



Growing Faith Mini-Course 5

The Nature of the Church

Booklets # 3, 17, 18, 19 & 20.

1 Description

This course asks and responds to the following questions about God and the Christian, Catholic faith to which we hold:

- How is revelation passed on to us?
- Who is the church?
- What is the communion of saints?
- How does the church pray?

2 The flow of this mini-course...

The Growing Faith booklets used in this course include the ones listed below by number. The flow of this course is set by the *Catechism* itself, where we come to understand how God reveals himself to us humans, and how the Church helps us understand that. Because of its importance in our lives, we develop a deep love for and appreciation of the Church.

#3 – Divine revelation Is Passed on in the Church

- What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations.
- Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form a single sacred statement of the Word of God.
- The pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.
- The Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, passes on to every generation all that she believes.

#17 Understanding the Church

- The word "Church" designates the assembly of those whom God's Word "convokes," i.e. gathers together to form the People of God,

- and who themselves, nourished with the Body of Christ, become the Body of Christ.
- The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and us.
 - One enters into the People of God by faith and Baptism.
 - The Church is the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

#18 Marks of the Church

- The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during Christ's passion.
- Those who do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.
- The Holy Spirit is the "principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" and that as it continues the mission of the Church unfolds the mission of Christ.
- The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

#19 – Christ's faithful: the people of the church

- To proclaim the faith and to plant his reign, Christ sends his apostles and their successors. He gives them a share in his own mission. From him they receive the power to act in his person.
- The bishop of the Church of Rome, successor to St. Peter, is "head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ and Pastor of the universal Church on earth."
- Helped by the priests, their co-workers, and by the deacons, the bishops have the duty of authentically teaching the faith, celebrating divine worship, above all the Eucharist, and guiding their Churches as true pastors.
- Lay people share in Christ's priesthood: ever more united with him, they exhibit the grace of Baptism and Confirmation in all dimensions of their personal, family, social, and ecclesial lives, and so fulfill the call to holiness addressed to all the baptized.

#20 Heaven, hell and the communion of Saints

- The Church is a "communion of saints" united above all by the Eucharist.
- Everyone receives his or her eternal recompense from the moment of his or her death in a particular judgment by Christ, the judge of the living and the dead.

- By virtue of the "communion of saints," the Church commends the dead to God's mercy and offers her prayers, especially the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, on their behalf.
- By following the example of Christ, the Church warns the faithful of the "sad and lamentable reality of eternal death," also called "hell."

3 Procedures and Suggestions

We recommend you follow the order for this course laid out above.

- ✚ Use the individual Growing Faith booklet [STUDY GUIDES](#) for each session (they're free & available at [PastoralPlanning.com](#)).
 - Begin with the first step on the [STUDY GUIDE](#) and follow the outline provided to the end of that session.
 - Do not rush the learners. Allow ample time for questions and discussion. Allow the learners to explore the various exercises and topics thoroughly before moving on.
 - If necessary, spread the treatment of any one booklet over two sessions rather than running late and long. If you finish early in one particular session, simply move to refreshments and pick up next time at the beginning of the next booklet.
 - Have on hand a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for reference. The article numbers from the *Catechism* are given on the front cover of each Growing Faith booklet.

- ✚ Make ample use of the [Exercises & Reflections](#) which are given in each booklet. Use them to guide your discussions. Remember that the goal here is not so much to create “mini-theologians” among your learners as to help increase their faith and the understanding of that faith.

- ✚ Work in a room which is [prepared for your gathering](#). Remember that your learners are exploring the mystery of faith in these sessions, not studying theology as they would in college or religion class. You may wish to have on hand sacred music, a special copy of Sacred Scripture in an honored position in the room, and symbols of the Church’s liturgy and faith tradition.

- ✚ At each gathering, begin by [Breaking Open the Word](#) from the readings of the liturgy from the previous Sunday. We provide a resource for this purpose on the web site at this link: <http://store.pastoralplanning.com/quofwerere.html>. The connection to the Sunday Liturgy is essential in order to have a thoroughly Catholic understanding of faith.

- ✚ If you have questions or need assistance, or simply wish to talk with a specialist about your mini-course, call anytime 8 AM eastern to 5 PM pacific time, Monday thru Friday at [612-220-6943](tel:612-220-6943).