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CCO FAITH STUDY SERIES  
PARTICIPANT GUIDE

# COMMISSION

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# Commission Leader Guide

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*Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross*

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The cover image for *Commission* is wheat, which reminds us of the harvest—the importance and urgency our Lord placed on the mission to bring the Good News to the whole world.

*But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.*

John 4:35

*He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’*

Luke 10:2

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St. Oscar Romero, Homily (6 November 1977), in *Su Pensamiento*, I-II, San Salvador, 2000, p. 312.

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# Dedication to St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II's teaching and heart is woven throughout CCO staff's formation on evangelization. This theme is exemplified in his various addresses to the youth of the world and, in particular, his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. During the early years of CCO, André and Angèle Regnier regularly immersed themselves in Pope St. John Paul II's writings as published in the magazine *The Pope Speaks*. Since then, CCO has endeavoured to act on what Pope St. John Paul II taught about the Church's missionary identity.

In 2002, CCO was honoured to receive a personal letter of encouragement from the Holy Father following World Youth Day. You can see a copy of the text on the next page. Three years later, nearly 400 young people who were gathered at CCO's national student conference, *Rise Up*, sent the Pope a signed pledge. Through this pledge, they committed to the Pope's World Youth Day Toronto vision of "a new generation of builders" and promised to join in the work of evangelization. The pledge was forwarded to St. John Paul II while he was ill in the Gemelli Clinic in Rome. As we now know, the Pope had only a few more months to live. Shortly after the message was sent, CCO received this short note:

“ I am pleased to inform you that your message was presented to the Pope by Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, his private secretary. The Holy Father has responded in turn by signing, in his own hand, a copy of the text and returning it to you, as an expression of recognition to the organizers of the initiative and all those who participated. ”

This faith study is dedicated, with great affection and admiration, to the memory and legacy of Pope St. John Paul II. We thank God for the privilege of having been formed under his leadership and in his "school of evangelization".

The following is the letter written and personally signed by His Holiness, Pope St. John Paul II, to Catholic Christian Outreach on the occasion of the Rise Up 2002 Christmas Conference in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

From the Vatican, December 28, 2002.

“ It is a great joy for me to greet you on the occasion of your National Christmas Conference. The memory of my meeting with you and so many other young people from around the world in July of this year remains vividly etched in my mind.

At the World Youth Day Prayer Vigil held in Downsview Park on Saturday, the evening of July 27, I called for a new generation of builders to respond to the aspiration of humanity for a civilization of love marked by freedom and peace. Indeed I entrusted this hope of mine specifically to you, my dear young people. As members of the Catholic Christian Outreach you are generously responding to that appeal through your courage to be disciples of Jesus, living the life of the Beatitudes on campuses throughout Canada. In this way, as you strive to be the salt of the earth and light of the world for others, you become shining beacons illuminating the way of the Lord, answering the question that stirs in the hearts of all young people: “to whom shall we go?” (Jn 6:68).

Yes, Jesus Christ is the sure foundation of your hope and joy. Immersed in him and his paschal mystery your own lives will grow in holiness, which is the authentic path of true witness to the light of his loving presence in our world. And so I confidently renew my appeal to you: listen to the voice of Jesus! Let His light shine in your lives, continue steadfastly on the path of holiness, share with everyone “the good news of a great joy which will come to all the people” (Lk 2:10).

Invoking upon all of you the joy and peace that the birth of our Savior brings, I cordially impart to you and your families my Apostolic Blessing.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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# **Commission Small Group Information**

**TIME:**

**PLACE:** PREVIEW

**LEADER:**

**PHONE NUMBER:**

**EMAIL:** PREVIEW

**PARTICIPANTS:**

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LESSON 1

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**The Premise**

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# Introduction

In this lesson and the next, we will look at a number of truths on which *Commission* is built. Today, in particular, we will focus on the Church's teaching about our calling and identity as disciples of Christ. It is a critical premise to establish as we begin our *Commission* pilgrimage.

- 1** What kinds of answers do you think people would give to the questions “What is the main purpose of the Catholic Church?” or “Why does the Catholic Church exist?”

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# Deepest Identity

“ The Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all nations to make disciples of them. ”

*Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 767*

“ Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize. ”

*Evangelii Nuntiandi, 14*

“ The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. ”

*Ad Gentes, 2*

*Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church,  
Second Vatican Council*

“ It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He, the first and supreme evangelizer, commanded the Apostles on the day of his Ascension to the Father: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Faithful to this mandate, the Church—a people chosen by God to declare his wonderful deeds (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)—ever since she received the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14), has never tired of making known to the whole world the beauty of the Gospel as she preaches Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the same “yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8), who, by his death and Resurrection, brought us salvation and fulfilled the promise made of old. Hence the mission of evangelization, a continuation of the work desired by the Lord Jesus, is necessary for the Church: it cannot be overlooked; it is an expression of her very nature. ”

*Ubicumque et Semper*

*Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI establishing the  
Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization*

“ John Paul II asked us to recognize that “there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel” to those who are far from Christ, “because this is the first task of the Church”. Indeed, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church” and “the missionary task must remain foremost”. What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity. ”

*Evangelii Gaudium, 15*

These statements are central to *Commission*. They confirm that the Church has a clear understanding of why she exists. There is, however, confusion among some of her members. In recent years Catholics have become increasingly aware of the importance of evangelization, yet uncertainty remains about the *why*, *how* and *who* of the evangelistic mission.

*Who are we?* This is a question we must be able to answer with confidence and clarity. When we know our deepest identity—personally and as a community—we are able to live meaningful, abundant and vibrant Christian lives. Unfortunately, many Catholics do not know their deepest calling, and the Church has consequently suffered an identity crisis. We must overcome this crisis in order to accomplish the task God has entrusted to us: the mission of evangelization.

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**2** What happens to someone who has lost an understanding of his or her identity?

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**3** What happens in our lives when we know who we are?

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**4** How does confusion about our Catholic identity affect the life of the local Church?

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## 5 How would clarity of Catholic identity help the local Church? This excerpt from *Redemptoris Missio* provides some context.

“ Faith must always be presented as a gift of God to be lived out in community (families, parishes, associations), and to be extended to others through witness in word and deed. The evangelizing activity of the Christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the Church’s universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith. A radical conversion in thinking is required in order to become missionary, and this holds true both for individuals and entire communities. The Lord is always calling us to come out of ourselves and to share with others the goods we possess, starting with the most precious gift of all - our faith. The effectiveness of the Church’s organizations, movements, parishes and apostolic works must be measured in the light of this missionary imperative. **Only by becoming missionary will the Christian community be able to overcome its internal divisions and tensions, and rediscover its unity and its strength of faith.** ”

*Redemptoris Missio*, 5 (emphasis added)

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The Church's roles and ministries are varied and extensive. They include defending and teaching the faith, working for social justice, carrying out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, loving our neighbour, faithfulness to our vocation, sacraments, prayer, penance and the worship of God. Let us be very clear: none of these things should be seen as lesser than, or separate from, the call to evangelization. The challenge is to look at all these roles and ministries, and everything the Church does, through the lens of her deepest identity: evangelization. In everything, love must be our motivation.

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died” (2 Corinthians 5:14), and without love we are nothing (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).”

## Personal Connection

Many Catholics do not feel any personal responsibility for the work of evangelization and mission. They see this work as meant for those who seem more directly called: priests, religious and perhaps a few radical lay people who choose a career in ministry. However, the Church makes it clear that each baptized Catholic is called to evangelize.

“Being Christian and “being Church” means being missionary; one is or is not. Loving one's faith implies bearing witness to it, bringing it to others and allowing others to participate in it. The lack of missionary zeal is a lack of zeal for the faith. On the contrary, faith is made stronger by transmitting it. The Pope's words on the new evangelization can be translated into a rather direct and crucial question: “Are we interested in transmitting the faith and bringing non-Christians to the faith?” “Are we truly missionary at heart?” The new evangelization is the name given to the Church's project of undertaking anew her fundamental mission, her identity and reason for existence.”

*Linamenta for the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization, 10*

“ In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. ”

*Evangelii Gaudium, 120*

Not only is this call universal, it is urgent. As St. John Paul II noted:

“ The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church’s mission is obvious...God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples. ”

*Redemptoris Missio, 3*

## **6 Do you feel personally called to the mission of evangelization? Why or why not?**

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While we all share this universal call to mission, some people find it challenging to maintain lifelong missionary zeal. Some experience a missionary zeal in their youth or closely following their conversions. For others it may be tied to their involvement in an evangelistic ministry or movement. Their apostolic zeal can start to wane with changing seasons in their lives. Although they often continue to be faithful Catholics and believe in the work of evangelization, they might not participate in the life of the Church with the same apostolic purpose they once did.

## **7 Why do you think some Catholics are (or become) disconnected from evangelization?**

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## **8 How can we resist this tendency to become disconnected from our deepest identity?**

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# Summary

If we, as the Church, do not know our deepest identity, how can we really be who we are meant to be? The Church exists to evangelize. This truth has the power to transform how we see ourselves as the Church and minister to the world around us. We are personally invited to connect with this identity and engage in the life-giving mission of evangelization.

## Living It Out

### CHALLENGE

In the last few decades, the popes have written a number of outstanding documents that have shaped the mission in the twenty-first century. The challenge for the next two lessons is to read for at least 30 minutes from any of the following documents and to come to the next lesson prepared to share what you learned about evangelization.

- **EVANGELII NUNTIANDI**—*On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Pope St. Paul VI, 1975). Written on the tenth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council and one year after the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* confirms the Church’s fundamental missionary identity and aims to help the Church live out this missionary identity in the modern world in light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis once called it “the greatest pastoral document that has ever been written to this day.” It’s a dense read that has influenced all subsequent papal documents on evangelization.

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- **REDEMPTORIS MISSIO**—*On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate* (Pope St. John Paul II, 1990). It is common for popes to write documents on the publication anniversaries of previous documents to commemorate their publication and to carry forward its teachings into the contemporary context. St. John Paul II published *Redemptoris Missio* on the fifteenth anniversary of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. This document highlights the urgency of the Church’s mission of evangelization in the face of an increasingly secular world; it’s a call to dedicate all the Church’s efforts to evangelization. This document also offers one of the first written explanations of the new evangelization. *Redemptoris Missio* has been foundational in forming CCO’s mission.
- **MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR THE VII WORLD YOUTH DAY** (Pope St. John Paul II, 1992). St. John Paul II implores the young people of the world to take up the mission of evangelization. Faith is not a private matter, but a gift that must be shared with others. This is the shortest and easiest read on this list.
- **EVANGELII GAUDIUM**—*The Joy of the Gospel* (Pope Francis, 2013). Pope Francis wrote this Apostolic Exhortation following the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in 2012. He calls all Catholics to become “missionary disciples” who are motivated to evangelize by their personal experience of God’s love and mercy. He challenges the Church to make missionary activity the paradigm for all its activities. He also speaks to the social dimensions of evangelization. He closes with a reflection on the Church’s need for “Spirit-Filled Evangelizers.” This is a long but fruitful document that challenges the Church to evangelize with a joyful spirit.

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## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father,*

*As difficult as this may be to pray, I know that I must surrender my very identity to you.*

*In you alone can I find my true identity and be who I am meant to be.*

*Help me to see all aspects and activities of my life through the lens of my deepest identity: evangelization.*

*Lord God, I want to embrace your plan for my missionary identity; I also desire this for the whole Church.*

*I pray that you would pour out your grace so that many more people would come to embrace who they are as missionary disciples.*

*I desire to see all God's people united in that same call and purpose.*

*May your Kingdom come and your will be done!*

*Amen.*

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