

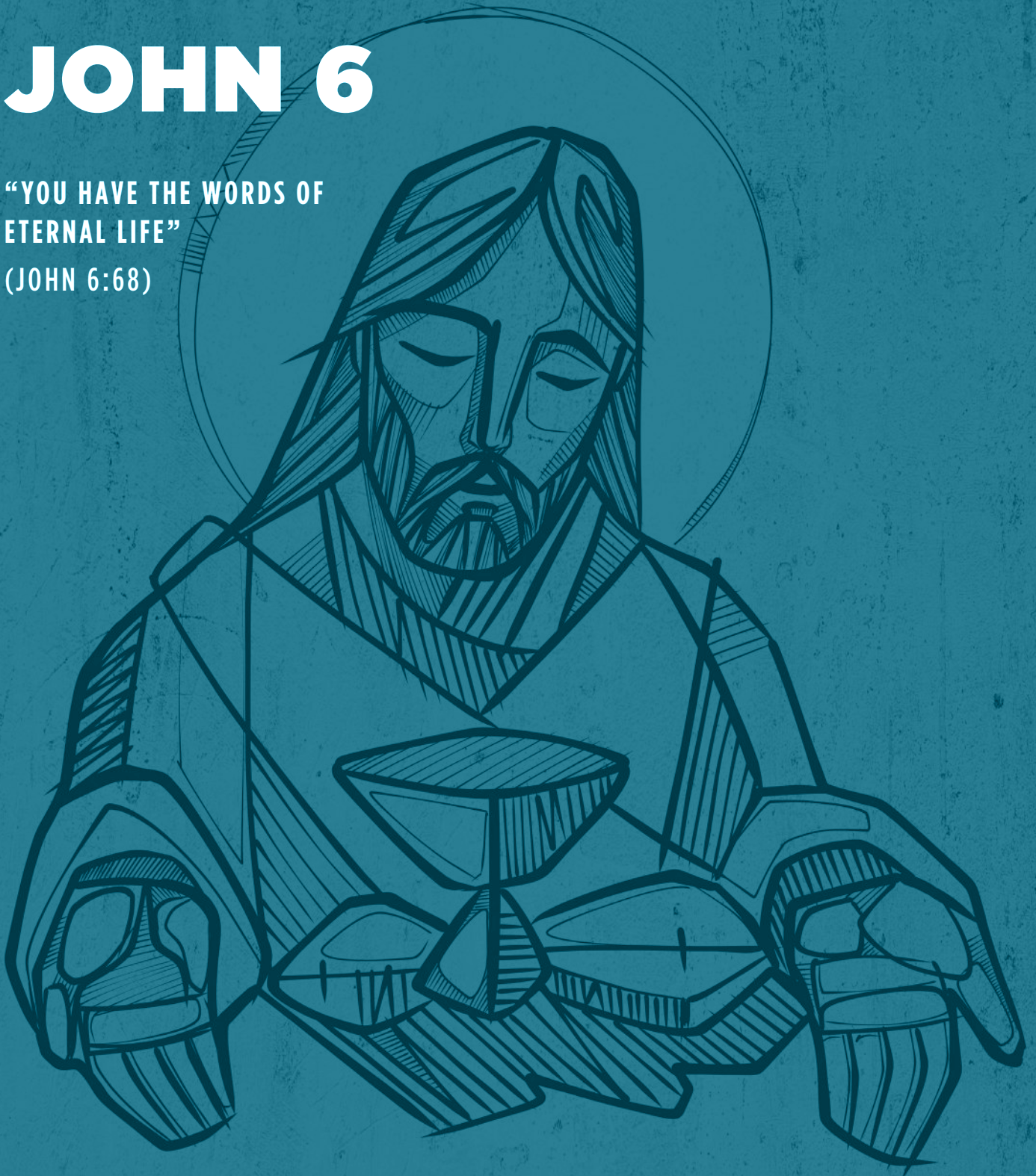


ARCHDIOCESE OF
DENVER

JOHN 6

**“YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF
ETERNAL LIFE”**

(JOHN 6:68)



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am excited to offer to you this resource exploring Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. While in prayer with my team regarding the Eucharistic Revival, the Lord drew me to John 6 and put on my heart the words, "Let Jesus be the teacher about the Eucharist." This resource is designed to put us in touch with the actual words of Jesus so that we may encounter him there and be formed directly by him on his presence in the Eucharist. Even in the time of Jesus, the teaching was divisive, and sadly many left him and the gift of salvation he offers. It is my hope that this resource will be a blessing to you and that through your prayer and pondering on the words and deeds of Jesus, he will truly teach you about the great gift of the Eucharist.

The Bishops of the United States in their document, "The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church," reminded Catholics of the love revealed in the Eucharist and cited St. Teresa of Calcutta. "We encourage this devotion [Eucharistic Adoration], which helps all of us to be formed by the self-giving love we behold in the Lord's gift of himself in the Eucharist. St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta reportedly once said: 'When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now.'"

Be assured of my prayers for you, that together we will encounter Jesus profoundly in the Mass, learn to lay down our lives with him in his sacrifice, and always be transformed by his saving presence in the Eucharist.

Fraternally Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samuel J. Aquila". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name.

Very Rev. Samuel J. Aquila
Archbishop of Denver

The hope of this resource is that it will facilitate for you an encounter with Jesus, through engaging in dialogue with Him about his words and deeds in John 6. This resource is broken up into three sections.

- This first section, **the introduction**, is meant to provide the biblical and theological context for this chapter of John's gospel and an encouragement about the nature of relational prayer.
- The second section consists of **six sessions**. We've broken John 6 into six smaller sections which will allow us to savor all of Jesus' words and deeds included in this long and rich chapter. Each of these sessions will include a portion of the text from John 6, points to consider, and questions for prayer.
- Finally, the third section of this resource, **the appendix**, will include suggestions for engaging this resource with different methods of prayer and adaptations for use within different settings (small groups, family, children's faith formation, etc).

The heart of this resource is the encounter with the words of Christ in John 6. However, Jesus' words aren't fully accessible without understanding the context in which he speaks them. Some of this context is given to us within the chapter itself. The rest of the context revolves around the historical first century hopes and expectations around the Jewish messiah. Entire books have been written to explore the many layers within each of these contexts. Our hope is to highlight the most important features of the biblical and historical contexts of the chapter in a way that is approachable to the average Catholic.

“The Jewish feast of the Passover was near.” (John 6:4)

With this one verse, John gives us the single most important context to unlocking the meaning of the words and deeds of Christ within this chapter. All that Jesus says and does within John 6 must be seen in light of the feast of Passover. It's as if the Passover is the scenery, the stage setting behind the drama which is playing out within this chapter.

What significant details should we remember from the original event in salvation history, memorialized by the Passover, that help fill in this backdrop? Here is a simple reminder of some of the details of that event, organized using the simple questions: What, Why, How, and Who.

What

When we talk about the Passover we are referring both to the Passover meal God commanded his people to participate in (Ex 12) and also the entire Exodus event in salvation history.

Why

The Passover took place because God “...heard their groaning and was mindful of his covenant” (Ex 2:24). In other words, God’s chosen people were trapped, enslaved, oppressed, exploited, etc... and God cared. He acted to save His people from their suffering and to bring about the fulfillment of the promise he had made to their fathers, a promise to give them a land flowing with milk and honey (Gen 17:7-8).

How

How did God choose to free his people and set them on the road towards His promise? The answer is what we could call “the Passover” in the strictest sense of the term. Through Moses, God commanded his people to procure for themselves an unblemished lamb, to kill the lamb, spread it’s blood upon their doorposts, and eat the lamb. The detailed account of this “Passover meal” can be found in Exodus 12. It’s important to note that all of those steps needed to be followed for that family to participate in the salvific work of God.

Who

The Exodus was the work of **God**. He initiated it, performed the mighty deeds by which it was successful, and oversaw the entire event through to its triumphant conclusion. However, God chose to accomplish this work through his servant **Moses**. God the protagonist, Moses the mediator.

Why is this background important? The Jewish people expected that to happen again. Why? Due to this prophecy spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, “A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kindred”. A prophet like Moses was expected to come again. What is Moses most known for? Leading the people out of Egypt to the promised land, and mediating for them a new covenant with God. What did the Jewish people expect of this “new Moses”? That he would lead them out of slavery, to freedom, and institute a new covenant with God. This expectation is in plain sight through the question of the crowds in John 6:30-31.

These are questions we should consider when reading this chapter (and the other Gospels): Do Jesus’ actions and words imitate those of Moses? Does Jesus feed the people miraculously (as Moses did with the manna), does Jesus speak of a meal that would bring about salvation (as Moses did with the Passover meal)? Does Jesus institute a new covenant between God and his people?

Jesus has come to institute a new exodus, to establish a new Passover meal, to lead God’s people out of slavery (not to an earthly power but to a spiritual one; the powers of sin and death), and to lead God’s people to their promised land (not an earthly plot of land but to our heavenly homeland). We hope that as you listen again to the words of Jesus in John 6, you are more prepared to understand the deeper significance Jesus is trying to communicate to each of us in this chapter.

A Word on Relational Prayer

This resource is not an academic tool or even a self-reflection program. The sole purpose of this resource is to help you enter into a personal encounter with Jesus. Jesus is still alive! Our faith is built upon the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is still working, speaking, healing, teaching, etc. Prayer is the privileged encounter between you and the living Jesus. If Jesus is truly still alive, if Jesus truly is God, if Jesus truly love us, we should expect to encounter Him and hear from Him when we spend time in prayer. However, many of us enter prayer with little faith that this will happen. Maybe we never knew this was possible, maybe we feel we've tried prayer and it "didn't work", or maybe we are unaware of what Jesus' voice "sounds like" in prayer.

No matter your previous experience of prayer, we invite you, we challenge you to exercise faith and come to these times of prayer with the expectation that you will encounter Jesus. In the appendix of this resource, you will find a variety of prayer *methods* that will provide a framework for your prayer. However, we want to share a few simple habits that have been helpful for many Catholics in shifting their prayer from a time of simple self-reflection to an experience of true dialogue with Jesus.

There are four easy habits that can be exercised with any method of prayer: Acknowledge, relate, receive, and respond.

- **Acknowledge:** when praying, simply put, name the thoughts, feelings, or desires you experience. This habit is about becoming more aware of the movements within our heart and mind.
- **Relate:** once I've become aware of what's moving in my heart and acknowledged it ("named" it), I turn to Jesus and tell him all about it. The keys to this habit are honesty and consistency.
- **Receive:** After becoming aware of what is moving in my heart and telling Jesus all about it, I wait for his response. Prayer should be a dialogue, a two-way conversation between us and the Lord. This habit trains me to give space for listening and a deeper awareness of where Jesus is responding to the movements in my heart.
- **Respond:** There may be a series of "back and forth" moments between acknowledging what is happening in my soul, relating it to Jesus, and receiving his response. Once I have more certainty around how Jesus is responding to me, I should consider what an appropriate resolution would be. An encounter with Jesus normally invites a small next step. "Respond" means that I name what I feel Jesus is inviting me to do as a result of this prayer time and I make the resolution to do it.

Using these four habits, within a proven method of prayer, and exercising faith in Jesus' love and presence will facilitate supernaturally fruitful times of prayer for you.

SESSION ONE

THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

John 6:1-15

¹ After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee [of Tiberias]. ² A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish feast of Passover was near. ⁵ When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little [bit].” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people recline.” Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. ¹² When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, “Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted.” ¹³ So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- The crowd is following Jesus because of the miraculous signs he has worked.
- Jesus chooses to lead his disciples up a mountain in a deserted place as the location for this miracle.
- The disciples have different reactions to the situation. At least one appears incredulous at the suggestion of buying food for the large crowd. Another at least attempts to offer aid, though humanly speaking it is wildly inadequate.
- The number of total people gathered may have been twice the stated amount, since John is simply capturing the number of men (without mentioning the accompanying women and children).
- Everyone is totally satisfied with the meal. No one is allowed to take any extras with them. All of the fragments are collected by the disciples at the request of Jesus.
- After the miracle, the people come to believe that Jesus is the “new Moses” promised by God and prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. As a result, they desire to take Jesus and declare him king of Israel.
- Jesus evades their attempts to assign him a role of their making (king of Israel), withdrawing to the mountain alone.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God’s presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, why did you test your disciples when you already knew what you would do in this situation (verse 6)?*
- *Jesus, why did you instruct the crowd to recline instead of asking them to come receive the miraculous loaves from you? Did you have any particular reason beyond a timely/effective distribution of the food?*
- *Jesus, why did you have your disciples distribute the food instead of doing it yourself?*
- *Jesus, why didn't you allow anyone to take extras with them? What was the significance of collecting all the fragments?*
- *Jesus, why didn't you allow them to take you and make you king?*
- *What other questions arose in my heart or mind for Jesus after reading this section.....?*

Questions to imagine Jesus asking me...

- *My daughter/son, do you consider yourself one of my followers? Why do you follow me?*
- *My daughter/son, where are you hungry and seeking to be fed?*
- *My daughter/son, do you believe that I have the desire to feed you, to satisfy your heart's deepest hunger?*
- *My daughter/son, do you believe that I have the power to feed you, even if it appears to your human mind to be impossible?*
- *My daughter/son, how might you be trying to assign a label to me (such as the people at the end of this miracle tried to do)? Will you allow me to reveal myself to you?*
- *What other question(s) can I imagine Jesus asking me in the context of this section?*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?
- What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?
- What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?
- What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...*

SESSION TWO

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

John 6:16-21

¹⁶ When it was evening, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ embarked in a boat, and went across the sea to Capernaum. It had already grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” ²¹ They wanted to take him into the boat, but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading.

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- The disciples are not forgetting Jesus when they embark without him. We learn from the other Gospel accounts of this story that Jesus commands them to go without him (Mt 14:22; Mk 6:45).
- The disciples begin their journey across the sea in the dark, and it is the middle of the night by the time they encounter Jesus walking on the sea.
- When Jesus says “It is I” (verse 20), he is recorded as using the divine name, “I Am Who Am”, in the original language of the Gospel.
- The boat, although far offshore when the disciples encounter Jesus initially, miraculously and immediately arrives at shore after he finishes speaking to them.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God’s presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, why did you have your disciples go before you to the other side of the sea? Did they voice any objections to your instructions? How did you answer them?*
- *Jesus, why did you wait until the middle of the night to join them?*
- *Jesus, what was the reaction of your disciples after you told them “Do not be afraid” (v. 20)?*
- *Jesus, why did you miraculously move the boat to the other shore? What was your intention in causing that additional miracle?*
- *What other questions arose in my heart or mind for Jesus after reading this section.....?*

Questions to imagine Jesus asking me...

- *My daughter/son, my disciples were willing to follow my instructions to go before me to the other side of the sea, even though that instruction may have appeared illogical, or inconvenient to them. Are you willing to follow my instructions when they may appear illogical or inconvenient to you?*
- *My daughter/son, in this moment, my disciples were initially afraid when I began to come near to them. Are there areas of your life, places in your heart, or memories that you may be afraid of me coming close to?*

- *The fear of my disciples was based on their misconception, they mistook me for a ghost (Mt 14:26). Is it possible that your fear of me coming closer is also based off a misconception of who I am?*
- *My daughter/son, where are you experiencing fear in your life right now? Where do you need to hear me say “Do not be afraid” (v 20)?*
- *My daughter/son, are you willing to invite me into your “boat”?*
- *What other question(s) can I imagine Jesus asking me in the context of this section?*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?
- What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?
- What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?
- What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...*

SESSION THREE

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:22-34

²² The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. ²³ Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. ²⁴ When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. ²⁵ And when they found him across the sea they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. ²⁷ Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” ²⁸ So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:

‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- The crowds are confused as to where Jesus has gone after the miracle of the loaves. They go in search of him to the other side of the sea.
- When the crowd finds Jesus, he tells them that they are searching for him because they had been fed, not because they saw a miracle. They pursue Jesus for earthly reasons (a free meal) and not spiritual reasons.
- The crowds ask Jesus to perform another sign for them so that they may believe. They seem to imply that they wish Jesus to keep feeding them, as their fathers were fed for 40 straight years on the manna.
- Jesus corrects the crowds, saying that God provided the manna and not Moses. In addition, Jesus reveals to the crowds that God intends to give them the “true bread” from heaven.
- The crowds ask Jesus to provide this bread “always”, which is a greater miracle than the manna, which was provided for only 40 years.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God’s presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, why didn't you reveal the miracle of your walking on water to the crowds? They asked you when you arrived on this side of the sea, but you did not answer their question.*
- *Jesus, I feel that I must work for food that perishes, otherwise I won't have my material needs met. Why do you instruct me to not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life?*
- *Jesus, what is the food that endures for eternal life, and how do you give it to me?*
- *Jesus, sometimes I feel that I need to ask you for a sign so that I may believe. What signs have you done for me that are meant to help me believe in you? Is it ok for me to ask you for signs in the future?*
- *What other questions arose in my heart or mind for Jesus after reading this section.....?*

Questions to imagine Jesus *asking me...*

- *My daughter/son, sometimes, like the crowd, you may be confused about where I have gone in the midst of your life. Are you willing to look for me or will you move on from me during those moments?*
- *My daughter/son, when you pray to me, are you more concerned about your earthly needs being met or your deeper, spiritual needs?*
- *My daughter/son, are you working more for the food that perishes or the food that I want to give you? What keeps you from working for the food that endures for eternal life?*
- *My daughter/son, do you believe in me? Do you believe the Father has sent me, put his seal upon me, anointed me to bring you glad tidings, to feed you, to lead you to your eternal home?*
- *My daughter/son, just as the crowds mistook the work of God and attributed it to Moses (v 32), so you too, at times, mistake the work of God and attribute it to chance or to humans. Do you believe that I am the one who provides for you?*
- *My daughter/son, will you ask me to provide for your needs and stop trying to provide for your own needs?*
- *What other question(s) can I imagine Jesus asking me in the context of this section?*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?
- What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?
- What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?
- What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...*

SESSION FOUR

“I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN”

John 6:35-51

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. ³⁶ But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe. ³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, ³⁸ because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day.”

⁴¹ The Jews murmured about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,” ⁴² and they said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, “Stop murmuring among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets:

‘They shall all be taught by God.’

Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; ⁵⁰ this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- This is the first of seven “I am” statements Jesus will make in this Gospel. These statements are crucial revelations about the identity of Jesus.
- Jesus has promised to “give them the true bread from heaven” (verse 32). The crowds, seemingly stuck in an earthly/material perspective, continue to assume that Jesus is going to provide solely for their material needs by giving them food (like the manna) for an extended period of time. Now, shockingly, he reveals that *he* is this “bread” that has been promised to them.
- The description of “the Jews murmuring” (verse 41) echoes the murmuring of the Jewish people against Moses and God in the wilderness after the crossing of the Red Sea.
- Jesus’ seemingly ordinary background is a stumbling block to the Jews, preventing them from having faith in the revelation he is giving them in these verses.
- Jesus quotes extensively from the prophets to show that God had promised to satiate his people’s hunger and thirst at the time of their salvation, which Jesus is inaugurating in their midst.
- We are meant to see a clear connection between this “bread from heaven” which will give “eternal life” and the tree of life in Genesis. Humanity was cut off from this tree and its fruit due to original sin, and now in Jesus, humanity is given access again to the food that gives eternal life.
- Finally, Jesus reveals for the first time that this “bread” is not simply a figure of speech. This bread which gives eternal life is his flesh, not simply a symbol for his teaching or way of life.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God’s presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, you promise that those who come to you and believe in you will never hunger or thirst. What does it mean for me to “come to you” or to “believe in you” so that I won’t hunger or thirst?*
- *Jesus, you have told me that you didn’t come to do “your will... but the will of the one who sent you” (verse 38). To give up my will and do the will of God seems difficult and sometimes unattractive to me. How were you able to do this? How did you find joy or peace in laying aside your will?*

- *Jesus, you said that you would not lose anything that the Father has given you. How does that apply to me, to my family or friends?*
- *Jesus, the Jews were unable to understand how you were both the child of Joseph and Mary, and also the Son of God who came down from heaven. Why didn't you explain more to them about the nature of your identity as God and man? Sometimes I struggle to hold these two truths in balance. Jesus, show me where I may be hindered by an incomplete understanding of either your humanity or divinity.*
- *Jesus, tell me more about the nature of "eternal life." Is it something I only experience after I die? Is it something I am supposed to begin experiencing on earth? If so, how?*
- *What other questions stirred in my heart or mind that I would like to ask Jesus....?*

Questions to imagine Jesus asking me...

- *My daughter/son, "whoever comes to me... believes in me... will never hunger or thirst" (verse 35). Where are you "hungry" or "thirsty" in your heart? Will you "come to me" right now with that hunger? Will you bring your "thirst" to me right now during this time of prayer?*
- *My daughter/son, I promise to raise on the last day those who believe in me. Do you have faith that I will be the one to raise you to heaven or do you struggle with the misconception that you need to "raise yourself" to heaven?*
- *My daughter/son, the Jews grumbled amongst themselves and to me. Where do you find yourself "grumbling" either "to me" or "at me" in your life right now? Are you willing to open yourself to hearing my voice in this area?*
- *My daughter/son, many of the workings of my body, the Church, appear to be solely earthly or human in origin. It can be easy to dismiss the work of my body, the Church, saying the same thing as the Jews, "how can this come from heaven" (verse 42). Do you believe I am accomplishing my mission in and through my body, the Church? How might your difficulty with the human reality of my body be preventing your deeper faith in me, the head?*
- *My daughter/son, I do wish to teach you (verse 45), and I greatly desire to show you the path of life, of peace, of joy, etc. Will you acknowledge your need to be taught these things or do you struggle with the pride that convinces you that you "know it already"? Are you willing to allow me to teach you, starting now?*
- *My daughter/son, I desire to give you my flesh, the "bread of life," so that you may have eternal life. How would you describe your desire for eternal life? Do you desire the bread that I wish to give you or do you struggle with a lack of desire? If so, ask me and I will put within you a holy desire for these things.*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?
- What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?
- What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?
- What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...*

SESSION FIVE

“FOR MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD, AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK.”

John 6:52-59

⁵² The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?” ⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats[s] my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- The disagreement between the Jews intensifies in these verses. They have gone from “murmuring” to “quarreling,” arguing with one another about what Jesus is suggesting.
- The command to eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood is shocking and disturbing to his Jewish audience. The Torah, their law, expressly forbids the consuming of blood. The eating of human flesh, then as it is now, would be entirely unthinkable.
- In the original language of this gospel, Greek, Jesus changes the verb he uses to describe “eating” his flesh in verse 54. Previously he had used a word that was a general term for eating. Now, as the debate around what he is asking them to do intensifies, he uses an even more specific verb which loosely translates “to gnaw on.” Jesus clearly wants his audience to understand he is not speaking in metaphor, but actually commanding them to eat his body.
- The result of our eating his flesh and drinking his blood (verse 56) is that we will “remain” in Jesus, and he in us. Jesus uses this language of “remaining” elsewhere in this gospel to describe the intimate relationship between him and the Father. Most notably, he will return to this language of “remaining” at the Last Supper (John 15), the very meal where he will give the Eucharist to his apostles for the first time.
- Jesus now returns to the original scriptural backdrop, the manna in the desert (Exodus 16), as he finishes revealing to us what the “true bread” God wishes to give the world is. He reveals to the Jews that the manna was simply a foreshadowing of the “true bread” which God desires to give to the world. This “true bread” is the body and blood of Jesus.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God’s presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, you say that unless we eat your flesh and drink your blood we do not have life within us (verse 53). What do you mean by “life within me”?*
- *Jesus, what about my family members, friends, or co-workers who do not go to Mass or receive you in the Eucharist? Help me understand your heart and disposition towards those who do not “eat your body or drink your blood.”*
- *Jesus, why did you choose to give me your body and blood under the veil of bread and wine? It seems to me that doing it in this way only makes it harder to believe it truly is your body and blood. Why did you choose this way?*

- *Jesus, what does it mean to “remain” in you? How are you asking me to do a better job of “abiding” in you?*
- *What other questions stirred in my heart or mind that I would like to ask Jesus....?*

Questions to imagine Jesus asking me...

- *My daughter/son, where might you have experienced “quarreling” about the Mass (in yourself, your family, etc)? What is the source of this “quarreling” and how can I help you in the midst of it?*
- *My daughter/son, do you understand the gift I am giving you in the Eucharist? Be honest with yourself and with me, do you desire to have “life within you,” to be “raised on the last day”?*
- *My daughter/son, do you believe that I am truly present in the Eucharist? Where are you struggling to believe and what can I do to help you come to deeper faith?*
- *My daughter/son, I desire to give you life through my Eucharist. Where do you turn when things are difficult, frustrating, painful? What do you think would happen if you turned to the Eucharist in those moments?*
- *My daughter/son, where in your life are you “remaining with me”? Where are you separated from me? Are you ready to allow me to “abide” with you in those places?*
- *What other questions can I imagine Jesus asking me as a result of the reading...?*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- *What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?*
- *What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?*
- *What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?*
- *What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...**

SESSION SIX

“DO YOU WANT TO GO AWAY AS WELL?”

John 6:60-71

⁶⁰ Then many of his disciples who were listening said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” ⁶¹ Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, “Does this shock you? ⁶² What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.”

⁶⁶ As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. ⁶⁷ Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?” ⁷¹ He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve.

Small details to consider prior to prayer

- Jesus' original audience finds his revelation shocking, and difficult to accept and live by.
- If the crowd finds it difficult to believe that Jesus is the bread of heaven which has descended from heaven for them, how will they be able to believe when Jesus is lifted "back up" in his passion, resurrection and ascension (verse 62)?
- "The flesh is of no avail" – meaning a "fleshy"/"human"/"earthly" way of looking at the Eucharist is insufficient and cannot pierce the truth of what Jesus is revealing. Jesus is challenging the Jews who are attempting to make his teaching conform to their preconceived ideas.
- If we take to heart the "words Jesus spoke" (verse 63) we will find the fulfillment and "life" we desire.
- Jesus is aware that there are many in the crowd who do not believe what he is saying. Many Jews stop following Jesus as a result of his teaching about the Eucharist.
- Jesus does not change his teaching to attempt to win back those who reject his words.
- Jesus turns to his closest friends and asks them if they will reject him, too.
- Finally, Jesus mentions Judas' betrayal. Seen in the context of the chapter, John seems to be implying that one element to Judas' betrayal is his rejection of Jesus' teaching on the Eucharist.

Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...

- I will take a moment in silence to acknowledge that I am in God's presence. He looks on me with love. He has planned for this time of prayer since before I was born and has prepared a special grace for me.
- I take a moment to become aware of what thoughts, feelings, desires, or questions arose in my heart as I read the selected scripture passage.
- I invoke the help of the Holy Spirit as I now enter into conversation with Jesus using the following questions as a starting point...

Questions to ask Jesus ...

- *Jesus, why did you challenge instead of convince the disciples who were murmuring against you (verse 61)?*
- *Jesus, you say that "the words [you] have spoken are spirit and life" (verse 63). What does it mean to hear you speak to me? Is there more to our relationship than me reading the words written down in the Gospel?*
- *Jesus, why did you allow your disciples to walk away from you? What were you thinking or feeling when they left you?*
- *Jesus, where might there be places that I, unknowingly, have stopped "accompanying you" (verse 66)?*
- *Jesus, what is it about your teaching on the Eucharist that is so important that it's worth losing "many of your disciples" (verse 66) over it?*
- *What other questions arose in my heart while reading this section...?*

Questions to imagine Jesus *asking me...*

- *My daughter/son, does my teaching on the Eucharist shock you?*
- *My daughter/son, what do you find hard to accept about my teaching?*
- *My daughter/son, I wish to speak words of spirit and life to you. Are you taking time in your life to listen to my voice in prayer? Do you believe that I will speak to you when you take time to listen in prayer?*
- *My daughter/son, do you believe that the Father has called you in your baptism? That you can “come to me” because the Father has “granted it” (verse 65)?*
- *My daughter/son, where are the places in your life where you have “left me” and gone your own way? Are you ready to “accompany me” again?*
- *What other questions do I imagine Jesus asking me as a result of this reading...?*

Concluding reflection questions to help capture the fruit of my prayer.

- What stood out to me from the scripture selection (word, phrase, verse, etc)?
- What question(s) moved me most in prayer? What thoughts, feelings, or desires arose in my heart as a result of that question(s)?
- What do I feel Jesus was saying to me in this prayer time?
- What do I feel Jesus is inviting me to do to act upon our conversation or the grace I received? *If I find this question difficult to answer, I will calmly put the question to Jesus and ask him to help me know how to proceed...*

APPENDIX

Here are the different sections you will find in this appendix. Our hope is that this appendix assists you in finding creative ways of using this resource for discussion and prayer in your parish, small group, or family.

- A. Ideas for using the resource with different prayer methods.**
- B. Ideas for using the resource within a small group setting.**
- C. Ideas for using the resource within a family setting.**
- D. Ideas for parish wide adaptations.**

A. Ideas for using the resource with different prayer methods

Lectio Divina

The John 6 resource is a natural fit for use within the prayer model known as “*lectio divina*.” The resource was designed with this style of prayerful engagement with the scripture as the model. To follow the specific structure of *lectio divina* with this resource we would suggest:

- Begin your time of prayer with the “Preparing to dialogue with Jesus...” section of the session.
- ***Lectio*** – Read the selected scripture provided in the session 2-3 times prayerfully.
- ***Meditatio*** – the “Small details to consider prior to prayer” section could be a helpful aid in the “meditation” step of *lectio divina*.
- ***Oratio*** – The section of the session which lists suggested questions to ask Jesus or to imagine Jesus asking you would be a great aid in this step of the *lectio divina* model.
- ***Contemplatio*** – The “Concluding reflection questions...” section of the session may be a useful final step to conclude your time of contemplation.

Simple instructions on how to pray “*lectio divina*” can be found on the USCCB website here: www.usccb.org/catholic-prayers

Ignatian Imaginative Meditation

This model of prayer invites us to make use of our imagination to more deeply engage with the scripture. It is particularly effective in meditating with the four gospels and would be an excellent model for using this resource. Below you will find a link to a brief description/introduction of this model of prayer. For those who are familiar, it can be appropriate at times to select a particular individual to imagine during the time of prayer. Below you will find some suggestions for using this prayer model with each session.

- **Session 1** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The crowd
 - The Apostles
 - Jesus
- **Session 2** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The Apostles in the boat
- **Session 3** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The crowd who is searching for Jesus
 - The Apostles who are witnessing the exchange
- **Session 4** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The crowd
- **Session 5** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The crowd
- **Session 6** - Consider experiencing/imagining the scene through the perspective of:
 - The crowd
 - The Apostles
 - Jesus

For a brief introduction to Ignatian Imaginative Meditation see:
www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/pray-with-your-imagination/

B. Ideas for using the resource within a small group setting

Sample Meeting Agenda

- (5 minutes) Opening Prayer
- (10 minutes) Group Check In
- (20 minutes) Prayer time with the session text
- (15 minutes) Individual journaling time
- (30 minutes) Group Discussion

Suggested methods of prayer

- Following the resource as written or adapting it to either of the prayer methods mentioned in the section above would be fruitful in a group setting.
- We would encourage small groups to try different methods of prayer throughout their time in the resource (for example, if the group is used to practicing *lectio divina*, they may choose for several sessions to try Ignatian Imaginative Prayer.)
- The scripture selection should be read aloud to the entire group by the leader or a volunteer.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- Sample discussion questions could be:
 - Which of the prayer questions in this session stood out to you during the time of prayer and why?
 - What do you feel Jesus was trying to communicate with you during the prayer time?
 - What will still be resonating in your heart/mind in a few days from this prayer time?

C. Ideas for using the resource within a family setting.

There are a variety of ways the resource could be adapted for use by families. Obviously, the experience will differ depending on the maturity and attention span of the family's children. Below are a few suggestions that we hope will act as a starting point for other creative uses of the resource:

Family Table Sharing

- The resource could be an excellent source of conversation starters for parents and children at the dinner table or during another appropriate short discussion time (before bed, at the breakfast table, etc.)
- We would suggest picking one session and discussing it over the course of one or two weeks. Something like the following:
 - Sunday evening - the session scripture verse is read at the dinner table after the meal is completed (2 times, slowly and with appropriate "interpretation" for children). Then during clean up, each family member shares one thing that caught their attention from the reading and why it caught their attention.
 - Each subsequent evening - the reading is re-read to the family. The parents pre-select 1-2 questions from the session (either questions to Jesus or questions to imagine Jesus asking) and invite the family to share their reaction or "answer" to the question.
 - This continues until the parents feel all the questions have been discussed sufficiently or they discern it's time to move to another section of scripture (the next session).

Family Imaginative Prayer Time

- This works especially well with younger children who have a difficult time staying focused for long periods.
- This idea would require slightly more preparation from one or both parents but is well worth the few extra minutes to get ready.
- In this suggestion, the parent(s) lead their children in an Ignatian Imaginative Meditation based off one of the sessions of the resource (or other Eucharistic = related stories in the gospel - the Last Supper account for example, or the washing of the disciples' feet).
- The parents assist the children by giving them options of which individuals from the scene they can imagine to be during the prayer. The parents help the child "imagine the scene" by asking questions around the five senses, i.e.: "What time of day do you imagine this is happening at, what would it smell like to be by the sea and on a big grassy hill, what would you hear if you were there, etc..."
- The climax of the meditation should be the children imagining themselves encountering Jesus in the "scene" they've built and imagining what he would speak to them.
- After the meditation is complete, the parents would invite the children to each describe the place they imagined, the things they imagined seeing/hearing, and most importantly, what they imagined their encounter with Jesus was like.

D. Ideas for parish wide adaptations

Finally, we invite parishes to consider how they could creatively invite their community to pray with the resource as an entire parish family. There will likely be many opportunities to use the resource within ministries and initiatives that are already operating in the parish (the parish may not need to institute any “new” program to make use of the resource). We will list a few small ideas below, again, in the hopes that they will be a starting point for conversations amongst ministry leaders.

- Invite parish catechists to use the resource in their personal prayer leading up to the upcoming year of faith formation (possibly culminating in a special mass or Eucharistic adoration set aside for these leaders).
- When we hear John 6 in the weekly Lectionary (Easer 2024), invite the entire parish community to pray with the appropriate session from the resource following that Sunday Gospel (as a way of diving deeper into the Gospel). Possibly one or two of the prayer questions could assist the deacon or priest in their weekly homily.
- Consider the resource as a Lenten journey with your parish (culminating in the celebration of the institution of the Eucharist at Holy Thursday).
- Invite the catechumens and candidates in RCIA to pray through the resource in preparation for their first holy communion.

Finally, if you or your parish is looking for more support related to this resource or you wish to share a testimony of how the resource has positively impacted you or your parish, please reach out to the Office of Evangelization and Family Life Ministries at the Archdiocese of Denver – Office.EFLM@archden.org