

Catechist Formation and Training

Leader Directions for Alternate Model

These directions will guide you through an alternate Exploring the Sacraments section that is similar to the Director Guide pages 36-37, but provides formation without using the first two videos.

Before the Gathering

Following the two pages of Leader Directions, you will find two articles, “What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments” and “Entering the Mystery.” These replace the videos noted in the Director Guide.

Each is divided into 7 pages, labeled as Groups. You will be dividing your catechists into 7 groups when you gather. Make enough copies of each Group page for the number of catechists you will have in each group.

The last page of this PDF includes information on how the catechists view the “How to Prepare and Lead a Session” recorded webinar. This will walk them through Catechist Guide, with details on session planning and instruction. Have copies of these instructions available for catechists.

At the Gathering

Arrange your catechists into 7 groups for reading and discussion.

Follow instructions for Welcome and Opening Prayer (Director Guide pages 35-36). Use the script and instructions below for the Exploring the Sacraments section (replaces Director Guide pages 36-37).

Exploring the Sacraments

Say: There are two important things we want to accomplish in our time here. We first want to recall what the Church teaches about the Sacraments. This reflection and discussion may help some to refocus. For others, it may provide new insights and deeper understanding.

Give each group one of the numbered pages for “What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments.” Instruct the groups to:

- Read the section of the article they receive.
- Discuss using the reflection questions on the page.
- Summarize their reading and discussion for one representative to share with the larger group.

Note: The PowerPoint® includes slides for this process.

Give the small groups about 7 minutes for reading and discussion.

Do everything you can to make the adults comfortable about sharing. Walk through the groups and encourage their participation.

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Leader Directions for Alternate Model

Page 2

Start with Group 1 and have each small group share insights with the larger group. After all groups have shared, move to the next topic.

Say: The first important reflection for today was that the Sacraments are gifts given to us by God. The second reflection is that in order to receive these gifts, we must be open to receiving them. This second article will help us to consider what difference our dispositions make as we receive these gifts from God.

Give each group one of the numbered pages for “Entering the Mystery.” Have groups follow the same process as before.

Note: The PowerPoint® includes slides for this process.

Give the small groups about 7 minutes for reading and discussion.

Start with Group 1 and have each small group share insights with the larger group. After all groups have shared, continue to the Session Process section.

Return to the Director Guide page 37 for Session Process and continue to the Closing section of the training.

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 1

In our human experience, the word *encounter* has many meanings. Attached to the word can be a variety of feelings that are connected to memories of “encounters.” You can encounter a problem or new situation that requires some creative problem-solving. The word can describe a challenging moment with another person. Exasperated, you may tell your friend, “I had a real encounter with my boss today.” relationships, how can I help my child learn to love others?

The most significant encounters we have however, are those encounters that touch the deepest parts of our human soul. It may be the smiling, crying face of a person who has been handed the keys to a simple home constructed by a volunteer group, or the open arms of a child running for the parent soldier who is returning home,

The most intimate of all encounters happens when we look into the eyes of another and see into his or her heart. Whether we see grief, joy, struggle, or love, we experience a connection of the most profound kind. We experience a communion, an intimacy that in some way changes us. We will never again be what we were before that moment. We are shaped and transformed by the encounter.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 2

Pope Saint John Paul II chose to speak about God's invitation to relationship and our response--- as an encounter: "The most beautiful and stirring adventure that can happen to you," he says, "is the personal meeting with Jesus, who is The only one who gives real meaning to our life." He explains that, "only in the encounter with him, the Word made flesh, do we find the fullness of self-realization and happiness."

Self-realization and happiness. As Christians we confess that self-realization is coming to understand that you are God's creation and he creates you with purpose. So—humanity was created with a purpose. That purpose was thwarted by our sinfulness but in his mercy God desired to restore that possibility for us. God sent his Son and we were redeemed by the sacrifice of love that Jesus made possible by his dying and rising. Our purpose has been restored.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did your read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 3

Living out your purpose is possible--it a gift from God that will give you meaning and happiness. God provides for many opportunities to encounter him and to learn your purpose.

As we hear the story of our salvation told in the Gospels, we can understand how the disciples encountered Christ.

They could hear, see, and touch Jesus. They came to know him and to believe in his mission to bring about his Father's Kingdom. We see how their encounter with Christ transformed their lives.

If our happiness depends on discovering our purpose, and our purpose is made known to us in relationship with Christ, then how do we encounter him today?

We meet Christ in prayer, in Scripture, in our neighbor, and in a particular way in the Sacraments. Saint Mother Teresa often spoke about encountering Christ in the face of the poor and vulnerable. In Scripture God is waiting to shape us by the power of his Holy Spirit and in prayer we are able to surrender to the presence of God.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did your read that affirmed you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 4

Do you know someone who has been transformed by an encounter with Christ? Some people can point to dramatic single moment of encounter-- they had a near death experience, or went on a mission trip to a foreign land and looked deeply into the eyes of someone who was both hungry and joyful. For some people the encounter happens in prayer or listening to spiritual music in their home. Here's a wonderful example of encounter and transformation.

A young woman came to attend her Confirmation Retreat with a lot of opposition. Everything about her spoke, "I simply don't want to be here." She had a difficult home life and was really struggling. There were lots of challenges at school. Defiance and anger were her first response to any suggestion. Her first session on retreat was a guided meditation on the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When her group moved on to the next session, she asked if she could stay in the chapel. She did so and again experienced the same meditation. As that group moved on, she asked once more to stay. By the time she left, she had been through the quieting, the Scripture reading and sitting in silence-- five times. When she handed in her reflection sheet at the end of the day, she had one simple sentence, "Today I met Jesus." And from her face you could see the peace that was the consequence of that encounter.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 5

While God invites us to deeper intimacy through various sacred experiences, Pope Benedict XVI tells us that in the Seven Sacraments, we experience a “grace-filled encounter with the Risen Lord.” Sacraments cannot be reduced to things that we get in order to gain favor with God.

The Seven Sacraments are gifts given to us by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the Church, the Holy Spirit invites us to encounter our Savior Jesus Christ. In the Sacraments, we can hear, see, touch, and taste the love of God given to us in his Son.

We look into the eyes of Jesus and see his heart, and he looks into our eyes and sees our heart. In this *divine encounter*, we are offered an experience of intimacy that can change us forever. What a mystery of love—a mystery of relationship that begins in God’s graciousness and begs a response of openness and faith.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 6

The life of God that flows through his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit flows through the Church. This happens in a special way in liturgical rites that express and realize profound communion with Jesus and one another. So in water, we die and rise. Anointed with oil, we are strengthened and called. Through bread and wine that are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, we are given the only food that will truly satisfy the hunger of our hearts. In the signs, symbols, actions, and words of the rites, we encounter Christ.

Through that encounter, we participate in the intimacy of the life of the Trinity, in the very life of God. We are graced. Did those words make you take a step back? Did they cause you to tremble? That would actually be an appropriate response! This is nothing less than a miracle. When the people of Israel encounter God on Mount Sinai the earth quakes, thunder rumbles and the top of the mountain is ablaze. Their response is to fall to the ground and hide their eyes. This encounter with the power and majesty of God, the great "I AM," can only be responded to with wonder and awe.

Grace is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call. It is a participation in the life of God. The grace of Christ is the free gift of God of his own life that is infused in our soul by the Holy Spirit. Think about the word infused—we could say saturated or permeated. The Holy Spirit steepes our soul with God's life to enable us to live with God and act by his love.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

What Catholics Believe about the Sacraments

Group 7

When we come to receive a sacrament, we should feel the earth quake, hear the rumble of thunder and see a fire ablaze. For in those moments the Holy Spirit will make Christ present and at the same time help us to be open for the moment of communion. Our response is gratitude, wonder, and awe.

The Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace because Christ himself is at work through the Sacraments. As an efficacious sign, a Sacrament not only points to something greater, it becomes what it signifies. The water used in Baptism not only represents dying to sin and rising to a life in Christ, what it represents actually happens. By the power of the Holy Spirit, in that water we are united to Christ and share in divine life.

In the Sacrament of Penance, we are not simply reminded of God's mercy and forgiveness, we ARE forgiven by Christ as we admit our sin. In the Eucharist, the bread and wine are not simply a reminder of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his desire to strengthen and nourish us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words and actions of the priest, the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ.

You are about to begin a sacred journey to prepare your child to encounter Christ in the sacraments. Your parish is committed to helping you to guide your precious child to recognize the value of the gift God is offering, and to open his/her heart to experience the intimacy of God's love. If you are feeling a little overwhelmed, don't forget that the Holy Spirit stands at the ready to do all the work. We just need to co-operate.

If you are feeling a little ill-equipped to express all these sacred truths, don't worry. Your parent guides or Family + Faith pages will help you to have sacred conversations with your child in language and images she/he will understand. If you are feeling a sense of wonder and awe, good for you! Trembling and awe are always an appropriate response in the presence of God. May this time be blessed and full of joy and peace!

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 1

A three-year-old sat in her car seat, snapping the sun, moon, stars and flowers into her Bible Story Book. Her mom spying her through the rear view mirror asked, "Hayley, what are you doing?" "I'm putting all the things God made on the page, Mom." "That's a lot of things God made," said her mom. "I wonder, Hayley, did God make everything?" Hayley, a very reflective child, sat back and thought for a minute. "Yes, mom. I think that God made everything-- except for all the stuff that's made in China!"

How long does it take before we lose the heart of a three-year old? Remember the last time creation made you stop. Have you marveled lately at a sunset, a lightning storm, or the fingers of a newborn child?

There are moments in our lives when something breaks through our everyday routines and schedules and makes us catch our breath. We are immersed in a mystery of our own smallness and the majesty beyond us.

In spiritual language, some call it an awakening. Our Catholic faith helps us to know that our capacity to be awakened is the result of sanctifying grace, the grace we receive at Baptism. Grace is the gift of God's sharing his divine love and friendship with us. It gives us the capacity to know him and respond to his invitation to relationship and communal life.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 2

The gift of grace awakens us to the mystery that *is* God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “even when he reveals himself, God is a mystery beyond words.” Because of our limitedness and because God is unlimited, it is a challenge to even speak about God. In a sense, all that we say is in vain because, in this lifetime, we can never fully know or understand all that God is. He is as beyond us as the universes we have yet discovered, and at the same time as close to us as a member of our family.

How is it, then, that so many of us can be so completely unaware of the God who enfolds us, who is beyond us and within us? What gets in the way of our hearing the call of the Holy Spirit to know the Father’s love and respond? What stops us from meeting Christ in Scripture and the Seven Sacraments? The answer to those questions has everything to do with *disposition*, our willingness to respond to the urgings. If God is always present and inviting, opening ourselves to the mystery must be about our choice.

The newest research indicates that 89% of Americans believe in the existence of God. Out of the 89% of believers, what would you guess is the percentage of people who live each day conscious of God’s presence in their lives? Think of the people you might know that you would put in that group. It’s important to ask how we arrived at this place both in our culture and in our personal lives of faith.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 3

When your child began to navigate the waters of school systems, you quickly learned the word *curriculum*. It is the course of study, a set of expectations laid out by a teacher, school district or state. The word *curriculum* can also be applied outside of an academic setting.

In fact, sociologists talk about the “phantom curriculum” of a culture. The culture teaches, but not in an overt, intentional way. Its values, perspectives, understandings and accepted behaviors form us without our awareness. Take one example, for instance. How is it that the average size home in 1980 was 1,500 square feet yet in 2013 it was 2,500 square feet? In those thirty years, our homes almost doubled in size because we were formed to believe that we needed bigger houses so that we could fit more stuff. We were taught by an increasing amount of media that having a great amount of things, or providing our children with a great amount of things, would make us happy. We learned what the phantom curriculum so effectively taught—more is better.

Here are some of the other lessons we have learned. Our society has lost the ability to imagine that someone can be chaste until they are married. There is not enough time for the things we would like to do we think are important. We have come to believe that we are entitled to a majority of the world’s resources. It seems that this unexamined truth—that one can be spiritual and not communal is a principle that many people live by. The phantom curriculum of the culture is a subtle and powerful teacher.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 4

One consideration when pondering our “spiritual-amnesia” is how little we are daily reminded of God’s presence in our lives. We live in a world of concrete and asphalt, far removed from the daily rhythms of nature that our ancestors knew. It was easier to remember how dependent you were on God’s goodness when what you ate each day really hinged on what the earth produced. When you had little protection against the forces of nature, and when each new day was a great unknown, turning to God was both natural and comforting. Our world is so very different. We live in an environment that offers the illusion that we are powerful and in control. It is possible to go days, weeks, even months without seeing something or hearing something that tugs at us to remember who we really are and who God is.

St. Augustine tells us that, “Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in you.” The phantom curriculum and the sin we intentionally choose harden the hearts that God created to long for him. Sadly, there are many people who are no longer aware of the holy longing that aches within us. And yet to enter the mystery of God, to hear God’s voice inviting us to love him and know ourselves loved—we must be open to receive what he offers.

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 5

to enter the mystery of God, to hear God's voice inviting us to love him and know ourselves loved—we must be open to receive what he offers.

This is especially true when coming to the Sacraments. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that, while the power of the Sacraments flows from God and cannot be altered, our dispositions affect how much we will allow God's grace to transform us. In any relationship, openness to the other is what allows intimacy. If we are not open to what God is offering us, he will not force his grace upon us.

The call to holiness is the journey of opening ourselves to God and allowing his grace to remove our hardness of heart, on piece at a time. God offers his grace for our transformation. Jesus gave his life for that purpose. In becoming his disciples, we embark upon the lifelong journey to contemplate the mystery of our faith through living a full sacramental life and studying and reflecting upon Scripture. "The fruit of sacramental life is," the *Catechism* tells us, ... "a life for God in Jesus Christ," and this allows the Church to love ever more like Christ and witness to the gift of salvation (CCC, 1134).

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group.

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 6

Maybe you have heard someone say, “I don’t go to Mass anymore because I don’t get anything from going.” Or, “Attending Mass is just a Church law that a bunch of Church people made up.” If we believe that God is present and always inviting us to deeper love, especially in the sacraments, then the truth must be that we don’t get anything out of the sacraments because our hearts are not open. Or, we have not felt the urging of the Holy Spirit to give praise to God because we want to, not because we have to.

The author of Psalm 139 says,

“Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.”

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
- What gave you new insight or understanding?

Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

Entering the Mystery

Group 7

God never gives up on you. He wants you to freely choose him. Relationships are hard work. Whether in a marriage, friendship, family, or community, relationships require attention and openness to each other, the willingness to risk being vulnerable to each other. Think about your most intimate relationship and the care it requires in order to grow. That is what is necessary to enter into the mystery of God.

God is waiting for you. In the sacraments, he is offering you the most intimate of all encounters. He wants you to look into his eyes and know how much you are loved. He wants to look into your eyes and see your desire and willingness to love him in return.

Will you come trembling before the awesomeness of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Discuss Reflection Questions

- What did you read that affirmed you?
- What did you read that challenged you?
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Summarize Key Points and Prepare to Share with Large Group

Catechist Formation and Training

“How to Prepare and Lead a Session”

Before your first session, watch this recorded webinar to learn how to most effectively use your Catechist Guide. Access this through the following link.

<http://event.on24.com/wcc/r/1252024/6B882BC60DE28148D02086F4C5DF0D1F>

You will be prompted to enter your name, email, and parish name. If you have previously registered for an OSV webinar, click Already Registered and follow the instructions.

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