

GOAL

The goal of this lesson is to reveal the need for religion and the tendency toward religious practice that each person has and to help foster confidence in the Catholic Church as the one church established by Jesus.

KEY CONCEPTS

- The human person has a natural need for structure and religious practice.
- Our tendency toward sin can make it difficult to choose what is good and right.
- God established the Catholic Church through Jesus to guide us, strengthen us, and give us abundant life.

KEY TERMS: Catechism, Concupiscence, Magisterium

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:24-47 ; Matthew 16:15-19 ; Colossians 1:17-20

CATECHISM: 28, 771, 816, 874,

DESCRIPTION

This Life Night begins with the members of each of the Saint's Houses discussing the primary question of the evening over dinner: *"Why is organized religion so important?"* The catechesis looks at our need for the Church and the freedom we actually find within the structure of the Church. The House Activity challenges the members of each House to work together to make their way through an invisible maze with their Peer Team Leader's help and guidance. Finally, the concluding remarks encourages everyone to think about the tools Christ has given us through the Church to achieve holiness and asks each participant to write down one tool we plan to use more often as we continue grow in faith.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Question Box
- Scroll with the words (in calligraphy) "Why is organized religion important?"
- Small table for the Question Box
- Magazine headlines and Posters and Self Help books
- Prayer Table and icons
- Media cart and screen (projector and laptop computer)
- PowerPoint of prepared excerpts from scripture and the catechism
- Sharpie pens (about 30)
- Small rocks (about 30)
- Table Tent Cards with the "Primary Question" printed on each
- Grid Key Handouts (about 8 copies)
- Handout of After Game Discussion Questions (about 8 copies)

ENVIRONMENT

- Set up a small table in the Large Group Area with the Question Box placed prominently on it – with the prepared scroll placed in it.
- Have common magazine headlines or books situated around the room such as “17 Simple Ways to Feel Your Best This Season,” “The Miracle Morning: The Not-so-Obvious Secret Guaranteed to Transform Your Life Before 8 a.m.,” “7 Yoga Poses to Give You a Boost,” and “The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People.”
- Have Prayer Table with Icons and Bible set up
- Make five-by-five grids on the floor with painter’s tape. Create enough grids for each Saint’s House to have one grid, and be sure that each square is large enough for a teen to step into it.
- Grid Key Handouts – one for each Peer Team Leader and Core Team Member

KEY TERMS

Catechism: A popular summary or compendium of Catholic doctrine about faith and morals.

Concupiscence: Human appetites or desires which remain disordered due to the temporal consequences of original sin, which remain even after Baptism, and which produce an inclination to sin.

Magisterium: The living, teaching office of the Church, whose task it is to give an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form (Sacred Scripture) or in the form of tradition. The Magisterium ensures the Church’s fidelity to the teaching of the apostles in matters of faith and morals.

LESSON SEQUENCE AND CONTENT:**OPENING PRAYER**

DINNER – House members seated together by House

HOUSE DISCUSSION DURING DINNER

1. Have a Peer Team Leader open up the Question Box, remove the scroll, and read the question: “Why is organized religion so important?”
2. Once the question is read, have everyone gather into their Saint’s Houses. Peer Team Leaders lead a conversation exploring thoughts about the importance of organized religion. This is only a discussion intended to allow the participants to express their thoughts, doubts, and questions. The Lead Catechist will provide thorough catechesis that addresses the “Question” of the evening.

ACTIVITY - INVISIBLE MAZE (25 min)

1. Divide the teens into their Saints' Houses
2. Have them stand in a straight line along the bottom of the grid.
3. Each Peer Team Leader should have a grid key that marks the path the teens must follow to get from one side of the grid to the other.
4. Use the **Grid Key** handout as a path.
5. As the teens try to get through the invisible maze, the Peer Team Leader gives them a thumbs-up if it they are following the right path or a thumbs-down if they are not on the path.

GAME RULES:

1. Only one teen can be on the grid at a time.
2. Every teen must get through the grid without any mistakes.
3. If a teen steps on a piece of paper that is not a part of the path, he or she has to step out of the grid and go to the back of the line.
4. House members are not allowed to talk during the game.
5. After five minutes, stop the game and tell them that one person may now talk during the process.
6. They are permitted one minute to decide who the leader is going to be.
7. Resume play.
8. After another five minutes, they are permitted as many rocks as there are "x"s on the Peer Leader's Grid.
9. They are permitted one minute to strategize a use for the rocks, and resume the game until all members of the House are able to get through the grid. (The hope is that they will use the rocks to mark the correct path.)

AFTER GAME HOUSE DISCUSSIONS:

When each group finishes, have the Peer Team Leader lead House discussions with the following questions:

- a. How did the task of getting to the other side feel at the start of the game?
- b. How did the task change once one person was able to talk?
- c. How did the task change once you were given the rocks?
- d. Would it have been possible to complete this task without your Peer Team Leader?

While small group discussions are happening, have an Adult Core Team Member gather all the rocks from the mazes and pile them up by the cross in the front of the main room. Also, put out Sharpies to be used in the Send.

LESSON CONTENT:

Use the following or similar words:

WHY RELIGION?

How many times have you heard people say, “I’m spiritual, but not religious”? They often believe in the importance of soul and spirit, but they don’t want to be defined by a specific religion or way of life. Many people have real reasons for their lack of enthusiasm toward organized religion. They may have been hurt by someone who is “religious.” They may only think of the religious wars they hear about in history class. They also probably feel like religion takes away their freedom.

Yet, if we look at history, some form of organized religion has played a role in every major civilization. We are naturally religious people. We desire structure, community, and a moral code. Not only do we see this in history, but we see it in our world today. Magazine headlines and Buzzfeed articles are constantly giving us tips on how to live a more structured and successful life. We are constantly creating new programs or routines to follow, and many times these routines are rooted in the ancient practices of the Church.

Project and read CCC 28.

We have a deep, spiritual need for religion. We want a greater purpose that gives meaning to our daily life. We desire to worship something or someone — and whether we realize it or not, we will. But what or who do we worship? While the word “worship” may bring to mind images of the Mass or other church activities, here we are referring to the reverence and highest place of honor we give to something. Many of us worship sports, technology, or even ourselves.

All of these things are good, but when we worship them, they lead us away from God. Many people miss Mass on Sunday to watch a big game or to attend a sports practice. They choose their sport over God. Other people spend all their time on technology. They say they don’t have time for prayer, but if you added up how often they are on their phones, computers, or televisions, it is clear that they are choosing it over God. Social media reveals that we often worship ourselves. Selfie after selfie, we wait to receive as many likes as we can get from others.

We desire to worship someone or something, and even when we say we desire to worship God, our actions often show something different. Each one of us is naturally misguided because of original sin. This tendency is called concupiscence. Since we naturally tend toward vice such as pride, ambition at the sake of others, and envy, God offers us the Church, an organized religion, to show us how to deal with our sin and to live a life that is fully alive.

WHY CATHOLICISM?

There are many religions in the world — Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, just to name a few. Each one gives parameters for how to live life with a particular purpose. So, why choose Christianity? Does it really matter? While we are not going to dive into the details of every

other religion, it is important to note that Christianity is the only religion that has a God who became one of His creations. Jesus Christ walked the Earth and taught that He is God. It makes the most sense, then, to get to know Him, His life, and His mission. At the heart of every other religion, they lack the saving power that Christ offers us. He came, lived, and died for us so that we might be fully alive!

This brings us to another question: If I'm convinced of Christianity, why should I be Catholic? Very simply, it is clear in Sacred Scripture that Jesus calls the apostles out of their ordinary lives to give up everything to follow Him. They give up their pursuit of wealth and prestige to follow the one true God — but Jesus doesn't stop there. He didn't say to the early Christians, "Okay now that you know me, good luck living out your faith." He gave them a structure with a leader.

*Project and read **Matthew 16:18-19**.*

Jesus told Peter he would be the rock of the Church. He gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom. Jesus knew we would be tempted and guided by our sin. He knew we would have questions. He knew we would seek answers. We are no different than the people of the early church. They, too, asked questions and disputed over what they believed was truth. What did they do when this dispute came up? Did they form a new church? Did they decide to just do what they thought best? No.

*Project and read **Acts 15:6-11, 19-22**.*

They met to discuss the obligations of those who were converting to Christianity and came to a conclusion about how to proceed. Imagine what this council looked like. There were a number of men who had passionate ideas about what they thought was right. They had been preaching to different types of people, including Jews who had been living out certain customs and Gentiles who knew little of Jewish law. They came together to argue, debate, and make a decision about what the Church would teach. They had to, as an organized religion, come together to decide what Jesus would have said about this topic. In order to do that, He gave Peter authority as the first pope to lead us, guide us, and help answer our questions. The authority Peter received has been handed down to each pope since then.

The Church teaches that all other religions contain elements of the truth. As Catholics, we can recognize the good in many of their teachings and learn from their example. However, the Catholic Church has the fullness of truth and the means to continue to teach it.

TRUE FREEDOM

We all have questions; we have questions about what is naturally good and right, about Church teachings, and about why we have to do the things we are told to do. It is because God knows our needs that He gave us the Church. Through the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the pope and bishops, the Church offers guidance and answers to these questions.

*Project and read **CCC 771**.*

It is important to realize that the Church does not take away our freedom. It proclaims the ultimate freedom of a life lived with faith, hope, and charity. It is through the structure of the Church that we learn about the truth and grace God has given us. Ultimately, the Church gives us the tools to reach heaven. It is like a go-kart track. Imagine yourself riding around a track with twisting turns in your go-kart. If you are a good driver aware of how to turn appropriately, accelerating and decelerating as you go, you can make it around the track without ever hitting the bumpers. However, if you start going too fast, if someone else gets in your way, or if you just don't know how to drive well, the bumpers are there to help guide you along the track. They are there to help keep you safe and keep you on track. Some people barely touch the bumpers and some people seem to ride along them.

Optional: Consider playing the video *"Guardrails"*.

The doctrines of the Church guide us toward our mission and goal. They are there to keep us in line with Christ's will for us. There will be times when we are living in Christ's will, following the teachings of the Church, and we won't even seem to know they are there because we are moving around the track smoothly. Because of our tendency toward sin, though, there will be other times when it seems like we keep getting tossed from one side of the track to the other. In those moments, we need the Church and her teachings even more. Our Lord was very aware of this need and that is why He gave us the Church.

The bumpers can seem restricting at times, but the reality is that without them you could be seriously injured. They actually give you freedom to drive the go-kart before you are an expert at driving. They give you freedom to have fun on the track without the fear of injury. The doctrines of the Church are meant to give us the freedom to truly love the Lord and to know what path we need to take to live our life for Him.

THE CHURCH AND YOU

So, what does this look like for you? How do you start to live in the freedom of the Church? The greatest tools Christ has given us, through the Church, are the sacraments. He has given us the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that we might be cleansed of our sin and reconciled back to God. He has given us the Sacrament of the Eucharist so that we might be nourished by His body and blood. He has given us the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation so that we might have the strength and grace to live out His will in the world. Some other beautiful tools the Church has given us are Sacred Scripture and models of prayer, such as lectio divina, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Ignatian Examen.

If you still have questions about what the Church actually teaches on certain topics, you can go to the Catechism where the Church has laid out what and why she teaches what she teaches. Have you been taking advantage of these tools to live a deeper life of holiness?

CLOSING ACTIVITY AND PRAYER

1. Gather the teens in the Large Group Meeting Area, and have instrumental music or quiet worship songs playing in the background as they enter.
2. Review the questions from the small group discussion in the large group.
3. Use the following or similar word to transition into the closing activity:

It was impossible for your group to get through the maze without the help of the Peer Team Leader telling you that you were on the right path. Using rocks to mark the path made it even easier to get across. This is why Jesus gave us the Church, to guide us in the direction of God and His will for our lives. It's OK if we don't know the direction at first, and it's OK if we have questions we want to ask, but we need a leader to point us in the right direction. Jesus gives us tools, through the Church, to help us walk the path of holiness.

What is one tool that you haven't taken advantage of so far? The Sacrament of Reconciliation? The Eucharist? The Catechism or Sacred Scripture? A priest who can answer questions and gives great advice? When you are ready, come to the front of the room, grab a rock, and write down with a Sharpie the one tool you want to use more often to help you grow in holiness. When you are done head back to your seat with the rock in your hand.

4. After all teens have had a chance to get a rock, end in a brief prayer, reminding the teens that the Church is there to guide them and lead them on their journey to holiness. Challenge them to take their rock and place it somewhere in their house, car, or backpack as a reminder to use the tools Jesus gives us.

CLOSING PRAYER

For the Catechist: GENERAL TEACHING POINTS**WHY RELIGION?**

How many times have you heard people say, “I’m spiritual, not religious”? Most of them have real reasons for why they don’t want to be “religious.”

If we look at history, organized religion has played a major role in every civilization. We are naturally religious people. We desire structure, community, and a moral code.

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We have a deep spiritual need for religion. We want a greater purpose that gives reason to our daily life.

Many of us worship sports, technology, or even ourselves. All of these things are good in themselves, but when we give them the highest place of honor in our life, they lead us away from God.

Each one of us is naturally misguided because of original sin. The Church shows us how to deal with our sin and live a life that is fully alive.

WHY CATHOLICISM?

There are many religions in the world — Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Christianity is the only religion that has a God who became one of His creations.

The Church teaches that all other religions contain elements of the truth. At the heart, they lack the saving power that Christ offers us. He came, lived, and died for us so that we might be fully alive!

Project and read Matthew 16:18-19.

Jesus knew we would be guided by our sin. He knew we would have questions. He knew we would seek answers. So, He established the Church and made Peter the head to lead us, guide us, and answer our questions.

TRUE FREEDOM

Project and read CCC 771.

It is important to realize that the Church and her doctrines are not here to take away our freedom; they are here to proclaim faith, hope, and charity.

Consider playing the video “Guardrails” found in the Media Suggestions.

The doctrines of the Church are meant to give us the freedom to truly love the Lord and to know what path we need to take to live our life for Him.

THE CHURCH AND YOU

We live in the freedom of the Church through the sacraments. We are given the Sacraments of Reconciliation, the Eucharist, Baptism, and Confirmation so that we might have the strength and graces to live out His will among the world.

Some other beautiful tools the Church has given us are Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and models of prayer.

Have you been taking advantage of these tools? Pick just one of them that you want to dive into more to help you continue living a life of holiness.