

Testimony Preparation Outline

*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life,
and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:11).*

The importance of a Testimony

A testimony is a verbal sharing that describes a conversion to Jesus and his Church that happened through the action of grace. A testimony allows listeners to hear and see how conversion of heart takes place and how to enter the mystery of Christ and to join his Church. For listeners who do not have a strong relationship with Christ, or who may have limited experience of authentic Christian witness, fellowship, and service, the Christian needs to demonstrate what those realities are like. Otherwise, how will listeners know what they are called by God to be? How will they know what it looks like to respond to that calling and to try to live as a disciple of Christ?

There are three ways in which this calling and this response can be demonstrated:

- 1) Teaching the life of Christ as the model *par excellence*.
- 2) Teaching the lives of saints for the purpose of showing that Christ can be followed successfully in every era, every age-level, and every state of life.
- 3) Teaching your life to them, within the context of how you have heard, responded to, and are striving to live out the very personal call to holiness that the grace of the Holy Spirit makes possible. This is the purpose of testimony.

The purposes of a Testimony

A testimony is valuable to the work of conversion for these reasons:

- ❖ It *removes misconceptions and barriers to relationships*: If you are speaking to someone who does not know you, they cannot know what kind of person you are and what you think of them. Perhaps they wonder if you are a know-it-all, or the opposite – someone who knows little about Christ and the Bible. Perhaps they think you are there “just to do a job,” or to “bring people over to your side.” They might wonder what you think of non-Catholics, or if you are judgmental. Done well, a testimony allows listeners to become knowledgeable about you, which may not otherwise occur quickly, or occur at all, in casual conversation. After you have given your testimony, their ability to relate to you is greatly increased, because you have given them “keys” to entering a relationship with you as a follower of Christ. Your testimony clears up misconceptions by communicating your humility, your joy at their presence, your intention to serve them, and your desire to love them and have fellowship with them. The ice is broken. Instead of a conversation that is awkward and superficial, listeners can be at ease with you and are more likely to open their hearts to you.
- ❖ It *models conversion*: Listeners need to have others demonstrate what it would look like to turn one’s life away from sin and towards Christ and his Church. They may be aware of many poor examples of weak, lukewarm Catholicism that could be interpreted as the norm, unless countered by team members who give a more faithful witness to a life converted to Christ. Your testimony should reveal you as a real person, imperfect and struggling with sin, yet serious about sinning less and less and seeking holiness, confident that God not only desires this, but will make it possible to any soul that seeks honestly to know and do his will.

What to Do

- ❖ Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to say only that which he wants you to say.
- ❖ Speak clearly; make eye contact. Practice your testimony, perhaps in front of a mirror.
- ❖ Consider using a notecard or very simple outline to remind you of the points you want to make.
- ❖ Be brief; generally between five and, at most, seven minutes is normal.
- ❖ Know what you are going to say and what you hope to achieve.
- ❖ A possible outline could be:
 - Begin with an interesting story.
 - Describe your early faith life, to the degree that you were distant from, or not as close as you are now, to God and the Catholic Church.
 - Tell the story of how and why this changed, perhaps gradually or suddenly, in your life.
 - Explain the difference a relationship with Jesus and His Church has made in your life.
 - Conclude with a thought-provoking comment, question, or loving challenge to those present. Keep in mind that a testimony is often a powerful way to help others think about what God and the Church are asking of them and offering to them.
- ❖ Allow listeners to see your joy in the Lord and your love for his Church.

What to Avoid

- ❖ Do not give a biography of your life, though details are important to you; in a testimony only that which is relevant to how you came to love Jesus and his Church should be included, so every detail you include must in some way serve this purpose.
- ❖ Do not use Catholic terminology or phrases that would be unfamiliar to listeners.
- ❖ Do not exaggerate elements of your story, or downplay things out of a false sense of humility.
- ❖ Do not be negative about other people or other religious organizations; a testimony is about hope and your thankfulness for God's mercies.
- ❖ Do not read your testimony from a pre-written text; it is your story to be told from the heart.
- ❖ Do not speak condescendingly or give a lecture; you are giving a testimony, not a teaching.
- ❖ Do not be afraid; the focus is not on you, but on the works of God in your life.

Questions to Help You Consider the Content of Your Testimony

Reflect on some of these questions to help you identify the “wonderful works of God” in your life:

- ❖ What prompted me to respond to God's grace?
- ❖ How have I found joy in the Lord and in his Church?
- ❖ When have I experienced the peace which surpasses understanding (through the Church)?
- ❖ How have I experienced my heart being softened by Jesus (through his Church)?
- ❖ How has my mind been changed by Christ and the Church?
- ❖ How have I grown in virtue through Jesus and the Church?
- ❖ What other blessings have I received from the Lord and his Church?
- ❖ What difference has the Holy Spirit made in my life?
- ❖ How have I loved those who are difficult for me to love?
- ❖ What are some things I am thankful to God for (to his Church for)?

*“The most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith”
(Guide for Catechists 8).*