HYPOCRITES WELCOME

HUMANITY AND DIVINITY OF THE CHURCH

QUICK GLANCE

ABOUT THIS LIFE NIGHT

Teens are often bombarded with objections to involvement in the Catholic Church, such as “They are all hypocrites,” “I don’t need Mass, I can just pray to God on my own,” and “the Church claims to be one family, but there is so much division.” This Life Night addresses these objections and provides teens with helpful talking points to defend the Church.

The first half of the Life Night is set as a trial. The teens hear objections and get a chance to discuss their opinions. A short teaching follows the trial. The last portion of the Life Night transitions from intellectual engagement to heart engagement with the Good News that Jesus came for sinners and hypocrites just like us. Through a reflection on the prayer during the Penitential Rite, the teens seek the prayers of the community.

The goal of this Life Night is to answer common objections to the Catholic faith, particularly to highlight the holiness of the Church, despite the sin of its individual members, and the need for community.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:13-18 | Matthew 28:16-20 | 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 | Ephesians 5: 25-27

CATECHISM

CCC 798, 882, 888-896

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this Life Night is the set for the Church on Trial Skit. More information about Environment suggestions and Supplies can be found in the Getting Ready section.

GATHER

News Report and Jury Assignment

The short Gather sets up the premise of the Life Night in fun, memorable ways, using characters and a courtroom setting. Teens meet in Connect Groups and begin with an Opening Prayer.

PROCLAIM

Church on Trial Skit

A skit intermixed with small group questions illustrates common objections to the Church and provides time for teens to articulate their thoughts and formulate responses within Connect Groups.

BREAK

Talk: "Humanity and Divinity of the Church"

The talk serves as the Defense's closing argument to persuade the jury of the goodness of the Church. In this teaching, the presenter addresses the concerns of the Prosecutor in the skit.

SEND

Penitential Rite Reflection

A teen and core members lead this reflection to hone in on a common prayer of the Mass that recognizes our sinfulness and acknowledges God's mercy and love. The Life Night concludes with a casual celebration of the semester.

GETTING READY

LIFE NIGHT DATE: _____

ONE WEEK BEFORE

- Advertise and promote the Life Night.
- Read through the Life Night outline, pray, and brainstorm environment ideas.
- Gather and prepare all supplies.
- Create a short video of a core member dressed as a news reporter outside the front of the church. They should report that the Catholic Church is on trial for hypocrisy. Include a field report interview with a few teens and parish staff, asking about their interactions with "the hypocrites" of the Church. End the news cast with the grim prediction that the Church has little hope of recovery from this charge.
- Cast the Church on Trial skit. Cast the teaching presenter as the Defense Lawyer. Write your cast below:

JUDGE: _____

(elder parishioner or priest)

DEFENSE LAWYER*: _____

(youth minister, priest, or core member)

PROSECUTOR: _____

(core member or parent)

WITNESS 1: _____

(recent convert to the Catholic faith)

WITNESS 2 :_____

(teen)

WITNESS 3: _____

(outspoken teen)

BALIFF:_____

(core member)

- Copy and distribute the Church on Trial script, found at the end of this Life Night.
- Determine costumes and props.
- Select a teen and core member to lead the Pentiential Rite Reflection and provide take-home copies so they can practice. Select a teen who is not cast in the skit.

*This person gives the teaching at the end of the skit.

DAY OF THE LIFE NIGHT

- Set up the Environment for the main meeting space.
- Test audio-visual equipment and play upbeat music as the teens arrive.

SUPPLIES

	Skit scenery, props, and costumes
	Connect Group questions
	Snacks

ENVIRONMENT

The environment for this Life Night is the setting for the skit. Set the room to look like a courtroom. Set a table centerstage and elevate it on a riser, platform, or stage. Cover the front of the table with a black cloth so no one can see under the table. Set a large desk chair behind the table. This is the judge's bench.

Set up a witness stand stage left by surrounding a chair with a three-walled box that hides the chair. The box can be made from a cut cardboard shipping box covered in black cloth. Set up a projection screen or large TV monitor stage-right.

Set tables and chairs farther stage-right and stage-left, facing the audience but angled toward the judge's bench, for the defense and prosecution. Cover both tables with black.

Step up the environment with intentional lighting design. The courtroom environment should be kept brightly lit, with the rest of the room dimly lit during the skit. When the skit breaks, change the lighting to dim the stage while bringing the rest of the lights up. Use lighting cues to signal it is time to return to the skit.

To add to the environment, assign a core member or parent to dress as a bailiff and welcome the teens to the Life Night.

NOTES

GATHER

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS 5 min

Gather all the teens into the main meeting space, and tell them you're really sorry, but the regular Life Night had to be postponed.

The "bailiff" announces, "the trial of the century is about to begin." It seems that someone had the nerve to sue the Catholic Church for being filled with hypocrites.

Tell the teens they are summoned to jury duty for this monumental court case.

NEWS REPORT AND JURY ASSIGNMENT 5 min

Play the prepared new report video featuring a core member dressed as a news reporter outside the front of the church, interviewing teens and parish staff on the hypocrisy trial. The news cast ends with the grim prediction that the Church has little hope of victory.

The "bailiff" then explains that the trial is taking place right now and the teens have been asked to serve as the jury. To support deliberation, the teens need to gather in Connect Groups. They will remain with their small group for the rest of the Life Night. During this transition, anyone helping with the skit should report to the backstage or designated area.

Lead an opening prayer, using the following or similar words:

> Lord God, may our lives always bring you glory.
> May our example testify to the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth – you!
> Give us strength through the trials of life
> And convict us to follow you always.
> In your holy name we pray,
> Amen.

Begin the skit.

PROCLAIM

CHURCH ON TRIAL SKIT 40 min

The skit introduces some of the common objections to the Catholic Church through the examination of three witnesses. After each witness, the teens will have an opportunity to discuss the objection in small groups.

The skit script follows the Life Night.

The skit must be rehearsed in advance so the message is clear to all the teens.

Jury Deliberation 1: Sinners and Hypocrites in the Church

1. How would you respond to the lawyer's questions?
2. Would you consider yourself a sinner? What place do sinners have in the Church?
3. Why does the Church make a big deal about our sin?
4. How can the Church claim to be holy if its members are sinful?

Jury Deliberation 2: The Need to Worship as a Community

1. How would you respond to the lawyer's questions?
2. Do you go to Mass? If so, why?
3. Why is community important in worship and prayer?

Jury Deliberation 3: The Unity of the Church Despite our Differences

1. How do you respond to people who have problems with the Catholic Church?
2. Do you believe that, despite its differences and cultures, the Church is one family?
3. How can you promote Catholic unity in this parish?

BREAK

GETTING STARTED

The person cast as the Defense Lawyer gives the teaching. It can be set up as a closing argument in the trial.

This Teaching Guide is not just an outline; it's a tool to help you craft a powerful and personalized talk that will leave a lasting impact. You hold the power to make this topic relevant and engaging for your youth group, and this guide is here to assist you every step of the way.

Practice your talk, pour your heart into it, and trust that you have the power to make a difference in the lives of these teens. This guide is just the beginning - the rest is up to you!

MAIN POINTS

1. Individuals in the Church are susceptible to sin since sin is part of the human condition, but individual members are not the Church. The Church, founded by Jesus Christ and guarded by the Holy Spirit, is holy.
2. The Church encourages private and public prayer. These two work together.
3. The diversity present within the Church is evidence of its universal reach. The Church's Magistrate ensures appropriate care for the sacraments and upholds doctrinal Truths.

TEACHING GUIDE 10 min

Let He Who Is Without Sin

- Well, look who decided to show up and tell us not to sin – it's the Catholic Church. Is this the Church with 2000 years of scandals, bad popes, bad bishops, bad kings, and bad people? How can the Church possibly come forward and tell us anything about truth or sin? Critics say it's hypocritical – that the Church teaches one thing but acts in oppositionThe fact that members of the Church have committed terrible sins is a defensible argument. But individual members are not the Church.

Main Point 1:

Individuals in the Church are susceptible to sin since sin is part of the human condition, but individual members are not the Church. The Church, founded by Jesus Christ and guarded by the Holy Spirit, is holy.

- Since sin is part of the human condition, and the Church – the body of Christ – is made of human beings, sin exists within the Church. We acknowledge it. In fact, the moral teachings of the Church allow its members to recognize its bad representatives.
- Since people fail, does that mean the Church is not trustworthy? No. We have the Holy Spirit to protect the Church from teaching errors in matters of faith. The Holy Spirit ensures the Church remains sinless even if the members sin. Complicated? A little. Hypocritical? That is for you to decide.
- The Church never stops teaching that the people of God need to be holy. The Church refers to itself as always needing to be reformed (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) because while the institution is spotless, its members need purification.
- The main work of the Church is to provide spiritual grace and sustenance to its members in their strivings for holiness. The Church is the world's greatest sponsor of charitable actions, providing holy work for its people. This is so that Earth becomes more like heaven, and we become more perfected and prepared for eternal life.

Let's Get Organized

- You heard the Prosecution challenge the need for organized religion with the question, "Isn't it better to worship God in your own way, when and how you want?" The Defense's answer is, "You do." And, "No." Let me explain.
- God wants us to come to him as members of his family. That is why he reveals himself as a Father (God) and a Husband (Spouse of the Church). We are called brothers and sisters. How are we to become members of his family? Family members worship God.
- Jesus made a way for us to become members of his family. When we are baptized, we become part of the Church. The Church responds to our need for community and connection and provides us with grace. Through the Church Jesus established, we receive encouragement, support, good example, the sacraments, Scripture, the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Main Point 2:
The Church encourages private and public prayer. These two work together.

- The Church offers us types of worship. We can retreat to our "inner room" and speak to God on our own. And, we also have the promise that when "two or three are gathered in my name," Jesus is there. These two work together. The fruits of inner prayer that we bring to the community contribute to community worship. So, yes, we do worship God in our own ways on our own time, but no, it does not replace communal worship; rather, it enhances it. **(Matthew 6:6, 18:20)**

Unity of Community

- You heard the Prosecution challenge the need for community by casting doubt upon whether a collection of strangers can ever come to know one another deeply. The Defense answers that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can thrive in community because that's how God made us.
- God made us in his image, and God's image is communal. In Scripture, it states that it is "not good" for us to be alone. The reason it is not good is that it opposes our identity as relational beings. **(Genesis 2:18)**

- Further, when we are part of a religious community, we all – even the pope – become accountable to someone. With accountability comes support in difficult times. We help one another become holier.
- You heard the Prosecution challenge the universality of the Church by pointing out varying cultural particularities. The witness pretty much made the defense for us, but here's a recap.

Main Point 3:

The diversity present within the Church is evidence of its universal reach. The Church's Magistrate ensures appropriate care for the sacraments and upholds doctrinal Truths.

- The diversity present within the Church is definitive evidence for its universal reach. The Church is so widespread and available to the peoples of the world that it has necessarily been beautifully adopted into local cultures through appropriate means.
- Think of an apartment complex. An overseeing entity maintains the basic structure and utilities of the building, while each apartment can be decorated and improved (or neglected). Each apartment bears the stamp of its residents, and the apartments endure as part of the whole building. Individual apartments may be in disarray, but the complex remains standing.
- The Church's Magistrate ensures appropriate care for the sacraments and upholds doctrinal Truths. They are the caretakers of Scripture and Tradition. Their holy work allows the faithful to worship in confidence in the ancient truths of the faith.

Conclusion

- Jesus Christ himself became man; he knew when he founded the Church that we wouldn't be perfect. He knew this so well and still gave the leadership of his Church to a man who denied him three times at his most desperate hour. **(Mark 14:66-72)**
- He knew we wouldn't always get it right, so he safeguarded the Church through the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus loves us so much that he died for us. It stands to reason that he wants us to have a way to stay connected to him. This is why he instituted the Church and protects it from worldly influences. The Church is entrusted with the fullness of Truth so that through the Church we can know God.
- Thank God for our Church, which teaches the truth, even when we get in the way. The Defense rests.

SEND

PENITENTIAL RITE REFLECTION 15 min

Prepare for a time of reflected prayer using the following or similar words:

The Church, although made up of sinners, will be protected and perfected in heaven. It is through the Church that the Kingdom of God is made present on earth. Despite our own unworthiness, God still chooses to use us to reveal his Kingdom.

It is our responsibility to be witnesses of the Kingdom of God. It begins with our acknowledgement that we are sinful. We must first repent of our sins before we can fully enter into the Kingdom. The Church knows this. For this reason, at the beginning of each Mass, we have the Penitential Rite. During this time, we acknowledge our sin and our need for forgiveness. We humbly ask for the prayers of our community on earth and in heaven.

The words of the Pentitential Rite are familiar to anyone who regularly attends Mass. But the funny thing about the familiar is that sometimes we tune it out. It becomes rote. To conclude this Life Night, we will zoom in on the Pentitential Rite, reflect on God's forgiveness, and be strengthened to enter into our week with confident faith.

For the reflection, invite a leadership teen to read the first part of the prayer, then a core member reads the reflection. Step it up with a live song refrain after each reflection. Song suggestions include "Lord, I Need You" or "As It Is in Heaven," both by Matt Maher. The reflection is found on the next page.

Announcements and Celebration

Conclude the Life Night by affirming the teens' presence throughout the semester. Share the kickoff date of the next semester and any events happening during the break.

Offer sweet refreshments and drinks, and plan an extended time of post-Life Night socializing. Play upbeat music to promote a happy, energized vibe. Encourage all core members to engage in relational ministry for 15 minutes following the dismissal.

Reflection

Teen
I confess to Almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters

Core member
Lord, we acknowledge our sinfulness.
We ask you for your grace and mercy upon us.
We confess before our community that we are sinners,
And when we do, we are not alone.
So too, our sin does not just affect us but impacts our entire community and the whole world.
We ask all of our brothers and sisters to have mercy on us and forgive our wrongs.

Teen
That I have sinned through my own fault,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do

Core member
Lord, you called us each by name. You have given us a specific mission.
Lord, often we fail to live our lives for you.
We forget to keep you constantly on our minds, in our hearts, and in our words.
We acknowledge our humanity and the need to continually repent of all how we failed to serve your kingdom on earth.
Lord, have mercy on us. You called us once, now lead us back to your heart.

Teen
And I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
all the angels and saints,

Core member

We pray especially for the intercession of all the saints in heaven.

They have walked the journey of faith, endured the trials and hardships of life, while remaining faithful to you. They are perfect examples of hope and perseverance.

Now they are face-to-face with you, and we beg for their prayers.

We most especially seek the intercession of our Mother, Mary.

We seek to imitate her love and devotion to you.

Teen

And you, my brothers and sisters,

to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Core member

Lord, we ask also our community for their prayers.

We were not made to be alone. You created us for community.

We entrust our prayers to one another and rely on good friends and mentors to walk with us.

We pray also for the Church and all her members.

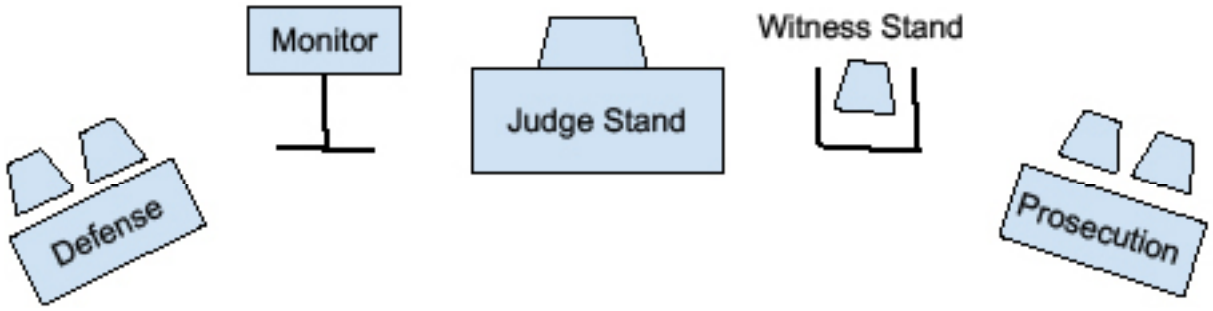
We desire to reflect your love in all that we do.

We pray to be witnesses of your truth in all situations.

Amen.

CHURCH ON TRIAL SKIT

Set: Place a table centerstage and elevate it on a riser, platform, or stage. Cover the front of the table with black cloth. Set a large desk chair behind the table. This is the judge's bench. Construct a witness stand stage left by surrounding a chair with a three-walled box that hides the chair. The box can be made from a cut cardboard shipping box covered in black cloth. Set up a projection screen or large TV monitor stage-right. Set tables and chairs farther stage-right and stage-left, facing the audience but angled toward the judge's bench, for the defense and prosecution. Cover both tables with black. See the diagram.



Step up the environment with intentional lighting design. The courtroom environment should be kept brightly lit, with the rest of the room dimly lit during the skit. When the skit breaks, change the lighting to dim the stage while bringing the rest of the lights up. Use lighting cues to signal it is time to return to the skit.

Props: gavel, "HONORABLE LEO T. FOURTEENTH" name plate, Bible, large crucifix pendant on a necklace chain, mini papal flag

Costumes: Black judge robe, power suits for lawyers, police officer uniform for bailiff

Characters	Cast	Played By
Judge	Elder parishioner or priest	
Defense Lawyer	Core member, youth minister, or priest (gives the Life Night teaching)	
Prosecutor	Core member	
Witness 1	New convert	
Witness 2	Teen	
Witness 3	Teen	
Bailiff	Core member	

Scene 1: Trial, Part I – Courtroom

(DEFENSE LAWYER seated at the counsel table on stage right, PROSECUTOR seated at the counsel table on stage left, WITNESSES 1, 2, 3 seated in the first row with the teens.
BAILIFF enters.)

Bailiff:

(addressing the audience) All rise.

(DEFENSE LAWYER, PROSECUTOR, WITNESSES 1, 2, 3, and all audience stand.
JUDGE enters and stands behind the bench.)

The honorable Judge Leo T. Fourteenth presiding.

Judge:

Good evening. (strikes the gavel on the table)

Court is in session.

(Looks at papers on his stand.)

You, the members of the Catholic Church, are charged with hypocrisy in the practices of your faith.
How do you plead?

Defense Lawyer, Witnesses 1, 2, 3:

Not guilty.

Judge:

You may be seated.

(All are seated. BAILIFF sits in the first row of the audience with the witnesses.)

Prosecution, you may call your first witness.

Prosecutor:

Thank you, Your Honor.

(hesitates) But, just before I do, I'm sorry, your name is Leo T. Fourteenth?

(JUDGE nods, somber, with no hint of mirth.)

That just seems like a remarkable coincidence, does it not,
that your first name is the same as the pope's?

Judge:

Counselor, you have brought very serious accusations to the court. Please stay on topic.

Prosecutor:

Apologies, Your Honor.

(PROSECUTOR stands. Throughout the examinations, PROSECUTOR can roam the set freely, while cheating out to the audience to ensure all lines are audible.)

The Prosecution calls [NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 1]
to the stand.

(WITNESS 1 and BAILIFF approach the witness stand. WITNESS 1 stands behind the chair.)

Bailiff:

(holding Bible out, addressing WITNESS 1) Please raise your right hand.

(WITNESS 1 complies and places left hand on the Bible.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Witness 1:

Yes, I do.

Bailiff:

Please be seated. (WITNESS 1 sits in the witness stand and BAILIFF returns to their seat.)

Prosecutor:

(addressing WITNESS 1) Please state your
full name for the court.

(WITNESS 1 complies.)

Thank you. How long have you been a member of the Catholic Church?

Witness 1:

I fell in love with the Catholic faith a few years ago and entered the Church at Easter.
The people of my parish were so welcoming. My OCI classes taught me a lot, and I have been able to share what I have learned with my family and friends.
I truly found what I had been spiritually seeking through the Catholic Church.

Prosecutor:

(distracted) Do you notice a striking resemblance between the honorable judge and Pope Leo XIV?

(more to self than to the witness) It's in the eyes … no, maybe the hairstyle? (stares at the judge, tips head)

(WITNESS 1 looks confused and gives a pleading glance to JUDGE, who looks annoyed.)

(back on track and all business) OCI .. that is Order of Christian Initiation – the official preparation process for entering the Catholic Church?

(WITNESS 1 affirms.)

What did you discuss in these OCI classes?

Witness 1:

We talked about many facets of the faith: the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, Mary and the communion of saints, the Mass, the Eucharist, the sacraments and grace, sin, the Church's authority, community, Scripture – so many things over many meetings.

Prosecutor:

Did you just say you talked about sin?

Witness 1:

Yes, we talked about the need for holiness and to avoid sin.

Prosecutor:

Is your teacher of the Catholic faith a sinner?

Defense Lawyer:

Objection!

Judge:

Overruled. Proceed, Counselor.

Witness 1:

Well, we're all sinners. So, yeah … I guess so.

Prosecutor:

Well then, Mr./Ms. [LAST NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 1],
isn't the Catholic Church hypocritical in telling people to be holy and avoid sin
when even the members, including teachers and clergy, are guilty of terrible sins?

Witness 1:

Um, I mean, we are all sinners, but I don't think that makes the Church hypocritical ...

Prosecutor:

Are you a sinner, Mr./Ms. [LAST NAME]?

Witness 1:

Me? Yes, I am.

Prosecutor:

Are you a member of the Catholic Church?

Witness 1:

Yes, I am.

Prosecutor:

No further questions, Your Honor.

(PROSECUTOR returns to the counsel table and sits.)

Judge:

The witness may step down.
The court will take a ten-minute recess for the jury to discuss the evidence presented.
(Strikes the gavel on the table.)

(Change the lighting.)

Gather in Connect Groups to discuss the questions
Jury Deliberation 1: Sinners and Hypocrites in the Church.

Scene 2: Trial, Part II – Courtroom

(Open to DEFENSE LAWYER seated at the counsel table on stage right, shuffling papers, PROSECUTOR seated at the counsel table on stage left, stretching and preparing for the next round of questioning, WITNESSES 1, 2, 3 are seated in the first row with the teens.
JUDGE and BAILIFF enter.
JUDGE is now wearing a large crucifix pendant around his neck over his robe.)

Bailiff:

All rise. (Action follows.)

Judge:

Please be seated. (Action follows.)

Prosecutor, please call your next witness.

Prosecutor:

(pointing to the judge's crucifix pendant) New jewelry, Your Holiness – I mean, Your Honor?

(JUDGE shrugs.)

The Prosecution calls [NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 2].

(WITNESS 2 and BAILIFF approach the witness stand. WITNESS 2 stands behind the chair.)

Bailiff:

(holding Bible out, addressing WITNESS 2) Please raise your right hand.

(WITNESS 2 complies and places left hand on the Bible.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Witness 2:

I do so swear.

Bailiff:

Please be seated. (WITNESS 2 sits in the witness stand and BAILIFF returns to their seat.)

Prosecutor:

Please state your full name for the court.

(WITNESS 2 complies.)

How long have you been coming to the Catholic Church,
Mr./Ms. [LAST NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 2]?

Witness 2:

Ever since I was a wee baby. My parents bring me every Sunday. We never miss.

Prosecutor:

Do you enjoy coming to church?

Witness 2:

Sometimes. I like it more now than I did when I was younger, although the donuts afterward always hit. (WITNESS 2 and JUDGE both independently smile.)

Prosecutor:

"Sometimes," huh? Why just sometimes?

Witness 2:

Well, I don't understand everything going on all the time. I mean, we sit and stand at Mass. Then we recite a wordy Creed. The homilies are alright, I guess, but sometimes I just get bored.

Prosecutor:

So, you can't fully participate because you don't know what's happening at Mass?
Is this correct?

Witness 2:

I guess so … I mean, I'm trying. It's just hard.

Prosecutor:

Wouldn't it be easier and better to pray on your own, how you want and when you want?

Witness 2:

Yeah, probably.

Prosecutor:

(growing louder, almost to a yell) Do you really need to go to church to talk to God?
Do you really need the Church to tell you how to pray?
Do you really need to go to Mass? Can't you be holy without the Church?

Defense Lawyer:

Objection!

Judge:

(banging gavel) Prosecutor, calm down!

Prosecutor:

Yes, Your Honor. Sorry. Let me rephrase.
(calmly) Isn't it better to worship God in your own way and when you want instead of at a church with people you don't really know, saying things and doing things you don't understand?

(PROSECUTOR faces the jury/audience while delivering the last phrase.)

Witness 2:

(slowly, a little uncertain) It would be easier.
I could talk to God in the way I want on my own time.

(more confidently) But on the other hand, I've had some great prayer experiences at Mass and at Life Nights with my community.
Even though I don't totally understand my faith at all times, God has still moved in my life.
That I cannot deny.

(JUDGE is visibly moved and absently touches the crucifix around his neck.)

Those times have been when I'm on my own, but more often when I am in a state of grace and surrounded by the faith community. So, my answer is no.
It would not be better to worship God in my own way on my own time.

Prosecutor:

(floundering because this was not the expected answer) But … your community doesn't know you as well as you know yourself, correct?

Witness 2:

The role of the congregation is –

Prosecutor:

(briskly interrupting) No further questions, Your Honor.

(PROSECUTOR hurries to the counsel table and slumps in the seat with a pensive look.)

Witness 2:

I wasn't finished speaking.

Judge:

The witness may step down.
The court will take a ten-minute recess for the jury to discuss the evidence presented.

(Strikes the gavel on the table, genuflects while exiting.)
Prosecutor:

(springing up indigently from chair) Hold up! (pointing at JUDGE and appealing to the audience) Did anyone see that?! The judge just straight-up genuflected as if he were at church.
(PROSECUTOR paces, pulls at hair, and waves arms around in frustration while exiting.)

(Change the lighting.)

Gather in Connect Groups to discuss the questions
Jury Deliberation 2: The Need to Worship as a Community.

Scene 3: Trial, Part III – Courtroom

(Open to DEFENSE LAWYER seated at the counsel table on stage right, reading from a large Bible or praying the Rosary on rosary beads, PROSECUTOR seated at the counsel table on stage left, rapidly paging through a thick legal book, WITNESSES 1, 2, 3 are seated in the first row with the teens. A small papal flag has been added to the judge's bench.
JUDGE and BAILIFF enter.)

Bailiff:

All rise. (Action follows, except for PROSECUTOR, who clearly did not hear and whose nose remains in the legal book.)

Judge:

Please be seated. (Action follows.)

Prosecutor, call your final witness.

Prosecutor:

(startled, as if just now noticing the court is back in session. PROSECUTOR stands and notices the papal flag.)

Your Honor, is that a papal flag? Now you are outright goading me.

Judge:

Counselor, need I remind you that I am not the one on trial here?

Prosecutor:

(turning from the JUDGE with a loud sigh.) The Prosecution calls
[NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 3] to the stand.

(WITNESS 3 and BAILIFF approach the witness stand. WITNESS 3 stands behind the chair.)

Bailiff:

(holding Bible out, addressing WITNESS 3) Please raise your right hand.
(WITNESS 3 complies and places left hand on the Bible.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Witness 3:

Yes.

Bailiff:

Please be seated. (WITNESS 3 sits in the witness stand and BAILIFF returns to their seat.)

Prosecutor:

Please state your full name for the court.

(WITNESS 3 complies.)

(PROSECUTOR locks in) Mr./Ms. [LAST NAME of the actor playing WITNESS 3],
have you ever been on a mission trip to another country?

Witness 3:

I went to Mexico with my Life Teen group a few years back. It was a group of about 15 of us. We worked in this little town and helped build a school for the children. Only some of us spoke Spanish, so communication was a little challenging, but we still really connected with the kids, despite the language barrier. It was really fun to play soccer with them, look at picture books, and attend Mass with the community. Their Mass was different from ours. There is a lot of culture built in, and the congregation expresses itself in ways that are very different from how we do in our country. It was definitely an experience I won't forget.

Prosecutor:

Sounds like you had a good time.

Witness 3:

I did.

Prosecutor:

You know, [NAME], the word "catholic" means "universal," right?

Witness 3:

Yes, I know that.

Prosecutor:

Then tell me, how can the Catholic Church call itself "universal" if, for example, as in the case of your mission trip, the Mass is in another language? Not everyone can fully participate.

Witness 3:

Well, Counselor, your attempt to make the Church sound hypocritical does just the opposite.

Bailiff:

Oh, snap!

Witness 3:

(continuing as if not interrupted) You see, the Church is universal because everyone has access to it. While the expressive language varies and cultural customs are particular, the essential rituals remain the same. The liturgy, the sacraments, the papacy, and the teachings of the Church are consistent everywhere.

(PROSECUTOR attempts to interrupt, but WITNESS 3 presses on.)

Different cultures express their faith in different ways, but it is still the same faith.

Prosecutor:

(Returns to counsel table, as if retreating from a battle, and fumbles through papers.)

Right … um … What about the fight between the so-called liberals and conservatives?

(regaining composure and confidence through this new line of questioning)
Progressive versus orthodoxy? How can the Church sustain unity if everyone is fighting all the time?

Witness 3:

Sir/Ma'am, do you have a family?

Prosecutor:

Yes.

Witness 3:

Does your family always get along?

Prosecutor:

Not all the time.

Witness 3:

So you sometimes argue about important family issues?

Prosecutor:

Of course.

Witness 3:

Yet at the end of the day, are you still a family?

Prosecutor:

(seeing defeat) Yeah.

Witness 3:

The same thing happens within the Catholic Church. The members of the Church will never fully agree on everything, and yes, we are all sinners and many of us don't fully understand all the teachings of the Church, yet we instinctively know we need one another. We are the Church – founded by Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit.

Prosecutor:

(sitting down as if the knees are weak) The Prosecution rests, Your Honor.

Witness 3:

Your Honor, if I may – is your last name truly "Fourteenth."

Judge:

Indeed it is, young man/lady.

Witness 3:

Well, that's quite remarkable. And, one more question, Your Honor: what does your middle initial stand for?

Judge:

(with a twinkle in his eye) You can't expect me to give away all my secrets.

(to all) Young men and women of the jury, you have heard compelling evidence that the Catholic Church is full of hypocrites, who discredit and disgrace it to ineffectiveness.
Now it's time to deliberate and determine what you think.
Has the Prosecution made its case? Or is there still a strong defense for the Catholic Church?

This court is in recess. (Bangs gavel.)

Bailiff:

All rise.

(Change the lighting.)

Gather in Connect Groups to discuss the questions
Jury Deliberation 3: The Unity of the Church Despite our Differences for 10 minutes.
Then transition to the teaching.

SESSION 6

STILL WATERS

FINDING PEACE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

For this session, you will need a large, clear bowl or glass container filled with water, a bottle of food coloring or ink, a spoon, index cards, and a small basket or box.

KEY THEMES

1. The Holy Spirit offers us peace that surpasses understanding, which isn't dependent on our circumstances; instead, it is rooted in God.
2. True peace is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit that grows whenever we surrender control and trust in God's plan for us.
3. Peace is not an absence of struggle or anxiety. It is the presence of God in the midst of it.
4. We can cultivate peace through spiritual practices such as prayer, moments of silence, and willful surrender.
5. The Holy Spirit calls us to be peacemakers in our relationships, communities, and the world.

GATHER 10 min

Welcome and Regroup

Welcome your Connect Group with warm hospitality and take the time to reconnect. Engage with the teens as they arrive with a lighthearted conversation about their week. Ask questions like "What is keeping you busy?" or "Anything good happen this week?"

Next, invite each group member to share their experience from Session Five's Weekly Challenge: *Choose a category from the Life in the Spirit brainstorm where you feel drawn to improve and work on it this week.* Categories may have included family, school work, relationships, free time, and responsibility.

Go around the circle or allow the responses to be more spontaneous.

Transition to the Opening Prayer by saying, "Today we are going to talk about something we all need more in our lives: peace. Real, lasting peace that comes from the Holy Spirit."

OPENING PRAYER

Prince of Peace,
You came into a chaotic world to bring us peace.
You calmed the storms, quieted the fears, and conquered death itself
so that we might know the peace that only you can give.

Holy Spirit, we invite you into this space.
Calm the noise in our minds, the worries in our hearts,
and the anxieties that keep us from resting in God's love.
Teach us what it means to have your peace,
and help us to share that peace with others.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Water Experiment

Place a large bowl or glass container filled with water in the center of your group so that everyone can see it. Explain that the water represents peace: calming, still, clear peace.

Next, add a few drops of food coloring or ink and stir vigorously with a spoon. The water will become cloudy and chaotic. Say to the group: "This is what our lives often feel like; it can be busy, chaotic, full of noise and mirkiness. It is hard to find peace when everything feels like this."

Now, stop stirring and set the spoon down. Allow the group to watch in silence as the water gradually settles. The color will still be there, but the swirling motion will slow and eventually stop. The water will become still, though not clear.

After a minute or so of watching, ask the following questions:

- What did you notice as the water settled?
- Though the color changed and became unclear, what happened when the stirring stopped?
- How is this similar to what happens in our lives when we invite the Holy Spirit's peace into our lives?

Transition to the Proclaim, using the following as an example:

The water could only settle once the stirring stopped. So, too, our hearts are most settled when we make time to be quiet and still. Then we can experience the Holy Spirit's peace. Today, we are going to explore what that kind of peace feels like and how to find it.

PROCLAIM 15 min

The Peace the World Cannot Give

- We live in a world obsessed with "peace," but no clear path to find it. Depending on the source of the information, you may be led to believe peace comes from earning good grades, being popular, having the perfect relationship, landing the college of your choice, making the school team, or achieving the ideal success.
- We think obtaining peace is as simple as controlling our circumstances, if we can just make everything go right. Once we have everything "just right," then we will finally have peace.
- Here is the problem with that idea: that kind of peace is temporary and fragile. It depends entirely on things going well, and life does not always go well. When our circumstances change, like when we fail a test, lose a friend, face rejection, or experience other kinds of loss, then the worldly idea of peace evaporates instantly.
- Jesus offers us a different kind of peace. On the night before he died, knowing full well what was to come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." We hear these words every Sunday at Mass and are offered the peace of Christ. **(John 14:27)**
- Jesus distinguishes his peace from the peace the world offers. The world's peace is conditional and circumstantial. Jesus' peace is unconditional and eternal. It is a peace that does not depend upon everything going right. It is a peace that can exist even within our suffering, uncertainty, and fear. It is a peace above all that the world tries to manufacture, it is the Peace of the Holy Spirit.

Peace as a Fruit

- In **Galatians 5:22-23**, St. Paul lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit; that is, the qualities that grow in our lives when we cooperate with God's grace. Peace is one of those fruits. This tells us something important: peace is not something we achieve on our own; it is not the result of perfect circumstances or the byproduct of positive thinking. Peace is offered to us by the Holy Spirit, and if cultivated, can grow within us as we surrender all to God.
- Further, peace occurs precisely when we stop trying to control everything. Peace happens when we trust that God is in control. It happens when we stop aimlessly striving and permit ourselves to rest in God's love. Peace happens when we remember that we are held by a God who is faithful and good. He promises to work all things for our good. **(CCC 736, Romans 8:28)**

What Peace Is and What It Is Not

- We must understand what peace is and what it is not. Peace is not the absence of problems.
- Jesus never promised us a life without struggle, quite the opposite. In **John 16:33**, Jesus says, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

- Peace does not mean everything is easy or that we never experience hardship. Peace is the presence of God in the midst of our problems.
- It is a deep assurance that no matter what we are facing, God is with us. It is the calm that comes from knowing that our lives are in his hands. It is the ability to trust in God, to understand that his will has us in mind.
- Think about the story of Jesus calming the storm. The disciples were in a boat when a violent storm suddenly arose and caught them by surprise. They were terrified and convinced that they were going to die. Meanwhile, Jesus was asleep in the boat – imagine that. They woke him up in a panic, and Jesus questioned their faith. He then stood and rebuked the wind and waves, saying, "Peace! Be still!" Immediately, the storm stopped. **(Mark 4:35-41)**
- So, here is a question for you: Was Jesus at peace before he calmed the storm, or only after? The answer is before. Jesus had peace throughout the storm because he completely trusted his Father. The storm did not determine his peace; his relationship with the Father did.
- That is precisely the peace the Holy Spirit offers to us. It is not contingent on the storms in our lives calming down. It is rooted in our relationship with God, who is sovereign over every earthly storm.

Read **Philippians 4:6-7.**

SCRIPTURE

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

-Philippians 4:6-7

- In this passage. St. Paul gives us a roadmap to peace. When we are anxious, we are invited to bring everything to God in prayer. We do not just bring the big things; we bring everything. When we do, God promises to give us peace that "passes all understanding."
- This is the peace of the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural. It transcends our circumstances and is available to each one of us. You may experience it instantly, or more likely, over time as your relationship with God deepens and your trust in him grows.

Cultivating Peace as Peacemakers

- First, we must practice surrender. This does not mean we become passive and stop caring. It means we do our part, and then we trust God with the results. We study, we work, we make good decisions, then we are correct in saying, "God, I am doing my best. I trust you with the rest."
- Second, we practice prayer. We bring everything to God, including our worries, fears, hopes, and needs. Prayer is the way we stay connected to the source of peace: "Come, Holy Spirit, give me your peace and reorient my heart towards you."

- Third, we practice silence. Our lives are so noisy with constant notifications, music, podcasts, social media, and DMs. These are not bad in moderation. We also need time for reflective silence. Peace requires stillness. We need to create space for silence where we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and rest in God's presence.
- Fourth, and finally, we practice gratitude. Our perspective shifts when we focus on what we are grateful for: from one of scarcity to abundance, from fear to trust. Gratitude reminds us of God's faithfulness and goodness to us.
- The peace of the Holy Spirit is not just for us. It is meant to flow through us to others: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." **(Matthew 5:9)**
- Peacemakers need to avoid conflict or pretend everything is fine when it is not. Being a peacemaker means bringing the presence of God into situations of tension, division, and hurt. It means choosing forgiveness over resentment, reconciliation over retaliation.
- We are instruments of God's peace in our relationships, families, schools, and other communities. We can be an example of calm in the midst of chaos, much like Jesus in the storm.
- The Holy Spirit empowers us to be peacemakers. We cannot do it on our own, for we have a natural inclination to fight or flee. The Spirit gives us the grace to respond differently, to be people who bring healing and unity wherever we go. **(CCC 2305)**

BREAK 25 min

Peace Inventory Reflection

Pass out an index card and a pen to each teen. Invite them to find a comfortable spot where they can reflect quietly and undisturbed. You might play quiet instrumental music in the background.

Say to the group: "I want you to think honestly about the level of peace in your life right now. We are going to perform a quick inventory of where you are and determine what might be blocking you from experiencing the peace of the Holy Spirit."

Give the following reflection prompts and allow time for the teens to write:

- Rate your peacefulness on a scale of 1-10, where one represents feeling totally anxious and stressed, and ten represents a feeling of deep abiding peace.
- List the biggest sources of stress or anxiety in your life right now. If there are many, focus on the first three that come to mind.
- What do you tend to turn to for relief when you are stressed or anxious?

  If examples are helpful, suggest friends, video games, busyness, food, social media, isolation, creative outlets, destructive habits, etc.
- In a few words or sentences, describe a time when you experienced real peace, the kind that did not depend on your circumstances.
- What is the one thing you could do this week to intentionally invite the Holy Spirit's peace into your life?

  If examples are helpful, suggest daily prayer, less screen time, silence, releasing control, practicing gratitude, etc.

Allow about ten minutes for this personal reflection. Give a one-minute warning before gathering back together for a discussion.

Small Group Discussion

Reassure the teens that they do not have to share everything they wrote, but invite them to share what they are comfortable with so they can hear God speaking to them through the group and grow in relationship with one another.

Lead a thoughtful conversation using the the questions on the next page.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Were you surprised by the rating you scored yourself on the peace scale? What does your rating tell you about where you're at right now and how you tend to interpret your circumstances?
2. Why do you think it's so hard to find peace in our daily lives? What gets in the way?
3. Jesus said he gives us a peace that the world cannot provide. What do you think is the difference between the world's version of peace and the Holy Spirit's peace?
4. What does it mean practically to "surrender" to God? Is there anything in your life right now that you're holding onto tightly that you need to release?

   Sample responses may include: Surrender means trusting God with outcomes we can't control, like grades, relationships, college decisions, family situations, and health issues. It means doing our part and then letting go.
5. For your reference, as the leader: Many teens struggle with the fear of surrender because it feels like giving up, losing control, or not caring, but surrender is actually an act of trust.
6. Saint Paul tells us to bring everything to God in prayer — not just the big things, but everything. Why do you think prayer is so connected to peace?
7. Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. What does that look like in your life right now? Is there a relationship or situation where the Holy Spirit is calling you to bring peace?

   Sample responses may include forgiving someone who hurt them, reaching out to reconcile with a friend, choosing not to participate in gossip or drama, being a calm presence in a tense family situation, standing up for someone being bullied, choosing kindness over retaliation. Emphasize that being a peacemaker takes courage and the Holy Spirit's help.

SEND 10 min

Weekly Challenge

This week, commit to one practice that will help you cultivate peace in your life. Choose from one of the following options or come up with your own.

Option 1: Daily Silence
Spend 5-10 minutes in silence each day. Turn off your phone, find a quiet space, and simply sit in God's presence. You do not have to say anything. Simply be still and invite the Holy Spirit to bring you peace.

Option 2: Surrender Prayer
Each morning and night, pray this simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, I surrender [name the thing you're worried about] to you. I trust you with this. Give me your peace."

Option 3: Gratitude Practice
Each night before bed, write down three things you are grateful for that day. Notice how gratitude shifts your perspective toward peace.

Option 4: Peacemaker Action
Identify one relationship or situation of tension or conflict. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one step you can take to be a peacemaker this week. This may be through initiating a conversation, offering forgiveness, or simply choosing kindness.

Additionally, this week, each person will pray for the intention of another group member, and a group member will specifically pray for their intention. They may or may not know who prays for them.

Invite them to pray each day for their person, asking the Holy Spirit to bring them peace.

Peace Prayer Exchange

Once more, distribute an index card and a writing utensil to each teen.

Invite them to write their name on one side of the card, and on the other side, their prayer intention. It should focus on one situation in life where they are comfortable sharing their need for the Holy Spirit. Examples include, “Peace in my relationship with my parents,” “Peace about college decisions,” “Peace through anxiety,” or “Peace at school.”

Collect the cards in a basket or bowl and mix them up. Then, have each teen draw a card. If they draw their own, ask them to trade or redraw. Explain that this week, they will pray for the person whose card they drew. Generally, they should keep this group member in prayer. Specifically, they can ask the Holy Spirit to bring peace to the situation written on the card.

After everyone has a card, invite them to stand in a circle. Then, transition to the Closing Prayer, using the following as an example:

This week, you will be an instrument of the Holy Spirit's peace for this person through your prayers. You do not have to tell your person you are praying for them unless you want to, but commit to praying for them at least once each day this week. Trust that the Holy Spirit will work through your prayers to bring them peace. At our next session, be ready to share how you experienced peace this week and what you noticed as you prayed for your person.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, Prince of Peace,
You are the source of all true peace —
the peace that the world cannot give,
the peace that surpasses all understanding.

We confess that too often we look for peace in the wrong places.
We try to control everything, we strive endlessly,
and we fill our lives with noise and distraction.
Forgive us for forgetting that peace is found in you alone.

Teach us what it means to surrender,
to release our grip on outcomes,
and to trust that you are working all things for our good.

Calm the storms in our hearts and minds.
Quiet the anxieties that steal our joy.
Help us to be still and know that you are God.

Make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is conflict, let us bring reconciliation.
Where there is division, let us bring unity.
Where there is chaos, let us bring calm.

Holy Spirit, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
and fill us with the peace that only you can give.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.