

Session 1 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Was This Only for the Apostles?

A mission beyond the first generation

Did Jesus intend his mission to outlive the people standing in front of him?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the commission in Matthew 28 is built to outlast the Eleven, that Jesus prays by name for later believers, and that a gift meant for every Christian is not the same thing as an office held by every Christian.

Catholic Touchstone. The Apostles are the unrepeatable foundation of the Church, and their pastoral mission has a permanent dimension that continues after them. Read CCC 857 to 860 before the meeting.

What You Need to Know

Start with the people and the promises in the text, not with a debate about churches. In Matthew 28 Jesus speaks to eleven men on a mountain. What he tells them to do is bigger than eleven men could finish: all nations, Baptism, and everything he taught. Then he promises to be with them "to the close of the age." The promise reaches past their lifetimes.

John 17 makes the same point from the other side. Jesus prays not only for the disciples in the room but for "those who believe in me through their word." Anyone who came to faith through apostolic preaching, including us, is inside that prayer. John 14 adds the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, who stays with the Church forever. Christ did not leave his work to human memory and good intentions.

These passages establish an enduring mission. They do not, by themselves, settle how that mission is carried on, who ordains whom, or what a pope is. Say that plainly. The study will earn those conclusions week by week. Tonight the group needs one distinction and one question. The distinction is between a gift meant for all Christians and an office held by some Christians. The question is how later generations receive what Christ gave.

Ephesians 2 gives the picture the whole study will use. The household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. A foundation is laid once. A household keeps being built on it. Both things are true, and the Church holds both. (CCC 857; 860.)

Terms, in plain words

- **Apostle:** one of the men Jesus personally chose and sent as witnesses of his resurrection. The word means "one who is sent."
- **Commission:** a task given with the authority to carry it out.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 12:1-3. God's promise to Abram reaches past one household to "all the families of the earth." Read it beside the command to make disciples of all nations. The comparison shows how wide God's saving purpose has always been. It is not, on its own, an argument for bishops.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not say that every instruction Jesus gave an Apostle transfers automatically to every later believer. Some things the Apostles were, such as eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, cannot be handed on. Some things they did, such as teaching, governing, and sanctifying, were meant to continue. Keep both halves of CCC 860 in view all night.

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Summary: Christ was sent by God, the Apostles were sent by Christ, and the Apostles, preaching through the countryside and cities, appointed their first converts as bishops and deacons for future believers. The Church's ministry begins as a mission received, not an authority invented.

First Letter to the Corinthians, 42

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The mission entrusted by Christ to the Apostles will last until the end of the world, and for that reason the Apostles took care to appoint successors. The Council reads Matthew 28:20 as the reason the office had to continue.

Lumen Gentium, 20

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: The risen Christ, by giving the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, entrusts to them his power of sanctifying, so that they become sacramental signs of Christ. By the power of the same Spirit they entrust this power to their successors.

CCC 1087

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 857.** The Church is apostolic in three ways: built on the Apostles, keeping their teaching, and taught and guided by them through their successors.
- **CCC 860.** What in the apostolic office cannot be transmitted, and what has a permanent aspect.
- **CCC 1087.** The sacramental transmission of the Apostles' ministry.

Session Goals

1. Identify the audience, the actions, and the duration of the commission in Matthew 28.
2. Explain why later believers are inside Jesus' prayer in John 17.

3. Plant the distinction between a gift for all and an office for some, and leave open how the mission is handed on.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread A, "gift or office," is planted tonight in Question 5 and the objection. Do not resolve it. Thread B, "received and handed on," begins next week. Hand out Take-Home 1 at the end. Each person writes a sealed guess and brings it to Session 2. The guesses open in Session 4.

Timed Plan | 75 to 90 minutes

Clock	Segment	If you only have 60
0 to 8	Opening prayer and Win	One Win question
8 to 28	Build, Questions 1 and 2	Keep
28 to 48	Build, Questions 3 to 5, with the live discovery	Drop Question 5. Assign Ephesians 2:19-22 for home
48 to 60	The objection, built then pressed	Keep
60 to 70	Send and Live It This Week	One Send question
70 to 75	Memory verse and closing prayer	Keep

For 90 minutes, let the Build discussion breathe and add the Dig Deeper passage at the end.

OBJECTION BENCH | leader only. Answers for questions that may come up. Do not read aloud.

If someone says: *Jesus said "I am with you always." He meant with believers, not with an institution.*

You can answer: He said it to the men he had just commissioned to baptize and teach, and he tied it to the end of the age. The presence and the mission travel together. Whether that mission includes offices is exactly what the next seven weeks examine.

If someone says: *The apostles had no successors. Nobody else saw the risen Jesus.*

You can answer: Agreed, and the Catechism agrees (CCC 860). The eyewitness role ended with them. The question is whether the teaching, governing, and sanctifying they were sent to do also ended. Acts 1 and the Pastoral Letters say it did not, and we read them next week.

If someone says: *The Great Commission is for every Christian. I have been sent too.*

You can answer: Yes. Every baptized person shares Christ's mission (CCC 863). The study will never deny that. It will ask whether sharing a mission is the same as holding every office within it. Session 8 comes back to your share in it directly.

Answers at a Glance

One line per question, for the leader who needs to check quickly during the night. Full answers are in Part Two.

1. The Eleven, sent to all nations, to baptize and teach, with Christ present to the close of the age.
2. The Spirit of truth stays forever. The Church's future rests on God's action, not on organization.
3. Later believers are inside Jesus' prayer, and he wants them one so the world will believe.

4. Genesis 12: a blessing for all families of the earth. The reach of the Gospel was always this wide.
5. Ephesians 2: a foundation laid once, a household still being built. Both are true.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Read aloud everything marked SAY, ASK, and READ. Keep everything marked LEADER to yourself. Share each parchment box only after the group has talked.

Opening Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, open our minds to your word and our hearts to your grace. Show us the care you have taken for your people in every generation, including ours. Give us patience to listen and courage to follow you. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

LEADER Invite brief responses. Anyone may pass. Take one question if time is short.

ASK 1. Who first helped you take faith seriously? What did that person give you that was more than information?

ASK 2. When something important is handed down to you, what helps you trust that it arrived intact?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Matthew 28:16-20.

ASK 1. Who receives this commission? Name its audience, its actions, and how long the promise lasts.

LEADER If the group stops at "the disciples," push for the number in verse 16 and the phrase in verse 20.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus speaks to the Eleven and sends them to all nations. They are to make disciples, baptize, and teach everything he commanded. His promised presence runs "to the close of the age." The task is larger than one place or one lifetime.

That raises the question this study exists to answer. If the mission outlives the Eleven, how do later generations receive what Christ gave them?

READ Read John 14:16-17.

ASK 2. What does Jesus promise about the Holy Spirit, and for how long? What does that do to our picture of the Church's future?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus promises another Counselor, the Spirit of truth, to be with the disciples forever. The Church's survival does not rest on the strength of human organization. It rests on God's action. That promise does not make every believer's opinion true, but it gives us reason to expect that Christ's gifts were meant to reach us.

READ Read John 17:20-23.

ASK 3. Whom does Jesus include beyond the men in the room? What does he want for them?

LEADER Ask the group where they are in this prayer. The answer is verse 20.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus prays for "those who believe in me through their word." That is every Christian who has ever come to faith through apostolic preaching. He wants them one, in communion with him and the Father, so that the world may believe. We are not outside his prayer. The apostolic word was meant to bring later people into the same life.

Live Discovery

SAY Look near the beginning of Genesis for God's call of Abram. Find the promise that reaches beyond Abram's own family.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply Genesis 12:1-3 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 4. What connection do you see between the promise to Abram and the commission to the Apostles?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

God blesses Abram so that "all the families of the earth" will be blessed. Jesus sends the Apostles to all nations. The reach of the Gospel was never a private possession of one family or one generation. The comparison shows the width of God's purpose. It does not yet tell us anything about Church structure, and we should not pretend it does.

READ Read Ephesians 2:19-22.

SAY Paul describes the Church as a building. Listen for what is finished and what is still going on.

ASK 5. What was laid once, and what keeps being built? Why does that difference matter for this study?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The foundation is the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. That is laid once. The household of God keeps being built on it, "joined together" and growing. So two things are true at once. The Apostles cannot be replaced as foundation, and the building did not stop when they died.

Hold onto this picture. Some of what the Apostles were cannot be handed on. Some of what they did must be. Sorting out which is which is the work of the next seven sessions. (CCC 857; 860.)

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Before we finish, we are going to hear the strongest version of the objection to everything Catholics say about the Church. Listen to it as if a friend you respect were saying it.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Fine, the Great Commission continues. Every Christian church agrees with that. But nothing you read tonight mentions bishops, priests, or a pope. A group of believers with a Bible could baptize, teach, and make disciples until Jesus comes back. You have proven that the mission continues. You have not proven that any office continues with it."

"And there is a second problem. The Apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. No one after them can be that. So whatever they were, it ended with them."

ASK What have tonight's passages actually established, and what would still need to be shown?

LEADER *Let the group try to answer from the passages read tonight before you share the response. Do not rescue the discussion too early.*

CATHOLIC RESPONSE | share after the discussion

The objection is right about the limits of tonight's evidence, and we should say so. An enduring mission is not, by itself, an argument for bishops or a pope. The second point is also right. No one after the Apostles can be an eyewitness of the resurrection, and the Catholic Church teaches exactly that (CCC 860).

What the objection has not shown is that the eyewitness role was the only thing the Apostles held. Ephesians 2 gave us a foundation laid once and a house still being built. Whether the Apostles appointed others to carry their pastoral work, and what those others received, is a question of evidence. We will look at that evidence next week instead of settling it tonight by assertion. (CCC 77; 860-862.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. What changes for you when you realize you are named, in advance, in Jesus' prayer?

ASK 2. What question about how the Church got from the Apostles to us would you most like this study to answer?

Live It This Week

Pray. Read John 17:20-23 on three different days this week. Thank Jesus for praying for you before you were born.

Remember. Thank one person who handed the faith to you, in person or by message.

My Guess. Fill in the sealed box on Take-Home 1, seal it, and bring it to Session 2. You will not have to defend it.

Scripture Memory

"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Matthew 28:20 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, thank you for those who handed the faith on to us. Guard us from pride and from indifference. Help us seek the truth with patience and receive your gifts with gratitude. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in the order it appears. Materials: RSV2CE Bibles for everyone, this guide, and the Take-Home sheets to hand out at the end.

When	Passage	Purpose
1	Matthew 28:16-20	The scope and duration of the commission
2	John 14:16-17	The Spirit who stays forever
3	John 17:20-23	Later believers inside Jesus' prayer
4	Genesis 12:1-3	Live discovery: blessing for all families
5	Ephesians 2:19-22	Foundation laid once, household still built
Memory	Matthew 28:20	Christ's promised presence

Dig Deeper | Luke 10:16

Jesus tells the seventy, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me." Notice that hearing Christ is tied to hearing the people he sends. Read it with CCC 858. Do not use it yet to prove any particular office. It sets up the question of how Christ's voice reaches us through people he sends.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 1. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.