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Chapter 1

The Big Picture of Being Catholic

Learning Objectives

- to understand that beliefs of the Catholic faith are rooted in the revelation of Scripture and Tradition
- to identify and name some core Catholic beliefs, practices, and attitudes

Materials Needed

- four sheets of chart paper
- two copies of the handout “Beliefs, Practices, and Attitudes,” on pages 14–15, one to cut apart and one to use as an answer key
- a basket
- a roll of clear tape
- a Bible

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Tell** the participants that this session begins with a traditional Catholic prayer called the Act of Faith, which is a prayerful commitment to the core truths of our faith.
2. **Invite** them to turn to the Connecting with God article on page 19 in the handbook.
3. **Lead** the group in the Sign of the Cross, and then invite them to pray the prayer aloud together.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



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Foundations of Faith (15 minutes)

Some Core Catholic Beliefs

1. **Arrange** the participants into groups of three or four. Ask each group to think of as many Catholic beliefs as they can. Write them on the board as the groups share them.
2. **Invite** the participants to read or review the section “Some Core Catholic Beliefs,” on pages 15–16 in the handbook.

3. **Encourage** questions and observations on the content, and invite discussion on the questions in the For Reflection feature on page 16 in the handbook.

If you would like to provide a brief overview of the chapter's content, you may wish to use the handout "Chapter 1 Summary," on page 13, or the chapter 1 digital overview presentation in the online resources for this course.



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Faith in Action (35 minutes)

What Being Catholic Means

1. **Prepare** by writing the following headings at the top of four different sheets of chart paper: "Beliefs," "Practices," "Attitudes," and "I Don't Know." Affix these to the wall next to one another. Cut the handout into strips. Fold the strips in half and place them in the basket.
2. **Direct** the participants to form pairs. Tell them that they are going to take time to identify some items that will help them describe what being Catholic means. Explain that the basket you prepared contains slips of paper with names of various items related to the beliefs, practices, and attitudes of Catholicism.
3. **Share** that the three categories—beliefs, practices, and attitudes—are closely related: People's beliefs cause them to act a certain way (practices) and to see the world a certain way (attitudes).
4. **Provide** the following directions:
 - Line up in your pairs, forming two or three lines that face the table that holds the basket of slips of paper and the tape.
 - In turn, each pair will approach the basket and have 10 seconds to choose a slip of paper, decide which heading it belongs under, and tape it under the corresponding heading on the wall. Speak to your partner only to determine where your slip of paper should go.
 - Once you have placed your slip of paper, return to the end of the line. We will continue until all the slips of paper have been categorized.
 - If you and your partner cannot agree on where your slip of paper should go, tape it under the "I Don't Know" heading.



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5. **Ask** the participants if they think each slip of paper has been posted where it belongs. Decide as a group where any misplaced papers belong and why. If there are any slips of paper under the “I Don’t Know” heading, decide as a group where those slips of paper belong. You may use a copy of the hand-out for some help. Some of the terms could logically appear under multiple headings, so make sure you focus on a “both/and” approach rather than an “either/or” approach to assigning locations.
6. **Make** the following comments in these or similar words:
 - Catholic beliefs are rooted in the revelation of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.
 - Catholic practices are the ways in which Catholics worship and live a moral and faith-filled life.
 - Catholics have a distinct worldview. Even though we hold many beliefs in common with other Christians, there are significant differences in Catholic beliefs, practices, and attitudes as Catholics live out their faith in the world.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Select** a volunteer to read 2 Thessalonians 2:15–17.
2. **Lead** the participants in the Sign of the Cross, and invite them to think of what they currently believe about their faith.
3. **Invite** the selected volunteer to read 2 Thessalonians 2:15–17 aloud, and then ask everyone to respond by praying aloud the Apostles’ Creed on page 456 in the handbook.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



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Additional Activities

Creative Beliefs (25 minutes)

Materials Needed

- sheets of chart paper, one for each participant
- art supplies to decorate posters
- recordings of Catholic songs or hymns used at Mass and the appropriate equipment for playing them

1. **Invite** each participant to select one of the core Catholic beliefs from pages 15–16 in the handbook.
2. **Distribute** the chart paper and art supplies, and explain that each participant will spend some time creating a poster with words, signs, and symbols that reflect that belief in some way.
3. **Assure** the participants that even if they don't understand the belief fully, they should create a poster to the best of their ability.
4. **Play** some Catholic songs or hymns while they are working on their posters and invite them to listen for how these songs relay some of the Catholic beliefs covered.
5. **Encourage** volunteers to share their posters with the rest of the group, explaining the belief they chose and the meaning behind the words, signs, and symbols they presented on their posters.
6. **Affirm** the group for their creativity and assure them that they will be learning more about Catholic beliefs, practices, and attitudes as they continue through this course.



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The Core of the Catholic Faith (25 minutes)

Materials Needed

- copies of handout “The Core of the Catholic Faith,” on pages 16–18, one for each group of three
- instrumental music and the appropriate equipment for playing it (*optional*)

1. **Arrange** the participants into groups of three, and distribute the three-page handout to each group.
2. **Tell** the participants that each group member should take a page of the handout so that each person has a different topic: core beliefs, core practices, or core attitudes of the Catholic faith.



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3. **Explain** that everyone should silently read each statement on their handout page and choose a symbol that best represents their current understanding of each statement. Share that they should then briefly write what they know about each statement.
4. **Consider** playing instrumental music as the participants complete the handout. Allow about 10 minutes (or longer if some have not completed their page).
5. **Call** time and assure those who may not have finished that they can share based on what they have.
6. **Explain** that the first person to share will be the person in each group who is holding the page dealing with core beliefs. Note that the second person to share will be the person who has the topic of core practices, and the third will be the one who has the topic of core attitudes.
7. **Encourage** the groups to listen carefully as people share. Tell them that after a group member shares about each statement on their list, the large group may express their ideas about the statements.
8. **Allow** some time for conversation and then invite volunteers to share with the large group something new they learned about the Catholic faith through this activity.
9. **Conclude** by reminding the participants that they are only beginning this course about the Catholic faith and will have many opportunities to learn, ask questions, and share their faith and knowledge with one another.

Chapter 1 Summary

The Big Picture of Being Catholic

1. Being Catholic is a wonderful and powerful way to experience God in the world and the fullest way to follow Jesus Christ.
2. The popular image of Catholicism formed by the media is filled with stereotypes and misinformation and is a misleading source for truly understanding what it means to be Catholic.
3. The great number of Catholics in the world testifies to Catholicism's universal appeal and to the power that the Catholic faith has in people's lives.
4. Catholics have a distinct worldview. Even though Catholics hold many beliefs in common with other Christians, there are some significant differences between Catholic and Protestant beliefs, practices, and attitudes.
5. Some common threads surface when Catholics talk about what is important to them about the Catholic faith.
6. Catholic beliefs are rooted in the revelation of Scripture and Tradition.
7. The fullness of God's revealed truth is called Sacred Tradition and is entrusted to the Apostles' successors, the bishops of the Church.
8. Catholic practices, the ways in which Catholics worship and live moral and faith-filled lives, are based on Catholic beliefs, so they are also rooted in Scripture and Tradition.
9. Catholics see the world in a unique way because their attitudes reflect God's Revelation in Scripture and Tradition.
10. Catholics recognize that God is present to, in, and through all creation—including the natural world, people, communities, and historical events.
11. The Act of Faith is an old and traditional prayer of the Catholic Church. People prayed it as a sign of commitment to the core truths of the faith.



Beliefs, Practices, and Attitudes

Beliefs



We are created for union with God.

Original Sin deprived us of holiness and justice.

God established covenants as a sign of fidelity.

We believe in one God in three Divine Persons.

Jesus was both fully God and fully human,
the Second Divine Person of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus suffered, died, and was raised for our salvation.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the
Third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity.

The Catholic Church is One, Holy,
Catholic, and Apostolic.

God's revealed truth is found in
Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.



Practices



- Celebration of the Sacraments
- Following the Liturgical Year
- Faithfulness to the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes
- The dignity of the human person
- Living out our Catholic social teachings
- Honoring the Blessed Mother and the Communion of Saints
- Forgiveness of sin
- Keeping Sunday holy

Attitudes



- Seeing creation as sacred and a potential source of God’s grace
- Placing trust in the essential goodness of the human person
- Recognizing that we are flawed by the effect of Original Sin
- Appreciating both faith and reason—religion and science
- Putting an emphasis on community life and communal worship
- Respecting the diversity of cultures in the world
- Being committed to proclaiming Jesus’ message to all people



The Core of the Catholic Faith

Core Beliefs

Each statement below is a core belief of the Catholic faith. Choose a symbol (“I get it,” “I’m unsure,” or “I don’t get it”) that best reflects your understanding of each belief. Then briefly explain what you might know about each core belief. You may need another sheet of paper for your explanations.

<p>All humans were created to live in perfect harmony with one another.</p> <p>What do you think about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>Original Sin deprived the human race of our original holiness and justice.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>God worked to restore humanity’s love and trust through a series of covenants, especially through Jesus.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of the relationship of love and trust between God and humankind.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>The Holy Spirit has been at work from the beginning of creation to the present day.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>God has revealed himself to be Trinity, that is, the mystery of one God in three Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</p> <p>What do you know about his core belief?</p>	  
<p>Christ established the Catholic Church on the foundation of the Apostles.</p> <p>What do you know about his core belief?</p>	  
<p>The Bible is a source of God’s revealed truth.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  
<p>The baptized who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior will find their eternal reward in Heaven.</p> <p>What do you know about this core belief?</p>	  



Core Practices

Each statement below is a core practice of the Catholic faith. Choose a symbol (“I get it,” “I’m unsure,” or “I don’t get it”) that best reflects your understanding of each practice. Then briefly explain what you might know about each core practice. You may need another sheet of paper for your explanations.

<p>Catholics celebrate Seven Sacraments that form the basis of their worship, or communal prayer, together.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>The Seven Sacraments were instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church to make the love of God real and present in the world.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>The Eucharist is the heart of the Church’s life.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>Catholics keep the Lord’s Day (Sunday) holy by attending Mass and resting from work.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>Catholic worship follows the Liturgical Year, which marks the events and mystery of Christ’s life.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>Catholics place a strong emphasis on living a moral life.</p> <p>What do you know about this practice?</p>	  
<p>Catholics defend the dignity of all human life and oppose any practices that threaten the sanctity of human life.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>The Church is responsible for transforming society by working for justice.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  
<p>Catholics honor holy women and men of faith who have preceded them.</p> <p>What do you know about this core practice?</p>	  



Core Attitudes

Each statement below is a core attitude of the Catholic faith. Choose a symbol (“I get it,” “I’m unsure,” or “I don’t get it”) that best reflects your understanding of each attitude. Then briefly explain what you might know about each core attitude. You may need another sheet of paper for your explanations.

<p>Catholics recognize that God is present to, in, and through all creation—the natural world, people, communities, and events.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics place their trust in the essential goodness of the human person, who is made in the image of God.</p> <p>What do you know about this Catholic attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics rely on both faith and reason to grow in their understanding of God, and believe that reason can lead us to faith.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics believe that conflicts between religion and science are a result of not fully understanding one or the other.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics believe that the fullness of truth resides in the Catholic Church but that other religions can share in aspects of the truth.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics emphasize community life and communal worship.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>The Catholic faith deeply respects the diversity of cultures in the world and is committed to proclaiming Jesus’ message to all. (Your name) takes responsibility for nurturing their faith through the Church, especially by participating in the sacraments.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  
<p>Catholics respect and embrace a wide variety of prayer forms.</p> <p>What do you know about this core attitude?</p>	  



Chapter 2

How Can We Know God?

Learning Objectives

- to gain insight into the Catholic Church's understanding of Revelation and its transmission
- to understand how Catholics come to know the truth about God and why that has meaning for their lives

Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each participant
- copies of the handout "Aquinas's Five Proofs for the Existence of God," on page 25, one for each participant

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Tell** the participants that the opening prayer will begin with a reading from Scripture that illustrates God's Revelation to us.
2. **Select** a participant to read 1 Samuel 3:1–10,19 aloud.
3. **Lead** the group in the Sign of the Cross and the following prayer. Have the participants respond "Here I am, Lord" after each statement.
 - Good and gracious God, you call to us constantly, without ever giving up on us. *(Here I am, Lord)*
 - Help us to open our hearts and minds and ears, and to never give up on your love. *(Here I am, Lord)*
 - Let us be a sign of your presence and love for those in need. *(Here I am, Lord)*
 - Inspire us to read your Word and follow the example of your disciples in spreading the Good News. *(Here I am, Lord)*
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

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Foundations of Faith (15 minutes)

Our Need for God

1. **Explain** to the participants that one way God reveals himself is through creation. Read the Connecting with God article on page 23 in the handbook. Ask the participants to share some other ways God reveals himself to us.
2. **Direct** the participants to read or review the chapter introduction and the sections “Our Need for God” and “Reason and Revelation,” on pages 21–25 in the handbook.
3. **Guide** the participants to the For Reflection feature on page 24 in the handbook. Invite them to share their responses to the question.

If you would like to provide a brief overview of the chapter’s content, you may wish to use the handout “Chapter 2 Summary,” on page 24, or the chapter 2 digital overview presentation in the online resources for this course.

Faith in Action (35 minutes)

Proofs for God’s Existence

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1. **Prepare** for this activity by distributing copies of the handout to each participant. Arrange the participants into groups of four.
2. **Begin** this activity by highlighting the following information:
 - You will be working in groups today to examine the role of reason in coming to know God. You will specifically focus on some important understandings given to us by Saint Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth-century theologian. Aquinas is one of the Doctors of the Church and is considered one of the greatest theologians and philosophers in the Church’s history.
 - Saint Thomas Aquinas’s most famous work is the *Summa Theologica*. As a work of systematic theology, the *Summa Theologica* sought to explain the Christian faith in a reasonable and coherent way by addressing human nature and our ability to know God. Aquinas worked to unite the intellect with the senses in what is sometimes referred to as “natural theology.” His work continues to be studied today as an important part of the Church’s teaching on faith and reason.

- You will be examining Aquinas’s Five Proofs for the Existence of God in your groups. Aquinas based his arguments, or “proofs,” for God’s existence on human reason. Aquinas’s proofs are extremely valuable today because they demonstrate the idea that believing in God is reasonable.
3. **Assign** one proof to each group. If you have more than five groups, several groups will focus on the same proof. Tell each group to discuss the meaning of their proof and to capture some key points of their discussion in writing so that they will be able to present their understanding to the other groups. Each small group should select a representative who will present their summary to the large group. Assure the participants that these proofs can be difficult to understand, but encourage them to do their best.
 4. **Allow** each small group sufficient time to review, discuss, and summarize their assigned proof. Gather the large group and invite each small group’s representative to present a summary of the proof their group studied. Ask clarifying questions and provide encouragement and support for each representative as they present.
 5. **Ask** the large group for feedback on this exercise. Did they find it helpful or confusing? Could they have used more background information? Have the participants share their understanding of why it is important to use the faculty of reason to better know our relationship with God. Ask if this approach to understanding God may have some limitations.
 6. **Remind** the participants of the following distinctions as a summary:
 - We can come to know God on the basis of his works, through natural reason. Reason is the natural ability human beings possess to know and understand the truth.
 - Revelation is God’s self-communication and disclosure of the divine plan to humankind through Creation, events, and people, and most fully through Jesus Christ.

You may want to preview the Five Proofs for God’s Existence by directing the participants to the Good to Know article on page 56 in the handbook. You may also opt to give your own summary of each proof to provide additional background for the participants.



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Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Prepare** for the closing prayer by distributing the Bibles and asking the participants to find Psalm 138. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.
2. **Lead** the participants by reading Psalm 138:1–3 aloud.
3. **Direct** them to respond, after each verse is read, “I thank you, Lord, with all my heart.”
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

Additional Activities

Scripture and Tradition (15 minutes)

Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each participant

1. **Write** the headings “New Testament” and “Old Testament” on the board or somewhere all can see. Ask the participants to call out as many names of the books of the Bible as they can. Write these under the appropriate headings.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles, one to each participant, and instruct them to turn to the table of contents to see which books they missed.
3. **Direct** the participants to read or review the sections “Scripture and Tradition” and “Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation,” on pages 25–29 in the handbook.
4. **Tell** the participants to turn to the questions in the For Reflection feature on page 29. Discuss as a group.



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Revelation: God’s Gift to Us (25 minutes)

Materials Needed

- copies of the handout “Prayer Card,” on page 26, glued to or printed on cardstock, enough for each participant to have a copy of the verses
- envelopes, one for each participant
- a box with a lid, large enough to hold all the envelopes



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1. **Prepare** for this activity by copying the handout on cardstock or by gluing the printed handouts to sturdy cardstock. Cut each prayer card along the dotted lines and place each card in an envelope. Once you have sealed the envelopes, place them in the large box and cover it with the lid.

Chapter 3

The Bible's Big Picture

Learning Objectives

- to be introduced to some significant events in salvation history
- to be able to distinguish between the Old Testament and the New Testament

Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each participant
- copies of the handout “The Bible’s Big Picture (Part 1),” on page 34, enough so that each group of three will receive a Scripture passage when cut apart
- a container to hold the Scripture passages
- copies of the handout “The Bible’s Big Picture (Part 2),” on pages 35–36, one for each participant
- copies of the handout “The Prayer of Saint Anselm,” on page 37, one for each participant

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Tell** the participants that this session will begin with a meditation on a kind of prayer known as a canticle. Explain that a canticle is a song and refers to hymns (other than the Psalms) that appear in the Bible.
2. **Distribute** the Bibles and ask the participants to find Luke 1:68–79, the Canticle of Zechariah.
3. **Ask** them to think about what God is saying to them as they read the prayer.
4. **Begin** with the Sign of the Cross and proclaim the canticle aloud with the participants.
5. **Close** by saying the Glory Be together and end with the Sign of the Cross.

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Foundations of Faith (15 minutes)

The Big Picture of Sacred Scripture

1. **Lead** the participants in a brainstorming exercise to identify some of the most important people and events in the Bible.
2. **Write** the names of the people and events on the board as the participants identify them. You may have to offer some clues to help them out.
3. **Direct** the participants to read or review the chapter introduction and the sections “The Big Picture of Sacred Scripture,” “Primeval History,” and “The Life of Jesus Christ” on pages 31–32 and 38–39 in the handbook.
4. **Guide** the participants to the Good to Know article on page 40 in the handbook.
5. **Engage** the participants in a brief discussion about the languages of the Bible by asking the following questions:
 - Have you ever considered what language or languages the books of the Bible were written in?
 - How does this affect your thinking about the intended audience?
 - Do you think translating the Bible from its original languages could alter the meaning of some words or passages when read in a modern language?



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If you would like to provide a brief overview of the chapter’s content, you may wish to use the handout “Chapter 3 Summary,” on page 33, or the chapter 3 digital overview presentation in the online resources for this course.

Faith in Action (35 minutes)

The Bible’s Big Picture

1. **Prepare** for this activity by ensuring that each participant has a Bible. Cut the handout “The Bible’s Big Picture (Part 1)” into strips. Fold the strips in half and place them in a container so that each group can draw one passage.
2. **Arrange** the participants into groups of three. Walk around the room, inviting each group to draw one Scripture passage from the container. Then distribute a copy of the handout “The Bible’s Big Picture (Part 2)” to each participant.



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3. **Give** the following directions:
 - Each group has drawn a Scripture passage that describes one of God's covenants. Choose one member of your group to read the passage aloud while the other members of the group follow along in the Bible. If you need help finding the passage, raise your hand and I will help you.
 - Then read the explanation of a covenant on the handout "The Bible's Big Picture (Part 2)." Be sure that everyone in your group understands the meaning of *covenant*.
 - Using the questions provided on your handout, discuss why the covenant you have chosen is important. When you have completed your group work, select a representative from your small group to share with the large group a description of the covenant you chose and what you learned about.
4. **Walk** around the room as the participants work, assisting them if necessary. When everyone has finished, call on each group to share. Make sure each group shares a description of the covenant they read about in Scripture and a description of what they learned about this covenant by answering the questions.
5. **Conclude** by explaining to the participants the meaning of salvation history and inviting them to relate this concept to their personal lives. Use these or similar words:
 - All of God's covenants, culminating with the final covenant in Jesus Christ, are together what we refer to as salvation history. Through his covenants, which reach their ultimate goal in Jesus Christ, God has revealed the big picture of his relationship with us.
 - Salvation history begins with Creation and finds its complete meaning in Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and restored eternal life.
 - All of us are an important part of salvation history. God has offered the New Covenant to each of us. Reflect for a few minutes on this question: How do you fit into the big picture of salvation history?
6. **Invite** any volunteers to share their responses about how they see themselves fitting into salvation history.