

# WHERE Do I Fit In?

We live in a loud, chaotic world that is filled with many voices, each of which demands our attention. As members of the Church, we are called to listen to the voices that will help us grow in our relationship with Christ. By taking time for prayer, we are able to hear what these voices call us to do. What can you do to take time to hear God's voice? For author Jim Manney, God's voice sounded like nothing he expected.



by Jim Manney

## Whose Voice Do I Listen To?

A while ago I was having some very bad days. I had too much work to do. My wife and I had a stack of unpaid bills. Problems kept cropping up, and my solutions weren't working. I felt helpless, and I hated feeling that way. I was angry, then depressed; boastful, then self-pitying. In the middle of all this mental turmoil came a quiet thought: "All will be well. Just do the next thing you have to do. All will be well." I was surprised. My heart settled down. I concentrated on the work at hand and put other worries out of my mind. Things improved.

Another time I had to decide how to deal with someone who had crossed me in a business deal. He hadn't done what he said he would do, but he wouldn't admit that. I felt wronged and said so. We exchanged harsh words. I was furious. Then came a quiet thought: "Maybe you should apologize." Ridiculous, I thought. He should apologize to me. But I thought about it some more and decided that maybe I should apologize. I may have been right about the business deal, but I had acted badly. So I did apologize for my part in the mess. The result was peace in my heart.

Both times the thought was quiet and simple. Both times the thought was virtually the opposite of what I had been thinking. The thought "All will be well"

came at a time when nothing was going well and, in fact, seemed to be getting worse. The thought "Maybe you should apologize" came when I was listing all the reasons why the guy should apologize to me.

Upon reflection, I realized that the thoughts were the voice of God. Where else could they have come from? Certainly not from me. And doing what the voice said had good results. Ever since, I pay special attention to quiet thoughts that are contrary to what I'm thinking at the time. That's a sign that they might be from God.

### A Clear Voice

On a separate sheet of paper, make a T-chart with the headings *Voice* and *Message*. List some of the voices that are trying to get your attention, such as your friends, your family, and the media. Then write the message that each voice is trying to convey to you. During the next week, spend some time in quiet reflection and determine whether these voices are helping you grow in your relationship with Christ.

**JIM MANNEY** is the author of *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer*.

Reflect

Session 1 > Jesus' Message

# WHERE Do I Fit In

God has freely chosen to share his love with all people. Families and communities are a reflection of God's love for us and our love for one another. They not only teach us about God's love; they are God's love in action. As members of the Church, we are called to respond to God's gift of love in ways that express our unity with our brothers and sisters in God.



by Maria Mondragon

## A Place Where I Belong

See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you.

*Isaiah 49:16*

I grew up in New Mexico, the youngest of seven kids. I have six uncles, eight aunts, and 40 cousins. People often assume that in large families it's easy for one child to fall through the cracks. And people often wonder if parents could possibly have enough love for all those kids. I can tell you that in my family, love was (and is) abundant. There were no cracks to fall through because the family was tight-knit.

At family gatherings my uncles would play guitar and sing old favorites. We'd all sing along. It took all our individual voices to make that loud and beautiful sound. And if one voice was a bit off-key (usually mine), it didn't matter because the group as a whole was in tune. When we'd gather for family picnics, we'd all play kickball or baseball. Each of us was cheered on and encouraged. There was room for errors because it was understood that we were all learning to play the game together.

Our church community expanded that circle even more. Members of our extended family and our parish community attended each of our seven First Holy Communion and Confirmation celebrations. My parents also sang in the parish's Spanish choir. For each choir member's birthday, the choir members and their families would gather at sunrise and sing

"Las Mañanitas" outside the person's window to celebrate the day on which he or she was born.

It was in these communities that I recognized something—I matter.

My presence among my family members' celebrations was important, just as their presence mattered to me. You might think that if one of the seven of us didn't attend an event, it would go unnoticed. That never happened. People asked for each of us by name. And they still do.

I live in Chicago now, and I miss my family. But here I have helped build a community of families where I know I belong and where people ask for me and for my own children by name.

Reflect

### We Belong

Think of the communities to which you belong. Draw a Venn diagram with three circles and your name in the center where the circles intersect. Label each circle with the name of a community, such as school, church, team, or family. Write the names of the people in each of those communities. Then write a paragraph describing how you feel you belong to each community. How does each community call you by name? How is the Holy Spirit at work in each community?

**MARIA MONDRAGON** is a managing editor at Loyola Press.

Session 2 > The Church Grows

# WHERE Do I Fit In?

We often pick up the beliefs of the people around us. Without giving it much thought, we profess to believe the same thing as our parents, friends, and culture. It is often when we are challenged that we take the time to clarify our beliefs. The challenges that the early martyrs faced strengthened their faith so that they could remain true to their convictions.



by Honora Wood

## What Do I Stand For?

Growing up, I often took my parents' statements at face value without understanding the facts behind their conclusions. They had done the research already, so why should I? I never even dreamed that my parents could be wrong, so it seemed pointless to ask them why they believed what they did.

When I got older, this passive attitude came back to bite me. I realized that I needed to understand what I truly stand for.

One summer, when I was in high school, I got into a discussion with a guy named Jim, who worked with me in a summer job. We were talking about colleges, and we were on opposite sides of the fence about one particular school. My parents had strong views about this college, and I stated them as my own opinion. Jim had the opposite opinion, with facts and personal experience to back him up. He had visited this college and spoken with many staff members who worked there. I had no such experience. I thought I was right. I knew my parents had reasons for their opinion, but I didn't know what they were. All that I had retained was their opinion, with none of their factual support. Jim asked me, "What proof do you have?" I was completely taken aback; I had no answer to that question. I had to concede to Jim that I simply did not have enough facts to back up my statement. I would have to research it further.

It's easy to listen to parents and other adults because they have so much wisdom and experience. As a young adult transitioning into independence, however, simply parroting the beliefs of my parents will not suffice anymore. God is really pushing me to find out for myself what it means to be Catholic today. I may end up thinking as my parents do, but for my beliefs to shape how I live out God's Word, I have to discern for myself how God is calling me to live out my faith. I am so blessed by the wisdom and the Catholic formation my parents have given me. With their encouragement, I am learning more and more how to make decisions in situations that they never faced.

Reflect

### A Journey of Faith

On a separate sheet of paper, draw a walking path. Include markers along the path that describe events in your life that have challenged and strengthened your faith.

**HONORA WOOD** is currently studying at the University of Michigan, where she is pursuing a bachelor of fine arts in dance.

Session 3 > Witnesses to the Faith



# WHERE Do I Fit In?

As Catholics we are called to share our gifts with all the communities to which we belong. Participating in the life of the community is a way to share our God-given gifts with others. As Mary Alice Pratt reflects here, sometimes we receive as much from the community as we give to them.



by Mary  
Alice Pratt

## Giving and Receiving in Community

When I was around 10 or 11 years old, I read in a Catholic magazine about missionaries working in Africa. This work seemed exciting. I thought I'd like to serve God that way too. I became a nurse, and I joined a society of Catholic women who use their professional skills in developing countries. I went to Amman, Jordan, very near Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other places of Jesus' life.

Most of the patients at the hospital where I worked were children, including many babies who were dehydrated and undernourished. One of the doctors had developed a formula of bananas, yogurt, water, and a little salt that worked wonders on dehydrated babies. It was wonderful to feed them and watch them recover in a few days.

Many of the children were sicker than that, however. I remember one boy named Sa'id. He was about 13 years old and was sick with typhoid fever, a serious infection caused by contaminated food and water. Most of the children in the hospital were from Muslim families, but Sa'id was a Melkite Christian, one of the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church. He was very sick. We watched him anxiously, and someone from his family was with him almost all the time.

Sa'id recovered. To thank us, his family brought a lamb to the door of the church, had it blessed and then gave it to the staff of the hospital for a feast.

**MARY ALICE PRATT** devoted her life to serving others. In addition to serving as a nurse, she also coordinated peace and justice ministries at the University of Kentucky Newman Center.

That was when I realized that being a missionary is about relationships—each one gives and each one receives. We had served Sa'id's family, and they were thanking us.

I learned much from the Arabs, Christians, and Muslims amid whom I lived and worked. I learned to accept customs that were different from my own. My professional skills did not make me superior to the people I helped. That was simply the way I served. The people with whom I lived and worked served me in their own ways. We were equals, giving and receiving from one another, serving Christ together.

Reflect

### Gifts to Share

Identify a community into which you have been welcomed. What gifts were you able to share with the community? What gifts did the community share with you? Write your responses on the lines.

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# WHERE Do I Fit In?

Sacramentality is at the heart of our Catholic experience of God. We believe that music, the arts, people, and physical objects can serve as reminders of God's presence in our lives. The principle of sacramentality teaches us that anything in our life can serve as a visible reminder of God's invisible grace. Relics, one type of sacramental, remind us that we are not alone and that other human beings, both past and present, support us in our journey of faith.



by Michael  
Cameron

## What Good Are Relics?

I confess to an almost incurable habit of saving things. Sometimes the things I haven't thrown out threaten to swallow me up! The saving urge is especially strong when things connect to important people in my life. For instance, for many years I've carried four items in my wallet: a ticket from visiting the Empire State Building with my son, Erik, in 2000; a theater stub from a movie I saw with my son, Matt, in 2002; a receipt from visiting the Mt. St. Helens volcano with my mom and dad in 2005; and an undated love note from my wife, Lorie. Why? Certainly these items flood me with warm thoughts of important people and times. But they give me more than memories of mountaintop moments. Suddenly I'm invaded by the love of the people I love. I vividly recall that I'm not alone in the world—that actual people cherish me as I do them and that we are part of one another no matter what. Strangely, that's somehow even truer since my dad passed away in 2008.

Those four items work like relics. An amazing spiritual power of love at work in the saints leaps to mind as we encounter their lives in things they touched, an item of their clothing, or even a part of their own bodies. But even more than their memory, their love for God surges through us as we open ourselves to their holy memory. The Body of Christ makes us all part of one another—even persons who lived centuries ago!

**MICHAEL CAMERON** teaches theology at the University of Portland in Oregon. He is married to Lorie Simmons and is the father of two grown sons, Erik and Matthew.

The Church keeps alive their memory and channels God's love to us in special ways by reverence for relics. That's why the Church embeds sacred relics of the saints beneath the altar of every church in the world. While sharing our Lord's Body and Blood there, we also partake of one another's love for God. This spectacular truth of faith shines brightest in our darkest hours: we are never, ever alone without people who love us and love God!

Reflect

### A Living Reminder

Reflect on a person, object, or experience that has served as a reminder of God's presence in your life. In the box below, express how that person, object, or experience helped you grow closer to God. You may wish to write a poem or reflection, compose a song, sketch something, or attach a photograph.

Session 5 > Celebrating Ordinary Time