy and love.

CLOSING PRAYER

To close each Lenten Sunday reflection read the Gospel passage that was the focus of the group discussion.

SEGMENT TWENTY

(NOTE: For Archbishop Edwin O'Brien's Lenten and Easter streaming video messages please check the AMS Website in the weeks before and during Lent)

THEME: LITURGY OF THE WORD FOR THE EASTER VIGIL

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Romans 6: 1 - 4

Psalm 33: 1 - 9

Psalm 118: 1 - 8

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The RCIA journey of faith begun several months earlier culminates in the great Vigil of Easter when the *elect* receive the sacraments of initiation and are incorporated into the Christian community.

Through this final step of sacramental initiation the *elect* receive pardon for their sins, and welcomed into the People of God. They are “graced with adoption as children of God and are led by the Holy Spirit into the promised fullness of time begun in Christ, and as they share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal, even to a foretaste of the kingdom of God.” (RCIA, 206)

The *elect* who have spent many months preparing for initiation hear the Word of God in the Liturgy of the Word immediately before they receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Word for the Easter Vigil leads those who now stand on the threshold of the sacraments of initiation to open their hearts and minds to God's renewing power and love. As a preparation for their full, conscious and active participation in the Easter Vigil the readings of the Liturgy of the Word may be read individually and as a group, and reflected on and discussed.

- ❖ “*Easter* is not simply one feast among others, but the “Feast of Feasts,” the “Solemnities of Solemnities.” Just as the Eucharist is the “Sacrament of sacraments,” Saint Athanasius calls Easter the “Great Sunday.” The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subjected to him.” (CCC, 1169)
- ❖ “In the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, during the *blessing of the baptismal water*, the Church solemnly commemorates the great events in salvation history that already prefigured the mystery of baptism.
- ❖ In the Liturgy of the Word for the Easter Vigil, the readings invite the *elect* to reflect on God’s powerful words and deeds throughout the history of salvation, from the creation of the world to the liberation of Israel in the event of the Exodus to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. These readings trace the past and present saving actions of God that the *elect* will personally experience as they are baptized into the life, death and resurrection of the Lord.
- ❖ Reflecting on the Easter Vigil readings from the Old Testament, the epistle and the Gospel prepares the community and the *elect* to enter more fully into the sacramental mysteries of Easter.

LITURGY OF THE WORD FOR THE EASTER VIGIL:

Saturday, April 10, 2004 (Liturgical Year C, Cycle II)

1. First Reading: Genesis 1:1--2:2 or 1:1, 26-31

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 13-14, 24, 35, or Psalms 33:4-5, 6-7, 12-13, 20-22

2. Second Reading: Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

3. Third Reading: Exodus 14:15--15:1

Responsorial Psalm: Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 17-18

4. Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54:5-14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

5. Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55:1-11

Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

6. Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9-15, 32--4:4

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 19:8, 9, 10, 11

7. Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16-28

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 42:3, 5; 43:3, 4, or Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6, or
Psalms 51:12-13, 14-15, 18-19

8. Epistle: Romans 6:3-11

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 118:1-2, 16, 17, 22-23

9. Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

- 1. What is the connection between the saving works of God begun in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus Christ AND the sacraments of initiation?**
- 2. How do the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist continue the saving words and deeds of God in the Old Testament and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?**
- 3. Share your reflections on one of the readings of the Easter Vigil.**

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father

SEGMENT TWENTY ONE

THEME: *MYSTAGOGY* – POST-BAPTISMAL THEMES

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:14

Acts 13: 32-33

1 John 1: 1-4

1 Corinthians 15: 3-4

Romans 4: 25; 6: 4

Galatians 3: 27

INSTRUCTORS’ SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

Mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis is the final period of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults extends through the entire Easter season ending with Pentecost. It is a time for deepening of Easter faith, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the Christian community.

Mystagogy is the time for the newly baptized, or *neophytes*, as they are called, to reflect on the Easter Vigil experience of sacramental initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Looking back the neophytes deepen their understanding of being made a “new creation in Christ” through sacramental initiation. And looking forward they reflect on how they will live out their new life of faith in Jesus Christ through their participation in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and through daily and ongoing conversion.

At the Sunday Masses of the Easter season the entire Christian community should be encouraged to welcome the neophytes into the community, helping them to feel more at home in the community of the baptized. The neophytes should also be encouraged to discern the ways in which God is calling them to witness to their Easter faith and serve in various ministries of the Church. The Emmaus account (Luke 24: 13 – 35)

reflects the abiding presence of the risen Lord with the disciples and with every community of believers.

- ❖ The Easter Vigil and the reception of the sacraments of initiation conclude the Rite of Christian Initiation. But they are only the beginning of a new life lived in the power of the redemption offered to us by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.
- ❖ After the completion of their Christian initiation in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, the neophytes begin the period of *mystagogy* by participating in the Sunday Eucharist during the entire Easter season. They should do so in the company of their godparents and those who have assisted in their formation.
- ❖ The Eucharist is the “repeatable” sacrament of initiation that deepens the new life of grace received and confirmed in Baptism and Confirmation. Instituted by Jesus as a memorial of his death and resurrection, every Eucharist we participate in is our sharing in the Passover, the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, that he commanded his apostles to celebrate until his return. (CCC 1337)
- ❖ Liturgical catechesis or *Mystagogy* aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ. By proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the “sacraments” to the “mysteries.” (CCC 1075) The rites of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist point to the meaning and grace received in the sacraments of initiation. (CCC 1234)
- ❖ In the Easter season the neophytes reflect on the meaning of the rites, the signs and symbols of the Easter Vigil as the visible means through which they were initiated into a new life of grace and into the Christian community of believers.
- ❖ The sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist gives us a real share in the risen life of Jesus, in his victory over sin and death. By his death Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection he opens for us the way to new life with God. (CCC 651 – 655)
- ❖ Saint Paul reminds us that just “as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4) During the Easter season, the newly baptized reflect on what it means to “walk in the newness of life” in the Risen Lord.

- ❖ “The neophytes are, as the term *mystagogy* suggests, introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and above all through their experience of the sacraments they have received...they have been renewed in mind, tasted more deeply the sweetness of God’s word, received the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and grown to know the goodness of the Lord. Out of this experience, which belongs to Christians and increases as it is lived, they derive a new perception of the faith, of the Church and of the world.” (RCIA, no. 245)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

- 1. Share your experience of sacramental initiation at the Easter Vigil.**
- 2. How did the signs and symbols and the scripture readings of the Easter Vigil deepen your understanding of the new life of faith you received in the sacraments of initiation?**
- 3. How will you continue your spiritual journey through participation in the sacraments, study of scripture and prayer, and service in the Christian community?**
- 4. How are you called to be a witness to your Easter faith in the resurrection of Christ?**

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Universal Catechism, article nos. 1234 – 1245 for Baptism; 1293 – 1301 for Confirmation; 1333 – 1336 for the Eucharist.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, nos. 244 – 251 on “The Period of Post-baptismal catechesis or *Mystagogy*.”

CLOSING PRAYER

The Creed