



ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

THE CHURCH AS A SIGN AND
INSTRUMENT OF UNITY

LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

CATECHISM

791

814 - 822

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:18 -19

John 17:11 -21

1 Corinthians 12:26

Galatians 3:27 -28

KEY CONCEPTS

Jesus Christ brings unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Church seeks to be one.

The Church seeks to heal the wounds between Christians caused by schism and heresy.

GOAL OF THIS NIGHT

The goal of this Life Night is to help the teens see that Jesus Christ is unifying and that through the Holy Spirit, His Church is seeking to accomplish unity. The teens will see how human pride and weakness have led to disunity among Christians and will experience how to be a part of the humble solution.

ABOUT THIS NIGHT

The focus of this Life Night is to celebrate that Catholicism is meant to unify and to address the issue of disunity among Christians. Often times, teens feel confused on how or why to believe in Jesus Christ because they are exposed to so many different Christian denominations. This Life Night will help the teens to understand how some of these differences came about and what we can do as the young Church to build bridges with our Protestant brothers. Be well versed in what other Christians in your community believe.

The night begins with a few fun games that illustrate disunity among the whole group. The teaching for the night will be broken up into two sections between the Proclaim (part 1) and Break (part 2). The Proclaim will discuss the Church as a sign of unity in the world and the Break will discuss the Protestant Reformation and schisms within the Church. The Send will give the teens a very real opportunity to reach out to other Christians in their community by writing letters and praying for other Christians and those who are separated from the Church.

PARENTAL NOTICE

This Life Night is designed to help your teen understand how it came to be that Christianity has so many different denominations and rites. We will discuss how it all started historically, and we will also take a look at how Jesus prophesied about this in the Gospel of John. We will end the night by showing the teens that we are called as Catholics to work for ecumenism and the building up of one Church so that body of Christ is united. Take a few minutes to follow up with your teen this week. Here are a few discussion questions for you and your teen:

1. Why are there so many different Christian denominations in the world? Is this Jesus' fault or humanity's fault?
2. What can we do as a family to build up the Body of Christ?
3. How do we treat our own family and friends that are not Catholic?

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this Life Night should give a divided feeling. Have the Core Team split in half. Each half of the Core Team will be assigned to one side of the room. Have each side choose a color (like red or blue) that will represent their "side" and have the Core dress only in their chosen color. The Core Team should not cross over to the "other side" of the room. There will be a table on each side of the room. One table will have a bible covered by a box and a sheet that matches that teams color. The other

side and table will have an empty chalice & paten covered by a box and sheet of matching color. The idea is that the two sides are protecting their gifts during the opening game. The two gifts will be revealed as a part of the Proclaim.

GATHER

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

(5 min)

The youth minister should gather all the teens together and welcome them to the Life Night. Make sure that the teens are evenly split on both sides of the room. You could do this by assigning a color as they enter the room, giving them a sticker or piece of fabric with the corresponding color. The Core Team should be clearly against each other based on the team they are on. The youth minister will then explain that they are going to play some “old school” games.

SCHISM DODGE BALL

(15 min)

This will need to be carefully orchestrated depending on the space where you meet for Life Nights. With the Core Team, the teens will play dodge ball amidst the tables that hold their “gifts.” The teens do not know what the gifts are but they know they need to protect them. Establish that there is no hitting in the head.

Make sure to use soft dodge balls (you may be able to borrow them from a local school for the weekend). Never let the game actually end. The youth minister or Core Member who is acting as the referee should keep starting the game over under the premise that the teens are being “too prideful, righteous and violent.” The referee will need to be someone dramatic in order to stop and restart the game and make it believable.

HERETICAL TUG-O-WAR

(5 min)

Select a few teens to participate in this event. The teens are playing the old game of Tug-O-War in hopes of winning the other side’s “gift.” Introduce this game as the tiebreaker because the teens “couldn’t play nicely at dodge ball.” What the teens will not know is that the rope has already been frayed, so that as soon as they pull, it will break. This can be done by hiding the frayed portion with a ribbon to mark the center of the rope. Make sure there is nothing dangerous the teens will fall into when the rope breaks. Be mindful of what teens are wearing when you choose them, for modesty and safety. You may want to try it out with a test rope before the Life Night.

PROCLAIM

TEACHING PART 1

(20 min)

After the two opening games, transition into the Proclaim by explaining that no one wins when trying to hoard or conquer the gifts that God has given the Church. Have a teen from each side of the room reveal their sides' "gift" and bring it up to the front of the room and place it in a sacred space. The idea is to show that the gifts are meant to go together.

The teaching for this night will be split into two parts. The first part will focus on the Church as the instrument for unity. The second part will focus on what happened during the Protestant Reformation and the Great Schism. The second part will be covered in a large group discussion during the Break.

THE CHURCH AS A SIGN AND INSTRUMENT FOR UNITY

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has been acclaimed as the Pope of Christian Unity by the media and theologians of the day. In his pontificate, he has gone to great lengths to reconnect with splinter groups and factions within the Church. He has reached out to the traditionally minded groups and lifted excommunications. He has opened up a road to communion for members of the Anglican Church, which separated from the Catholic Church 500 years ago. The Holy Father has also reached out to Orthodox churches in hopes of reunion as one single Church of Christ. There is no question to the fact that Benedict has sought to bring all peoples into the Church, starting with those with whom we share so many truths. Why is this so important to the Holy Father? Why would the successor of St. Peter unashamedly seek out those who have at one time veered from the true Church of Christ? What's the point?

Ephesians 5:0

CCC 760

“God created the world for the sake of [our] communion with his divine life...’Just as God’s will is creation and is called ‘the world,’ so His intention is the salvation of men, and it is called ‘the Church.’” This Church is a great gift. It is united with Christ as a bride is united to her husband and is the means by which we come to know the intimacy of God’s love for His people and through which we can find a way to offer ourselves back to God.

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UNITY IS THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH

In the Nicene Creed that we profess at Mass, Catholics attest to "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." These four aspects of the Church are elements by which we can know the true Church. The first of which is her "oneness" – her unity. The Church is one, and she is one because of several reasons. The Church is one because of her source. The Church is given to us by one God who exists in the perfect unity of Father, Son, and Spirit. The Church is also one because of her founder, Jesus Christ. Christ was "true God and true man," a blessed union of natures, "the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross, . . . restoring the unity of all in one people and one body." Lastly, the Church finds her oneness in her "soul," the Holy Spirit. "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity."

1 Corinthians 12:4 -6

1 Corinthians 12:12 -13

Ephesians 4:3

CCC 813 - 822

CCC 264

CCC 815

gaudium-et-spes 78.3

salvific-doloris 0

How can we honestly claim that the Church can have so much perceived unity, while at the same time there are many differences among the followers? There are different ways to pray, different styles of music at Mass, and different beliefs among the followers; there are different roles in the Church, and different abilities of her members. With all this diversity, how can there be this sweeping claim of oneness?

Within our Church, there does exist a great deal of a certain sort of diversity, but we must not confuse diversity with "being different." It is a good thing, for instance, for a symphony to be "diverse." If a symphony is composed of all violins or all tympani playing the same notes in unison, it would lack a certain depth of beauty that makes good music so enjoyable. Symphonies are based on the diversity of rhythms, tones, and notes. Similarly, within the Church we find a gracious assortment of gifts and traditions. St. Paul noticed this in the church in Corinth in the first century. He tells them that, "there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men...The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many,

they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.”

Our diversity is needed for our strength, and it is found in the Christ, the source of our Christian unity. “The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church’s unity. Sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity. So, the apostle has to exhort Christians to ‘maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’

However, we cannot always see the spiritual unity that we share. Thankfully, the Church does have physical signs of her unity— visible ways in which we can know that there is one constant message of truth, one constant source of our joy and hope for salvation. As a Church, we all share the same common faith witnessed by the Apostles and passed down through our Church. We also see unity in our worship, and in our sacraments. And lastly, our Church has maintained an unbroken line of priestly succession dating back to the time of the Apostles; this is, “apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God’s family.”

ECUMENISM IN THE CHURCH

It is blatantly obvious that the world of Christianity is diverse. Most Christian faiths agree on more things than they disagree. This is because they all contain an element of truth within their doctrines in as much as they have maintained the instructions and revealed Word of God in their doctrines and practices. Though there are great similarities among the Christian religions, the Bible tells us of Christ’s desire that His followers are one, even as He is one with the Father in Heaven. This can be challenging to us who are born into a world with so many factions and with such division.

Unity was the intention for His Church. Christ would not have founded multiple truths. “Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of His disciples.”

The history of the western world is largely the history of the Catholic Church; for 1200 years, it was the only form of Christianity. Because of this and because of the climate in which Protestant faiths formed, the Church’s language towards other faiths was rather defensive.

John 17:11

John 14:6

CCC 820

lumen-gentium 8

Catholics were not encouraged to participate in “interfaith” activities. This meant that it would be scandalous to attend a non-Catholic Christian prayer service of any sort. Certain exceptions were understood, as in the case of a wedding or funeral outside the Church, where attendance would be permissible as a common courtesy. The rationale behind the precautions was that there was no way to safeguard or guarantee the theology or orthodoxy proclaimed at these events, and Catholics were advised to avoid these circumstances.

The Church’s guidelines towards non-Catholic Christians was one of the topics discussed at the Second Vatican Council. At the Council, the Church recognized the need to improve relations with other Christian ecclesial communities. This effort to unite all Christian peoples is called “ecumenism.” “In ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians standing fast by the teaching of the Church and investigating the divine mysteries with the separated brethren [i.e. Protestants and Orthodox] must proceed with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility.”

We share an immense wealth of God’s revealed truth with Orthodox Churches and Protestant communities such as our common baptism of all Christians and teachings of Christ. Pope John Paul II is careful to remind the Church that, “The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, ‘the way, and the truth, and the life,’ who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth? Even so, doctrine needs to be presented in a way that makes it understandable to those for whom God himself intends it.”

The fullness of God’s revealed truth is the possession of the Catholic Church, not by her own doing, but by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit who has bestowed upon the structure of the Church the means for salvation. “This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.”

TEACHING PART 2: PROTESTANT REFORMATION

(Note to the presenter: This part of the teaching only covers the historical facts about Protestantism. Within the group discussion, the implications for the Church today should be addressed.)

CCC 814

CCC 1202

The Church went through significant growing pains following the legalization of Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 313. Once Christianity was permitted to spread throughout the Empire, many schools of thought and philosophies came up and tried to explain God's revelation in such a way that the human mind can understand its full implications. This is what we call theology.

Protestants- In the aftermath of particular clerical abuses within the Church in the 16th century, new and anti-Catholic interpretations of Sacred Scripture took parts of Europe by storm. Kings and Princes would adopt and support these anti-Catholic movements in order to combat land-owning churchmen and the Holy Roman Empire. This was the atmosphere during the rise of Protestantism. Many questioned the pope and the Church's authority in political matters and perhaps for good reason. Some pushed the matter into theological affairs, questioning and ultimately protesting the Church's authority in matters of faith and morals. (Protestants are not thought of as "heretics" per se. Today, the Church recognizes these fellow Christians as "separated brethren," this will be addressed later on.)

A popular accusation of the Catholic faith was that Catholicism was based on the instruction of bishops and not the teachings of Christ as found in the Bible. Because of this, the idea of Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) was developed, which is the belief that all religious teachings must come directly from personal interpretation of Scripture and not from a human institution, which the Protestant reformers felt was the Church. A glaring flaw in this theory is that the idea of sola scriptura itself is contradicted by the very texts found in scripture itself and dismissed the significance of tradition.

Another Protestant theme arose in the 16th century known as sola gratia, or the belief that you receive salvation by "God's grace alone" and not by human works. Protestant thinkers of the day were under the impression that Catholics believed that if they did good works on earth, then God would let them into Heaven. In other words, you would earn your own salvation if the good you do somehow outweighs the bad. Protestants thought this was nonsense because it would mean that you could essentially save your own soul.

This idea of sola gratia is very misunderstood because the idea that Catholics believe that you can work your own way into Heaven is

fundamentally false. Catholics fully believe that you are only made holy by the grace of God and by no merits of your own. The individual may, and should, cooperate with God's grace so that they may become receptive to an increase in grace and holiness, which we know comes through spiritual and corporal exercises and works of mercy, charity, and prayer. In no way does this mean that the works alone are what makes someone holy. We always need the grace of God to accomplish any good.

Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, over 30,000 independent Protestant-Christian churches have emerged in over 200 countries. These churches have either splintered off from Catholic tradition or from a Protestant faction, and each take a portion of what God has revealed to His Church. Using the lens of the particular church leader(s), each proclaims their own message. This interpretation is without a governing tradition, magisterial guidance, or authoritative theology and thus is prone to immense variations from church to church. We ought to remember that Christ did not teach multiple truths and that the goal of any theological endeavor is to access the one truth of God's Revelation and to make its fruit more accessible to all men.

TEACHING PART 3: THE GREAT SCHISM (THE SPLIT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST)

Some obstacles to Christian unity are called schisms and are different than heresies. The word schism means "separation" and explains the relationship between a particular person, group, or church community and the Catholic Church. "Schism is the refusal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him." Despite this refusal of submission, schismatic churches are closer to the Catholic faith than any other and hold the vast majority of Catholic beliefs as revealed to the world by God. As we proceed, we will see the differences emerge.

As early as 431, divisions and rifts occurred in the Church due to differences in interpreting and understanding God's revelation. The term Orthodox (with a capital "O") is used to distinguish the churches of the east that are in schism with the Catholic Church for one reason or another.

The largest and most significant schism, and the one we most often think of when we hear the term schism or Orthodox, is the Great Eastern Schism of 1054. The contributing factors of this schism go

back to cultural and political differences between the cultures of Rome and Constantinople. Rome was the former capital of the (western) Roman Empire and the seat of the pope. In Rome, Latin was the primary language used in liturgy, and sacraments were celebrated according to the traditional Roman Catholic rites. In contrast, Constantinople was the current capital of the Byzantine empire, the remnants of what was the Roman Empire.

Constantinople was believed by many to be the “New Rome,” thus the bishop of Constantinople was believed to have authority on par with that of the pope in Rome.

In Constantinople, they spoke Greek and the sacraments were in Greek because their traditions had developed out of their culture, as the Roman traditions had in the west. These two cities were superpowers of their time and pride ran deep in their supremacy of their respective territories. Conflict emerged when the patriarch of Constantinople decided to critique certain elements of Roman Christianity. The message was not received well by the pope at the time, who felt the patriarch was overstepping his authority. Problems also emerged from misunderstandings and misinterpretations between Greek and Latin in their correspondence. The final straw came when the pope decided to amend the Nicene Creed with the Latin word, “Filioque” (“and the Son”) to distinguish the procession of the Holy Spirit from God the Father and the Son. This distinction was not in the original text. In response to these events, the patriarch of Constantinople informed the pope that he was excommunicated from the Church for what the patriarch felt was significantly changing the Creed. The pope in turn informed the patriarch that he was excommunicated for acting without the authority of the pope, leader of all other bishops (and patriarchs). From this controversy the Eastern Orthodox Church was born and still exists today, though the excommunications were mutually lifted on December 7, 1965.

We ought to recognize the overall closeness the Catholic Church shares with the Orthodox churches. They are sharers in the apostolic heritage of Catholics. We pray for an end to our separation and for healing of the wounds that divide us. Pope John Paul II expressed great respect for these traditions and the recognition of the need for the Church to, “breathe fully with her ‘two lungs,’ the East and the West,” that the whole world may share in unity of the Christian mission.

Unity in Diversity

When the Apostles traveled throughout the known world, they established individual churches along their journeys. Aside from the unity of faith, unity of sacraments, and unity of apostolic succession, these churches developed how they do things independently of

each other. They developed their own system of church law, government, and other regulations. Some of these churches continued to flourish throughout the centuries. Today, there are twenty-two of these churches whose roots extend all the way to the Apostles of Jesus Christ and who hold and profess all the teachings handed to them by Christ. These churches are all included in the Catholic Church— the universal Church.

Around the world, styles of worship may differ. There may be practices held in the United States that would be unfamiliar to those visiting from somewhere else. If you were to compare the ordinary liturgies from many different places around the globe, you would notice a multitude of variances. You would discover very different types of music and song. There may be an additional prayer or two said after Mass is over. You will even find different devotional practices. These are all acceptable.

BREAK

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION—WHAT HAPPENED?

(30 min)

The Break for this night will be different from most Life Nights. The Break will be a continuation of the teaching with an opportunity for a discussion on both Protestant churches and the Eastern Orthodox churches. Like many nights in the semester it is important to have people who are well versed in these topics. If necessary, bring in a guest speaker for this portion of the Life Night. An outline for both sections has been provided as a guide. Be sure to adapt the outline according to your surrounding area, culture, and needs.

Have one or two Core Members/speakers give the short teaching and then follow up with some discussion questions. Allow the teens to ask questions of their own and offer their own experience with these two different groups of churches.

The Protestant churches teaching outline can be found attached.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the most common misconceptions our Protestant brothers and sisters have about the Catholic faith?
- Can someone share a story about a time when you were able to share the truth of the Catholic faith with someone who might have misunderstood something based on what they heard?
- Based upon your interaction with friends or family who attend a Protestant church, what are some practices of faith we can learn from them?
- What are a few ways we, as a group, can work together to promote Christian unity among our Protestant brothers and sisters within our schools, family or community?
- The Eastern Orthodox teaching outline can be found on pages 62-63.
- Discussion Questions:
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- The Orthodox churches (East) offer the Roman Church (West) many different traditions that can enhance or experience of God. Can you name a few?
- Can someone share his or her experience of attending a Mass in an Orthodox church?
- What do you think Pope John Paul II meant when he spoke of need for the Church to “breathe fully with her two lungs?”
- What are a few ways we as a group can work together to promote the healing and unity between the “two lungs” of the Church?

SEND

RECAP OF LIFE NIGHT

(5 min)

The youth minister should transition into a time of prayer and reflection by reminding the teens that they have a role to play in the unity of all Christians. As the hands and feet of Christ in the world, their witness to truth and prayer for healing is very powerful.

LETTERS TO THE PASTOR

(10 min)

The Core Members should hand each teen a piece of paper and pen. The youth minister should explain that unity begins by reaching out to others with compassion and prayer. One way the whole group can work together is to reach out to local pastors or youth pastors by writing letters to let them know the community is praying for unity among all local Christian churches. The point of the letter is to celebrate our common belief in Christ. It will be important to stress the need for compassion and unity not to attack areas of separation. Talk to your own parish priests about this ahead of time because they may have some insight. Make sure to read all the letters before sending them on with a cover letter to each local pastor.

Once the teens are finished with their letters, instruct them to bring the letters forward and place them in baskets. Around the basket create a sacred space that unites the two gifts that were separated at the beginning of the night with the addition of a crucifix or image of Christ. Lead the teens in a time of praying for the unity of God's kingdom here on earth. Have a senior proclaim John 17:20-23 with soft music playing in the background. After the teen has finished proclaiming the verse invite the teens to offer up the name of a friend or family member who is distant from the Church or has "issues" with the Church. Give them a few minutes and do not be afraid of silence. Entrust all the mentioned names into the hands of Mary, who is a model of the Church, and close with the Hail Mary & Ave Maria.

CONCLUSION

ADAPTING THIS NIGHT

Invite one or two local youth pastors to come and pray with the teens at Life Night.

If possible include a witness from a teen or young adult who recently came into the Church.

For larger groups, the Gather games may need to be played in a bigger space than your typical Life Night gathering space.

GOING DEEPER

Within a few weeks of the Life Night, host a prayer gathering of local Catholic and other Christian youth groups. Invite the youth pastors of the other churches to share with the teens on the importance of unified prayer.

Encourage the teens to seek out those people they named during Life Night during the week and have a conversation with them about the faith.