

The Invitation

Standalone Practicum Module · Luke 5:17-26; Luke 14:15-24; Acts 8:26-31; John 1:35-46

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover from the men who let a paralysed man down through a roof that Jesus responds to the faith he sees in the group carrying somebody who could not carry himself, that the obstacle they had to get through was the crowd already inside, and that the invitation in the banquet parable is issued three separate times and gets more specific each time. Then write the actual message you are going to send.

Catholic Touchstone

The Church proposes the faith and does not coerce assent, which leaves her teaching authority and her legitimate discipline entirely intact. And a proposal has to be concrete enough to be accepted or declined. Most of this module is practical advice, which is ours rather than the Church's teaching, and it is labeled that way throughout.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This is the most practical module in the study

Roughly half of tonight is logistics: which Mass, what to say beforehand, what happens at Communion, how to explain Confession to somebody who has been away thirty years, and who to call about OCIA.

Almost all of that is our practical advice rather than Catholic teaching, and you should say so out loud when you give it. The doctrine in this module is thin and firm. The advice is thick and negotiable.

Before you run this, find out three things about your own parish and write them down: the Mass you would actually bring a stranger to, the confession times including anything by appointment, and the name and contact of whoever runs OCIA. If you do not have those three, the practicum will not work.

The men and the roof

Luke 5:17-26. Men come carrying a paralysed man on a bed, cannot get near because of the crowd, go up on the roof, and let him down through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. Two details come from St. Mark rather than St. Luke and should be cited there: Mark 2:3 says there were four of them, and Mark 2:4 has them digging out an opening.

Then verse 20, which is the verse this module exists for: "And when he saw **their** faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

The faith he sees in the group who brought him. Note what Luke does not say: it does not say the paralysed man lacked faith, and it does not make another person's faith a substitute for his own. What it shows is Jesus

responding to faith visibly expressed by the people carrying somebody who could not carry himself, and the man on the mat is not recorded as saying a word before he is forgiven.

Two details worth pressing. **They opened somebody's roof**, which St. Mark describes as digging out. What it cost, and whether it was made good, the Gospels do not say; treat that as reconstruction if you use it. And the obstacle between them and Jesus was the crowd, which is to say the people who were already inside listening. Sit with that for a moment before you decide it is unfair.

The banquet, and three servant sendings

Luke 14:15-24. A man gives a great banquet and invites many. At the hour, he sends his servant to say come, for all is now ready, and they all alike begin to make excuses: a field, five yoke of oxen, a wife.

Then the servant is sent **again**, to the streets and lanes, for the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And when there is still room, he is sent a **third** time, to the highways and hedges.

Three servant sendings, at verses 17, 21 and 23, each reaching further out. Do not say each gets more specific; the third does not name classes of people at all. And keep them distinct from the original invitation issued earlier. The first invitation being declined is not the end of the story; it is the beginning of the second verse.

And now the hard phrase, which you must handle honestly. The third sending says "compel people to come in." That phrase has an ugly reception history: St. Augustine used it in his letters concerning the Donatists to justify state coercion of schismatics, and he is one of the greatest of the Fathers and he was wrong about this. The Church's settled teaching is that the act of faith is of its very nature free and that no one may be coerced (Dignitatis Humanae 10, CCC 160). Give your group both facts. It is a live demonstration that a real saint can be mistaken and that the Church can develop.

How can I, unless someone guides me

Acts 8:26-31. Philip runs up to the chariot, hears the man reading Isaiah, and asks whether he understands what he is reading. And the Ethiopian says: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invites Philip to come up and sit with him.

Two things for tonight. The opening was a question rather than an offer. And the invitation, when it came, ran in the other direction: the seeker invited the guide to sit down.

A great many of the invitations your people are afraid to issue would be accepted, and some of them are already being waited for.

What the practical advice is actually for

The immediate reason people do not invite is often practical rather than theological. It is that they cannot picture the next ninety minutes and do not know what to say about Communion.

Solve that and much of the barrier drops. A great deal of the alienation a guest feels at Mass is eased by ten minutes of preparation beforehand and by somebody sitting next to them who knows what is happening. Theological, cultural, disability-related and trauma barriers are real, and preparation does not dissolve them.

The discussion guide carries the specific scripts. Mark them as ours when you give them.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

A table set for the wrong people

Isaiah 25:6-8: a feast of rich food for all peoples on the mountain, where death is swallowed up forever. Proverbs 9:1-6: Wisdom builds her house, sets her table, and sends out her servants to call from the highest places in the town. The banquet to which the unlikely are summoned is an Old Testament image before it is a parable.

Come, buy without money

Isaiah 55:1-3: everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. The invitation in Scripture is characteristically issued to people who cannot pay for what is offered, which is worth remembering before anyone decides a friend is not ready.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine, and a mistake worth naming

St. Augustine used "compel them to come in" from this parable, in his letters concerning the Donatists, to defend the use of state coercion against schismatics. He is among the greatest of the Fathers, and this study has quoted him more than anyone else. What the Church now teaches, and what he defended, have to be stated precisely: the act of faith is by its nature free and no one may be forced to embrace it, so using civil coercion to compel religious adherence is rejected. Note the distinction he himself worked with, between forcing interior assent, which he also rejected, and applying civil pressure to the already baptised, which he defended and which the Church does not.

The Church's settled teaching is that the act of faith is of its very nature free, that nobody may be forced to embrace the faith against his will, and that Christ invited people to faith and refused to impose it by force. Hold both halves together. An account that only ever quotes saints approvingly is training people to argue badly.

St. Augustine, from his correspondence concerning the Donatists, where Letters 93 and 185 are the passages usually cited; read against Dignitatis Humanae 2, 7 and 10 and CCC 160. Document-level citation, since the letter numbering should be checked against the edition used.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | Pope Francis on what a confessional is not

The confessional, Pope Francis wrote, must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best.

Say it out loud, because some Catholics carry a bad experience in a confessional from years ago, and it can quietly shape how they approach the sacrament afterward. They will not invite anyone to something they are themselves avoiding.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 44 (2013).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Vianney, who simply stayed in the box

The Curé of Ars spent extraordinary hours hearing confessions, in later years for the better part of a day, as people travelled from across France to a village that had been notable for nothing. He was not a scholar and

had struggled badly with his studies for the priesthood.

What he did was make himself available, relentlessly, in one place, for years. It is worth remembering, because the whole point of what follows is lowering the cost of somebody else's next step.

St. John Vianney, from the standard accounts of his ministry at Ars. Historical summary, not a quotation; a named biography should be supplied before publication.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

Two of these are doctrinal and must be got right. The rest of the module is practical and is ours.

- **CCC 1422 and 1423-1424.** The sacrament of Penance, and the several names the Church gives it: conversion, penance, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation.
- **CCC 1458.** Confession of everyday faults is strongly recommended even when not strictly necessary.
- **CCC 1400.** Eucharistic intercommunion with the ecclesial communities of the Reformation is not possible, because they have not preserved the sacrament of Orders in its fullness. State this plainly and kindly; a guest deserves the real reason.
- **CCC 1401.** The narrow circumstances of exceptional sacramental sharing, judged by the diocesan bishop or episcopal conference under the conditions the paragraph sets out.
- **CCC 160.** The act of faith is of its very nature free, and Christ never coerced anyone.
- **CCC 1389 and 2181.** The Sunday obligation, for context when a guest asks why you go every week.
- Every script in the discussion guide is our wording, not the Church's, and should be adapted freely.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

Standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads, and it pairs naturally with Session 10, which established that the destination is the Church rather than you.

Do the homework before you lead. The Mass you would bring a stranger to, your parish's confession times, and the OCIA contact. Written down, in your hand, in the room.

Mark the advice as advice. The master rule of this module is that our practical suggestions never get dressed as the Church's teaching. Say "here is what I would do" rather than "the Church says."

Watch for the person who is themselves avoiding Confession. They are in the room, quite possibly leading it, and they will not invite anyone to something they are avoiding. The Pope Francis voice is there for them.

Do not let the group build a parish evangelization program tonight. The unit of this module is one message to one person.

SESSION GOALS

1. Land Luke 5:20 on the room: he saw **their** faith, and the man on the mat had said nothing.

2. Have the group notice that the obstacle was the crowd already inside, and that the friends had to break something.
3. Have them count the three sendings in the banquet parable and see that each goes further out.
4. Handle "compel them to come in" honestly, including where St. Augustine went wrong and what the Church now teaches.
5. Give the practical scripts, clearly marked as ours, especially the one about Communion.
6. Work the objection that Mass is the worst possible first invitation.
7. Have every person write and send an actual message before they leave the room.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer.
0:05-0:12	Win questions.
0:12-0:26	Read Luke 5:17-26 aloud. Build 1 and 2.
0:26-0:36	Read Luke 14:15-24 aloud. Build 3, the three sendings.
0:36-0:44	Live discovery: the phrase that was misused.
0:44-0:56	Build 4, the practical scripts. This is the part they came for.
0:56-1:08	Build 5, the build-then-press on whether Mass is the wrong first invitation.
1:08-1:24	Practicum: write it and send it.
1:24-1:30	Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Drop Build 3 and summarize the three sendings yourself in two minutes. Saves eight minutes.
- Run the discovery as a leader note rather than a group hunt. Saves six minutes, and it is a real loss because it is the most interesting thing in the module.
- Cut the Acts 8 material entirely; it is prep colour rather than load bearing. Saves five minutes.
- **Do not cut Build 4 or the practicum.** If people leave without having sent something, the module has not happened.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

If someone says they would be embarrassed by their own parish, do not argue. That is Session 10's objection and it has a full treatment there. Tonight, ask them which Mass in the area they would bring someone to, and let the answer be a different parish if it has to be.

If someone in the group has not been to Confession in years and it surfaces, do not pursue it in the room.

Mention your parish's times in passing as part of the practical content, so the information reaches them without anyone being addressed.

If the group starts debating who may receive Communion, give CCC 1400 and 1401 plainly, say that the narrow exceptions are for a minister to judge rather than for us, and move on. It will eat the module.

If someone objects that "compel them to come in" is being twisted, welcome the challenge and read the Church's own teaching at CCC 160. The point of raising it is precisely that the phrase has been abused.

Discussion Guide

The Invitation

Luke 5:17-26; Luke 14:15-24; Acts 8:26-31; John 1:35-46

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some men once opened a hole in somebody's roof to get their friend in front of you, and you called that faith. Give us that much nerve and that much practicality. Show us the one message we have been meaning to send for a year, and let us send it tonight. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ What is the last invitation you accepted that you almost declined? What made you say yes?
- ▶ When you have gone to something religious in another tradition, what made you feel most out of place?

BUILD

Read Luke 5:17-26 aloud. Ask the group to picture the logistics: the size of the crowd, the height of the roof, the cost of the tiles, and what the man on the mat could see from where he was lying.

1. Luke 5:18-20. What did the friends have to do, and whose faith does verse 20 say Jesus saw?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They could not get near because of the crowd, so they went up on the roof, removed the tiles, and let him down through the opening into the middle, in front of Jesus.

And verse 20: "when he saw **their** faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Their faith: the faith he sees in the group who brought him. The man on the mat is not recorded as saying a word before he is forgiven. Jesus responds to the faith he sees in the people carrying somebody who could not carry himself, which is not the same as saying the man himself had none.

Say plainly what that means for the people on your list: you are not waiting for their faith in order to act. Yours is already doing something, and none of this makes their own coming to faith unnecessary.

2. Two details in that passage are uncomfortable. What did the men have to open, and what exactly was in their way?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They opened a roof. Luke has them let him down through the tiles; Mark 2:4 says they dug out an opening. Somebody owned that house, and what it cost or whether it was made good the Gospels do not say. Mark it as reconstruction when you use it, and the point survives: getting their friend in front of Jesus was

disruptive and made a mess.

And what was in the way was the crowd. Not opposition, not the authorities, not the weather. The people who were already inside listening.

Let that sit before anybody explains it away. The obstacle between a person and Christ is very often the people who are already in the room, and it is usually not deliberate. It is just that we filled the doorway.

Ask the group what the modern version of the crowd is, and do not accept a general answer. Make them name something specific about their own parish or their own group.

3. Luke 14:15-24. How many times is the servant sent out, and how does the instruction change each time?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Three, at verses 17, 21 and 23. First the summons to those already invited, who all alike make excuses: a field, five yoke of oxen, a wife. Then out into the streets and lanes for the poor and maimed and blind and lame. Then out to the highways and hedges. Note that the original invitation came earlier, before the banquet was ready.

Each sending reaches further out. The first refusal is not the end of the story; it is the beginning of the second sending.

And note the excuses. None of them is hostile. They are all reasonable, ordinary, busy-life reasons, which is exactly what your invitations will get.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them looking, and then tell them the history. This is a two part discovery.

First, have someone find the exact phrase in the third sending, at Luke 14:23, and read the verse aloud: "Go out to the highways and hedges, and **compel** people to come in, that my house may be filled."

Ask the group what that phrase could be used to justify.

Then give them the history, because it was. St. Augustine used this verse, in his correspondence concerning the Donatists, to defend the use of imperial force against schismatics; Letters 93 and 185 are the passages usually cited. That is not an anti-Catholic caricature, and it was influential for centuries afterward. Be precise about what he argued: he did not hold that interior assent could be compelled, he held that civil pressure on the already baptised was legitimate.

Then have someone read CCC 160 aloud. The act of faith is of its very nature free. Nobody may be forced to embrace the faith against his will. Christ invited people to faith and conversion and never coerced them; he bore witness to the truth and refused to impose it by force on those who spoke against it.

Now ask the real question: what do you do when a saint you admire, quoted approvingly in this very study, turns out to have been wrong about something the Church now teaches clearly? Let them work it out. The answer is that the Church is not a collection of infallible individuals, that development is real, and that a study which only ever quotes saints approvingly is training people to argue badly.

4. Practical section. What actually stops people from inviting someone to Mass, and what would fix it?

Leader: everything in this answer is our practical advice, not Church teaching. Say so when you give it.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The immediate obstacle is often practical rather than theological. It is that they cannot picture the next ninety minutes, and that they do not know what to say about Communion.

On which Mass. Pick the one you would actually bring a stranger to, which may not be the one you usually attend and may not even be at your own parish. Tell your friend the start time, tell them you will meet them outside, and be there ten minutes early.

On the ninety minutes. Beforehand, in about two minutes: there is a lot of standing and sitting, nobody minds if you stay seated, there are readings, then a talk, then the part where we believe the bread and wine become Christ, and then people go up to receive. Say that you will be sitting next to them the whole time.

On Communion, which is the one everybody fumbles. Check your own parish's practice first; the crossed-arms gesture is a widespread local custom rather than a universal norm, and staying in the pew is always a safe default. Say it in advance, kindly, and never at the moment. Our wording, adapt it: "When people go up, I am going to go. You are very welcome to stay in the pew, or to come with me and cross your arms for a blessing, which many parishes here are used to, though you should check what yours actually does, since it is a local custom rather than a universal norm and a blessing is not guaranteed by the gesture. It is not a judgment on you; the Catholic Church understands receiving as a statement that you are already fully in communion with her, and we do not want to put you in the position of saying something you do not yet mean."

The doctrine underneath, which is fixed. CCC 1400 states that intercommunion with the ecclesial communities of the Reformation is not possible, and gives the reason. CCC 1401 gives narrow exceptions, judged by the diocesan bishop or the episcopal conference under the conditions the paragraph lists, and not by us. Give the real reason rather than an embarrassed one; people can tell the difference.

On Confession, for somebody who has been away. Our wording: "You can walk in and say, it has been thirty years and I do not remember how this goes. The priest will take it from there. That happens more than you would think."

On OCIA. Know the name of the person who runs it, know roughly when it starts, and offer to introduce them rather than passing on an email address.

And the invitation that is not Mass. For many people the first invitation should be dinner at your house with other Catholics in it. See Session 10.

5. Someone says: Mass is the worst possible first invitation. Ninety minutes of things they do not understand, in language they do not use, where they cannot participate in the main event and everyone will know they are an outsider. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Work the build-then-press below. The objection is right about sequencing and wrong about the destination.

DIG DEEPER

Acts 8:26-31. Philip opens with a question rather than an offer, and the invitation runs the other way: the Ethiopian asks him to come up and sit. Some of the invitations we are afraid to issue are already being waited for.

John 1:39 and 1:46. "Come and see," twice, once from Jesus and once from Philip. Note that Philip's invitation is not content-free: at verse 45 he has just made a specific messianic claim and named Jesus's town and father. "Come and see" invites Nathanael to test that claim in person, which is exactly the point Session 1 makes.

Isaiah 55:1-3. Everyone who thirsts, come; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. In Scripture the invitation is characteristically issued to people who cannot pay for what is offered.

BUILD THEN PRESS

Build the objection at full strength:

Build it properly. Most of it is observably true.

The Mass is genuinely opaque to a newcomer. There is standing and sitting and kneeling that everyone else knows and they do not, responses they cannot join, and a rhythm that assumes years of formation.

The Communion moment is genuinely alienating. Everyone else in the building gets up and walks forward, and your friend sits alone in a pew while the whole congregation files past. Whatever you said beforehand, that is what it feels like.

And a poorly celebrated or unwelcoming Mass can make a damaging first impression. If the music is poor, the homily is thin, and nobody speaks to your guest, you have spent your one invitation on an experience that argues against you. (Note for the leader: the objector's phrasing here concerns the guest's experience. A validly celebrated Mass has its own objective worth whatever the guest felt, and the press should say so.)

Meanwhile a dinner at your house costs your friend nothing socially, lets them ask questions, and puts them next to Catholics who are recognizably normal. The objection is really about sequence, and about not spending your best card first.

Then press, from the text:

Now press.

First, from tonight's parable: the servant is sent to bring people **in**, to the banquet. The parable's primary reference is entry into the kingdom and the eschatological feast; reading the table Eucharistically is a Catholic application, and a legitimate one. Either way, the destination is not a preliminary. And on the objector's aside about a badly celebrated Mass: a guest's experience can indeed be damaging, and the Mass itself does not lose its worth because it was celebrated poorly. Both are true, and only the first is a reason to choose which Mass you bring them to.

Second, from Session 10: you cannot give anybody the Eucharist. If you never get someone to the sacraments, you have handed them to yourself, and you are not enough.

Third, from tonight's primary text: the friends carried the man to where Jesus actually was. It was inconvenient, it involved a roof, and they did not settle for a location that was easier to get to.

Fourth, and this is where the objection mostly dissolves: much of the alienation it describes is eased by ten minutes of preparation and by sitting next to the person. Not all of it: theological, cultural, disability-related

and trauma barriers are real and preparation does not dissolve them. The problem is not the liturgy. It is that we invite people to it without telling them anything, and then leave them to work out the Communion procession on their own in real time.

And concede the sequencing entirely, because it is right. For most people the first invitation should not be Mass. It should be a table with Catholics at it. Spend the early invitations on your kitchen, and get to the liturgy when there is a relationship strong enough to survive a bad homily. What the objection cannot support is never getting there.

SEND

- ▶ Which Mass would you bring a stranger to? Name the parish and the time out loud.
- ▶ What is the invitation you have been meaning to issue for more than a year?

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | write it, and send it before you leave

PRACTICUM: write it and send it. Sixteen minutes, and nobody leaves without having sent something.

Step one, four minutes. On paper, write three things: the name of one person, the specific thing you are inviting them to, and the date and time. If you cannot fill in all three, you have not yet made an invitation, you have made a gesture.

Step two, six minutes. Draft the actual message you will send. Rules, and these are ours: keep it under four sentences. Name the specific event and time. Say that you will be there and will meet them. Give them an easy way to say no in the same message, because an invitation that is hard to decline is a form of pressure.

Step three, three minutes, in pairs. Read your message to one other person. The listener answers one question only: would this be easy to say no to? If the answer is no, rewrite it.

Step four. Send it. Now, in the room, before you leave. Phones out.

Step five, three minutes. Whoever wants to can say what they sent. Nobody has to.

Leader guidance. The resistance to step four is the whole exercise, and you will feel it in the room. Expect two objections. "The timing is wrong" is almost always fear, and the fix is that the invitation names a specific date, so a wrong date can simply be declined. "I want to think about the wording" is also fear, and four sentences is not a document. Send yours first, out loud, before you ask anyone else to.

If someone genuinely has nobody to invite to anything, have them write the message they would send and keep it. That is a real outcome and should be received as one.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

This week. You have already sent one. Now handle what comes back.

- If they said yes: confirm the time, and be outside ten minutes early. Do the two minute explanation before you walk in. Sit next to them the whole way through.
- If they said no: reply warmly, do not explain, do not ask why, and do not offer an alternative in the same message. The banquet parable has three sendings, and the delay this study suggests is prudential advice rather than something the parable teaches; the sendings there run within one continuous sequence.
- If they did not reply: leave it alone as your default. Non-response can be oversight as easily as refusal, so one gentle follow-up later is fine; chasing it is not.
- Either way, find out your parish's confession times and the OCIA contact this week, and write both down where you can find them.
- And go to Confession yourself before you invite anyone else to it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, some men carried their friend to you and opened a roof to do it, and you called that faith. Forgive us for the invitations we have been drafting for years and never sent. Make us practical, make us specific, and make us easy to say no to. And keep us out of the doorway of other people. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"And when he saw their faith he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 5:20

MODULE 4 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

The Invitation

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
Luke 5:17-26	Primary text, read aloud. Their faith, the roof, and the crowd.
Mark 2:3-4	Build 1 and 2. The four bearers and the digging out of the roof, which Luke does not give.
Luke 14:15-24	Primary text, read aloud. Three sendings and three excuses.
Luke 14:23	Live discovery. "Compel people to come in," and its reception history.
Acts 8:26-31	Dig Deeper. How can I, unless someone guides me.
John 1:39, 46	Dig Deeper. Come and see, twice.
Isaiah 25:6-8	Old Testament Roots. The feast on the mountain for all peoples.
Proverbs 9:1-6	Old Testament Roots. Wisdom sets her table and sends out her servants.
Isaiah 55:1-3	Old Testament Roots and Dig Deeper. Come, buy without money.