

St. John Neumann Confirmation Prep 2024
3rd Session - Small Group
Topic: Church

Main Objective for Session 3:

We want the students to come to a deeper understanding of the beauty of their Catholic Faith. They will come to understand how the Church is both human and divine. Christ has established this Church and how it's an instrument of encountering the living God most profoundly. The hope is not only to see what the Church has to offer them but also what they have to offer to the church.

This resource is a guide for planning your session. Our main objective is to build relationships and community within the teens, win them over, and have the opportunity to spend another four years with them. Keep in mind the main objective mentioned above when structuring your session. We have taken content from both platforms that talk about this subject. The intent isn't to go over everything but to review and choose what will work for your group.

Green text indicates special notes for mentors.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- I. Community Building/Ice breaker
- II. Quick Review on Christ.

TESTIMONY & REFLECTION

- III. Activity and Reflection on what is the Church?
 - A) Invite the teens to reflect on what the Church is,
 - what the Church is, its role, why it exists, what their experience is, etc..
 - have them write answers to these types of questions and have them discuss them.
 - B) Mentors, here is an opportunity for you to share your view of the Church. How has your opinion changed? How has your relationship flourished in regards to Mother Church?
 - C) After your testimony, ask the teens to look back at the reflections they wrote on the handout and invite them to add additional thoughts that may have come to them during this session. In the end, you can do this exercise again and see if they have come to a deeper understanding of the Church.

DISCUSSION: CHRIST COMES TO ESTABLISH THE CHURCH

- IV. Reading of Scripture: Who do people say that I am? Matthew 16:17-20.
- V. Discussion of the reading.

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- A) What sticks out to you in the reading? What was interesting?
- B) What is Christ Doing?
 - This is a springboard for understanding how Christ here is establishing His Church.

VI. The biblical context of the scripture reading (Matthew 16:13-20)

A) Biblical significance of the keys

- In the Old Testament, David and his descendants, the anointed kings of Judah, realized that they could not govern alone. The most crucial office assisting the king was something akin to a prime minister. He was called “the Master of the Palace.” The Master of the Palace wears special robes of honor, indicating his special authority. He is to be a “father” to everyone in the Kingdom. The symbol of his administration is a key, for the prime minister has the power to open doors for people and to close doors as well. In Particular, he controls access to the king himself. Whenever the king went away in battle or left his kingdom, the prime minister would be given the keys to the domain until the king returned.
- In Isaiah 22, we see God tell an unworthy Master of the Palace, Shebna, that he will be replaced by Eliakim, who will do things right. Here is an example of the role of the prime minister taking place.
- By Jesus giving the keys to Peter, people at that time would understand that Christ had given Peter a unique role and was appointing him and his future predecessors to that special role. In this session, we will dive deeper into what this means.

CHURCH DIVINE

VII. Church Divine

A) watch Chosen's 3.3

- To access videos, log in at https://ascensionpress.thinkific.com/users/sign_in
- Click on “Chosen - Leader Access.”
- On the left side of the screen, click on “Lesson 3.”
- Click on “Video 3.3: A Kingdom on Earth (9:00).”
- Use the discussion guide in your chosen leaders' guide for this series.
 - Can use the discussion guide for this series on the document link.

CHURCH HUMAN

VIII. Discussion guide summary and questions continued.

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- Regarding the human aspect of the church, there might be things that may arise in the discussion that the teens don't like about the church. They can also bring up stuff they might disagree with or have been hurt by. This can be an opportunity to hear from them, as the bishop did for the synod listening session.
- After listening to them, this can be an opportunity for you to share your testimony on why you continue to stay faithful and navigate questions in your own life.

IX. Things with the Church

- Morality- how can I take that to prayer? There might be things that I struggle with in understanding the faith. The critical next step would be to assume that struggle to pray and ask God for the Wisdom, Good Counsel, and Understanding necessary to understand it.

X. Empowered people who created change within the Church for the better

Here are some saints who helped reform the Church. We can draw from the lives of the saints who help improve the Church and make it better.

A) St. Catherine of Siena

- She traveled to Avignon, France, and spent three months trying to convince Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome. Gregory eventually did go back to and returned the papacy to the Eternal City.

B) St. Francis of Assisi

- Francis received a message from God, saying, "Rebuild my church, which is in ruins." He did so through the simplicity and poverty of life, reforming the way of life of the clergy and religious.

C) St. Teresa of Avila

- Teresa worked hard to return the cloister of religious life to its simplicity and poverty, eliminating many cases of abuse.

D) St. Joan of Arc

- Joan was tough. Believing she was acting under divine guidance, and after winning over some male skeptics, she was about 18 when she led the French army to victory in the 1429 battle at Orleans during the Hundred Years' War between France and England. Later, she was captured, accused of witchcraft and heresy, and burned at stake.

FAMOUS DEPICTIONS OF ART

XI. **Pietro Perugino: Jesus gave the keys to Peter (1581-1482)**

- You can use this painting at the beginning of your session or as an activity. Have them look at the painting and discuss/right down what sticks out to them in the painting.
- Insight to the painting:
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/early-renaissance1/painting-in-florence/a/perugino-christ-giving-the-keys>
- Other insights/symbolism:

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- ❖ The people are at the Church's foundation: You can highlight how we make up the Church and how the Church isn't just some building. We, the people, build up the body of Christ, the Church.
- ❖ The Church's image is the apostles but also modern people: I like how the image highlights the laity in the painting. The role of the laity is just as crucial, as our priest and bishop, in building up the Church.
- ❖ The people in the background: opportunity to reflect on others in the painting and their significance. Who is paying attention vs. who isn't?
- ❖ The significance of two keys: In his book, Dante talks about how an angel protects the gates of heaven and has two keys (one gold and one silver). The keys symbolize God's Mercy and Justice- Perugino puts this symbolism in his painting. We see that Jesus gives Peter the golden key. Jesus states, "that whatever you bind on earth is in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will be loosed in Heaven." Jesus gives the authority to the apostles to enact God's mercy and justice. In the picture, you can ask what 'Key' Jesus is giving Peter. Both are important, but many theologians state that we must always lead with mercy. That we express truth with love- aligns well with how Pope Francis leads. Discussing the balance of mercy and justice can lead to a great conversation.

XII. Michelangelo: the last judgment

- <https://www.tripimprover.com/blog/the-last-judgment-by-michelangelo>
- Peter gives the keys back to Jesus: We see in this painting that Peter is giving the keys back to Jesus. This action fits well with how he is the prime minister, and Jesus is the king. The pope, the successor of Saint Peter, is given by apostolic succession granted by Christ.

THE CALL

XVI. We are the Church

B) *Chosen's 4.2 on "Scripture and Tradition"*

- To access videos, log in at https://ascensionpress.thinkific.com/users/sign_in
- Click on "Chosen - Leader Access"
- On the left side of the screen, click on "Lesson 5."
- Click on "Video 4.2: Scripture and Tradition"
- Use the discussion guide in your chosen leader's manual for this series.

ENCOUNTER/CONCLUSION

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XVIII. Conclusion: Our goal is to help them have an encounter and build a relationship with Christ. Prayer will be a theme sprinkled in every session.

You can use the PDF resource “Lectio-wrap-summary-reference” to do a guided meditation. Feel free to use the scripture verse we reflected on or any other you may think fits. For those more visual, feel free to use a piece of art to reflect on.

The activity of four aspects of humanity: Start with the four aspects and end with reviewing how they had it and start a new column. Have them put their desired order and tangible goals for what they will do this coming time till you meet again.

Challenge till next time:

To foster that community, develop something that the group can do together. Some ideas can be:

- Committing to pray during the week
- Having a scripture challenge where they pray with certain scriptures
- Fasting as a group or adding something
- Have them pick a saint and share for next time around.