



Faith Formation Session on Community: LEADER'S GUIDE

3 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!

Faith formation leaders should review all materials and select the material most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.

Introduction:

Though we live in an individualistic society, as Catholics, we appreciate our communal faith. "Community," "communal," "family," "familial," and "unity" were used to describe our faith. As Catholics, faith is more than Jesus and me—it is Jesus and we! Our community consists of those who are baptized into the body of Christ, who reach out in love to everyone. As Catholics, we gather around the altar, around the family dinner table, and in service around the community meal. We know we're in this together!

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.

Guide us to a deeper conversion.

Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty and truth of our Catholic faith.

Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.

May your church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.

Be with us now as we explore community.

Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture (Two Choices):

Acts 2:42-47

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to the breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

OR

John 13:34,35

A reading from the Gospel according to John:

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Song:

How Beautiful is the Body of Christ:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVzc4RGHtfM>

Section I: The Monastic Life as Community

Video # 1: Communal Life at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey

http://www.mississippiabbey.org/Community_Life

Video # 2: Witness of Communal Life at New Melleray Abbey

<http://youtu.be/vAB3WxcRex8>

Christian community is rooted in the Sacrament of Baptism and formed in the Eucharist. Community, created through communion, referred to the shared life of the early church, as noted in the Acts of the Apostles. We are community because God is community—three persons in one God. The Trinity, a community of loving relationship, extends that relationship to us. The church, the body of Christ, is God's gift to us as our way to live and thrive in true Christian community. It was this shared communal life in the early church that caused others to remark, "See how they love one another!"

At 3:15 a.m., bells ring calling members of the monastery together to begin the day with lauds, the ancient morning prayer of the church. Again at 6:30 a.m., 7:30 a.m. Mass, 9:15 a.m., 11:15 a.m., etc. "Vigils, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline are the seven 'hours' of the liturgy of the hours or opus Dei (work of God) as St. Benedict called it in his Rule." Seven times throughout the day the monks cease communal work to gather in prayer to intercede for the church and all of humanity. Throughout the day, the members of the monastery serve others by offering hospitality, leading prayer and listening to hungry hearts. While set apart, monastic communities exist for the sake of the whole church.

Within that larger community, the monastic life also serves as a model for shared life. The tradition of monasticism goes back to the early church, starting with the desert fathers and mothers of Egypt in the third century. By the sixth century, St. Benedict guided monasticism through his spiritual and administrative instructions in *The Rule of Saint Benedict*. The value of community, according to Benedict, is to "become who we are by our relationships with others."

Father Jonah testified that he joined the monastery to pursue the "one thing." The New Melleray website states: "A monastery is a place of charity where we learn to love God with our whole heart, our whole mind, and our whole soul." The Benedictine community is formed through mutual love and support, prayer, work, simplicity, hospitality, seeking the common good and honoring the weakest among them—all seeking the one thing, God. "The spirit of St. Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto of the [Benedictine Confederation](#): *pax* ('peace') and the traditional *ora et labora* ('pray and work')."

While monasticism seems idyllic, as in any community there are conflicts. As Pope Francis remarked when speaking to religious leaders in November of 2013, "A life without conflicts is not life." He commented that to sustain community we must go "beyond conflict." "Although conflicts are necessary if the community is living sincere and honest relationships, they must be faced 'head on' and 'should not be ignored.'" He encouraged everyone to overcome conflict through tenderness. "We have to recapture that tenderness, including maternal tenderness. Think of the tenderness that Saint Francis lived, for example." He also spoke of "Eucharistic tenderness" and the need to "caress conflicts."

"We hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome," wrote St. Benedict. "As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love."

We are blessed to have two monasteries in the Archdiocese of Dubuque: Our Lady of the Mississippi for consecrated women: www.mississippiabbey.org and New Melleray Abbey for consecrated men: www.newmelleray.org. Take time to make a visit, join in communal prayer, buy a casket and or some caramels, or call to schedule a retreat at either monastery. Both monasteries are of the Order of the Strict Observance. They describe this as “a Roman Catholic contemplative religious order, consisting of monasteries of monks and monasteries of nuns. We are part of the larger Cistercian family, which traces its origin to 1098. As Cistercians we follow the Rule of St Benedict, and so are part of the Benedictine family as well. Our lives are dedicated to seeking union with God, through Jesus Christ, in a community of sisters or brothers.”

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. How practical is the form of community as outlined in the Acts of the Apostles?
- b. What aspects of monastic life model community for each of us?
- c. Are you able to strike a proper balance between prayer and work? Why? Why not?
- d. How does community help each of us to seek the “one thing”?
- e. How does your community of faith go beyond conflicts?

Section II: The Family as Community

Video #3: The Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/pUVRtGe3Xz0>

The Christian family may be considered the most profound faith community because of the deep intimacy possible between a husband and wife, parent and child, brothers and sisters. At 3:15 a.m. the mother rises to the cry of her infant. In the silent darkness, she soothes her baby and prays on behalf of her family and the entire world. At 6:30 a.m., the family rises and at 7:30 a.m. they are nourished with breakfast and prayer. Throughout the day, members serve by playing with a toddler, listening to a hurting teen, helping a co-worker or caring for an elderly parent. Later, the family once again gathers at the dinner table to share their day and to be strengthened in love for the next. Bedtime prayer and blessings at 8:00 p.m. conclude the day. This is the Liturgy of the Hours lived out family style!

According to the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: “The family is the domestic church” (Lumen Gentium, #11). “Family, become what you are!” exhorts John Paul II in the document, *Familiaris Consortio*. Become an “intimate community of life and love!” Become the place where God’s grace is present through continual acts of love, forgiveness, healing, and peace. Become the place where children learn they were created by God—for God. Become the place where members choose simplicity over consumerism, community over individualism, service over entertainment, collaboration over competition, sacrifice over selfishness, and mercy over judgment. Become the place where others remark: “See how they love one another!”

At first glance, the Christian family as the domestic church appears not much different from the average family. Yet gradually others notice purposefulness in daily life—a mission. As one mother witnessed: “Our motivations are very different from the world; we’re raising our children to be followers of Christ!” Another mother says when weighing a decision she ponders, “Will this help them get to heaven? “Does this lead to the one thing?” The goal—the purpose and the intentions—of the Christian home is often vastly different from other families in our culture. When invited in, many will observe rituals and images that lift hearts to the Lord and a love that leads to fruitfulness

Henri Nouwen would characterize the healthy, holy family community as exemplifying “fruitfulness.” He compares

successfulness (a secular ambition) vs. fruitfulness: "Fruits grow in vulnerability. There is a great difference between successfulness and fruitfulness. Success comes from strength, control, and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another's wounds. What brings us true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness" (Nouwen: meditation 1/6/2014).

The fruitfulness of community (family or church) relies upon a common vision, an acceptance of strengths and weakness, a willingness to forgive, support and trust in the infinite mercy and grace of God to accompany our human efforts. The community cultivates its members' gifts and talents and discerns together God's divine plan. Through community, we become good stewards of God's abundance in the larger world.

Finally, community is a living organism needing to be fed at the Eucharistic table and nourished by the Word in company with God's holy people. From St. Benedict to Pope Francis, from the first century scriptures to the Vatican II documents, we readily glimpse the importance of the family to the Body of Christ. "That they all may be one" reveals that we belong to one another...from each according to his ability and to each according to their need.

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. How is faith formed in your family, the domestic church?
- b. What rituals do you practice in your family?
- c. What pressures make family life difficult in our society?

Section III: The Parish as Community

Video #4: The Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/ZbP32pmTlqA>

At 3:15 a.m., the pastor rises for his Holy Hour to receive strength and fuel to provide for the spiritual needs of his parish. At 6:30 a.m., the church bells ring calling members of the parish community together to celebrate daily Mass. As brothers and sisters in Christ, they will pray the same psalms, hear the same Gospel, and receive the same Jesus as all Catholics throughout the world. Strengthened by the body of Christ, members of this community are sent in mission to serve in the workplace, neighborhoods, and cities. They will serve others by washing the feet of the homeless, delivering a hot meal to a new mother, teaching English to immigrant, tutoring the struggling student, sitting with a friend suffering with cancer or lobbying for justice in the statehouse. This community understands that "if [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor 12: 26).

The church as community enjoys a rich and varied history. The Israelites formed a unique people, called by God to renew the earth and to follow Yahweh among the pagan nations. Their singular purpose brought them considerable persecution, but suffering further united them, acting as a catalyst to deepen their community commitment and belonging. They proclaimed that God is one, and therefore God's people are one. Their identity, their life, their faith, their belonging and their blessings poured forth from their membership in the community as Yahweh's chosen ones.

With the promise of Jesus, the Savior, the New Testament writes a new covenant within each believer's heart. "Love God and love your neighbor." "Love others as I have loved you." Additionally, Jesus promised to send God's Spirit to

be with the community, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Pentecost is viewed as the beginning of the Christian community. The fledgling church found its strength and courage in the power of this Spirit to go out to the world. It is within the church that we have come to realize one of the most profound theological truths: it is communion with the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit that unites the people of God. This is the Mystical body of Christ in covenant with God.

Pope Francis, in his joyful invitation extends community to all believers: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. ... We discover (in the gospel) a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others" (The Gospel of Joy, p.5). The church community today commits to worship and educate, to celebrate and serve with joy, to show love and compassion toward all of God's people but especially the most vulnerable. Intimacy through trusting dialogue, shared faith stories, and communal prayer continues to unite faith communities.

Today's small faith sharing communities continue to imitate the faith communities of the first century, and others continue to remark, "See how they love one another!!" A member of one small faith sharing community expressed it this way: "We have been together for over twenty years. We break bread both in the liturgy each week and in our homes each month. We've journeyed down the paths of joy and sorrow, have watched our children grow, marry, divorce, have children and choose life paths; we've stood in solidarity while some have lost jobs and changed employment, have faced shattering assaults, moral dilemmas and have buried their loved ones. Just like the friends of Jesus who distributed the bread on the hillside to the hungry people, we distribute God's love – grace and mercy - to one another as we keep company now into our golden years. There is an acceptance, hope, and honor accorded each such that none go without and none hold more than needed. In the brokenness and vulnerability of our shared existence, we become "more" by being together than any one of us could have been alone. We are family, the family of God, blending temporal and eternal realities until our final banquet invites us home. This is church, a blessing and gift."

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Does your church/parish feel like a real community? Why? Why not?
- b. When has someone from your parish given you support during a difficult time? How?
- c. How does our parish reach out to the suffering? Where are there needs which could be addressed?
- d. What are the potential benefits from belonging to a small faith community?

Conclusion: What difference does community make in our lives?

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion:

Concluding Questions:

- a. What did you learn about community?
- b. What did you like best about the session?
- c. What is one insight you will share with someone else?
- d. What difference does it make in one's life to believe in the power of community?

Prayer in Thanksgiving for the Gift of Community:

Loving God, you have called each of us to live in community.
Help us to witness to you through our love for one another.
Grant us a deep desire to care each other, especially the weakest in our communities.
Help us to be men and women of prayer, humility, love, and service.
Give us the strength and courage to live according to the values of true community.
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Closing Song:

Many and One by Steve Angrisano

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxJdrFyWj-Y>

Additional Resources:

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on Community, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580, ext. 214, or dbqcmed1@dbqarch.org.