

CATHOLIC ARMORY

A Catholic Inductive Bible Study

Until the End of the Age

How Christ's Teaching, Authority, and Sacraments Reach Us Today

Eight sessions | 75 to 90 minutes each | Leader Edition

Apostolic succession | The keys and binding and loosing | Reconciliation and the Eucharist | Scripture and Tradition

Scripture references follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE).

This is a Catholic Armory formation resource. No imprimatur or nihil obstat is claimed.

Leader Edition

Contents

Eight sessions, one continuing mission

Using This Guide.....	3
01 Was This Only for the Apostles?.....	5
<i>A mission beyond the first generation</i>	
02 A Mission Handed On.....	14
<i>Teaching, appointment, and the laying on of hands</i>	
03 The Keys of the Kingdom.....	23
<i>Peter's office in Christ's Church</i>	
04 Binding and Loosing.....	32
<i>Authority that serves the word of God</i>	
05 Whose Sins You Forgive.....	41
<i>The apostolic ministry of reconciliation</i>	
06 Do This Until He Comes.....	50
<i>The Eucharist and Christ's one sacrifice</i>	
07 Guard What Has Been Entrusted.....	59
<i>Scripture, Tradition, and faithful development</i>	
08 What We Receive, We Hand On.....	68
<i>The mission entrusted to the whole Church</i>	
Sources and Further Reading.....	77

Each session has three parts: a Leader Preparation Guide, a Discussion Guide, and a Leader Reference Card. Sessions run 75 to 90 minutes, with a 60-minute cut list on every timed plan. The eight two-page Take-Home sheets are a separate document, handed out after each session.

Before the first meeting

Using This Guide

Read together. Discuss honestly. Receive and hand on.

What this study asks

When Jesus entrusted teaching, authority, and sacraments to his Apostles, how were those gifts meant to reach people born twenty centuries later? That is the whole question. The study answers it from Scripture read within the Church's Tradition and teaching, one piece of evidence at a time. It says out loud what each passage establishes and what it does not, and it never asks a single verse to carry the whole Catholic case. (CCC 75-86; 857-862; 1087.)

One distinction runs through all eight weeks, and it is planted in Session 1: a gift meant for every Christian is not the same thing as an office held by every Christian. Both are real. Sorting out which is which, from the text, is the work of the study.

How a session runs

Win. Two open questions from experience. Everyone can answer; anyone may pass.

Build. Five questions that walk the group through Scripture. Each has a parchment ANSWER box marked "share after the discussion." Let the group work first. Then read the box.

Live Discovery. Once a session, the group is told roughly where to look and finds the passage itself before you supply the reference. Do not skip this. It is where people learn they can read the Bible.

A Serious Objection. Every session states the strongest Protestant or skeptical objection to that night's material, at full strength, in a box you read aloud. Then the group tries to answer from the passages before you share the CATHOLIC RESPONSE. If the objection does not feel strong, you are reading it wrong.

Send. Two questions that move from understanding to personal response, then Live It This Week, a memory verse, and a closing prayer.

What the marks mean

- **SAY** and **ASK** and **READ** are read aloud, word for word if you like.
- **LEADER** lines, the Objection Bench, Thread Watch, and any box marked "leader only" are for you alone.
- **Answers at a Glance** in Part One is a one-line cheat sheet for checking an answer quickly during the night.
- The **Objection Bench** holds short answers to questions that may come up. It is not a script. Read it before the meeting so you are not surprised.

The sealed guess

After Session 1, each person writes a provisional answer to one question on Take-Home 1: "What would need to be handed on for Christians a century after the Apostles to receive what Christ gave them?" They seal it and bring it to Session 2. You collect the envelopes without reading them. They open together in Session 4, after the group has met succession, the keys, and Acts 15, and everyone gets one final revision in Session 8. Nobody is graded. The point is to let people watch their own understanding grow.

Bibles, sources, and honesty

Bring RSV2CE Bibles for everyone. Memory verses are printed from that edition; everything else is read from the Bible in hand. The three Voices of the Church in each session are labeled summaries of what the named source says, with the exact locus printed, never reconstructed quotations. Patristic writers illuminate how the early Church received the faith; they are not all equal in authority to the Magisterium, and the study says so where it matters. Where the Church has not defined something, the study says that too.

Time

Plan for 75 minutes and let good discussion run to 90. Every session's timed plan carries a 60-minute cut list. The cuts are always the same shape: one Win question, drop Build Question 5 and assign its passage for home, one Send question. Never cut the Scripture readings, the live discovery, or the objection and its response.

After Session 8

End with a meal if you can. Then point people to the two studies this one sits between in the Catholic Armory catalog: *Unless Someone Guides Me*, on Scripture, Tradition, and the authority of the Church, and *Abide*, on the Eucharist, grace, and staying in Christ. Do not hand out this leader guide as a participant workbook. It has the answers in it.

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.

Session 2 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

A Mission Handed On

Teaching, appointment, and the laying on of hands

Did the Apostles make provision for others to continue their work, or did they simply hope for the best?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers in the Pastoral Letters a deliberate chain of transmission, sees that the chain carries a ministry and not only a message, and understands why Catholic apostolic succession involves more than repeating correct ideas.

Catholic Touchstone. The Apostles left bishops as their successors. Episcopal consecration confers the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and priests share in the bishops' ministry as their co-workers. (CCC 77; 1555-1562.)

What You Need to Know

Second Timothy 2:2 is four links long. Paul taught Timothy. Timothy is to entrust the teaching to faithful people. Those people must be able to teach others. That is two generations past Paul in a single verse. The verse is about teaching, and it would be dishonest to make it say more than it says. It does say that the Apostles planned for transmission.

The other passages add ministry to message. Timothy received a gift "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6). He is to guard a deposit entrusted to him. Titus is told to appoint elders in every town, and those elders must hold to sound teaching and be able to correct error. Read together, these are not descriptions of enthusiasm. They describe a received ministry with obligations attached.

Be honest about the vocabulary. In Titus 1:5-7 the words "elder" (presbyter) and "bishop" (episkopos) appear to describe the same local ministers. The settled three-tier language of bishop, priest, and deacon is not fully fixed in the New Testament. Catholic teaching does not need it to be. It holds that the ordered ministry is continuous with the apostolic mission and that its terminology developed. By roughly the year 107, St. Ignatius of Antioch writes of bishop, presbyters, and deacons as three distinct orders. (CCC 1554.)

Acts 1 is supporting evidence, not the whole case. Matthias takes "the place in this ministry and apostleship" that Judas left. The requirement that he be an eyewitness from the baptism of John onward shows this is about restoring the Twelve. It also shows the Apostles treated their office as something another person could receive. Use it that way and no further. (CCC 860.)

Terms, in plain words

- **Presbyter:** the Greek word for elder, the root of our word priest.
- **Episkopos:** the Greek word for overseer, the root of our word bishop.
- **Deposit:** the body of teaching entrusted to the Church to be guarded and handed on, from the Latin depositum.

- **Apostolic succession:** the handing on of the Apostles' pastoral ministry through the bishops, by ordination and in the apostolic faith.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Numbers 27:15-23. Moses, facing death, asks God for a leader so that the people will not be "as sheep which have no shepherd." Joshua is publicly commissioned by the laying on of hands before the whole congregation. God's people are not left to improvise after a leader dies. The pattern is instructive. Joshua's commissioning is not Christian ordination, and the group should hear that difference from you.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Three things must stay distinct tonight. The Apostles as eyewitness foundation cannot be succeeded. The pastoral ministry they exercised can be, and was. Priests share in that ministry as co-workers of the bishops without holding the fullness of the episcopal office (CCC 1562). If someone blurs any two of these, restore the line gently.

Voices of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Summary: The Apostles knew there would be strife over the office of bishop, so they appointed the men named above. Afterward they gave instructions that, when these died, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Clement treats orderly succession as part of the apostolic arrangement itself.

First Letter to the Corinthians, 44

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: The tradition of the Apostles is manifest in every church to anyone who wants to see it. Irenaeus says he can list the bishops the Apostles appointed and their successors down to his own day. A received faith and a recognizable ministry go together in his argument.

Against Heresies, III.3.1

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Episcopal consecration confers the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, the high priesthood. With the office of sanctifying it confers the offices of teaching and governing, which by their nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college.

Lumen Gentium, 21

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 77.** The Apostles left bishops as their successors so that the Gospel would be preserved whole and alive.
- **CCC 861-862.** Successors appointed by the Apostles, and the permanent office of shepherd handed on.
- **CCC 1554.** The three degrees of Holy Orders: bishop, priest, deacon.
- **CCC 1558.** Episcopal consecration confers the fullness of Holy Orders.

- **CCC 1562.** Priests as co-workers of the episcopal order.

Session Goals

1. Trace the four links of transmission in 2 Timothy 2:2.
2. Read teaching, appointment, and the laying on of hands together as a received ministry.
3. Distinguish bishops, priests, and the unique apostolic foundation without collapsing them.

Thread Watch | leader only

Collect the sealed guesses tonight without reading them. Thread A: develop the difference between passing on a message and receiving a ministry. Thread B, "received and handed on," is planted in Question 1 and returns in Sessions 6 and 7. Save any grand synthesis for Session 4.

Timed Plan | 75 to 90 minutes

Clock	Segment	If you only have 60
0 to 8	Opening prayer and Win. Collect the sealed envelopes	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 1 Timothy 4:14 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: *Elders and bishops are the same thing in Titus. So there were no bishops over priests in the Bible.*

You can answer: The words overlap in Titus 1, and you are right to notice. What Titus himself is doing in that chapter, appointing elders in every town on Paul's authority, is what a bishop does. The role is there before the title settles. By Ignatius, around 107, the three titles are fixed.

If someone says: *Laying on of hands was just a blessing, like praying over someone.*

You can answer: Paul says a gift was given through it (2 Timothy 1:6) and tells Timothy not to do it hastily (1 Timothy 5:22). A blessing anyone can give is not something you are warned to be careful with. The texts treat it as conferring something.

If someone says: *Matthias replaced Judas because Judas betrayed Jesus. That is a one-time event, not succession.*

You can answer: Correct that it is about restoring the Twelve, and the study says so. But notice the language: Judas held an "office" (Acts 1:20, quoting the Psalm) and another man "takes his place." The Apostles did not treat the office as something that died with the man.

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.** Four links: Paul, Timothy, faithful people, others also. Transmission was planned.
- 2.** A gift through hands laid on, a deposit to guard, elders appointed who must teach soundly. Ministry, not only message.
- 3.** Matthias: another person receives an apostolic "office." Restoring the Twelve, and evidence that the office was receivable.
- 4.** Numbers 27: Moses asks for a shepherd, Joshua is commissioned by hands laid on. Precedent, not identity.
- 5.** Titus 1: elder and bishop overlap in words. Titus appointing them is the bishop's role before the title settles.

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 Holy Spirit, help us receive the faith with humility and hand it on without distortion. Strengthen the bishops and priests who serve your Church, and make us faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. What makes someone a trustworthy teacher of something that matters?

ASK 2. Have you ever been handed a responsibility you did not create? What did faithfulness to it require?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

ASK 1. Trace the movement of the teaching. Count the people in the chain. Who receives it, and who is expected to teach it next?

LEADER Get the group to four links: Paul, Timothy, faithful people, others also.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Paul taught Timothy. Timothy is to entrust it to faithful people. Those people must be able to teach others. That is four links and two generations past Paul in one verse. The goal is not new ideas but faithful transmission. This is clear evidence that the Apostles planned for their teaching to continue beyond the first generation. It is evidence about teaching. Notice what it does not yet say about ministry.

READ Read 2 Timothy 1:6, 13-14, then Titus 1:5-9.

ASK 2. What do these passages add to the picture? Look for a gift, an act of appointment, and a duty to guard something.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Timothy received a gift "through the laying on of my hands," and he is to guard "the truth that has been entrusted" to him by the Holy Spirit. Titus is to appoint elders in every town, men who hold firm to the word and can teach sound doctrine and refute error.

So the chain carries more than a message. It carries a gift conferred by an act, a deposit to be guarded, and an appointment to office with standards attached. That is a received ministry with obligations, not personal enthusiasm for leadership.

READ Read Acts 1:15-26.

ASK 3. What is being restored when Matthias is chosen? What in the passage keeps us from treating it as the whole explanation of later succession?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Judas's "office" is given to another, and Matthias is numbered with the Eleven. The qualification, an eyewitness from John's baptism to the Ascension, shows the immediate purpose is to restore the Twelve as witnesses. So it is not a template for every later bishop. It does show that the Apostles treated their office as something another person could receive. The Church's full teaching rests on the wider apostolic witness and Tradition, not on this chapter alone. (CCC 860-862.)

Live Discovery

SAY Search the later chapters of Numbers for Moses asking God to provide a leader so the people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply Numbers 27:15-23 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 4. What is Moses afraid of for the people? What resemblance do you see to tonight's New Testament passages, and what difference must remain?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Moses does not want the people left "as sheep which have no shepherd." Joshua is commissioned publicly, by the laying on of hands, before the whole congregation. God's people have never been left to improvise after a leader's death. The resemblance to Timothy and Titus is real. The difference is also real. Joshua's commission is not Christian ordination, and New Testament ministry has to be understood through Christ, not through Moses.

READ Look again at Titus 1:5-7.

SAY This time watch the titles. Verse 5 says one word and verse 7 says another.

ASK 5. What two words does Paul use for the men Titus appoints? What is Titus himself doing in these verses?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Verse 5 says "elders" and verse 7 says "bishop," and they seem to describe the same local ministers. The titles overlap at this stage. Notice what Titus is doing, though. He is appointing ministers in every town on Paul's authority. That is the work a bishop does, whatever it is called yet. The office is present before the vocabulary settles. Within a generation St. Ignatius names bishop, presbyters, and deacons as three distinct orders. (CCC 1554.)

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Here is the objection at full strength. Some of you may have heard it from a friend, or thought it yourselves.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Second Timothy 2:2 describes discipleship. Any Christian can teach another Christian, and that is all Paul is asking. Nothing in the verse says the teacher must be a bishop in an unbroken chain of ordinations."

"Worse for your case, Titus 1 uses elder and bishop for the same people. The three-tier structure Catholics have today is not in the New Testament. If the offices were that important, Paul would have spelled them out. What you have is a developed system read back into a few verses about appointing local leaders."

ASK Is teaching the only thing we read about tonight? What do appointment, the laying on of hands, and the duty to guard the deposit add? And is the vocabulary problem as serious as it sounds?

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 first half is partly right. Ordinary discipleship really is part of what 2 Timothy 2:2 means, and Catholic teaching does not deny it. The Catholic case never rested on the word "teach." It reads the transmission of teaching together with a gift conferred by the laying on of hands, the appointment of ministers in every town, and a charge to guard the deposit. The pattern is cumulative.

The second half is honest and deserves an honest answer. The titles do overlap in Titus 1, and the Church does not require the New Testament to use later terminology with technical precision. What it claims is that the ordered ministry itself is continuous with the apostolic mission and that its names developed. Titus appointing elders on Paul's authority is the episcopal role in action. By the early second century St. Ignatius speaks of bishop, presbyters, and deacons as distinct. The Church receives this threefold ministry in apostolic Tradition. (CCC 77; 1554-1562.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. How can gratitude for the Church's ministers strengthen, rather than replace, your own duty to learn the faith?

ASK 2. What would help you hand on one teaching more faithfully than you do now?

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray each day this week for your diocesan bishop and your parish priests, by name.

Learn. Read CCC 1554, 1558, and 1562. Write one sentence on how a bishop's ministry and a priest's ministry are related.

Hand on. Explain one thing from tonight to someone this week, using the passages rather than an analogy.

Scripture Memory

"Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

2 Timothy 1:14 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, you remain the Shepherd of your people. Give your ministers fidelity and holiness. Teach us to receive the truth with grateful hearts and to share it with patience and love. 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	2 Timothy 2:1-2	Four links of transmission
2	2 Timothy 1:6, 13-14; Titus 1:5-9	Gift, deposit, and appointment
3	Acts 1:15-26	Matthias receives an office
4	Numbers 27:15-23	Live discovery: a shepherd after Moses
5	Titus 1:5-7	Elder and bishop: overlapping titles
Memory	2 Timothy 1:14	Guarding the deposit

Dig Deeper | 1 Timothy 4:14 and 1 Timothy 5:22

Timothy's gift came "when the elders laid their hands upon you." Then Paul warns him, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands." Read both with 2 Timothy 1:6. A rite that confers a gift, and that must not be done carelessly, is more than a prayer of good wishes. Do not treat these verses as competing accounts of ministry. They are three angles on one act.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 2. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 3 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

The Keys of the Kingdom

Peter's office in Christ's Church

What did Jesus entrust to Peter, and why does the Church say that responsibility did not die with him?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the keys in Matthew 16 are built on an Old Testament royal office, that Jesus repeatedly gives Peter a task the others do not receive, and that an office from Christ is not a claim that its holder is sinless.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ made Peter the visible source and foundation of the Church's unity, and that office continues in the bishops of Rome. Peter belongs with the other Apostles, as the pope belongs with the college of bishops. (CCC 880-882; Lumen Gentium, 18, 20, 22.)

What You Need to Know

Matthew 16 puts Peter's commission right after his confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus is the one who builds the Church. Whatever Peter receives, he receives from Christ and depends on Christ for it. The keys do not make Peter the owner of the kingdom. They make him a steward in it.

Isaiah 22 is the background for the keys. Eliakim is given "the key of the house of David" and authority to open and shut, as the chief steward of the royal household. He is not the king. He runs the king's house on the king's behalf, and the office continues when he leaves it. The parallel illuminates Matthew 16. It does not prove every later detail of the papacy, and not every feature of Eliakim's story transfers to Peter. Say both things.

Christians disagree about what "this rock" refers to: Peter himself, his confession, or Christ. The group should know that the commission in verse 19 does not depend on settling that debate. "I will give you the keys" is addressed to Simon Peter personally, in the singular. So is the authority to bind and loose in that verse. Whatever the rock is, the keys are Peter's.

John 21 and Luke 22 fill out the picture. The risen Jesus entrusts his sheep to Peter three times. The sheep remain Christ's. Before the Passion Jesus tells Peter that Satan will sift them, that he has prayed for Peter, and that Peter, once turned back, is to strengthen his brothers. An office from Christ and a failure by the man who holds it appear in the same breath. Catholic teaching concerns an office established by Christ, not a claim that its holders are personally sinless. (CCC 880-882; 891; Lumen Gentium, 18-22; 25.)

Terms, in plain words

- **Primacy:** the first place among the bishops that belongs to the bishop of Rome as Peter's successor. It is a real authority, not only a title of honor.

- **Infallibility:** the Spirit's protection from error when the pope, or the bishops with him, definitively proclaim a teaching on faith or morals. It is narrow, conditioned, and does not cover a pope's opinions, decisions, or personal conduct. (CCC 891.)
- **Steward:** a servant who runs the household on the owner's behalf.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Isaiah 22:19-23. Shebna is removed and Eliakim is installed over the royal household with the key of the house of David: "he shall open, and none shall shut." The office is real, delegated, and continues past its holder. Verses 24 and 25 add that Eliakim's own peg will one day give way. Do not hide that. The Church's teaching rests on Christ's commission read within apostolic Tradition, not on Isaiah alone.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not reduce Peter to a substitute for Christ. Do not reduce the pope to an honorary spokesman either. Catholic teaching affirms a real primacy of jurisdiction, exercised as service to Christ's Church and always together with the college of bishops (Lumen Gentium, 22). Keep three things separate all night: primacy, personal holiness, and infallible teaching.

Voices of the Church

Pope Benedict XVI

Summary: In his catechesis on Peter, Benedict reads the three images Jesus gives him, the rock, the keys, and the power to bind and loose, as one particular responsibility within the Church. Peter is made the foundation of the Church's faith and unity, and his ministry serves that faith and communion.

General Audience, 7 June 2006

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: Irenaeus singles out the Church of Rome, founded and organized by Peter and Paul, as the church with which every church must agree because of its preeminent authority. He then lists its bishops from Linus down to his own day. This is an early witness to Rome's place, not a full statement of later papal definitions.

Against Heresies, III.3.2-3

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Just as Peter and the other Apostles formed one apostolic college, so the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, successors of the Apostles, are joined together. The college has authority only together with its head, and the pope's full, supreme, and universal power over the Church is preserved.

Lumen Gentium, 22

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 552-553.** Peter's first place among the Twelve, and the keys as a specific authority.
- **CCC 880-882.** Peter and the college; the pope as the visible source and foundation of unity.

- **CCC 891.** The precise conditions of infallible teaching.
- **CCC 1444.** Binding and loosing given to Peter and also to the college united with its head.

Session Goals

1. Explain why the keys describe delegated, continuing authority, using Isaiah 22.
2. Read Peter's office inside his confession of Christ, so that faith in Christ and the office Christ gives are not rivals.
3. Distinguish primacy, personal holiness, and infallible teaching, and say what infallibility does not cover.

Thread Watch | leader only

Keep the sealed guesses closed. Thread A develops: Peter receives something the others do not, which is the sharpest case of "office" in the study. Plant the phrase "steward, not owner." Next week joins office, teaching, and concrete judgments in Acts 15.

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, with the live discovery	Keep
28 to 48	Build, Questions 3 to 5	Drop Question 5. Assign Matthew 16:21-23 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: *Eliakim's peg gives way in Isaiah 22:25. If that is the model, the office fails.*

You can answer: Good catch, and the passage says exactly that. The comparison is about the shape of the office, a steward with the master's key, not about the fate of one holder. Luke 22 makes the same point from the other direction. Peter will fail personally and still be told to strengthen his brothers.

If someone says: *The rock is Peter's confession, or it is Christ. Peter is just a small stone.*

You can answer: Read verse 19. "I will give you the keys" is singular and addressed to Simon. So is "whatever you bind." Whatever the rock is, the keys are given to a person, and the Catholic case does not depend on winning the debate over the rock.

If someone says: *Peter was corrected by Paul at Antioch and denied Jesus three times. Some rock.*

You can answer: Yes, and Jesus predicted the denial in the same conversation where he gave Peter the job (Luke 22:31-32). Catholic teaching has never claimed popes are sinless or always right in what they do. Infallibility is narrow: definitive teaching on faith and morals, under conditions. It does not cover Peter's table manners at Antioch.

If someone says: *Nothing in Matthew says the office passes to the bishops of Rome.*

You can answer: Correct. Matthew gives the commission; it does not give a succession plan. The claim that Peter's office continues in Rome rests on that commission read with the Church's Tradition, witnessed by Irenaeus around 180 and defined by the Church. The argument is cumulative, and we say so out loud in the response tonight.

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. Peter confesses Christ; Christ builds; Peter alone receives the keys and binding and loosing in verse 19.
2. Isaiah 22: Eliakim holds the king's key as steward. Delegated, real, continuing. Not the king.
3. John 21: three times, "feed my sheep." The sheep stay Christ's. Peter is shepherd under the Shepherd.
4. Luke 22: Peter will fail, Jesus prays for him, and he is to strengthen the brothers. Office and weakness together.
5. Matthew 16:21-23: the man just given the keys is called Satan. The office survives the correction of the man.

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, keep your Church united in the truth. Give the pope and all the bishops courage to serve you faithfully. Help us receive your word without pride and speak of other Christians with charity. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. What is the difference between owning something and being entrusted to care for it?

ASK 2. When a group disagrees, what makes an authority trustworthy enough to settle it?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Matthew 16:13-19.

ASK 1. What does Peter confess? Who says he will build the Church? What is given to Peter, and is it given to him alone in verse 19?

LEADER *Have someone reread verse 19 and count the pronouns. They are all singular.*

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Peter confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus says "I will build my church." Then he gives Peter the keys of the kingdom and authority to bind and loose. In verse 19 every pronoun is singular. Whatever we make of "this rock," the keys are given to Simon Peter.

Peter's confession and Peter's office should not be pulled apart, as if the Church had to choose between faith in Christ and the responsibility Christ gives. The office comes from the confession and depends on the one confessed.

Live Discovery

SAY Look in Isaiah for an official who is given the key of the house of David. Read the whole appointment, not only the sentence with the key in it.

LEADER *Allow a short search. Supply Isaiah 22:19-23 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.*

ASK 2. What kind of responsibility comes with the key in this passage? How does it help you read Matthew 16?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Eliakim is placed over the royal household as steward. He holds the key of the house of David. "He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." He is not the king. He runs the king's house on the king's behalf, with real authority, and the office outlasts the man. That is what a key means in the ancient Near East. It helps us read the keys given to Peter as delegated, continuing authority in Christ's kingdom. The parallel illuminates Matthew's image. It does not, by itself, settle every question about the papacy.

READ Read John 21:15-17.

ASK 3. Whose sheep does Peter receive? What does Jesus ask him before giving them to him, and how many times?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They are Jesus' sheep: "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep." Three times Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him, matching the three denials, and three times gives him the flock. Peter's office is pastoral service under the Good Shepherd, not independent ownership. The Church teaches that this shepherding responsibility continues in Peter's successors for the good and the unity of Christ's people. (CCC 881; Lumen Gentium, 20, 22.)

READ Read Luke 22:31-32.

ASK 4. How do Peter's weakness and Peter's responsibility appear in the same sentence? What mistake would we make if we equated an office with personal perfection?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus tells Peter that Satan will sift the disciples, that he has prayed for Peter's faith, and that Peter, "when you have turned again," is to strengthen his brothers. A failure is predicted and a task is assigned in one breath. A commission from Christ does not make its holder sinless. Catholic teaching on papal authority and infallibility is not a claim that every papal action, opinion, or decision is free from error. Infallibility is narrow and conditioned. (CCC 891; Lumen Gentium, 25.)

READ Read Matthew 16:21-23.

SAY This is the same chapter, a few verses later.

ASK 5. What happens to the man who was just given the keys? What does that tell us about the office and the man?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus calls Peter "Satan" and a hindrance, because Peter is thinking like a man and not like God. The keys were given five verses earlier. The office survives the correction of the man who holds it. That is the pattern the whole New Testament shows for Peter, and the pattern Catholics expect of popes.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection at full strength. This one is serious, and thoughtful Christians make it.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Grant that Peter had a special role. Nothing in Matthew says that role becomes a permanent office in Rome. Matthew never mentions Rome, never mentions successors, and never explains any process of succession. You are reading a papacy back into one conversation on a mountainside."

"Christians also do not agree about the rock. Many say it is Peter's confession, or Christ himself. And even on your reading, Matthew 18:18 gives the same binding and loosing to all the disciples. So whatever Peter got, the others got too. Where is the office?"

ASK What does Matthew establish on its own? What has to come from somewhere else, and where? And does Matthew 18 cancel Matthew 16?

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

Matthew is not an administrative handbook, and the objection is right that Rome and succession are not in the text. Matthew gives Peter a personal commission inside the Church Christ builds. The Catholic conclusion about the bishops of Rome rests on that commission read together with the Church's apostolic Tradition and her definitive teaching. Irenaeus, around the year 180, is an early witness to Rome's succession from Peter and Paul. The Church states the enduring office in Lumen Gentium 20 and 22 and CCC 880-882. The argument is cumulative, and we do not claim Rome is in Matthew 16.

On the rock, verse 19 does not wait for that debate. "I will give you the keys" is singular and personal. On Matthew 18, the Church says the same thing the text does: binding and loosing was given to Peter and also to the college of Apostles united with him (CCC 1444). Peter alone receives the keys, and the college shares the power with him and never apart from him. That is Catholic teaching in one sentence. (CCC 880-882; 1444.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. How does seeing the pope as a steward under Christ change the way you pray for him?

ASK 2. How could you explain Peter's office to a friend without making either the pope or your own opinion the center of the faith?

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray daily this week for the pope, your bishop, and the unity of all Christians.

Read. Read Lumen Gentium 22 slowly. Note what it says about the pope and what it says about the other bishops in the same paragraph.

Practice. Explain, using John 21, the difference between Christ's authority and authority exercised in his name.

Scripture Memory

“But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.”

Luke 22:32 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, the Church belongs to you. Purify those who lead her and those who follow. Keep us faithful to your teaching and generous toward everyone you call into your flock. 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 16:13-19	Confession, rock, and keys
2	Isaiah 22:19-23	Live discovery: the steward's key
3	John 21:15-17	Christ's sheep entrusted to Peter
4	Luke 22:31-32	Weakness and responsibility together
5	Matthew 16:21-23	The office survives the correction of the man
Memory	Luke 22:32	Strengthening the brethren

Dig Deeper | Acts 15:6-12 and Galatians 2:11-14

Peter speaks first at the council and the assembly falls silent. Paul later corrects Peter to his face at Antioch over conduct, not doctrine. Read the two together with CCC 891. A real primacy and a fallible man are both in the New Testament, and the Church has never pretended otherwise.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 3. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 4 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Binding and Loosing

Authority that serves the word of God

Did Jesus leave his Church with authority to settle disputes, or only with advice to offer?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Matthew 18 and Acts 15 show a Church able to judge, that the judgment binds other communities, and that Catholic teaching distinguishes the deposit of faith from discipline that can change and the conditions under which a teaching is definitive.

Catholic Touchstone. The teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it. Binding and loosing includes the power to reconcile sinners with the Church. Not every exercise of authority is infallible, and the conditions are precise. (CCC 85-86; 1444-1445; Lumen Gentium, 25.)

What You Need to Know

Matthew 18 starts with a sinner, not with a power grab. The goal is to win the brother back. When a private word fails, then witnesses, then "tell it to the church," and the Church can make a judgment that stands. Jesus describes a community that can decide, not a collection of private opinions. Authority here serves repentance and communion.

Acts 15 is the first time the Church settled a doctrinal dispute. The question was whether Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The Apostles and elders met, heard Peter, heard Paul and Barnabas, heard James read Scripture, and issued a decision. They wrote "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Do not flatten the chapter into a contest about who spoke last or who won. Each voice has a place.

Acts 16:4 shows what happened next. Paul and Timothy delivered "the decisions" to the churches "for observance." The judgment bound communities that were not in the room. Its authority was not one preacher's persuasiveness. At the same time, be honest about the content. The letter forbade blood and strangled meat. Catholics today do not keep that rule in the same form. The Church has always distinguished the unchanging deposit of faith from disciplinary provisions that a later authority can adjust. (CCC 83.)

That leads to tonight's most important caution. Not everything a Church authority says is infallible. Lumen Gentium 25 lays out the gradation: the ordinary teaching of bishops in communion, the definitive teaching of the pope or of a council under specific conditions, and the religious assent owed to each. No Church authority can authorize disobedience to God or invent new revelation. Tonight the sealed guesses come out. Budget the time for it.

Terms, in plain words

- **Magisterium:** the Church's teaching office, the pope and the bishops in communion with him, charged with authentically interpreting the word of God. From the Latin magister, teacher.

- **Deposit of faith:** the revelation entrusted to the Church, to be guarded and handed on. It does not grow by addition.
- **Discipline:** rules of Church practice that real authority makes and can later change, as distinct from doctrine.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Deuteronomy 17:8-13. Cases too hard for local judgment went up to the priests and the judge at the place the Lord chose, and their verdict had to be followed. Israel's covenant life had a means of settling hard cases beyond private opinion. Use it to frame the question of communal authority. It is not a warrant to carry Israel's civil penalties into the Church.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not say every statement by a Church leader is infallible, and do not let the group say it either. Read Lumen Gentium 25 before the meeting so you can name the levels: ordinary teaching, definitive teaching, and the conditions for each. No authority in the Church can bind anyone to sin.

Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Summary: Let no one do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist is to be considered valid which is celebrated by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Where the bishop is, there let the people be, as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Unity is visible in a ministry, not only felt in a sentiment.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on. It listens to the word devoutly, guards it scrupulously, and explains it faithfully, and from this one deposit it draws everything it proposes for belief as divinely revealed.

Dei Verbum, 10

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: In giving the Apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. Bind and loose mean that whoever is excluded from your communion is excluded from communion with God, and whoever you receive anew into your communion God will receive into his. Reconciliation with the Church and with God go together.

CCC 1444-1445

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 83.** Sacred Tradition distinguished from theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions that can change.

- **CCC 85-86.** The Magisterium authentically interprets the word of God and is its servant, not its master.
- **CCC 888-892.** The teaching office of the bishops and the precise scope of infallibility.
- **CCC 1444-1445.** Binding and loosing, and reconciliation with the Church.

Session Goals

1. Trace how disagreement is handled in Matthew 18 and Acts 15, and how a decision travels in Acts 16.
2. Distinguish enduring doctrine from changeable discipline using the council's own letter.
3. Open the sealed guesses and revise them without embarrassment.

Thread Watch | leader only

After Question 5, return the sealed guesses. Invite volunteers to read theirs and say what they would add now. Do not grade them. Thread A gets its first synthesis: mission, ministry, teaching, and judgment belong together. Leave room. Sessions 5 and 6 will add the sacraments, and Session 8 asks for one last revision.

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 25	Build, Questions 1 and 2	Keep
25 to 43	Build, Questions 3 to 5, with the live discovery	Drop Question 5. Assign Deuteronomy 17:8-13 for home
43 to 50	Open the sealed guesses together	Keep, but hold it to five minutes
50 to 62	The objection, built then pressed	Keep
62 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: *Acts 15 banned blood and strangled meat. Catholics ignore that. So the council was not binding after all, or you are picking and choosing.*

You can answer: The Church has always distinguished doctrine from discipline (CCC 83). The council's doctrinal judgment, that Gentiles are not bound to circumcision, has never changed. Its dietary provisions were prudential discipline for the circumstances of Jewish and Gentile Christians sharing one table, and the same authority that made the rule later relaxed it. Binding does not mean frozen.

If someone says: *James gave the final ruling, not Peter. So James was in charge, not the pope.*

You can answer: Peter speaks, the assembly falls silent, and James says "I judge" as the local bishop and proposes the practical terms. Both are in the text. The chapter is not a contest, and the study says so. The Catholic point is simpler: a body of Apostles and elders made a decision in the Spirit that bound other churches.

If someone says: *If the Church can bind and loose, it can make anything a sin or a virtue.*

You can answer: No. The teaching office is under the word of God, not over it (Dei Verbum 10). It cannot invent revelation, contradict Scripture, or make wrongdoing good. Binding and loosing is authority to guard and apply what was received, and to reconcile sinners with the Church.

If someone says: *Then every papal document is infallible?*

You can answer: No, and the study is emphatic about it. Lumen Gentium 25 spells out the conditions: a definitive act, on faith or morals, by the pope as universal shepherd or by the bishops with him. Most Church teaching is ordinary teaching, owed religious assent, not an infallible definition.

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. Win the brother. Then witnesses. Then the Church, which can judge. Authority serves repentance.
2. Circumcision for Gentiles. Peter, then Paul and Barnabas, then James with Amos. Decision within the apostolic life.
3. A letter, chosen envoys, "the Holy Spirit and us." A real decision, not a suggestion. Not every later meeting has this weight.
4. Acts 16:4: the decisions delivered to other churches to observe. Authority that travels.
5. Deuteronomy 17: hard cases go up to the priests and the judge. Israel had a court. Keep the covenants distinct.

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 Father of truth and mercy, teach us to seek reconciliation and to listen faithfully to your word. Guide our conversation, heal our divisions, and make us willing to be corrected. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. When people who love each other sincerely disagree, what helps them get past competing opinions?

ASK 2. Have you ever been corrected in a way that was clearly an act of care? What made it feel that way?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Matthew 18:15-20.

ASK 1. What is the purpose of the first, private approach? How does the process move beyond one person's judgment, and what can the Church do at the end of it?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The purpose is to "gain your brother." The process goes from private word to witnesses to "the church," and the Church can make a judgment that stands, ratified in heaven. Jesus describes a community capable of deciding, not a crowd of isolated opinions. Notice also the setting. This is about restoring a sinner, so authority here serves conversion and communion, not humiliation. And the binding and loosing of Matthew 16 is here given to the disciples together. (CCC 1444.)

READ Read Acts 15:1-21.

ASK 2. What is the dispute? Who speaks, in what order, and what kind of evidence does each bring?

LEADER Make the group name all four: Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James, and the Scripture James quotes.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The dispute is whether Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the Law. The Apostles and elders gather. Peter recalls what God did through him among the Gentiles, and the assembly falls silent. Paul and Barnabas report the signs God worked through them. James connects it all to the prophets and gives his judgment. The decision comes out of the Church's apostolic life, with Scripture and experience both on the table. It is not a contest about who won.

READ Read Acts 15:22-29.

ASK 3. How is the decision sent out? What does the letter claim about the Holy Spirit, and what does it actually require?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The whole Church sends chosen men with a letter. The letter says "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." That is a claim to real authority, not a private suggestion. It also lists four requirements, including abstaining from blood and strangled meat. Hold onto that detail. The chapter shows the Church exercising authority in a concrete dispute. It does not mean every later meeting or pastoral opinion carries the same weight.

Live Discovery

SAY Keep reading into the next chapter of Acts. Find what Paul and Timothy deliver to the churches on their way, and what the churches are expected to do with it.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply Acts 16:4-5 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 4. What happens to the Jerusalem decision when it reaches churches that were not at the council?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Paul and Timothy deliver "the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders" to the churches "for observance." The judgment binds communities that were not in the room. It is authority that travels. Catholic teaching understands such authority as service to the apostolic faith. It cannot create a new Gospel or make wrongdoing good. (Acts 16:4-5; CCC 86.)

READ Read Deuteronomy 17:8-13.

SAY This is background from Israel, so keep the covenants distinct as you read.

ASK 5. What did Israel do with a case too hard to settle locally? What is the same and what is different when we turn to the Church?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Hard cases went up to the priests and the judge at the place the Lord chose, and the verdict had to be followed. God's people had a court, not only opinions. The same: a means of settling disputes beyond private judgment. The different: Israel's civil penalties do not transfer to the Church, and the Church's authority is the Apostles' authority received from Christ. Use the parallel for the question, not for the penalties.

Open the sealed guesses | leader only

Return the envelopes now. Invite volunteers to read their guess and say one thing they would add after three weeks. No one is required to share. Hold it to five minutes. Say aloud that Sessions 5 and 6 will add the sacraments, and that everyone gets one more chance to revise in Session 8.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection, at full strength. It has two edges, and both are sharp.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"The council in Acts 15 had living Apostles in the room. Of course it was binding. That says nothing about a meeting of bishops in the year 325 or 1870. You cannot borrow the authority of the Apostles for men who were not Apostles."

"And look at what the council actually decided. No blood, no strangled meat. Catholics eat both. So either the council was not really binding, or you keep the parts you like. Either way, the claim that Church decisions bind the conscience falls apart on the first example."

ASK How does what we learned about apostolic succession answer the first edge? How does the difference between doctrine and discipline answer the second? Be specific about the council's own letter.

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 first edge is answered by Sessions 2 and 3. The Catholic claim about later councils never rested on borrowing the Apostles' personal authority. It rests on the Apostles' pastoral ministry being handed on and continuing in the Church. We saw that pattern forming in the Pastoral Letters, and 1 Clement and Irenaeus witness it explicitly. The Church understands this continuity as apostolic succession. A council of the Apostles' successors is not simply another Acts 15. The bishops exercise the pastoral ministry handed on from the Apostles, always under the word of God and in communion with the successor of Peter. (CCC 860-862; 880-882.)

The second edge is answered by the letter itself. The doctrinal judgment, that Gentiles are not bound to circumcision, has never changed and never will. The dietary rules were disciplinary provisions, prudent for that moment, about how Jewish and Gentile believers could share one table. The authority that made them later relaxed them. The Church has always distinguished the unchanging deposit from disciplinary provisions that can develop. Binding does not mean frozen. Continuity means preserving the faith and the authority Christ gave, not keeping every rule in identical form. (CCC 83; Lumen Gentium, 25.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. After opening your guess, what would you now add to your answer about what the Church hands on?

ASK 2. How can you seek an accurate explanation of a Church teaching you find hard before you judge it?

Live It This Week

Sort. Pick one Catholic teaching or practice you find difficult. Decide whether it is doctrine, discipline, or a devotion. Write the answer down.

Read. Read the Catechism paragraphs on it in context. Write down the question that remains.

Ask. Bring that question to a priest or catechist this week instead of settling it with a slogan.

Scripture Memory

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

Acts 15:28 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, lead us into the truth and keep us from hardening our hearts. Give your Church faithful teachers and give us the humility to learn. Make our search for truth a work of love. 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 18:15-20	Correction, and a Church that can judge
2	Acts 15:1-21	The dispute and the deliberation
3	Acts 15:22-29	The letter and its claim
4	Acts 16:4-5	Live discovery: decisions delivered
5	Deuteronomy 17:8-13	Hard cases in Israel
Memory	Acts 15:28	The Spirit and the decision

Dig Deeper | Galatians 2:1-10

Paul's own account of going up to Jerusalem "lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain." Even the Apostle to the Gentiles submitted his Gospel to the pillars for confirmation. Read it beside Acts 15 and ask why an Apostle would bother, if private certainty were enough.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 4. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 5 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Whose Sins You Forgive

The apostolic ministry of reconciliation

How does the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross actually reach a person in a confessional?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that only God forgives sins, that the risen Jesus nevertheless breathes the Spirit on his disciples and speaks of sins forgiven and retained, and that the Church receives this as a real ministry carried on by bishops and priests, not as a talent anyone can claim.

Catholic Touchstone. God alone forgives sins. Christ willed that his Church be the sign and instrument of that forgiveness, and he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry, continued in bishops and priests. (CCC 1441-1442; 1461.)

What You Need to Know

Mark 2 sets the terms. The scribes are right about one thing: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus does not answer by saying sin is no big deal. He heals the paralytic as visible proof that "the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Every Catholic claim about confession starts here, with the divine authority of Jesus. If that is lost, everything after it is presumption.

John 20 must be read in that light and in order. The risen Jesus says "Peace," shows his wounds, says "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," breathes on them, says "Receive the Holy Spirit," and only then says "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Sending, Spirit, then sins. The disciples do not appoint themselves judges of God's mercy. They are sent, equipped, and commissioned.

Second Corinthians 5 supplies the vocabulary. God reconciled us to himself through Christ and "gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Ministers are "ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." An ambassador does not replace the one who sends him. The Church locates sacramental absolution inside this apostolic ministry. The priest acts in the person of Christ. God forgives. (CCC 1442; 1461.)

Be honest about history. The way penance has been celebrated changed a great deal, from severe public penance in the early centuries to the private form the Irish monks spread. The Catechism says so itself (CCC 1447). A changing form does not mean an invented foundation. And say the other honest thing: perfect contrition forgives even mortal sin, but it includes the firm resolve to confess sacramentally as soon as possible (CCC 1452). God is not locked out of a heart between confessions. The sacrament is not optional either.

Terms, in plain words

- **Absolution:** the words by which the priest, in Christ's name, declares the penitent's sins forgiven.
- **In persona Christi:** Latin for "in the person of Christ." The priest does not forgive by his own power; Christ acts through him.

- **Faculties:** the Church's authorization for a priest to hear confessions. Ordination gives the power; the Church governs its exercise (CCC 1462).
- **Contrition:** sorrow for sin with the resolve not to sin again. It is "perfect" when it comes from love of God above all.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 51:1-12. David asks for mercy, for cleansing, and for "a clean heart." The psalm never pretends sin is small; it asks God to do what only God can do. Pray it before the meeting. Verse numbering follows the RSV2CE; some editions number the psalm differently.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Two guardrails. First, God is the source of forgiveness and the priest is its minister; never let the group hear the priest described as its source. Second, do not suggest God cannot act outside a scheduled confession. Perfect contrition is real, and it includes the resolve to confess. No participant should be asked to name a personal sin tonight.

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Summary: Chrysostom marvels that men who live on earth have been entrusted with what belongs to heaven. He applies "whatever you bind on earth" and the forgiving of sins in John 20 directly to the priest's ministry. A king can bind the body; the priest, by Christ's gift, binds and looses the soul. The power is Christ's, exercised through the minister.

On the Priesthood, III.5

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Priests, exercising Christ's office as shepherd within their authority, gather the family of God and lead it to the Father. In the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and with the Church, acting in dependence on the bishop.

Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: Since Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his Apostles, the bishops who are their successors, and priests as the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise it. Bishops and priests, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Church regulates its exercise through faculties.

CCC 1461-1462

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1441-1442.** Only God forgives sins; Christ willed the Church to be the instrument of that forgiveness.

- **CCC 1447-1448.** The forms of penance changed across the centuries; the fundamental structure did not.
- **CCC 1452.** Perfect contrition, and the resolve to confess as soon as possible.
- **CCC 1461-1462.** Ordination confers the power; the Church authorizes its exercise.
- **CCC 1495.** Only priests with the faculty to absolve can forgive sins in Christ's name.

Session Goals

1. Identify the order of sending, Spirit, and sins in John 20 and explain why the order matters.
2. Explain why a priest is an instrument of Christ's mercy and not its source, using 2 Corinthians 5.
3. Invite a personal response toward the sacrament without asking anyone to disclose a sin.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread A, "gift or office," gets its sharpest test tonight. Every Christian must forgive; sacramental absolution belongs to the ordained ministry entrusted with it. Keep both halves. Session 6 will show the same shape at the altar. Do not open the guesses again.

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 James 5:14-16 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: *John 20:23 just means the apostles announced forgiveness when people believed the Gospel.*

You can answer: Then why "retain"? Announcing forgiveness to all who believe does not require a power to withhold it from any. The verse gives a two-sided authority, and the disciples receive the Spirit specifically for it. The early Church read it as a real judgment about actual sins.

If someone says: *I confess directly to God. Why put a man in between?*

You can answer: Keep confessing directly to God; the Church asks that of you every night. The question is whether Christ also gave a way to hear his forgiveness spoken to you by someone he sent, as he healed through hands and taught through voices. John 20 says he did. The two are not rivals.

If someone says: *James 5:16 says confess your sins to one another. That is mutual, not priestly.*

You can answer: It does, and Catholics practice that too. Notice that the same passage sends the sick person to the elders of the church, and the Church reads James 5 first of all about the Anointing of the Sick. Verse 16 is about mutual confession and prayer; it is not the text the sacrament of Penance rests on, and the study never claims it is.

If someone says: *Private confession was invented by Irish monks in the sixth century.*

You can answer: The private form spread through them, yes, and the Catechism says so (CCC 1447). Before that the Church practiced severe public penance. What changed was the form, not the claim that the Church forgives sins by Christ's authority. The Catechism traces that continuity through the changing forms (CCC 1447-1448).

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. Mark 2: only God forgives. Jesus heals the paralytic as proof he has that authority. Everything starts here.
2. John 20: peace, wounds, "as the Father sent me," breath, Spirit, then forgive and retain. Order matters.
3. 2 Corinthians 5: God reconciles, and gives a ministry of reconciliation. Ambassadors, not replacements.
4. John 20 with CCC 1461: bishops and priests receive the power through Orders. We receive the gift through them.
5. Psalm 51: mercy, cleansing, a clean heart. Forgiveness is God's act, and it is asked for, not assumed.

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 Merciful Father, give us the courage to admit our sins and the confidence to come home to you. Help us understand the ministry of forgiveness your Son entrusted to his Church. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. What is the difference between being told a wrong does not matter and actually being forgiven for it?

ASK 2. What makes it hard to ask for mercy, even when we know we need it?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Mark 2:1-12.

ASK 1. Why do the scribes object when Jesus forgives the man? What does Jesus do about it, and what does that reveal about him?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The scribes object because forgiving sins belongs to God alone, and they are right about that. Jesus does not argue the point. He heals the man in front of them "that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Forgiveness is not encouragement or a change of feelings. It is God's act, and Jesus shows he has God's authority. This is the source of everything the Church says about confession.

READ Read John 20:19-23.

ASK 2. List, in order, everything Jesus does before he speaks about sins. Why does the order matter?

LEADER Get all of it: peace, wounds, sending, breath, Spirit, then sins.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus says "Peace be with you," shows his hands and side, says "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," breathes on them, and says "Receive the Holy Spirit." Only then: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

The order matters because it rules out self-appointment. The disciples are sent as Christ was sent and equipped with the Spirit for the task. They do not become independent judges of God's mercy. They become ministers of it. And the power is two-sided, to forgive and to retain, which is more than announcing good news.

Live Discovery

SAY Look in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians for a passage about a ministry of reconciliation and about ambassadors who speak for Christ.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 3. Who starts the work of reconciliation? What exactly is entrusted to the ministers, and what is not?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

God begins it: "God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." The ministers are "ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." An ambassador speaks with the sender's authority and never replaces the sender. The Church understands sacramental absolution inside this apostolic ministry. The source is God's mercy. The minister serves the action Christ has entrusted to his Church. (CCC 1442.)

READ Return to John 20:19-23 and read CCC 1461.

SAY Now we ask how a commission given to the disciples in a locked room reaches a priest in your parish.

ASK 4. What connects Christ's commission that night with the ministry of bishops and priests today? Who does not receive this particular power, and why?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The Church receives John 20 as part of the enduring apostolic ministry we traced in Sessions 1 and 2. Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, and priests, as their co-workers, receive the power to forgive sins through Holy Orders. We do not each inherit the power of absolution, any more than we each inherit the Apostles' place. We receive Christ's forgiveness through the ministry he established for his people. That is the "gift for all, office for some" pattern again. (CCC 1087; 1461.)

READ Read Psalm 51:1-12.

SAY David after his sin. Read it slowly.

ASK 5. What does David ask God to do, and what does he never pretend? How does the psalm prepare a person to come to confession?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He asks for mercy, for washing and cleansing, for a clean heart and a right spirit. He never pretends the sin was small or that he can fix it himself. Forgiveness is asked for as God's act. That is the posture the sacrament asks of us: honesty about the sin, confidence in the mercy, and a request rather than an assumption.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection at full strength. Most of us have heard some version of it.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"John 20:23 does not describe a sacrament. It describes the Apostles announcing forgiveness to those who accept the Gospel and warning those who reject it. Nothing in the verse mentions a private confession to a priest, and the New Testament never shows anyone making one."

"And even if there were such a power, why would I need it? The Bible says there is one mediator between God and men. I can confess directly to God and be forgiven. Putting a priest in between adds a middleman Christ never asked for. Private confession as you practice it did not even exist until centuries later."

ASK How should the two-sided language of forgiving and retaining be read alongside the gift of the Spirit? Does confessing directly to God compete with the sacrament? And what about the history?

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

Announcing forgiveness is part of the Church's mission, and the objection is right about that. But John 20 gives a two-sided authority, to forgive and to retain, and the disciples receive the Holy Spirit precisely for it. Announcing good news to everyone does not require a power to withhold from anyone. The Church has always read this as a real ministry concerning real sins, long before the private form spread.

Direct prayer to God and sacramental confession are not rivals. The Church asks you to confess to God every night. The sacrament is a way Christ chose to let a sinner hear forgiveness spoken to him by someone Christ sent, as he chose to heal through hands and teach through voices. Christ remains the one mediator; the priest is his ambassador, not a second mediator. On history, the form changed and the Catechism says so (CCC 1447). What was invented later was a way of celebrating a gift the Church had claimed from the start. (CCC 1441-1448; 1461.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. What would help you approach God's mercy with more honesty and more confidence? You do not need to mention any sin.

ASK 2. How would you explain confession to someone who thinks the priest is standing in God's place?

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray Psalm 51:1-12 slowly on three days, asking for both mercy and a new heart.

Prepare. Make a private examination of conscience. If you can receive the sacrament, make a concrete plan and a time. If you are exploring the faith, ask a priest for a conversation.

Repair. Take one appropriate step toward repairing a harm you caused. Get advice first if contact would be unwise or unsafe.

Scripture Memory

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, you know our sins and still call us home. Give us true repentance and trust in your mercy. Help us receive forgiveness and become quicker to forgive. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in the order it appears. Materials: RSV2CE Bibles for everyone, this guide, the Take-Home sheets, and if possible a printed copy of CCC 1461 for Question 4.

When	Passage	Purpose
1	Mark 2:1-12	Only God forgives; Jesus proves his authority
2	John 20:19-23	Sending, Spirit, then sins
3	2 Corinthians 5:18-20	Live discovery: ambassadors for Christ
4	John 20:19-23 with CCC 1461	From the locked room to the parish
5	Psalm 51:1-12	The posture of repentance
Memory	2 Corinthians 5:20	Ambassadors for Christ

Dig Deeper | James 5:14-16

The sick person calls the elders, who pray and anoint. Then, "confess your sins to one another." The Church reads this passage first of all about the Anointing of the Sick (CCC 1510), and verse 16 about mutual confession and prayer. Do not present it as the proof text for the sacrament of Penance. Do notice that the elders of the church, not just any believer, are the ones sent for.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 5. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 6 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Do This Until He Comes

The Eucharist and Christ's one sacrifice

Was the Eucharist a meal for one night in an upper room, or a gift entrusted to the Church until Christ returns?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Paul hands the Eucharist on to a church that was not at the Last Supper, that he ties it to Christ's return, that he treats it as a real participation in Christ's Body and Blood, and that the Mass makes present one sacrifice without repeating it.

Catholic Touchstone. Christ's command "Do this" is addressed to the Apostles and their successors. In the Mass the one sacrifice of the cross is made present, not repeated. Christ is truly, really, and substantially present, and the ministerial priesthood serves his one priesthood. (CCC 1341; 1366-1367; 1374-1376; 1544-1547.)

What You Need to Know

This session has the most direct evidence in the whole study. Paul writes to Corinthians who were not in the upper room. He tells them, "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you," and then gives them the institution narrative. Something is being received and handed on, in the same vocabulary we met in 2 Timothy 2:2 and will meet again in Session 7. And Paul ties the celebration to the future: "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." A gift meant for the first recipients only does not get an "until."

Paul does not treat the meal as ordinary. In 1 Corinthians 10 the cup and the bread are a "participation" in the Blood and Body of Christ. In chapter 11 eating and drinking unworthily makes a person "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." The Church teaches that the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially present, and that by consecration the whole substance of bread and wine becomes his Body and Blood while their appearances remain. The Church calls that change transubstantiation. It is not produced by the assembly's faith or feelings. (CCC 1374-1376.)

Hebrews is not the enemy of the Mass, and the group should hear that from you before anyone else says it. Hebrews teaches that Christ offered himself "once for all" and that his priesthood "continues for ever." The Catholic teaching is built on both truths. The Mass does not add a second sacrifice beside Calvary and does not crucify Christ again. It makes the one sacrifice present, with the same Victim and the same Priest, offered now in an unbloody, sacramental manner. Ordained priests do not replace a priest who has stopped acting. They serve Christ's one, permanent priesthood. (CCC 1367; 1544-1545.)

The Passover is the frame. God commanded Israel to keep the night of deliverance as "a memorial day" forever. In the Bible a memorial is not a mental exercise. It is a rite by which a saving event is made present to a later generation. Luke places the Last Supper inside that Passover setting. Read Exodus 12 with the group so they hear "memorial" the way Jesus' disciples did. (CCC 1334; 1340; 1363.)

Terms, in plain words

- **Memorial (anamnesis):** in Scripture, a rite that makes a past saving act present to those who celebrate it, not merely a reminder of it.
- **Transubstantiation:** the Church's word for the change of the whole substance of bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, while the appearances remain (CCC 1376).
- **Real Presence:** Christ present in the Eucharist truly, really, and substantially, body, blood, soul, and divinity.
- **Unbloody:** the manner in which the one sacrifice is offered in the Mass, without a new death.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 12:1-14. The lamb, the blood, the meal eaten in haste, and the command: "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD... for ever." A commanded memorial, kept by generations who were not in Egypt, by which the deliverance becomes theirs. Luke explicitly sets the Last Supper in this Passover frame (Luke 22:15).

Keep this distinction | leader only

Never describe the Mass as a new crucifixion or an additional sacrifice alongside Calvary. Only a validly ordained bishop or priest consecrates the Eucharist (CCC 1411). The common priesthood of the baptized is real and does not confer that power (CCC 1547). Keep the one sacrifice, the one Priest, and the two distinct participations in his priesthood all in view.

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr

Summary: Justin, writing around 155, says Christians do not receive the Eucharist as common bread or common drink. They receive it as the flesh and blood of the Jesus who was made flesh, changed by the word of prayer that comes from him. He then describes the Sunday assembly: readings from the apostles and prophets, a homily, prayers, the bringing of bread and wine, thanksgiving, and communion, with deacons carrying it to the absent.

First Apology, 66-67

St. Ignatius of Antioch

Summary: Ignatius, around 107, says certain heretics abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that it is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins. He adds that the Eucharist is to be celebrated by the bishop or by one the bishop entrusts. Real Presence and ordered ministry appear together in his letter.

Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 7-8

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: The command of Jesus to repeat his actions and words "until he comes" asks more than remembering him. It is directed at the liturgical celebration, by the Apostles and their successors, of the memorial of Christ, of his life, death, resurrection, and intercession with the Father.

CCC 1341

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1334; 1340.** Passover background, and the Last Supper as the definitive Passover.
- **CCC 1341.** The command "Do this" addressed to the Apostles and their successors.
- **CCC 1363-1367.** Memorial in the biblical sense; the Mass and the cross are one single sacrifice.
- **CCC 1374-1376.** The Real Presence and transubstantiation.
- **CCC 1411.** Only validly ordained priests can consecrate.
- **CCC 1544-1547.** Christ's one priesthood and the two participations in it.

Session Goals

1. Follow the Eucharist from the upper room to Corinth to "until he comes."
2. Distinguish a biblical memorial from a mental reminder, and the Real Presence from a symbol in the mind.
3. Explain why the Mass does not repeat the crucifixion, using Hebrews rather than against it.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread B, "received and handed on," is the spine tonight. Paul uses the very words in 1 Corinthians 11:23. Thread A returns in the Leader Only box: the baptized share the offering; only the ordained consecrate. Do not open the guesses. Session 7 will turn the handed-on vocabulary into a session of its own.

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 Hebrews 10:10-14 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: *Hebrews 7:24 says Christ's priesthood is untransferable. So there can be no other priests.*

You can answer: Agreed, and Catholic teaching says the same: Christ's priesthood is unique and is not passed to anyone (CCC 1545). The ministerial priesthood is a participation in his priesthood, not a transfer of it. That is why a priest says "This is my body," not "This is Christ's body." Christ is the one speaking.

If someone says: *Jesus said "do this in remembrance of me." Remembrance means remember. It is a memorial, not a sacrifice.*

You can answer: Read Exodus 12 and ask what "memorial" meant to the men at that table. Israel did not "remember" the Passover by thinking about it. They kept a rite that made the deliverance theirs. The Church uses the word the way Scripture does (CCC 1363). And Paul says the cup is a participation in Christ's Blood, which is a strong word for a reminder.

If someone says: *Transubstantiation is a medieval word. Justin and Ignatius never heard of it.*

You can answer: True. The word was fixed in the thirteenth century to name what the Church had always confessed (CCC 1376). Ignatius in 107 says the Eucharist is the flesh of Christ that suffered for us, and Justin in 155 says it is not common bread. The word came later; the faith it names did not.

If someone says: *If the Mass is a sacrifice, then Christ is being killed over and over.*

You can answer: No. The Church rejects that as firmly as you do. Christ died once, and Hebrews is right. The Mass makes that one sacrifice present, with the same Victim and Priest, in an unbloody manner (CCC 1367). Nothing is repeated. Something is made present.

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. Luke 22: "This is my body... Do this." A gift given, then a command to keep doing it.
2. 1 Corinthians 11: received, delivered, proclaimed "until he comes." Handed on to people who were not there.
3. 1 Corinthians 10: cup and bread are a participation in Blood and Body. One bread, one body. Real presence, real communion.
4. Exodus 12: a memorial kept forever by people who were not in Egypt. Memorial means made present.
5. Hebrews 10: once for all. The Mass does not repeat; it makes present. Same Victim, same Priest, unbloody manner.

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, deepen our faith in the gift of your Body and Blood. Help us hear your word with reverence and come to your altar with gratitude, repentance, and love. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. How can a shared meal say more than "here is food"?

ASK 2. What helps you prepare for something sacred instead of going through it on autopilot?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Luke 22:14-20.

ASK 1. What does Jesus give the Apostles, and what does he tell them to do with it afterward? Where does Luke set the meal?

LEADER Verse 15 sets it at Passover. Verse 19 has the command.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Jesus gives his Body and his Blood, "the new covenant in my blood," inside a Passover meal he "earnestly desired" to eat with them. Then he commands: "Do this in remembrance of me." The gift comes from him before it becomes the Church's worship. Catholic teaching hears "remembrance" the way the men at that table would have heard it, as a Passover memorial: a rite that makes the saving act present, not a private recollection. (CCC 1340-1341; 1363.)

READ Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

ASK 2. What is Paul handing on, and to whom? How far into the future does he extend it? What does his warning tell us about what the meal is?

LEADER Have the group find the words "received" and "delivered" in verse 23 and "until he comes" in verse 26.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you." Paul hands the institution of the Eucharist to a church that was not in the upper room, in the vocabulary of tradition. And he extends it forward: "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." A gift for one night does not come with an "until."

His warning matters too. Eating and drinking unworthily makes a person "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." You cannot profane a symbol. Christ's gift was meant for the continuing Church, and Paul treats it as what Jesus said it was.

READ Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

ASK 3. What does Paul say we participate in? How does that participation connect to the Church's unity?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The cup is "a participation in the blood of Christ" and the bread "a participation in the body of Christ." Then: "we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The Church teaches that Christ is truly present, not present only as a symbol in our thoughts. Because the presence is real, communion with Christ in the Eucharist is inseparable from communion with his Body, the Church. (CCC 1374-1376; 1396.)

Live Discovery

SAY Find the institution of the Passover in Exodus. Look for the command that the day be kept as a memorial, and read the whole account around it.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply Exodus 12:1-14 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 4. What is Israel commanded to keep, for how long, and who keeps it? What does "memorial" mean here?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Israel is to keep the Passover "as a memorial day... throughout your generations... for ever." The people who keep it were not in Egypt, yet the deliverance becomes theirs through the rite. That is what a biblical memorial is: not a thought about the past but a celebration that makes God's saving act present to a new generation. Jesus gave his memorial inside this Passover. The Church has never reduced it to a reminder. (CCC 1363-1364.)

READ Read Hebrews 10:10-14.

SAY This is the passage most often quoted against the Mass. We read it because we agree with it.

ASK 5. What does Hebrews insist on? What does that forbid us from saying about the Mass, and what does the Church actually say?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Hebrews insists that Christ's offering was made "once for all" and that "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." That forbids any idea of a new sacrifice beside Calvary or a repeated death. The Church says exactly that: the Mass does not add another crucifixion. It makes the one sacrifice present, with the same Victim and the same Priest, offered now in an unbloody, sacramental manner. One sacrifice, made present, not repeated. (CCC 1366-1367.)

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection at full strength. It is made by serious Christians who love the Lord's Supper.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Paul clearly teaches a continuing memorial meal. Every Christian church has one. But a memorial is a remembrance, and 'do this in remembrance of me' means what it says. Nothing here requires transubstantiation, a word no one used for twelve hundred years."

"And the sacrifice language is worse. Hebrews could not be clearer: once for all, a single offering, perfected for all time. Any priest offering Christ on an altar, week after week, is saying the cross was not enough. Either the cross finished it or it did not."

ASK What can we establish from the command to continue and from Paul's own words? Does the Church's teaching set the Mass against Hebrews, or read it with Hebrews? And what did the first Christians think they were receiving?

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 command to continue is one piece of the evidence, not the whole doctrine, and the objection is right that "do this" alone does not prove transubstantiation. But Paul does not leave it alone. He calls the cup a participation in Christ's Blood and warns that unworthy reception profanes the Lord's Body. Those are not words for a symbol. Ignatius in 107 says the Eucharist is the flesh of Christ that suffered for us; Justin in 155 says it is not common bread. The word transubstantiation came in the thirteenth century to name what the Church had confessed since the first, and the Church says so (CCC 1376).

On Hebrews, the Church agrees with every word. Christ died once, and the cross finished it. The Mass is not a second sacrifice or a repeated death, and a priest who thought so would be wrong. The Mass makes the one, finished sacrifice present to us, with the same Victim and Priest, in an unbloody manner, so that its fruits reach us now. Hebrews itself says Christ's priesthood continues for ever and that he always lives to intercede. In the Eucharist, Christ exercises his one permanent priesthood sacramentally in the Church. Ordained priests serve his priesthood; they do not replace it. (CCC 1341; 1367; 1545.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. What would help you take part in Mass with more attention and more faith?

ASK 2. How would you explain the Eucharist to a friend without saying either "it is only a reminder" or "Christ is crucified again"?

Live It This Week

Prepare. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 before Mass this week and make a sincere examination of conscience.

Pray. Spend a few quiet minutes after Communion thanking Jesus for his self-gift. If you are unsure whether you can receive, ask a priest before Sunday.

Give. Choose one concrete act of self-giving service this week as a response to what Christ gives you.

Scripture Memory

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

1 Corinthians 11:26 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, you give yourself for the life of the world. Teach us to worship with reverence and to live with generous love. Draw your people into deeper communion with you. 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	Luke 22:14-20	Institution inside the Passover
2	1 Corinthians 11:23-29	Received, delivered, "until he comes"
3	1 Corinthians 10:16-17	Participation and unity
4	Exodus 12:1-14	Live discovery: a memorial kept forever
5	Hebrews 10:10-14	Once for all, made present not repeated
Memory	1 Corinthians 11:26	Until he comes

Dig Deeper | Hebrews 7:23-25

Christ "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever," and "always lives to make intercession." Read it with CCC 1544-1545. The ministerial priesthood is a participation in Christ's one permanent priesthood, never a replacement for it. If Christ's priesthood is permanent and active, ask where it acts. The Catholic answer includes the altar, where Christ exercises it sacramentally.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 6. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 7 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

Guard What Has Been Entrusted

Scripture, Tradition, and faithful development

How can the faith be handed on for two thousand years without turning into a different faith?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Jesus condemns one kind of tradition and Paul commands another, that the difference is the source and not the medium, and that growth in understanding is fidelity to the same gift rather than permission to contradict it.

Catholic Touchstone. Scripture and Tradition flow from the same source and together transmit the one apostolic deposit. The Magisterium serves that deposit and is not above it. Revelation is complete in Christ; the Church's understanding of it grows without any new public revelation. (CCC 80-86; 94; Dei Verbum, 4, 8, 10.)

What You Need to Know

Mark 7 and 2 Thessalonians 2 must be read together or the group will leave with half a Bible. In Mark 7 Jesus condemns "the tradition of men" that let a son declare his property Corban and so escape the duty to support his parents. The problem is not that the practice was old or unwritten. The problem is that it voided a command of God. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul commands the Church to "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Same word, opposite verdict. The difference is the source.

Sacred Tradition is not a name for every custom Catholics have inherited. The Catechism distinguishes the apostolic Tradition, which comes from the Apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus and the Spirit, from theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions that arose in local churches over time and can be kept, changed, or dropped under the Church's authority (CCC 83). If the group learns one paragraph number tonight, make it that one.

Development is the other half. The Church's understanding of what she received grows: through the contemplation and study of believers, through their experience of spiritual things, and through the preaching of those who hold the teaching office (Dei Verbum 8). A later word like "Trinity" or "transubstantiation" is not a new revelation. It is the same faith understood more precisely. And the word "development" never licenses contradiction. Vincent of Lerins put it in one line: progress, yes; alteration, no.

Finally, the teaching office is a servant. Dei Verbum 10 says the Magisterium "is not above the word of God, but serves it," teaching only what has been handed on. That is the safeguard against the fear behind tonight's objection. The Church cannot protect an innovation by calling it ancient, because the Church is bound to the deposit she did not write. Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium are so connected that none stands without the others.

Terms, in plain words

- **Tradition (capital T):** the apostolic Tradition: what the Apostles received from Christ and the Spirit and handed on to the whole Church, in word and in writing.
- **traditions (small t):** customs, disciplines, and devotions that grew up in the Church over time and can change (CCC 83).
- **Development of doctrine:** the Church's growth in understanding the one deposit, never a change in what was revealed.
- **Corban:** Hebrew for "an offering." In Mark 7 it names property declared as dedicated to God and so withheld from one's parents.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The Shema. Israel is to keep these words on the heart, teach them to the children, talk of them at home and on the road, and write them on the doorposts. Faithful transmission is not the storage of a document. The words are remembered, practiced, spoken, and taught inside ordinary life. That is what a living Tradition looks like from the inside.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not imply that the Apostles performed every later Catholic practice in its current form. They did not, and the Catechism does not say they did. Keep three things apart all night: the apostolic faith, changeable practices, and permissible theological opinions. (CCC 83; Dei Verbum, 8.)

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Summary: Against teachers who claimed a secret tradition handed to a few, Irenaeus argues that the Apostles held nothing back and hid no mysteries. If they had known secret things, they would have entrusted them above all to the men to whom they were entrusting the churches themselves. The apostolic teaching is public, and anyone can check it in the churches the Apostles founded.

Against Heresies, III.3.1

St. Vincent of Lerins

Summary: Writing in 434, Vincent asks whether there is progress in the Church of Christ and answers: certainly, and a great deal. But it must be real progress of the faith, not alteration of it. Understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow, in each person and in the whole Church, as a body grows from infancy to age while remaining the same body.

Commonitorium, 23

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The Tradition that comes from the Apostles makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. Understanding of what has been handed down grows in three ways. It grows through the contemplation and study of believers who treasure these things in their hearts, and through their experience of spiritual realities. It grows too through the preaching of those who received the sure charism of truth with episcopal succession.

Dei Verbum, 8

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 80-82.** Scripture and Tradition flow from one source and together form one deposit.
- **CCC 83.** Apostolic Tradition distinguished from changeable traditions.
- **CCC 85-86.** The Magisterium is the servant of the word of God.
- **CCC 94.** Growth in understanding of the faith.
- **CCC 66-67.** No new public revelation; private revelations cannot correct or complete it.

Session Goals

1. Distinguish the tradition Jesus condemns in Mark 7 from the Tradition Paul commands in 2 Thessalonians 2.
2. Explain the roles of Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium and why none stands alone.
3. Distinguish growth in understanding from contradiction, and say what "development" does not permit.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread B, "received and handed on," resolves tonight. Point back to 2 Timothy 2:2 (Session 2) and 1 Corinthians 11:23 (Session 6) when Paul uses the same words in 1 Corinthians 11:2. The Church hands on neither bare information nor an open license to innovate. Keep the guesses closed until Session 8.

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 2 Timothy 3:14-17 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: *2 Thessalonians 2:15 is about what Paul had already taught them. It is not a license for whatever the Church says later.*

You can answer: Correct, and the Church agrees. Tradition is what the Apostles handed on, not whatever comes later. The Magisterium is bound to that deposit (Dei Verbum 10). The verse does establish that apostolic teaching came by mouth as well as by letter and that both bind.

If someone says: *Everything the Apostles taught orally ended up in the New Testament, so Scripture is enough.*

You can answer: Where does Scripture say that? It is a claim about Scripture that is not in Scripture. What Scripture does say is to hold the traditions given by word or by letter, and that the Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church also had to decide which books were Scripture, which took a living Tradition to do.

If someone says: *Jesus condemned tradition. Catholics are the Pharisees.*

You can answer: Jesus condemned a tradition that voided a command of God, and he said so (Mark 7:13). Paul, in the same Bible, praised the Corinthians for keeping the traditions he delivered (1 Corinthians 11:2). The word is the same. The source is the test. Any Catholic custom that voided God's command would fall under Mark 7, and the Church says so.

If someone says: *Development of doctrine is just a way to say the Church changed its mind and kept the old name.*

You can answer: It would be, if development meant contradiction. It does not. Vincent's test is that the faith grows the way a body grows, the same body at every age. The Church can say more precisely what she always believed. She cannot say the opposite. If someone can show a real contradiction, that is a serious objection; a change in vocabulary is not one.

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. Mark 7: the Corban rule voided God's command. Condemned for its source, not for being oral.
2. 2 Thessalonians 2 and 2 Timothy 1: hold the traditions taught by mouth or letter; guard the deposit. Received, not invented.
3. 1 Corinthians 11:2: Paul praises them for keeping the traditions he delivered. Same word as Mark 7, opposite verdict.
4. CCC 83 and 86: Tradition versus traditions; the Magisterium under the word, not over it.
5. 2 Timothy 3: from whom you learned it, and the Scriptures. Teachers and text together, not against each other.

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 God of truth, teach us to love what you have revealed. Protect us from confusing our preferences with your word. Give us a faithful mind, a humble heart, and a willingness to learn. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. When have you understood something more deeply without discovering that what you first believed was false?

ASK 2. How do you tell a meaningful inheritance from a habit that just needs to change?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Mark 7:6-13.

ASK 1. What exactly is wrong with the practice Jesus condemns? Does he object because it is old, because it is unwritten, or for some other reason?

LEADER Push past "tradition is bad." Verse 13 gives the reason.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The Corban rule let a man declare his property dedicated to God and so refuse to support his parents. Jesus says this makes "void the word of God through your tradition." The problem is not that the practice was inherited or oral. The problem is that it canceled a command of God. So the test of any tradition is not its age or its popularity but whether it is faithful to God's word.

READ Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

ASK 2. How did these churches receive apostolic teaching? What attitude is Timothy told to take toward what he was given?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Paul tells the Thessalonians to "hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Timothy is to "follow the pattern of the sound words" he heard and "guard the truth that has been entrusted." Apostolic teaching came both by speech and by writing, and both bind. The inheritance is received and guarded, not constructed. And this keeps us from treating all unwritten teaching as the kind Jesus condemned. Paul commands it.

Live Discovery

SAY Go back to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Find the place where he praises them for holding to the traditions he delivered to them.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply 1 Corinthians 11:2 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 3. What does Paul call what he handed on, and how does he feel about their keeping it? What is the contrast with Mark 7?

LEADER Have someone reread 1 Corinthians 11:23 aloud right after. Same verbs, three weeks ago.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you." The very word Jesus used in condemnation, Paul uses in praise. Mark 7 is about a custom that undermined God's command. Paul is about apostolic teaching the Church must keep. The word "tradition" does not tell you by itself whether something is faithful. You have to ask what is being handed on and where it came from. Notice the verbs: this is the same "delivered" of 1 Corinthians 11:23 and the same chain as 2 Timothy 2:2.

READ Read CCC 83 and CCC 86.

SAY Two short Catechism paragraphs. Read them aloud in full.

ASK 4. What distinction does the Catechism make between kinds of tradition? What limit does it put on the Church's teaching office?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

CCC 83 separates the apostolic Tradition, which comes from the Apostles, from theological, disciplinary, liturgical, and devotional traditions that grew up later and can be kept, changed, or dropped. CCC 86 says the Magisterium "is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant," teaching only what has been handed on. So the Church can explain the faith more precisely and regulate her own life. She cannot replace Christ's revelation with something else. Growth is fidelity to the same gift.

READ Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

SAY This is the passage most often quoted to prove Scripture alone. Read all four verses.

ASK 5. What two things is Timothy told to continue in? What is Scripture said to be good for, and does the passage set it against his teachers?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Timothy is to continue in what he learned, "knowing from whom you learned it," and in "the sacred writings" he has known from childhood. Scripture is inspired and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training, so that the man of God may be "complete, equipped for every good work." Catholics affirm every word. The passage never says Scripture is the only authority; it names Timothy's teachers in the same sentence. Text and teachers together, which is what the Church has always said.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY Now the objection, at full strength. It is the one that makes Catholics nervous, and it should not.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Apostolic oral teaching was binding while the Apostles were alive and could be checked. That proves nothing about claims made centuries later. Once the Apostles were dead, anything could be called 'apostolic tradition,' and no one could check it. A church that appeals to unwritten tradition has given itself a blank check. It can protect any innovation just by calling it ancient."

"Scripture is different. It is written down, it is inspired, and 2 Timothy 3 says it makes the man of God complete and equipped for every good work. Complete. Why would you need anything else?"

ASK Does Catholic teaching treat every inherited practice as Sacred Tradition? What safeguards have we already met in this study? And does 2 Timothy 3 say what the objection needs it to say?

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 warning is right, and the Church agrees with it. Not every custom is apostolic, and calling something ancient proves nothing. That is why the Catechism draws the line in CCC 83 between the apostolic Tradition and traditions that can change. It is why Dei Verbum puts the Magisterium under the word of God, not over it. The check the objection wants does exist. Irenaeus named it in 180: the apostolic teaching is public, in the churches the Apostles founded, with the bishops they appointed. Scripture, the Church's received faith, apostolic succession, and the teaching office hold each other accountable. None is a blank check because none stands alone.

On 2 Timothy 3, Catholics affirm every word: inspired, profitable, equipping for every good work. What the verse does not say is "only." Paul names Timothy's teachers in the same breath as the sacred writings, and two verses earlier he tells him to hold what he learned "from whom you learned it." Scripture equipped Timothy inside a living community that handed it to him. That is the Catholic claim in one verse. And the Bible itself never lists its own contents. The canon was received and discerned within the apostolic Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 83-86; 120; Dei Verbum, 8, 10.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. Which Catholic practice or teaching do you need to understand more accurately before you try to explain it to someone?

ASK 2. How can you stay open to learning without treating the faith as something you get to redesign?

Live It This Week

Read. Read CCC 80-86 in one sitting. Write the difference between Tradition and traditions in your own words.

Sort. Pick one thing you do as a Catholic and decide whether it is apostolic Tradition, a changeable practice, or a devotion.

Explain. Explain the Mark 7 and 1 Corinthians 11:2 contrast to someone this week, in plain words, and admit what you still need to look up.

Scripture Memory

“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.”

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus, make us faithful to the Gospel we received. Give us humility to correct our mistakes and courage to hold fast to your truth. Let our words and our lives lead others toward you. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in the order it appears. Materials: RSV2CE Bibles for everyone, this guide, the Take-Home sheets, and a printed copy of CCC 83 and 86 for Question 4.

When	Passage	Purpose
1	Mark 7:6-13	A tradition that voids God's command
2	2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14	Hold the traditions; guard the deposit
3	1 Corinthians 11:2	Live discovery: traditions praised
4	CCC 83; 86	Tradition versus traditions; the servant Magisterium
5	2 Timothy 3:14-17	Scripture and teachers together
Memory	2 Thessalonians 2:15	Holding fast

Dig Deeper | 1 Timothy 3:15

Paul calls "the church of the living God" the "pillar and bulwark of the truth." Read it beside 2 Timothy 3:16. In the same letters, Scripture is inspired and the Church is the pillar of truth. Ask the group why Paul never seems to feel a tension between those two sentences.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 7. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook.

Session 8 of 8 | Until the End of the Age

What We Receive, We Hand On

The mission entrusted to the whole Church

After seven weeks on bishops, keys, and altars, what belongs to you?

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the first community handed on a life and not only information, that Timothy received the faith from his grandmother before he received it from Paul, and that every baptized person shares Christ's mission without every person holding the same office. Then each person makes one concrete commitment.

Catholic Touchstone. The whole Church is apostolic. All the baptized share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission. The common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood differ in essence, not only in degree, and are ordered to one another. (CCC 863-864; 1546-1547; Lumen Gentium, 10.)

What You Need to Know

Acts 2 shows what was actually handed on. The first believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Teaching, communion, Eucharist, prayer, and material care for one another, in one community. A faith passed on only as information would be too small to describe this. So would religious activity cut loose from the Apostles' teaching. The study has spent seven weeks on the structure. Tonight is about the life the structure carries.

Timothy is the study's best case for the whole Church. Paul appointed him and laid hands on him. But Paul is careful to say where Timothy's faith came from first: "a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice," and "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings." Two women and a household delivered the faith to the boy before the Apostle ordained the man. Recognizing the ministry of bishops and priests does not make parents, sponsors, friends, or catechists passive. Their mission is real. It is not the same office.

Say the distinction one last time, and say it warmly. All the baptized share in Christ's priesthood by faith, worship, witness, and charity. The ministerial priesthood exists to serve that baptismal life and differs from it in essence, not only in degree (CCC 1547). Baptism gives a true share in Christ's mission. It does not give the power to consecrate the Eucharist or to absolve sins (CCC 1411; 1461). Neither side of that sentence should be dropped, and neither side should be said with a sneer.

The last session must not end as a successful argument. Vine and branches sets the tone: fruit comes from remaining in Christ, and the Catechism applies exactly that to the apostolate (CCC 864). Give the sealed guesses one final revision, then ask each person for one specific, realistic commitment to accompany another person. Faithful accompaniment normally takes patience, not one perfect explanation.

Terms, in plain words

- **Apostolate:** the mission of the whole Church to spread Christ's kingdom, in which every member has a part (CCC 863).
- **Common priesthood:** the share in Christ's priesthood that all the baptized have, exercised by faith, worship, and a holy life.
- **Ministerial priesthood:** the priesthood of bishops and priests, conferred by Holy Orders, which serves the common priesthood and differs from it in essence.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 78:1-7. What "our fathers have told us" we will not hide from the children, but tell to the coming generation, so that they should "set their hope in God." The purpose is not nostalgia. It is a living faith reaching people not yet born. Read it as a description of what the group is now responsible for.

Keep this distinction | leader only

Do not describe every Catholic as an apostolic successor in the episcopal sense. Baptism gives a real share in Christ's mission, not the power to consecrate or to absolve (CCC 1411; 1461; 1546-1547). And do not let the distinction sound like a demotion. The whole study has been about gifts reaching people; tonight they reach the group.

Voices of the Church

St. John Paul II

Summary: The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. They exercise the priestly office by uniting their daily lives to the Eucharist. They exercise the prophetic office by witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed, and the kingly office by ordering the affairs of the world according to God. This is not a lesser Christianity; it is the Christian life of the baptized in the world.

Christifideles Laici, 14

Second Vatican Council

Summary: The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the Head. Incorporated into his Body by Baptism and strengthened by the Spirit in Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself. The apostolate is exercised in faith, hope, and charity, which the Spirit pours into all the members of the Church.

Apostolicam Actuositatem, 3

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: Christ is the source of the Church's whole apostolate, and its fruitfulness depends on the members' living union with him. Charity, drawn above all from the Eucharist, is the soul of the whole apostolate.

CCC 864

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 863-864.** The whole Church is apostolic; fruitfulness depends on union with Christ.
- **CCC 1546-1547.** The common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, differing in essence and ordered to one another.
- **CCC 1411; 1461.** Consecration and absolution belong to the ordained ministry.
- **CCC 897-900.** The vocation and apostolate of the laity.

Session Goals

1. Describe the shared life of the community in Acts 2 and what would be missing if the faith were only information.
2. Distinguish lay discipleship from ordained ministry without devaluing either, using Timothy's grandmother and Timothy's ordination.
3. Revise the sealed guess a final time, and make one specific, realistic commitment to accompany another person.

Thread Watch | leader only

Thread A resolves: Christ's teaching, pastoral ministry, and sacramental gifts belong together, and all the baptized share the mission they serve. After Question 5, invite each person to rewrite their sealed guess in one sentence. Do not grade it. Then move straight to Send and hold the group to one concrete commitment each.

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 26	Build, Questions 1 and 2	Keep
26 to 44	Build, Questions 3 to 5, with the live discovery	Drop Question 5. Assign Psalm 78:1-7 for home
44 to 50	Final revision of the sealed guess	Keep, three minutes
50 to 60	The objection, built then pressed	Keep
60 to 70	Send: one commitment each	Keep
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: *This whole study made lay people sound like spectators.*

You can answer: Then tonight is the correction, and it is in the text. Timothy's faith came from Lois and Eunice before Paul ever laid hands on him. The first community in Acts 2 was not clergy. Every baptized person shares Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission (CCC 897-900). What not everyone holds is a particular office within it.

If someone says: *Peter says we are all a royal priesthood. So there is no special priesthood.*

You can answer: The Church says the same thing Peter does: the baptized are a royal priesthood (CCC 1546). The same Bible also shows Paul laying hands on Timothy and telling Titus to appoint elders. Two participations in one priesthood, ordered to each other. Neither cancels the other.

If someone says: *I am not qualified to hand on the faith. I barely understand it.*

You can answer: Lois and Eunice were not theologians. Psalm 78 asks parents to tell the next generation what they were told. You hand on what you received, admit what you do not know, and bring people to those who know more. That is not a lesser form of the mission. It is most of the mission.

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. Acts 2: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, sharing. A life, not a file.
2. 2 Timothy 1 and 3: Lois, Eunice, the sacred writings from childhood. Faith reached Timothy through a household first.
3. John 15: fruit comes from remaining in the vine. Our effort cannot replace union with Christ. CCC 864 says the same of the apostolate.
4. Matthew 28 with CCC 1546-1547: all the baptized share the mission; the ordained hold a distinct sacramental ministry within it.
5. Psalm 78: tell the coming generation, so they set their hope in God. The commission, in a family.

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, thank you for the faith we have received. Join our learning to love and our prayer to action. Show each of us how to serve the people you have already placed in our lives. Amen.

Win | Begin with experience

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

ASK 1. Who has helped you grow in faith by staying beside you over time, patiently?

ASK 2. What one part of this study has changed how you see your own place in the Church?

Build | Let the text lead

READ Read Acts 2:42-47.

ASK 1. What practices mark the community's life? Which of them is teaching, and which is something more? What would be missing if the faith were reduced to information?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

They devoted themselves to "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." They shared possessions with those in need, attended the temple together, and broke bread in homes with glad hearts. Teaching is there, first. But so are communion, Eucharist, prayer, and charity. A Church that hands on the faith must teach the truth, worship, and care for people as one life, not three programs.

READ Read 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15.

ASK 2. Who gave Timothy the faith, and in what order? What does that do to a picture in which only ordained ministers hand the faith on?

LEADER Two women are named. Make sure the group says their names.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Paul remembers a sincere faith "that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice," and reminds Timothy that "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings." Timothy received the faith from a household before he received a ministry from an Apostle. Both happened. The continuing mission is not carried only by the ordained. Families and ordinary believers have a real part in bringing people into the life of faith, and Paul honors it by name.

Live Discovery

SAY Look in John's account of Jesus' last teaching before his Passion for the image of a vine and branches. Find what he says is necessary for bearing fruit.

LEADER Allow a short search. Supply John 15:1-8 only if the group is stuck. Then have someone read the passage the group found.

ASK 3. What does Jesus say produces fruit? What must stay central for anyone trying to help another person receive the faith?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

"He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Fruit comes from remaining in the vine. Effort, technique, and good arguments cannot replace union with Christ. Prayer, obedience, and dependence on grace are not extras added to an evangelization plan; they are the plan. The Catechism says the same of the whole apostolate: its fruitfulness depends on living union with Christ. (CCC 864.)

READ Return to Matthew 28:18-20 and read CCC 1546-1547.

SAY We end where we began. Listen for what belongs to everyone and what belongs to some.

ASK 4. How do all the baptized take part in this mission without everyone holding the same office? Give an example of each.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

All the baptized are called to worship God, bear witness to Christ, and serve in love; that is the common priesthood, exercised by every Christian life. Bishops and priests hold a distinct sacramental ministry within the same Church; that is the ministerial priesthood, which serves the common one and differs from it in essence. A parent teaching a child, a friend walking with a seeker, and a priest absolving or consecrating are not interchangeable. They are one mission, centered on Christ, with gifts for all and offices for some. That is the sentence this study has been building since Session 1. (CCC 1546-1547.)

READ Read Psalm 78:1-7.

SAY The psalm describes handing on the faith inside a family.

ASK 5. What is one generation told to do for the next, and why? Who in your life is "the coming generation" for you?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

The psalm tells the coming generation "the glorious deeds of the LORD," so that they "should set their hope in God" and not forget his works. The purpose is a living faith in people not yet born. The commission in Matthew 28, at the scale of a household. The last question is not rhetorical. Let people answer it.

Final revision of the sealed guess | leader only

Ask each person to rewrite their Session 1 guess in one sentence, now, on the back of Take-Home 7 or any paper. Invite two or three to read the before and after. Hold it to three minutes and do not grade anything.

A Serious Objection | build it, then press it

SAY The last objection is different. It comes from inside the Church, from people who sat through a study like this and felt smaller at the end of it.

THE OBJECTION | read aloud

"Seven weeks of bishops, keys, absolution, and consecration. Every real thing in this study is done by a man in a collar. If the mission is theirs, what is left for the rest of us except to show up and receive? A simpler Christianity, without all these offices, would give ordinary believers a real job instead of a seat."

ASK Does Catholic teaching make ordained ministry a substitute for the baptized, or a service to them? Use Timothy's grandmother and Acts 2 in your answer.

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

Catholic teaching rejects a passive picture of the baptized, and the New Testament will not allow one. The first community in Acts 2 was not a clergy meeting. Timothy's faith came from Lois and Eunice before it came from Paul. The common priesthood is exercised in faith, worship, witness, and charity, by every Christian, every day, in places no priest will ever go. That is not a seat. That is most of the mission.

The ministerial priesthood exists to serve that baptismal life, and it differs from it in essence rather than in rank. A priest consecrates so that you can be fed; he absolves so that you can be sent. Erasing ordained ministry would not give the laity a bigger job. It would take away the sacraments the job runs on. The right response is neither to remove the offices nor to excuse lay inactivity. It is for each person to receive what Christ gives and to carry it to someone else. (CCC 863-864; 1547; Apostolicam Actuositatem, 3.)

Send | Respond personally

ASK 1. Who is one person you could accompany more intentionally in the faith, without pressure or manipulation?

ASK 2. What specific step will you take with that person, and when? Say it out loud.

Live It This Week

Receive. Choose one sustainable practice of prayer, learning, or sacramental preparation that this study showed you need. Start it this week.

Accompany. Invite one person into a next step: a conversation, a Mass, a prayer, or another study. Then listen more than you talk.

Continue. Set the next conversation or meeting before you leave tonight. Faithful accompaniment needs patience, not one perfect explanation.

Scripture Memory

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2:42 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

SAY Lord Jesus Christ, you called the Apostles and entrusted them with your mission. Give us grateful hearts for the faith we have received. Help us receive your mercy, worship you faithfully, stay united to your Church, and lead others to you. Make our lives a faithful witness to the Gospel we hand on. Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in the order it appears. Materials: RSV2CE Bibles for everyone, this guide, the Take-Home sheets, paper for the final revision of the guesses, and if possible a printed copy of CCC 1546-1547.

When	Passage	Purpose
1	Acts 2:42-47	A life handed on, not only information
2	2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15	Lois, Eunice, and the sacred writings
3	John 15:1-8	Live discovery: remaining in the vine
4	Matthew 28:18-20 with CCC 1546-1547	Gifts for all, offices for some
5	Psalms 78:1-7	Telling the coming generation
Memory	Acts 2:42	The Church's shared life

Dig Deeper | 1 Peter 2:4-10

"A royal priesthood, a holy nation." Read it with CCC 1546. This is the common priesthood of all the baptized, stated by the first pope. Then reread 2 Timothy 1:6. The same New Testament that calls every believer a priest also shows an Apostle conferring a gift by the laying on of hands. The Church holds both without embarrassment.

After the meeting

Hand out Take-Home 8. Do not distribute this answer-bearing leader guide as a participant workbook. This is the last session. Consider ending with a shared meal, and give each person the study's "What Now" suggestions from the front matter.

Back matter

Sources and Further Reading

Exact works and sections used in this edition

Every Voice of the Church in this study is a labeled summary with its locus printed. Catechism paragraphs are cited by number and can be read at vatican.va. Council documents are cited by paragraph. Patristic works are cited by book, chapter, and section in the standard numbering used by New Advent (newadvent.org/fathers).

The Church's teaching

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 66-67; 75-95; 120; 552-553; 857-865; 880-892; 897-900; 1084-1090; 1333-1344; 1356-1381; 1396; 1411; 1440-1467; 1495; 1510; 1539-1571.
- Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* 10, 18-22, 25: the two priesthoods, apostolic succession, Peter's office, collegiality, and the conditions of infallible teaching.
- Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 4, 8, 10: revelation complete in Christ, growth in understanding, the Magisterium as servant of the word.
- Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2-3: one mission, diverse ministry, the laity's right and duty to the apostolate.
- Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5: priests as ministers of the sacraments, including Penance.
- Pope St. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 14: the lay faithful's share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission.
- Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience of 7 June 2006, on Peter the Rock.

Church witnesses

- St. Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians* 42 and 44 (c. 96).
- St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 7-8 (c. 107).
- St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 66-67 (c. 155).
- St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* III.3.1-3 (c. 180). Sessions 2 and 7 both draw on III.3.1, for its succession argument and for its refusal of secret tradition respectively.
- St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood* III.5 (c. 390). Section numbering follows the NPNF edition.
- St. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* 23 (434). Section 54 in editions that number sections.

Reading the sources responsibly

Scripture and Tradition transmit the apostolic faith; the Magisterium serves and authentically interprets it. The study distinguishes the deposit of faith from disciplinary and devotional traditions that can change, and it does not treat every custom, private interpretation, or individual minister's statement as infallible teaching. Where a passage establishes less than the full Catholic conclusion, the study says so and names where the rest comes from. (CCC 80-86; *Lumen Gentium*, 25.)

This is a Catholic Armory formation resource. It is not an official publication of the Holy See, and no imprimatur, nihil obstat, or other ecclesiastical approval is claimed.

Further reading

- *Unless Someone Guides Me: Scripture, Tradition, and the Authority of the Church* (Catholic Armory). The companion study on authority.
- *Abide: The Eucharist, Grace, and Staying in Christ* (Catholic Armory). The companion study on the sacraments.
- *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 3, read in full. It is shorter than people expect and clearer than they fear.