

## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

### THE CHURCH: Sacrament of Salvation

#### *Church: 1 hour*



Completion of this study entitles the catechist to one hour of credit toward certification.

### THEME

Christ and his Church, the marks of the Church, the role of the laity, the social mission of the Church, the Church and politics

### CATECHIST COMPETENCIES

As a result of this study, the catechist will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between Christ and Church.
2. Articulate the meaning of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.
3. Provide examples that show an appreciation of the various roles of the laity in the mission of the Church.
4. Provide examples that relate the social mission of the Church to their daily lives and activities.
5. Show examples that demonstrate the relationship of the Church to the political world.

### CATECHISM REFERENCES

#748, 813–865, 897, 1928–1942, 2401–2449

### FOCUSING THE STUDY

Catechesis on the Church and its mission leads to personal application—living as Church. The catechist is an important proclaimer and example for the children.

### INTRODUCTION

A stained glass window is unimpressive on its own. It's only when light shines through it that its beauty can be seen and its message understood. So it is with the Church—by itself it's merely a structure and a group of people. But, with Christ, the Light of the world, the Church comes alive. "The Church has no other light than Christ's . . ." (Catechism, #748).

### CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

"By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind; that is, she is a sign and instrument of such a union and unity" ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," #1).

The *Catechism* calls the Church the universal sacrament of salvation (see #774–776). It quotes the above statement and points out two ways the Church is a sacrament: (1) The Church is a sign and an instrument of the union between people and God. (2) It is a sign and instrument of the unity among all people. And how is this union and unity accomplished? Already begun and present in the Church, it is furthered through the Church's mission, which is Christ's mission. "Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit" ("The Church in the Modern World," #3).

The mission is simple—to unite all people as the People of God, one Body of Christ, one temple of the Holy Spirit (see *Catechism*, #776).



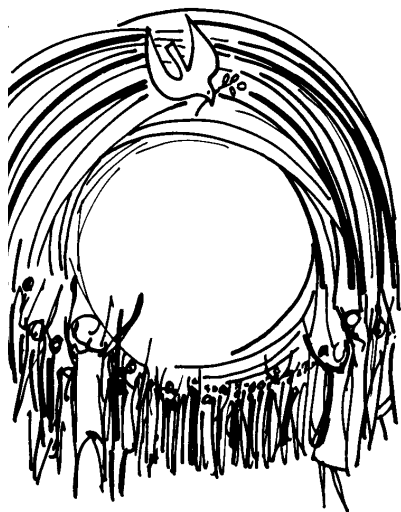
### THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The *Catechism* presents an impressive description of the marks of the Church. From childhood we've recited these characteristics or qualities of the Church. Seldom, however, have we delved into their meanings. First, let us remember that it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who makes the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Let us remember, too, that these essential elements of the Church's work do not exist in a vacuum; they are lived out by all of us as we participate in the Church's mission.

## ***Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert***

**The Church is one.** Growing up, many of us were taught that this meant that the Catholic Church is the same everywhere. But this is an inadequate understanding of the quality of unity. First and foremost, all of these qualities refer to the entire Church. The Church is one because its source is the Holy Trinity, its founder is Christ, and its “soul” is the Holy Spirit (see Catechism, #813).

After acknowledging the richness of diversity in the Church, the



Catechism explores the bonds of unity. At the head of the list is charity, the virtue so sublime that it has been equated with God—“God is love” (1 John 4:8). But there are also visible bonds of charity: (1) The Church professes one faith passed on to us from the apostles. (2) The Church has a common worship, especially its sacraments. (3) The Church recognizes apostolic succession through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Of course, the unity of the Church (in its widest sense, to include all Christian Churches) is wounded by its divisions, so all of us are called to work for the renewal and reunion of the Church—to live lives of conversion and to dialogue and collaborate with other Christians on the road to the unity of one Church of Christ. Catechists are signs of the Church’s unity to those they teach, and they share a love of the Church that is contagious.

**The Church is holy** because of its relationship with the Holy Trinity. The author and origin of the Church is God, and God is holy. Through his death, Christ made the Church holy. The life of the Church comes from the Spirit of holiness. Again, charity is a key word; it “is the soul of the holiness to which all are called . . .” (Catechism, #826).

Mary and the saints are models of holiness for all of us, but, as just quoted, all members of the Church are called to holiness. This belief received new emphasis with the Second Vatican Council, which explained that holiness “is expressed in multiple ways by those individuals who, in their walk of life, strive for the perfection of charity, and thereby help others to grow” (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” #39). What an apropos description of a catechist!

**The Church is catholic** or universal in two ways. (1) It is catholic because of the presence of Christ in the Church. From Christ the Church receives the fullness of all that is necessary for salvation—faith, sacraments, and apostolic succession (see **The Church is one**, top of the page, first column). (2) The Church is also catholic because its mission from Christ is to the whole world. The catholic unity of the People of God is experienced first and most completely within the Catholic Church, but it is shared to a greater or lesser extent by all Christians. Even non-Christians are related in a sense to the Church of Christ, the Jewish people most closely, followed by Muslims, who also hold the faith of Abraham. All those who seek God are touched by the far-reaching grace of a loving and saving Lord, of which the Church is an instrument. Catechists teach by word and example that in the Lord there are intrinsic links among all people. In this way, they further the kingdom of God in a significant way.

**The Church is apostolic** in three ways: (1) It is built on the foundation of the apostles. (2) With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Church keeps and hands on the teachings of the apostles. (3) Until the return of Christ at the end of time, the Church continues to be taught, made holy, and guided by the successors of the apostles, the pope and the college of bishops.

The whole Church is apostolic (see Catechism, #863). Catechists who authentically pass on the faith share in a special way in the apostolic mission of the Church. They are living the Christian vocation to share the good news far and wide—in word and action.

### **THE LAITY**

The majority of catechists are lay people. The laity share in the Christian vocation, the holiness of the Church, the apostolic mission of the Church. All who are baptized share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ (see Catechism #897).

The laity share in the **priestly office** when they participate in the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist. Liturgical ministries open to lay people are powerful ways to experience the priestly office—especially proclaiming the

## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

word and distributing Communion. In the classroom, the catechist is a proclaimer of the word and a facilitator of prayer, leading the students in worship and praise of God.

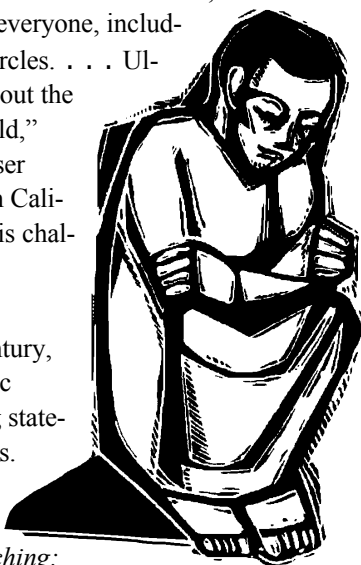
Lay people share in the **prophetic office** of Christ through teaching and evangelizing and through Christ-like example. This is the place where catechists especially identify with the work of Christ. Sometimes this task is difficult; we might even think of certain students as “little heathens.” But that’s the point—the evangelizer isn’t out there saving the saved; the evangelizer is proclaiming Christ to all those seeking God, whether they know they are doing so or not.

Finally, they share in Christ’s **kingly office** by ministering to a broken world. There are many broken children who enter our classrooms. These children may never experience the healing power of Christ unless they experience it through our kindness and affirmation and belief in their innate goodness and dignity. We can lead these special children to the Lord; we can help them break the cycle of violence and pain that is their usual environment and find a new way to live as children of God and members of a family. The Church is the home where they will be nourished; the catechists are the ones who hold their hands and lead them out of their pain.

### THE CHURCH’S SOCIAL MISSION

“The church exists not as an end in itself. . . . But we exist as a church too, to be food for the life of the world, to be eaten up as nourishment by everyone, including those outside our own circles. . . . Ultimately the church is not about the church, it’s food for the world,” wrote Father Ronald Rolheiser (9/12/03, quoted in Southern California’s *Tidings Online*). This challenge is most evident in the Church’s social teaching.

Since the late nineteenth century, the leadership of the Catholic Church has published strong statements on social justice topics. One summary document by the U.S. Catholic bishops (*Sharing Social Justice Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998) names seven themes in Catholic social teaching: (1) the life and dignity of the human person, (2) the call to family, community, and participation, (3) rights and responsibilities, (4) option for the poor and vulnerable, (5) the dignity of work and the rights of workers, (6) solidarity, and (7) care for God’s creation.



The Church is indeed a moral leader in the area of justice. It is important that Catholics know those teachings and live them out. Catechists can emphasize the justice principles in the lessons they teach and lead discussions on current events that have justice implications.

### THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

Some people suggest that two forbidden topics in polite society are religion and politics. For the Christian, not only are these acceptable topics, they are topics that are linked together. Church leadership has a responsibility to inform its members on issues that may not get adequate press compatible with Christian values. Because the issues are complex and neither of the two major parties lines up completely with Church positions, it falls to the individual Catholic to be informed on the Church’s teachings and stands and to vote according to his or her conscience. Catechists are important communicators of the Church’s teachings regarding social justice and how those teachings relate to the political scene.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a Website ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) that includes many of the documents published by the organization, including several on justice issues. The USCCB states that:

*Once every two years, the USCCB Office of Government Liaison prepares a legislative program for the new Congress. This is done in close consultation with the various USCCB Committees and staff that have the responsibility for public policy issues. The legislative issues are then reviewed and approved by the USCCB Administrative Committee.*

The issues addressed often include such items as domestic social development, education, international justice and peace, migration and refugees, and pro-life. Each issue may be broken down further. For example, in the resolutions for the 108<sup>th</sup> legislative session, the issue of migration and refugees is further developed under asylum, children, citizenship and naturalization, detention of aliens, due process for aliens, immigration enforcement, immigration services, integration of immigrants into American society, legal immigration, legalization of undocumented aliens and adjustment of status, public benefits for aliens, refugees—admissions, refugees—overseas assistance, refugees—resettlement in the United States, religious worker visas, and trafficking.

Here is a sample resolution:

*Support enactment of legislation to improve the rights and treatment of unaccompanied alien children who are encountered by or in the custody of immigration authorities. Desired improvements include a presumption against detention; mini-*

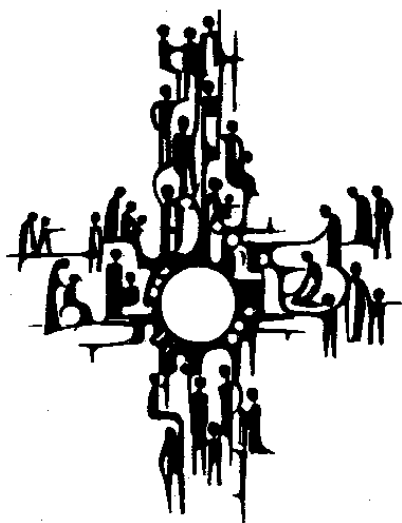
## Fostering Faith Catechist Formation Insert

*...mum standards of care; unaccompanied alien children's right to counsel and "friend of the child," both at government cost; and reforms in the special immigrant juvenile visa.*

Obviously, the USCCB has taken the time to craft carefully extensive resolutions for the consideration of the country's legislative branch. We, Catholics and citizens or residents of the United States, should be familiar with these resolutions and include some of them in our lessons.

### CONCLUSION

It's through the Church that we meet Christ, and that makes all the difference. We don't work in the Church to make it more important and respected. We work in the Church to bring others to Christ and to actively participate in his work of transforming the world. With Christ we believe, say, and act: "Thy kingdom come!"



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In order to complete this study and earn one hour of credit toward catechist certification, you must respond to the reflection/discussion questions in either of the following ways:

1. Write/type your responses (20-40 words each) and submit them to your catechetical leader;
2. Engage in a formal discussion of the questions (at least 30 minutes) in some forum approved by your catechetical leader; e.g. a catechist meeting, level meetings, catechist pairings, etc.

### Review Questions

1. What is the relationship between Christ and the Church?

2. What are the marks of the Church? To what does each mark refer?
3. What is the role of the laity in the Church?
4. What are the seven themes of Catholic social teaching?
5. How does the Church influence politics?
6. What role does charity play in the Church?

### Practical Application/Critical Thinking

1. In a practical sense, what does it mean to say that the Church is the sacrament of salvation?
2. How do you contribute to the unity of the Church? Its holiness? Its catholicity? Its apostolic nature?
3. How do you share in Christ's priestly office? His prophetic office? His kingly office?
4. What does it mean for a catechist to be a moral leader?

### About the author

Marilyn Bowers Gorun has worked as an author and an editor in religious education publishing for over twenty years. She lives in Dubuque, Iowa.

### Fostering Faith catechist formation inserts

These titles are available in a convenient 4-page copy machine-friendly 8 1/2 x 11 format for those who missed them first time around. Order the titles you need to make copies for your catechists. \$3 each. Send your check with a request for the desired titles to the Office for Catechesis. They are also available for downloading from the Office for Catechesis Website.

#### Titles now available:

- Scripture:** Formation of the Oral Tradition in the Old Testament  
**Liturgy:** Understanding the Liturgical Year  
**Catechesis:** Jesus, the Early Church & the Effective Catechist  
**Theology:** The Trinity Revealed in Creation  
**Sacraments:** Catechesis on the Sacraments  
**Prayer:** Ways of Prayer  
**Church:** Theology of Church  
**Catechesis:** Faith and Human Development  
**Moral Life:** The Role of Conscience  
**Liturgy:** The Liturgy of the Word  
**Scripture:** The Kingdom of God in the Meals of St. Luke's Gospel  
**Theology:** Jesus, the Revelation of God  
**Catechesis:** Lesson Planning – Applying the Catechetical Process  
**Theology:** The Holy Spirit  
**Prayer:** The Catechist, Person of Prayer and Leader of Prayer  
**Church:** Sacrament of Salvation

Fostering Faith inserts are the property of the Office for Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Permission is granted for reproduction and distribution to catechists for their formation. Any other use is prohibited. Direct questions to the Publications Manager: 312-243-3700.