



## Growing in Faith – Step 4

### The Church of Jesus

#### Aim

To deepen understanding of the Church founded by Jesus and of the role and relevance of this Church today.

#### Resources needed

Leaders

- Chosen videos, electronic device to view clips, Post-it notes and large sheets of paper
- Additional resources  
AHWGP - ch 7, 8  
Call and Response – ch 7

Young People

- Journal

#### Prayer Focus

Expressions of our belief:

**Bible** - (*God is with us*)

**Candle** - (*Christ our light*)

**Image** - (Pope Francis) or Papal Cross

**Cloth** - (*Appropriate for Liturgical season*)

#### Liturgical Link

We gather to pray as Church community, the community founded by Jesus, as a sign of our unity. We are united by the beliefs and traditions we share, passed down from the Apostles.

#### Overview

- The early church
- A catholic, apostolic church
- How is the Church holy?
- The authority of Peter continues
- Scripture and Prayer

#### Preparation by Catechists

- Familiarity with content and resources
- Readiness to share personal experiences of 'being Church'
- Pray for the young people and leaders

#### Scripture Passages

- Acts 1:6-9 The Church's mission
- Matthew 16:13-20 Jesus appoints Peter
- Romans 12:2 The Christian calling

#### Tenets of Faith (Faith Formation)

- Reliance on the Holy Spirit and prayer
- Jesus is the Messiah
- Teaching responsibility and authority of the Church, established by Jesus
- The unity of the Church
- All are called to be holy, to live in relationship with God and to follow

## Gathering

### Welcome and Introduction

- Welcome the young people back
- Introduce any newcomers to the group.
- Give a brief reminder of the key points from the last gathering.
- Provide the aim and outline of the gathering and the resources being used.

## Introductory activity

### Activity – *The early Church* - what was it like?

After Jesus returned to his Father, the fearful, but faithful followers of Jesus gathered regularly for prayer and support. When doing so on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as he had promised, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began preaching and teaching in Jesus' name.

- Ask the young people to ponder:
  - How do you imagine the actions of the disciples was received by Jesus' followers?
  - What would have changed for the disciples now that the Holy Spirit had impacted their lives?
- Hand out post-it notes.
- Invite individuals to jot down items to add to each of the four large sheets of paper headed: **Key teachings / Positive Responses / Negative Responses / Daily living**
- Allow 3-4 minutes for the activity, then gather the group around the sheets to look at the responses.
- Draw together the common threads and important points, seek clarification as necessary.
- Use the points below to help provide a clear picture of the early church.

The Acts of the Apostles, written by Gospel writer Luke, tells some of the significant events in the life of the early Church in Jerusalem. The stories tell us of how, through the power of the Holy Spirit the message of Jesus was spread. We are told that the disciples had to flee because of the persecution being faced. Individual and collective prayer united and strengthened them.

Each step forward or decision made is attributed to the Holy Spirit working through the disciples and Paul. Peter and Paul are the only individuals whose activities are described in detail in the Acts of the Apostles. The key teaching was that Jesus who had risen from the dead was the Christ, the Messiah.

Stephen created conflict by denying the temple as the dwelling place of the Lord. He promoted the spirit of God as being open to all, and that God would be present in all who believed. This view was unacceptable to the Jews, who regarded it as a criticism of their laws, beliefs and culture. This fueled the persecution of the Christians, including the stoning of Stephen.

The reception of a Roman soldier, Cornelius, and his household into the Church gave a clear statement that gentiles, not just Jews, were welcome. Antioch, in Syria, became the new centre for growth and missionary Headquarters from where Paul and Barnabas, prompted by the Spirit, went to Cyprus and Asia Minor. They converted many pagans, though their message was generally rejected by Jews they met.

*Notes adapted from Ch 7 of At Home with God's People, Evangelisation Office Brisbane, 2016 Edition*

## Prayer and Reflection

- Gather the group around the prayer focus to hear the last words of Jesus, as recorded in Acts 1:6-9

Read **Acts 1:6-9**

- Allow time for young people to ponder the amazing conviction, stamina and determination of the first disciples in preaching and teaching.,

### ***Prayers of intercession***

**Leader** We pray for missionaries today; especially those living and working in hostile communities or dangerous circumstances around the world. May the Holy Spirit be their inspiration and their labours bear fruit. Lord hear us,

**All** ***Lord hear our prayer.***

**Leader** We pray for the Pope, our Bishops and priests; that their preaching may touch the hearts of all who hear it, and their lives be a witness to God's love. Lord hear us.

**All** ***Lord hear our prayer.***

**Leader** We pray for each person here; that we continue to grow in relationship with the Father, follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Lord hear us.

**All** ***Lord hear our prayer.***

## Exploring

### ***What does it mean to be Catholic?***

Remind the young people that during the Inquiry period, time was spent thinking about the similarities and differences between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches. Today we explore this further by asking, 'What does it mean to be Catholic?' In the Creed we profess belief in the **one, holy, catholic and apostolic** Church, which is the Catholic Church.

- Begin by unpacking what group members believe these words to mean.

### Activity – *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*

- Invite comment on the meaning of each of the four words and chart up on the whiteboard / screen / large sheet of paper, without engaging in conversation other than to ask for clarity is something seem obscure.
- Provide a very quick potted history of the Church see notes below, then view the video clip. Use the points below to assist as necessary.

The *one church* is the Church Christ founded – it's a myth that Jesus didn't like organised religion. He was a very fervent Jew, who worshipped at the temple. Although he did challenge the church leaders and some of their laws, he also appointed Peter as the rock on which he would build his church.

A millennia ago, the East / West schism in the Catholic Church happened. Some of the Eastern Churches no longer recognised Peter as the head of the Church.

Five hundred years later other churches began to break away, for a number of reasons, meaning that some of these have quite different beliefs and practices. Example – though many Churches have a gathering to commemorate the Last Supper, the Catholic Church believes in the true presence of Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion, whereas for most others the action is symbolic. There are now over 40,000 Christian denominations. So, the question is, 'How do we know what is the one true Church?'

*Notes adapted from video commentary*

### Activity

- Invite the young people to watch the video clip **Chosen** Disc 2, Lesson 6 Seg 1 - *One Church* (clip is 9.30 min, start at 5.40 min)
- Ask them to note down in their journal anything that affirms or raises a question.
- Invite any brief comments in response.

## Going Deeper

### Activity – *A Catholic and Apostolic Church*

- Invite the young people to watch the video clip Invite the young people to watch the video clip **Chosen** Disc 2, Lesson 6 Seg 2 - *Apostolic and Catholic* (4min)
- Ask them to note down in their journal anything new, different or that prompts a question
- Invite comments in response to the video.
- Discuss how well the original thoughts from the group match up with those of the presenter?

Explain to the young people that the Church is one body, united in Christ who came to love and serve. The new Covenant (Jesus) was with a new people of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles who, though from different races, would be one because they were baptised in the one Spirit. [1Corinthians 12:13]

The Pope, and Bishops have been given the direct authority of Jesus, through the line of succession from St Peter. Collectively they are known as the Magisterium. Their role is to protect and defend the truths of our faith, handed down through Sacred Scripture and tradition, which are necessary for our salvation.

When speaking on matters of faith and morals, the Magisterium teach with the authority of Jesus, even though the issues of concern today were unimagined in the time of Jesus. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, such teaching is without error, infallible, speaking with one voice to the universal church. It is worth noting that it is very rare for statements to be pronounced as infallible.

The Catholic Church is not a denomination, but the universal denominator called to live and preach the Word of God.

*Notes adapted from video commentary*

### **Activity – A Holy Church?**

How can the Church be holy when its followers are sinners?

- Invite the young people to watch the video clip **Chosen** Disc 2, Lesson 6 Seg 3 - *A holy church. (4 min)*
- Invite comments.

Explain the young people that the Church teaches the truth, regardless of if its members, including at times some of its leaders, do not live up to that truth. The Church is understood to be *Holy* because Jesus the founder is holy, in union with the Father and the Spirit.

A visible reality of this is the Church around us and the many good works that are done in its name. The invisible reality is the good people who have gone before us and are now reunited with God in heaven, part of the communion of saints.

The Church is referred to as Mother, because of the role played in teaching and guiding of the people of God to holiness. We, as Church, can access aspects of that holiness each time we receive the sacraments, spend time in prayer, or stand up for truth and goodness in our world.

The Church also offers care to those who need support through its people and social service agencies.

*Notes adapted from video commentary*

## Scripture Reflection

### **Scripture Reflection**

Mention was made earlier of Peter being the one Jesus commissioned to lead his church. In Matthew's Gospel [16:13-20], Peter professes his faith and receives his commission.

Before listening to the encounter, be aware that Jesus' ministry has really taken off, many people are clamoring to hear him teach or to seek healing. At the same time the Jewish leaders who are becoming more and more unhappy with his preaching, are continually challenging Jesus and demanding that he give signs to prove he is whom he claims to be, the Son of God.

### Activity

- Bearing in mind the context of the scripture passage and earlier conversations lead young people to imagine themselves present at this event and ask that to allow it to speak to their heart.

### Matthew 16:13-20

- Following the reading allow for a few moments of quiet, then time to reflect and make jottings on the questions below.
  - Why do you think Jesus refers to Peter as the rock?
  - What seems to be the key roles he is being given?
  - Do you think Peter comprehends fully what this means?
  - Apart from Peter's profession of faith, what might be some of the qualities Peter possesses that Jesus believes fit him for the role?
- Drawing together responses and helping provide clarity.
- Use the points below to assist as necessary.

Explain to the young people that several passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) make reference to God as the rock on which the people of Israel depend. In Psalm 18:2 David (the composer of the psalms) acknowledges, *'The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.'* In the reference to the rock Matthew is making a statement about Peter being the foundation of the Church.

By referring to Peter as the rock, Jesus is suggesting Peter is firm, solid, steady, and has a strong foundation. Indeed, Jesus is aware of the turmoil the disciples will face after his death. Strong foundations will certainly be needed, and the greatest strength amongst Peter's many, is his faith, which he has just professed wholeheartedly and with great clarity to Jesus.

The text makes that Peter is being given authority, a position of great privilege and responsibility. Those who have keys are gatekeepers, people who can allow or deny entry, and have the responsibility to safeguard whatever is within. Jesus tells Peter that the decisions he makes using his authority will be acceptable not just on earth, but in heaven too, when making decisions for the welfare of the community. Peter will be the new shepherd of the flock. What great faith Jesus is placing in Peter.

In his role of defending the Church against evil there is an obvious requirement to maintain the unity of the Church for strength and stability. While Peter seems to calmly accept what is being asked of him, the incident which follows shows how little he really appreciates the fate that is ahead of Jesus. When Jesus explains about his death Peter exclaims that it must not happen. In reply Jesus calls him a 'stumbling block' with his mind focused on human things rather than divine. [Matthew 16:21-23]

The Church regards this reading as important in confirming the position of the Pope as its spiritual leader, and highest authority. Peter's primacy is understood to legitimately pass on to all successive Pope's since the beginning of the Church. Accounts of Peter in the bible identify a very human leader, who has sins and weaknesses alongside many gifts, including great faith in Jesus, but even that is shaken at times.

When struggling with our faith or encountering too many stumbling blocks in life, prayerful reflection on the life of Peter might help us to refocus on what faith calls us to.

*Notes adapted from Ch 8, At Home with Gods People, Office of Evangelisation, Brisbane, 2016 Edition*

## Closing Prayer

- Gather the group around the prayer focus and begin by asking them to:
- Recall anything heard today which was new or challenging.
- Recall some of the negativity towards the church they have experienced, or recognise.
- Consider their own feelings about being part of the Church.

Explain to the young people that within society today there is an acceptance of the value the spiritual dimension in life. However, organised religion often gets a bad press. Some people in particular will take every opportunity to knock the Christian, and more specifically the Catholic Church. Human beings are not perfect, nor is the Church, but we strive to be.

Being part of the Church can therefore be difficult to deal with at times. Faith is based on a relationship with God, through the person of Jesus Christ, and a desire to experience the fullness of life from following his ways. Our faith impacts on everything we are and do.

**Leader** So, when the going gets tough allow the words of St Paul to raise you up.

**Reader** 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good, acceptable and perfect.' [Romans 12:2]

*Allow a few moments for individuals to offer their own prayer in response.*

Then all join together in prayer:

**All** Lord, God, do not let me be discouraged by the negativity of others.  
Help me grow in faith so that I will never deny you, now-matter how much others may mock your existence, or my belief. Keep my heart open to your love and allow it to make a difference in my life. Our prayers we offer in faith and trust.  
Amen

*Adapted from Day 11, Discovering Prayer, Catholic Enquiry Centre, 2017*

## Closing Remarks and Next Step

- Invite response or feedback to the content for this step. Note any questions raised, and how / where to best deal with these.
- Identify the next stepping-stone the group will take
- Encourage personal and prayer support of one another and encourage the young people to attend Mass with their young companions or family members.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time for socialising when the work has been done.