

Our Catholic Life

A READING AND STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION

« LEADER'S GUIDE »

Welcome to *Our Catholic Life*!

This leader's guide will help you explore *why* engaging adults in faith formation is such an important endeavor at this time, *what **Our Catholic Life*** is all about, *whom* you may include in this process, and *how **Our Catholic Life*** works. We know how important it is to reach adults with essentials of our Catholic teaching, helping them make connections between faith and daily life. Like Jesus, the master catechist, who taught adults by using examples from their own experience, ***Our Catholic Life*** presents the core essentials of Catholic teaching in everyday, accessible language, drawing on the experience of participants through a dynamic method of learning and sharing. As a faith-formation leader, you deserve an enormous “thank you” from the Church community for all you do as a leader to help people grow as Catholic Christians. May you be renewed in your faith and spiritually nourished as you embark on this great journey of faith!

*The **WHY***

Most people who are alive in faith and are involved in their parish realize that participation in

religion today is not what it was fifty years ago. The number of people who describe themselves as “unaffiliated”—not officially belonging to any congregation—is increasing, especially among younger adults. The vast majority of those who move from one congregation to another, or who have stopped coming to church altogether, reveal that they do not feel their spiritual needs were met in the church of their youth. Some disagree with the teachings of the tradition; others are suspicious of most institutions, including, and for many, *especially*, the Church.¹ With this fluctuating and challenging religious landscape as the new reality, we understand why it is so important to reach out and form adults in faith.

How can we engage adults in and through faith formation? First, it must be noted that catechesis includes instruction in Church doctrine but is not limited to this one aspect of Catholic life. While the catechetical documents of the Church point to six tasks of catechesis, the focus of most parish programs in the past has been solely on knowledge of the faith. While we help adults to understand what we believe as Catholic Christians and why, it is crucial that we also provide a framework for spiritual growth and lived faith. Second, those

1. Pew Research Center, America's Changing Religious Landscape, 2015 <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

who lead adult faith formation in dioceses and parishes are deeply aware that one size does not fit all. And yet, meeting the needs of adults of a variety of ages and stages of life and faith is a daunting task at best. Finally, and perhaps most important for our consideration here, adult faith formation that is sustainable must be structured in a reasonable and realistic timeframe, using a sound resource that adequately and authentically presents Catholic doctrine.

Our Catholic Life offers a means for engaging adults of all ages in faith formation—true formation that leads participants to a greater appreciation of what we believe while providing a process for reflecting on Church teaching and applying it to daily life. **Our Catholic Life** presents Catholic core teaching in all its beauty, guiding participants to grow in belief and lived faith, to embrace a journey of ongoing conversion in Christ, and to live as Christian disciples in the world.

The **WHAT**

SEVEN THEMATIC BOOKS ► **Our Catholic Life** is comprised of seven books, each summarizing one theme of Catholic teaching found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). This thematic treatment gives participants an opportunity to delve into the topic, reflect on their experience of life and faith in relationship to Catholic core teaching, and apply it to their daily lives.

DETAILED SCOPE AND SEQUENCE ► Refer to the detailed Scope and Sequence [include link or reference point here] that links each volume of **Our Catholic Life** to the corresponding doctrinal points, sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic*

Church, and the passages of sacred Scripture that are treated in the sessions found in each volume. The themes of the seven books are The Human Journey of Faith, The Mystery of God, Drawing Closer to Christ, The Mystery of the Church, Living the Sacraments, Living the Commandments, and Praying Our Way through Life.

GROUP SESSIONS GUIDE ► Each book begins with a simple, detailed guide for using **Our Catholic Life** in small groups. The process outlined in the guide will establish a framework for the meeting and invite participants to develop a sense of familiarity with each other and the process. It will also help them be open to sharing, as appropriate, through the process questions included in each session.

LECTIO DIVINA ► *Lectio Divina* with sacred Scripture is an integral element of **Our Catholic Life**. Reflection on a passage of Scripture at the beginning of each session familiarizes participants with this ancient and profound tradition of prayer, links Catholic teaching to sacred Scripture, and draws readers' attention to the many Scriptural references found throughout the CCC. It is particularly important to make the links between the deposit of faith and salvation history that are found within Scripture and the long-standing teaching Tradition of the Church.

The **WHO**

Engaging adults of all ages and stages of life and faith in catechesis is a tall order. Some might say it is an impossible task. The content of **Our Catholic Life** is essentially the core teaching ex-

pressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, presented in accessible language, in brief sections. This results in a realistic process for people in the context of their busy lives. Since the questions for reflection and sharing are reflective of universal human experience in relationship to Catholic teaching, ***Our Catholic Life*** appeals to and engages adults of all ages. The preferred way of progressing through the books is in small groups. When experienced with others through this “roundtable pedagogy,” Catholic teaching comes to life through the shared experience of the participants, building Christian community in the process. Consider the following as ways to convene adults for faith formation when using ***Our Catholic Life***. The ideas shared are not exhaustive and are intended to spur consideration for planning as you explore and share ***Our Catholic Life*** in your parish.

ADULT PROCESS AT THE PARISH: Gathering adults at the parish is likely the first thing that comes to mind when pastoral leaders think about adult faith formation. There are distinct advantages to such gatherings. Adults see the parish as a center for their spiritual growth, and the parish is strengthened as small groups become communities within the larger faith community. Organizing materials, insuring quality facilitation, and providing a familiar setting conducive to adult faith sharing are all likely to be easily accomplished on parish grounds. (If this is not the case, consider home-based groups where the setting will be relaxed and conducive to sharing.) Gatherings at the parish typically do not presume a specific age or life-stage group unless specified, and this may be of benefit or perceived as a draw-

back. Consider the additional options below as you think about the adults in your parish.

LITURGICAL SEASONS ► Liturgical seasons can be optimal for providing faith formation opportunities, because parishioners often feel a renewed commitment to their faith during these times. Seasonal connections can be made by specifying a book for a particular season and weaving references into the homily, the Prayer of the Faithful, announcements, or web/bulletin content. By doing this, everyone in the parish will explore the same theme at the same time, providing consistency and unity through faith formation.

PARENTS ► Engaging parents through faith formation has multiple benefits—for the family and for the parish. When parents are offered opportunities—or are expected—to participate in faith formation in conjunction with their children’s catechesis, a powerful bond is created between the parents and the parish. Parents begin to see the parish as their community of faith; they view their children’s catechetical program and parish leadership as partners with them; they understand and appreciate Catholic teaching, grow as disciples, and pass on the faith to their children more naturally and readily at home. ***Our Catholic Life*** provides a unique platform for such faith formation, especially if it is offered concurrently with the children’s program and with parents facilitating the small-group discussions. Communicate the opportunity or expectation with strong partnership language, and gain feedback for future sessions following the first experiences; build on the positive experience of parents who initially opt in to encourage those who

hesitate to participate. Consider reaching out to post-baptism preparation parents as well as those with children of preschool age.

HOUSEHOLD GROUPS ▶ Encourage household groups to use *Our Catholic Life* at home. Neighborhood groups may convene in their homes, rotating the hosting and leadership for the sessions.

LIFE-STAGE GROUPS ▶ Whether they meet at the parish or in someone's home, having small groups for young adults, for parents of children in specific age ranges, for empty-nesters, for single adults, and for widows/widowers will ensure that everyone in the parish views this process as being for them. The conversations that take place will have a specific sense of immediacy and relevancy, due to the sharing of participants who are sure to reflect their life experience in response to the questions. Whenever possible, identify and prepare facilitators from within the target group in order to establish and maintain the cohesive feel of the group for participants.

CONFIRMATION ▶ Using *Our Catholic Life* in confirmation preparation provides an ideal platform for candidates to deepen their knowledge of the faith while helping them assimilate the language of the faith. Candidates learn to draw on their own faith experiences and share them with others. When possible, include sponsors and/or parents in the process.

ALREADY-EXISTING SMALL FAITH GROUPS ▶ Small faith communities that already exist in the parish are ideal candidates for *Our Catholic*

Life. Small groups always benefit from sound resources that include engaging discussion questions and a prayerful process. Some groups rotate their leadership; others discern or designate a leader or liaison with the parish. In either event, already-existing groups are sure to benefit from and appreciate *Our Catholic Life*.

LEADERS ▶ Parish life will grow in holiness through the commitment and service of well-formed informal leaders (for example, parishioners serving on the pastoral council or committees, those who fulfill ministerial roles within the liturgy, or in service and outreach, and those who serve as catechists) as well as the ministry of the parish's formal leaders (pastor/staff/clergy). *Our Catholic Life* may be used in conjunction with parish meetings, enhancing the leadership of all who serve. There is an added, nuanced benefit to such formation: when leaders appreciate the fullness of Catholic teaching they are vastly more likely to reflect our core principles through their actions, attitudes, and reactions to situations they face in their role as leaders.

THE CATECHUMENATE (RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS, THE RCIA) ▶ With special care, *Our Catholic Life* can be used as a resource for catechesis with catechumens, candidates, and the Elect, as well as with the newly initiated as an extended form of mystagogy. Special attention is needed to do this well: leaders and facilitators will need to be well prepared to nuance the questions and to guide sharing among those preparing for initiation or among the newly initiated. Since *Our Catholic Life* covers the core teaching of the Church as found in the *Catechism*

of the Catholic Church, leaders will be assured that participants will receive catechesis that has proven to be sound and faithful to Catholic teaching. It is not advisable to mix participants in the RCIA with other adults in the parish, as their experience, religious language, and questions are often vastly different from one another.

The **HOW**

SELECT FACILITATORS ▶ As with any small-group process, selecting quality facilitators for *Our Catholic Life* is essential. Insure that facilitators understand their role in preparing the session, encouraging the participation of all group members and actively listening to participants' sharing. When at all possible, facilitators should represent the target population for the group (young adults with young adults, parents with parents, etc.) Facilitators must understand that any misgivings about the teaching are to be kept out of the process. They should have a designated resource person in case participants have questions that the facilitator cannot address. Facilitators will prepare ideas for sharing in advance, including their own experiences, current events, and connections to contemporary culture in order to enhance the group sharing. Particularly at the beginning of the process, these additional discussion prompts will be essential to the experience of *Our Catholic Life*.

BEGINNING OUR CATHOLIC LIFE ▶ Facilitators will take particular care to establish respect, patience, and full participation for all group members. Setting ground rules, such as confidentiality, using "I" statements ("I under-

stand this to mean..." "I wonder about..."), and honoring all in the group, will be crucial to the success of the process.

LECTIO DIVINA ▶ Each *Our Catholic Life* book begins with a group sessions guide, which provides a simple and repeatable structure for meetings. Facilitators should be aware that the *Lectio Divina* that begins each session is an important element of the process; like the other elements of *Our Catholic Life*, *Lectio* should be given ample time to insure the prayerful beginning of the session. Remember that the passages of Scripture are selected because they are cited in the section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* treated in that session; the Scripture reflection is not extraneous but rather is an integral element of the meeting.

ROTATE READERS ▶ Note that the content sections are brief. Reading aloud will help participants to hear the content and reflect on it; rotating readers involves everyone in the process and also provides a means for maintaining a good pace for the process. This rotation in readers also establishes the full participation of all, which leads everyone to share during the group process.

GROUP OR PERSONAL PROCESS ▶ As the groups begin, facilitators will establish the hope that all will participate in the group sharing, according to their level of comfort. This element of *Our Catholic Life* insures that the process does not remain at the place of acquiring knowledge of the faith, and that participants will see how their life experience and future actions may be shaped by our core beliefs. In preparing the session in advance, facilitators may identify parish service

or outreach opportunities that tie to the content for the session. Groups may participate in service together or be encouraged to identify specific actions for individual action between sessions. Especially at the beginning of the process, facilitators take responsibility for making connections between participant sharing and the content, or the sharing between two or more group members. Later, it is likely that all in the group will more ac-

tively tie the sharing of one member with that of another.

LECTIO DIVINA ► Each session of ***Our Catholic Life*** closes the way it began, with *Lectio Divina*, couching the whole experience in prayerful reflection on sacred Scripture. Group members may add their personal prayers of petition or thanksgiving, unifying the group through shared prayer.

