

PART ONE ENCOUNTERS

Meeting Jesus through His Followers

Mark Springer & Julia Mazanka

"To speak of a 'culture of encounter' means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone... What is important is to create *processes* of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences."

(Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, #216-217)

WELCOME TO ALL!

To “encounter” Jesus and to be encountered by Jesus are to experience His compassion and to develop a relationship with Him. Think of the many stories about God choosing people: Abraham, Moses, Isaiah and later, Mary the mother of Jesus, Peter, John the Beloved, Mary Magdalene, Zachaeus, and Paul. God does not primarily choose them for a role or task. God is really choosing them to be companions, to be signs of God’s love in the world... to be love incarnate along the journey. Just like Jesus. The same is true for us, you and me, as we become aware of it... and allow it to unfold in our lives. To encounter is to become aware of our being chosen and sent.

This is the purpose of this series: for you and your fellow companions to walk this sacred path together. You will rejoice in your discovery of the gifts of yourself and others. Allow yourselves to experience being chosen, “be-friended,” and being God’s presence in your world. Love is being passed on through you to others. Human kindness overflowing is encountering Christ.

“Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss” (Ps 85:11). This is the reign of God! And so begins our journey...



INTRODUCTION

SENT TO SERVE is a sharing process for small groups designed to address one of the most important needs that Catholic parishes have today—how to help Catholics accept their baptismal role to be missionary disciples.

Church leaders at all levels, including the Pope, have spoken about the importance of a vibrant, joyous, confident attitude on the part of Catholics, an attitude that can move seamlessly into appropriate conversation and sharing with others, into respectful and tactful invitation and engagement. Although Catholic life provides many resources for shaping missionary disciples, this reality still goes largely unappreciated by most Catholics and, unfortunately, by many Catholic parish leaders.

SENT TO SERVE has three parts, each designed to enhance an aspect of Catholic life and each reinforcing the other parts. Over the course of this process in discipleship, Catholics will be exposed to the major elements of their Catholic experience in a way that brings to consciousness how their lives can be shaped in greater service to the Gospel.

SENT TO SERVE provides an accessible way to help Catholics acknowledge, reclaim, and activate the graces for being missionary disciples. Through the three parts of the program, Catholics can grow in their relationship with other Catholics, advance in their following of Jesus and response to his Spirit, and reflect on the kinds of actions they can do in their daily life to serve the vision of Jesus Christ.

Part 1, ENCOUNTERS, provides a way for Catholics to think about people who have been called by God and how their experience gives direction for our experience as well. The biblical figures chosen for reflection and discussion are figures that Catholics hear about in the Scripture readings on Sundays and in their ordinary prayer life. **ENCOUNTERS** provides the biblical framework to reinforce the theological reality that every Catholic has been called by Christ in the Spirit.

Part 2, BEATITUDES, develops the attitudes that shape Catholic actions. Each session offers a particular perspec-

tive on the various Beatitudes so that Catholics can begin to learn the inner vocabulary of discipleship—and how this inner vocabulary allows for growth in our ability to live and share our faith more fully.

Part 3, SACRAMENTS, looks at the Sacraments that we celebrate as empowerments of missionary action, helping Catholics to see that the sacramental reality we live is not just for our inner sanctification but also for our missionary engagement with the world around us. Reflection on the Sacraments ties together the call we have received and the gifts the Spirit has given us so that we can live more fully the priestly, prophetic, and kingly vocations we have received. As priests, we all pray and worship on our behalf and on behalf of all. As prophets, we all hear and reflect God's Word active in our lives. As kings, we all shape our world to be responsive to the vision of the Kingdom that Jesus gave us as a living legacy.

Whether your group meets in person or virtually, **SENT TO SERVE** is designed to create awareness of yourself as a disciple and acceptance of the implications of being called through interpersonal, communal expressions that reinforce the discipleship-reality of Catholic life. Each session has three elements: welcome, sharing, and hearing the Scripture; then discussing the lesson and video; finally more intimate sharing, prayer, and a song. Together these elements help create the relational dynamics that can amplify our Catholic awareness of how we are called, empowered, and sent to serve as followers of Jesus.

Note to Group Leader: Videos are available on the DVDs in the "Parish Pack." The videos might be found from other sources by searching online, but online availability cannot be guaranteed.

You will see that we include resources outside our Catholic sphere, both video presentations on YouTube from renowned Christian preacher Rob Bell and adapted meditation exercises from Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Perhaps some Catholics might feel a little uncomfortable about this, but seeing these powerful reflections provides a model for the kinds of ways we are all invited to delve into the Scriptures and our own experience and to find meaning that illuminates life—especially our Catholic life!

PART 1: ENCOUNTERS

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INTRODUCTION TO PART 1: ENCOUNTERS

Time and time again, our Bible readings show us vivid pictures of God's startling reversals. From our point of view, God's message and story are upside down, inside out.

We will discover in this series, **ENCOUNTERS**, new eyes with which to see the Scriptures and even our own lives. The first person whom we will companion is Mary, who encounters the angel sent by God. She is an ordinary young girl who becomes the Mother of Jesus. In the end, God's grace and mercy work the great reversal, as Mary proclaims in the Magnificat: "He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:51-52). In the ensuing sessions, we will experience Peter, whose relationship with Jesus overcomes his fear and doubt. Then John the Beloved, who loves Jesus as his dearest companion; Mary Magdalene, who becomes a courageous disciple; Zacchaeus, who completely converts his life to service; and finally Paul, who changes his exclusive dependence on the law to an inclusive relationship with others in Christ.

All of these sessions are to help each of us to become more keenly aware of our shared human experience, to open ourselves for the healing power of love to arise. We are not alone. We are part of the Body of Christ. When we look at and experience Mary's encounter with Jesus, we are encountering more than the human person Jesus through Mary. We are encountering God. It is such an adventure, opening our lives to see everything as a miracle. Once we know that all encounters are hiding places for God, then we will see him in others and all around us.

This mystery of discovering that encountering Jesus is really encountering God is not something you can't un-

derstand; rather, we glimpse it, as there is always more to learn and an inner experience to be had! Don't let that scare you or put you off. An encounter with God is both personal and universal. Jesus is both human and divine. God's essence is revealed: first in creation, then in Jesus, then in us, who are made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27)!

Throughout Part 1, we will encourage you to become aware of and be intentional in practicing "The Encounter Process," as we have named it. There are four simple steps:

First, to see another.

Second, to hear their story.

Third, to affirm them.

Fourth, to serve them.

At the end of these Encounters, Group Leaders will find notes on page 16 of this booklet that elaborate some of the group processes we suggest to enhance the experience of participants. Just notice where it says "LN" in the text; this refers to the "Leader Notes" located after the last session. *These notes, and video links, are also available at www.pemdc.org/sent.*

We also include at the end of each session an optional "Holy Homework" activity for during the week after the session. These are meditation/breathing exercises adapted from the 1975 book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk and peace activist. We hope these exercises will help you to slow down and be attentive, open to a deeper encounter with yourself, others, and God.

Let us begin!



PART 1: SESSION 1

Mary the Mother of Jesus

Welcome, Introductions & Scripture

Welcome! We are glad you are here! Come in, have a seat in the circle, and help yourself to some food or drink.

Let's learn each other's names through "The Name Game."
(5 minutes) **ELN 1**

Opening Activity (10 minutes)

The Group Leader may facilitate the experiential learning activity for this session—"Say YES!" **ELN 2A**

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38 (5 minutes)

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man? And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Take a few moments to reflect, and, if you feel moved, share a word or phrase that stood out for you from this passage.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Read aloud the following paragraphs (one person or participants one paragraph after another)

Essential to Mary is her "Yes!" We see her as always moving forward with the affirmative response to the angel Gabriel in God's quest for her to "See, I am doing something new!" (Is 43:19).

All through a woman's pregnancy, her mothering instinct is to feed, nurture, and protect her child, even fiercely if necessary. (Don't get between a mother and her young!) In the Bible, this mothering instinct becomes a metaphor; the word used for compassion is "raham," which means "womb." God is womb-like, representing the feminine quality of intimate care.

What are other words that describe a mother's love? Caring, attentive, nurturing, and natural. The maternal impulse is an innate nurturing instinct to care for her child. "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Is 66:13).

As Mary mothers her son, naming him in her Aramaic tongue "Yeshua," she is intensely present to him, first in her pregnancy, then as he matures from infant, to child, to young man, as he becomes a prophet of God, and ultimately through his death into his Resurrection.

But we know that Mary does not always go along with Jesus and his mission. Finding him lost in the Temple confuses her (Lk 2:41-52). At other times, she feels that she is on the outside looking in, as when he is preaching (Mk 3:32ff). In these moments, Mary struggles to understand her encounter with Jesus, much as we all do at times.

It is important to remember that such moments of doubt are natural. They arise from the ego, which seeks to be in control of what we see, instead of allowing us to see the encounter as it really is. As Rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani and others have written, we see things not as they are but as we are. In this way, the ego limits us, taking away our freedom to see and to be.

For Mary, there were misunderstandings in her encounter with Jesus; nonetheless, she was always guided by her maternal instinct to love, nurture, care, and encounter more deeply.

Mary can deepen our encounter with God through Jesus. She shows God's presence and guidance even when she did not fully understand. Can we look beyond our own ego, our own need to control? The true nature of encounter is not always what we see at first.

Video: She (Rob Bell | NOOMA) (15 minutes) **ELN 3**

As you watch the video, be attentive to any thoughts, feelings, or insights you experience.

Questions for Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)

1. When have you said "yes" to a new thing that God wanted to do in your life?
2. Have you ever struggled to understand something that was happening in your life? Looking back, what do you remember about the way God was guiding you during that time?
3. What are the encounters that have changed you the most? The ones that called for the most out of you?

Small Group Discipling (15 minutes)

In clusters of two or three, share about a time when you were confused about moving forward with something or someone in your life. What did you learn from this experience?

ELN 4

After each person has shared, the Group Leader will facilitate a discussion of what each group learned or had in common.

ELN 5

Prayer (10 minutes)

Pray together Mary's Prayer, the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55):

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.
He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.*

*He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

At the conclusion of the prayer, we will spend a few moments reflecting on our **Call to Action** for this week. (Write your thoughts in the space provided.)

What is a situation in my life where God's perspective might be different from my own? What does this inspire me to do?

Song: Hail Mary, Gentle Woman (Carey Landry) ELN 6

Let us go forth, offering each other the Sign of Peace, and enjoy a time of hospitality, fellowship, food and drink.

Holy Homework: Meditation/Breathing Exercise (optional)

Try this breathing/walking meditation several times at home during the week following this session.

Feel the Affirmation and Gratitude of Mary. As you walk:

Inhale, affirming, "Yes..."

Pause as you take several steps reflecting on the "Yes."
Exhale, affirming, "Thank You..." as you continue walking.
Focus on your breathing and your walking, being present to both.

When you have walked for five or more minutes, you may be surprised at the "encounter" you have had. What did you become aware of? Do you feel affirmed? Are you grateful?

Sent to Serve: BEATITUDES, *Cultivating the Attitudes of Jesus*

Authors: Mark Springer and Julia Mazanka

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PART TWO

BEATITUDES

Cultivating the Attitudes of Jesus

Mark Springer & Julia Mazanka

“We were put in this world to love [God] and our neighbors. Everything else passes away, only this remains. The tragedy we are experiencing summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is no use if not used to serve others.

For life is measured by love.”

(Pope Francis, Palm Sunday homily, April 5, 2020)

WELCOME TO ALL!

Life is indeed “measured by love.” We are so pleased that you and your group have gathered together to “ask, seek, and knock” (Mt. 7:7-8) for the life-changing ideas and practices of the Beatitudes of Jesus. With these sessions, we take seriously Jesus’ example of self-emptying love, the way of mercy and compassion, and the call to proclaim the Gospel in our lives. As St. Francis of Assisi famously said, “Proclaim the Gospel and, if necessary, use words.” That is what we all are to be about, the practical infusion of the Beatitudes into our everyday living. And so we begin open and excited...



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PART 2: BEATITUDES

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INTRODUCTION TO PART 2: BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes refer to statements at the beginning of the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, statements with which Jesus opens the long discourse we call the "Sermon on the Mount." These statements express, in a compressed way, values that should characterize the followers of Jesus. Jesus uses ways of stating things from Jewish tradition to express his message.

The Beatitudes refer to the "blessed," positive attitudes that Jesus teaches his disciples. The first word in each of the Beatitudes is "blessed," but its meaning is much more fully described with words such as "happy" or "blissful" or even "ecstatic"! The Blessed are favored in the eyes and heart of God. Living these Beatitudes as attitudes of being ("be-attitudes"), we make the reign of God present in our midst.

When we live these Beatitudes, we are taking a risk. When we come to understand and experience the ramifications of the Beatitudes, we will be putting people and relationships first, rather than wealth or popularity. Your life direction will change. People might put you down when someone hurts you and you don't get even. People might call you crazy for protesting war and the outrageous military budget. People might scoff when you say, "Love your enemies."

But Jesus says that God will bless us when we take these risks. When we follow God's direction, God's meaning will become more apparent in our lives. When we face our pain and mourn, we will be comforted. When we choose mercy and world peace, God will give us strength to forgive and to stand publicly against violence. The more we live in total trust in God, the more God's values and blessings will become transparent in our lives.

These attitudes that Jesus enjoins on us actually come from the encounters he has with us. When Jesus calls and engages us, he shows us the "inner heart" of God, that is, the way God's love and life work in terms of creation and human existence. Having explored various kinds of encounters in Part 1, the Beatitudes give us an opportunity to see some implications of what it means to encounter Jesus.

So, take a risk as you listen and explore the relational implications of living the Beatitudes.

Let the adventure begin!

Group Leaders will find notes for leading these sessions beginning on page 15 of this booklet. These Leader Notes, and video links, are also available at www.pemdc.org/sent.



PART 2: SESSION 1

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Welcome, Introductions & Scripture

Welcome! We are glad you are here! Come in, have a seat in the circle, and help yourself to some food or drink.

Let’s learn each other’s names through “The Name Game.”
(5 minutes) **BLN 1**

Opening Activity (10 minutes)

The Group Leader may facilitate the experiential learning activity for this session—“Open Bowl.” **BLN 2A**

Scripture: Luke 5:3-7 (5 minutes)

Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking.

Take a few moments to reflect, and, if you feel moved, share a word or phrase that stood out for you from this passage.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Read aloud the following paragraphs (one person or participants one paragraph after another)

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel is the first extended proclamation of Jesus to his followers. He intends to show them the basic attitudes needed to be his followers.

“Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What if we looked at the phrase “poor in” a little differently and spelled it “pour-in” spirit? This small change in spelling helps us get to the heart of this Beatitude. When we have a “pour-in” spirit, we make our spirits open so that we can be “poured into” by God and others. The personal results of this kind of disposition are the Fruits of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). When we see the emptiness in our hearts, our poverty because of our need for God, then God can fill that emptiness.

Think of a faucet. When you turn it on (open it), water flows in abundance. When a faucet is closed, no water can flow. Our spirits are like this! When we are open, we allow the Kingdom of God to be poured into us. It is poured into us so we can, in turn, pour it into the lives of others we encounter. The Fruits of the Spirit come from God so that, in turn, we use these new attitudes in relationship with others!

We, as modern people, are astonished by the simplicity and starkness of this message—“How are the poor blessed”? This question arises in all our minds because so much of our activity today is to gain and secure financial stability. Stock markets. Portfolios. Banking accounts. Our culture is all about these concerns today.

But the idea of being “poor” wants to cut deeper into our spiritual awareness. This Beatitude asks us what we should ultimately rely on in our lives. Do we not all know very wealthy people who are miserable? We likewise know powerful people who end up quite isolated.

What is Jesus asking of his disciples? That we understand that we cannot secure our lives by wealth and comfort. Rather, God has to be the basic wealth of each of us; to be “poor” is to be open to God’s action in our lives and to recognize our fundamental dependency on God, our need to have God’s life poured into us.

Video: Open (Rob Bell | NOOMA) (15 minutes) **BLN 3**

As you watch the video, be attentive to any thoughts, feelings, or insights you experience.

Questions for Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)

1. How does changing the spelling of “poor” to “pour-in” enhance your understanding of this Beatitude?
2. How much of our energy goes into being financially secure? How much into being of service to others? What would we prefer for our lives?
3. How has your experience of God freed you up to serve others? In what ways have you encountered others because of your openness (pour-in attitude) to God?

Small Group Discipling (15 minutes)

In clusters of two or three, share some ways that this new understanding of the Beatitude has opened your eyes toward mission. How might you, and our parish, be more open to reaching out to others?

BLN 4

After each person has shared, the Group Leader will facilitate a discussion of what each group learned or had in common.

BLN 5

Prayer (10 minutes)

You are invited to speak of the various kinds of poverty we find around us—in society, in the Church, in our personal lives—and to offer a prayers of intention in response.

At the conclusion of the prayer, we will spend a few moments reflecting on our **Call to Action** for this week. (Write your thoughts in the space provided.)

How can I live having a “pour-in” Spirit and trusting God more fully in my life this week?

Song: Open My Eyes (Jesse Manibusan)

BLN 6

Let us go forth, offering each other the Sign of Peace, and enjoy a time of hospitality, fellowship, food and drink.

For next session: Please bring an object that, for you, symbolizes meekness.

Holy Homework: Meditation/Breathing Exercise (optional)

Try this breathing meditation several times at home during the week following this session.

Inhale, affirming, “I have a pour-in spirit.”

Pause.

Exhale, affirming, “I am open to all!”

Repeat several times.

PART THREE

SACRAMENTS

Signs that Call Us Forth

Mark Springer & Julia Mazanka

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’ The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step toward Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: ‘Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you.

I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more
into your redeeming embrace.”

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #3)

WE WELCOME YOU WITH GREAT JOY!

And along with Pope Francis, we invite you to walk the sacred path of the Sacraments with us. This experience will engage and enliven you, as the Pope explains “to desire, seek and protect the good of others” (*Fratelli Tutti*, #1). We hope these group sessions will “catch you by surprise” and fill you with joy and abounding grace. Step forward now in faith, in a radical act of desire, that will move you in the direction of your possibilities and your unlimited potential as sacred daughters and sons of God! May you all be as open as was Samuel when he prayed to the Lord, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:10).



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Part 2, BEATITUDES, develops the attitudes that shape Catholic actions. Each session offers a particular perspec-

tive on the various Beatitudes so that Catholics can begin to learn the inner vocabulary of discipleship—and how this inner vocabulary allows for growth in our ability to live and share our faith more fully.

Part 3, SACRAMENTS, looks at the Sacraments that we celebrate as empowerments of missionary action, helping Catholics to see that the sacramental reality we live is not just for our inner sanctification but also for our missionary engagement with the world around us. Reflection on the Sacraments ties together the call we have received and the gifts the Spirit has given us so that we can live more fully the priestly, prophetic, and kingly vocations we have received. As priests, we all pray and worship on our behalf and on behalf of all. As prophets, we all hear and reflect God's Word active in our lives. As kings, we all shape our world to be responsive to the vision of the Kingdom that Jesus gave us as a living legacy.

Whether your group meets in person or virtually, **SENT TO SERVE** is designed to create awareness of yourself as a disciple and acceptance of the implications of being called through interpersonal, communal expressions that reinforce the discipleship-reality of Catholic life. Each session has three elements: welcome, sharing, and hearing the Scripture; then discussing the lesson and video; finally more intimate sharing, prayer, and a song. Together these elements help create the relational dynamics that can amplify our Catholic awareness of how we are called, empowered, and sent to serve as followers of Jesus.

Note to Group Leader: Videos are available on the DVDs in the "Parish Pack." The videos might be found from other sources by searching online, but online availability cannot be guaranteed.

You will see that we include resources outside our Catholic sphere, both video presentations on YouTube from renowned Christian preacher Rob Bell and adapted meditation exercises from Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Perhaps some Catholics might feel a little uncomfortable about this, but seeing these powerful reflections provides a model for the kinds of ways we are all invited to delve into the Scriptures and our own experience and to find meaning that illuminates life—especially our Catholic life!

PART 3: SACRAMENTS

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INTRODUCTION TO PART 3: SACRAMENTS

We have already seen the importance of encounter—with God through Jesus, in the Spirit, and with each other. God encountered people when they met Jesus Christ during his life on earth. But can we encounter Jesus today?

That's what Sacraments are about—encountering Jesus and also being empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve.

A sacrament is a sign of God's presence in our lives. It is a personal encounter with God, an experience of love, presence, and strength. These sacred realities can be celebrated everyday through our Christ-like living of the continuous grace of the Sacraments. These Sacraments lead us to be joyful, welcoming, forgiving, committed, strengthened, and capable of reaching out to others.

South African leader Nelson Mandela has been credited with saying, "If you talk to man in a language that he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to man in his language, that goes to his heart." We have heard the words of the Sacraments in the language of theology, and we have understood those with our heads. But we are, even more, invited to an experience of the Spirit and faith in our language, a language that goes to the heart, touching what is most precious and dear to us—our lives, our friendships, our families, and our experiences of being loved.

As we encounter Jesus, his attitudes are built up in us. Our celebration of the Sacraments both reinforces us in our faith and also empowers us to a more active discipleship as followers of Jesus.

Our hearts will be kindled with the flame of faith "burning within us" as we embark on our journey with Jesus. The Spirit guides us on our journey. The Spirit permeates the process. The Spirit strengthens us for action. Every gathering and every experience manifest the divine life that has been given to us.

Let us begin! Christ awaits!

Group Leaders will find notes for leading these sessions beginning on page 15 of this booklet. These Leader Notes, and video links, are also available at www.pemdc.org/sent.



PART 3: SESSION 1

Baptism and Confirmation

Welcome, Introductions & Scripture

Welcome! We are glad you are here! Come in, have a seat in the circle, and help yourself to some food or drink.

Let's learn each other's names through "The Name Game."
(5 minutes) **SLN 1**

Opening Activity (10 minutes)

The Group Leader may facilitate the experiential learning activity for this session—"M&Ms." **SLN 2A**

Scripture: Luke 3:21-22 (5 minutes)

After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Take a few moments to reflect, and, if you feel moved, share a word or phrase that stood out for you from this passage.

Group Reflection (5 minutes)

Read aloud the following paragraphs (one person or participants one paragraph after another)

Baptism and Confirmation are both Sacraments of initiation into the life of Christ. These Sacraments insert us into the Body of Christ, which is us, the Church, and deepen our commitment to be part of that Body.

This means that we've got to give of ourselves, responding to Jesus' encounter with us through our personal commitment. Just as we must do something to get many things in life, the same is true for our spiritual life! Sometimes even more effort is needed on our part because our culture works against the direction God is calling us!

So often the message we hear from our culture is: "We grow by getting! The more I have, the more I am!" When we listen to this message, we come to believe that our possessions are more important than our personal quali-

ties, such as character and virtue. No! We grow by giving! True growth happens by sharing our uniqueness with others, by being in relationships, in friendships, in following Christ.

Baptism is the Sacrament of belonging through which we are welcomed, washed clean of our ego needs to be separate (the false self), and immersed into the loving Body of Christ. It calls us to take on Jesus Christ as our model of life, our model of giving. It is the celebration of God's initial, and transforming, gift of grace in our lives. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to the life in the Spirit...and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons [and daughters] of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission... (#1213).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the Sacrament of Confirmation as celebrating the completion of baptismal grace by the outpouring of the Spirit:

For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (#1285).

This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in His service forever, and the promise of divine protection in the trials of life.

Confirmation is about choosing to affirm and strengthen ourselves and others in Christ. To affirm someone is to assure them of the certainty of their worth, their value, and their esteemed position. They are valuable, worthwhile and worthy because they are beloved children of God. This is true even before they have ever done anything good or noteworthy. As Baptism and Confirmation show how God affirms us as daughters and sons, it also allows us, through the Holy Spirit which we receive, to affirm and serve others.

We are to make a practice of building up others each day with every person we know and meet. This is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about: doing what Jesus would do—we are called “to be his hands and feet, eyes and voice” for others. The commitment we make to God, which is a result of the commitment God has made to us in Jesus, entails a similar commitment to others—to invite them into Christ’s gracious Kingdom of unlimited love.

Video: Breathe (Rob Bell | NOOMA) (15 minutes) SLN 3

As you watch the video, be attentive to any thoughts, feelings, or insights you experience.

Questions for Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)

1. Are you aware now that you are standing on holy ground? What does that mean?
2. How do you think the gift of Baptism helps us walk on holy ground?
3. How does our experience of the Sacrament of Baptism call us to offer that spirit of belonging to others? How can we be Christ’s “hands and feet, eyes and voice,” especially to those who are outside our communities or have not experienced the love of Christ?

Small Group Discipling (15 minutes)

In clusters of two or three, share about a time when you felt welcomed into a group. **SLN 4**

After each person has shared, the Group Leader will facilitate a discussion of what each group learned or had in common. **SLN 5**

Prayer (10 minutes)

The Group Leader will invite us to share expressions of thanksgiving for having been baptized and confirmed, prayers of petition for those whom we have become godparents, and prayer intentions for those who may not feel welcome in the Church.

At the conclusion of the prayer, we spend a few moments reflecting on our **Call to Action** for this week. (Write your thoughts in the space provided.)

How can I reach out and welcome those who do not feel welcome in the Church and help them to feel like they belong?

Song: Go Make a Difference (Steve Angrisano) SLN 6

Let us go forth, offering each other the Sign of Peace, and enjoy a time of hospitality, fellowship, food and drink.

Holy Homework: Meditation/Breathing Exercise (optional)

Try this breathing meditation several times at home during the week following this session.

Inhale, affirming, “I see myself as God’s beloved daughter/son.”

Pause.

Exhale, affirming, “I feel blessed!”

Repeat several times.