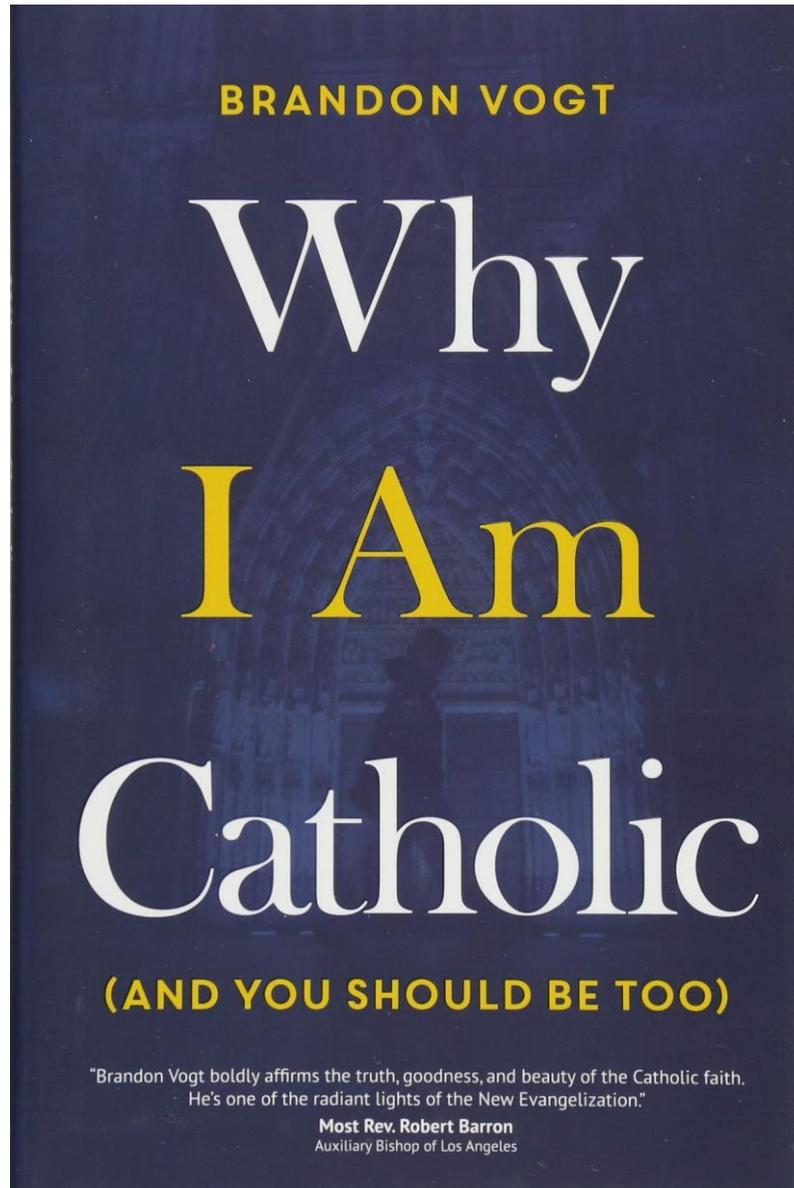




Saint Pius X Catholic Church Parish Book Program



2019 Participant Manual

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Opening and closing prayers as well as several discussion questions have been adapted from Justin McClain, *Why I Am Catholic (and You Should Be Too) Companion Study Guide* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2018).

This can be downloaded free of charge at <https://www.avemariapress.com/product/20078/Why-I-Am-Catholic-And-You-Should-Be-Too-Companion-Study-Guide/>

Introduction

Saint Pius X was happy to offer a copy of *Why I Am Catholic (and You Should Be Too)* to every parish family this Christmas. We have designed the accompanying study guide to help parishioners engage this book, create fellowship, and better appreciate and share the truth, goodness, and beauty of our Catholic faith.

Why I Am Catholic (and You Should Be Too) is written by Brandon Vogt, best known as the content director for Bishop Robert Barron's *Word on Fire* ministries. Raised Presbyterian, Brandon considered himself "spiritual, but not religious" in college before joining a vibrant Methodist student group. This began a process of intensively researching religions. In the end, he came to the conclusion that Catholicism contains the fullest expression of truth, goodness, and beauty; this led to his conversion to the Catholic Church in 2008. *Why I Am Catholic* combines elements of Brandon's conversion story with the most compelling features of Catholicism which he discovered. It won the Catholic Press Association's 2018 First Place award for "Popular Presentation of the Catholic Faith."

The book has three main parts, describing Catholicism's truth, goodness, and beauty. We have divided the eleven chapters of *Why I Am Catholic (and You Should Be Too)* into six reading sections. Each of these three features of the Church—its truth, goodness, and beauty—will be examined for two weeks in small groups.

There are many reasons for picking up this book and just as many ways to approach it:

- Perhaps you have been longing for a way to deepen your appreciation for the Church's riches, but theological texts seemed a bit intimidating. Brandon's book provides an accessible guide with further resources for exploration.
- Perhaps you have had difficult conversations with non-Catholics about the Catholic Church, but you did not know where to start. Brandon's book provides material to aid those conversations and to reflect on the importance of evangelization.
- Perhaps you are overwhelmed by the scandals opened this past summer in our Church. Brandon's book can offer timely reminders of the Church's enduring rootedness in Christ's truth, goodness, and beauty, despite the sins of members.

Whatever drew you to this book, we hope you enjoy *Why I Am Catholic*. We pray that it will lead you to reflect more deeply on why *you* belong to the Catholic Church, to be invigorated to share the riches of our faith with others, and to grow in fellowship with other members of our Saint Pius community.

May the Lord bless you and draw you closer to His Heart every day!

Book Program Calendar

Saturday, January 12, 10:00 AM: Parish Host Training

My Group's Gathering Day and Time: _____

My Group's Gathering Location: _____

Sunday, January 20-Saturday, January 26: Parish-wide Kickoff
Read Intro. and Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-40)

Sunday, January 27-Saturday, February 2: Week 1 Small Group Gathering
Read Chapters 3-4 (pp. 41-71)

Sunday, February 3-Saturday, February 9: Week 2 Small Group Gathering
Read Chapters 5-6 (pp. 75-97)

Sunday, February 10-Saturday, February 16: Week 3 Small Group Gathering
Read Chapters 7-8 (pp. 99-125)

Sunday, February 17-Saturday, February 23: Week 4 Small Group Gathering
Read Chapters 9-10 (pp. 129-150)

Sunday, February 24-Saturday, March 2: Week 5 Small Group Gathering
Read Ch. 11 and Conclusion (pp. 151-171)

Sunday, March 3-Saturday, March 9: Week 6 Small Group Gathering

Week One: Introduction and Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-40)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?
- Why are *you* Catholic? Have you ever had to make a deliberate choice to be Catholic?

Introduction: The Only Rebellion Left

“It’s easy to swim downstream, to accept the status quo. What’s hard is to be a rebel, to look with fresh eyes on something most people reject and say, ‘What if they’re mistaken? What if “anything but Catholic” should perhaps be “what else *but* Catholic?”” (p. 4)

- Brandon frames Catholicism as “the only true rebellion left” (p. 7). Do you experience Catholicism as rebellious? Do others? If not, why?
- What are some misconceptions that many people have about the Catholic Church?
- Did any of the statistics about millennials in the introduction surprise you? Why?
- In what ways can you relate to Brandon’s personal conversion story? In what ways can you relate to someone who has had doubts about Catholicism, or to someone—perhaps even yourself—who has fallen away from Catholicism?

Chapter 1: Because God Exists

“*[O]bjective* clues to God” exist which are “a bit heady, but they are clues that anyone can examine and consider, regardless of background or religious experience.” (p. 26)

- Have you ever encountered the skepticism or new atheism that Brandon mentions?
- Brandon notes that “direct, physical existence” of the immaterial and transcendent God “is impossible, even in principle” (p. 13). If God cannot be proven by science, what are the most convincing reasons to believe in God for you?
- Which of the three clues for God’s existence (the universe, morality, and reason) do you find the most convincing? Why?

Chapter 2: Because We Need Religion

“*[M]ost* people throughout history have [...] understood that religion is a desperately needed guide, an admission that our collective spiritual experiences, across space and time, are more reliable than one’s own solitary pursuits.” (p. 31)

- In your experience, is religion “actually helpful and life-giving rather than stultifying” (p. 35)? How?
- Why is being both spiritual *and* religious more fulfilling than being only spiritual?
- What are some ways that religion can make people (including *you*) happier?
- Why are many drawn away from religion?

Week Two: Chapters 3-4 (pp. 41-71)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?

Chapter 3: Because Jesus Is God

“We have no historical evidence for Zeus, Poseidon, or Santa Claus. Confucius, Moses, and Buddha never claimed to be God or rose from the dead. But Jesus is different. We know he existed as a historical person, and we have strong reasons to think he is divine [...].” (p. 53)

- What historical evidence for Jesus’s existence is most compelling to you? Why?
- Is C. S. Lewis’s identification of Jesus as a *liar, lunatic, or Lord* a convincing one when realizing that he could only be the Lord? Why?
- Why is an awareness of the significance of the Resurrection, from both a historical and theological standpoint, vital for understanding that Jesus is God himself? How does the mystery of the Resurrection influence how you live?
- Is *your* life convincing evidence that Jesus is God? To put it another way, would people think that you believe Jesus is God based on your relationship with him?

Chapter 4: Because Jesus Started a Church

“The Catholic Church is different. It claims to have divine roots. It is the rightful continuation of what Jesus started two thousand years ago.” (p. 70)

- What do you make of these two quotations from chapter 4?
 - “We can and should be open-minded about religious questions. We should put all options on the table and consider them fairly. But such open-mindedness is the beginning, not the end, of the search.” (p. 60)
 - “It’s not arrogant to believe you’ve found the truth. It would only be arrogant if you arrived there without good reason and refused to weigh other alternatives.” (p. 60)
- How can we be confident that our faith is true while also remaining open to those aspects of truth present in other religions and denominations (see pp. 60-61)?
- Though the Bible is indispensable to our faith, why is *sola scriptura* inadequate for living a fully Christian life?
- Why are the four marks of the Catholic Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—effective in establishing that the Catholic Church is the church founded by Christ two thousand years ago? Which mark is most convincing to you?

Week Three: Chapters 5-6 (pp. 75-97)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?

Chapter 5: Because It Built Western Civilization

“Although you may not find it celebrated in many textbooks, the Catholic Church has contributed a massive amount of good to Western civilization and has been, perhaps, its most indispensable builder.” (p. 85)

- Why is it vital for Catholics to understand that the Catholic Church is not opposed to science?
- Brandon described how, “for Catholic, each scientific discovery offered, in a sense, a glimpse of God” (p. 81). Have you ever experienced that wonder in learning something about the natural world?
- In what ways has the Catholic Church contributed to the rise of universities, charity, and a just legal system?
- Which contribution of the Church to our culture most surprised you?
- Why must Catholics admit the Church’s imperfect past in order to learn from it?

Chapter 6: Because of Its Heroic Charity

“[N]o tradition can match the varied and vast scope of Catholic saints. The saints of the Catholic Church are as inspiring as they are diverse. There’s a saint for all seasons and all peoples.” (p. 88)

- Do you agree with Brandon’s friend who said that “the right way to judge the Catholic Church is by its best members, not its worst” (p. 87)? Why?
- How much do saints encourage you in your own faith life?
- In your judgment, which is a more convincing proof for the Catholic Church: arguments about truth or the exemplary goodness of a saint? Which do you think is more convincing to someone who is not Catholic?
- Which of the three saints—St. Lawrence, St. Damien of Molokai, and St. Teresa of Calcutta—impacted you the most? Why? Are there other saints who prove the goodness and holiness of the Church for you?
- Brandon notes that he saw a basic continuity between the Church’s saints and “overall commitment to care and compassion,” since “[t]he Catholic Church serves more people than any institution in the world” (p. 96). Why is it fundamental for Catholics to recognize this reality? Where is it visible in our parish community?

Week Four: Chapters 7-8 (pp. 99-125)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?

Chapter 7: Because It Doesn't Go with the Times

"This Church is the bearer of God's message, and that comes with a huge responsibility. As G. K. Chesterton observed, the Catholic Church is 'the only thing that talks as if it were the truth; as if it were a real messenger refusing to tamper with a real message.'" (p. 112)

- Brandon writes, "When I first began seeing the Church as a protector and sharer of divine truths rather than an arbitrary rule maker, cooking up teachings and then declining to adjust them, my whole perception of Catholicism changed" (pp. 101-102). Have you or do you now think of the Church as an arbitrary rule maker? Have you had any experience of "the Church as a protector and sharer of divine truths"?
- After reading through the chapter, why do you think that issues regarding human sexuality and morality are such sensitive topics?
- Why is it important for Catholics to know that the Church is not somehow discriminatory in reserving some roles for men and some for women?
- What "disconnects" between the teachings of the Church and the institutional realities of the Church might be problematic for those outside the Church? Why are they not "deal-breakers" for you?
- How can we share the Catholic Church's message to a world that does not necessarily want to hear it but still needs to hear it?

Chapter 8: Because It Offers True Forgiveness

"Coupled with these extreme moral demands is the Church's equally extreme mercy. No matter how many times we miss the mark or come up short, the Church is ready to offer God's forgiveness and pick us up so we can try again." (p. 123)

- Why is the sacrament of Penance (also known as the sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession) vital within the Catholic's spiritual life when it comes to forgiveness with God? Is it vital in your life?
- Reflecting on Brandon's story of his first Confession, what effect did the priest's prayer of absolution have on him? Have you had a similar experience of Confession?
- Does the Church function as "a beacon of mercy" in your community (p. 125)? If not, what can you do to help make this identity of the Church known in your community? How can the Church grow as a beacon of mercy?

Week Five: Chapters 9-10 (pp. 129-150)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?

Chapter 9: Because It Cherishes Beauty

“Dostoevsky had it right: the world is sick and starving for wonder. And beauty is the cure. That’s what the Church offers: the medicine of beauty.” (p. 137)

- What role does beautiful art play in the Catholic faith? In our Saint Pius community?
- How is beauty “a pathway to God”?
- Though few of us have had experiences like Paul Claudel, has an experience of beauty ever strengthened your faith?
- Why do you think the Church needs good artists today?

Chapter 10: Because It Lifts Us Up

“Catholicism is ultimately the greatest humanism because it lifts up humanity, not just to great earthly heights but also to the very doors of heaven.” (p. 148)

- What is Brandon’s concern with the word “humanist”?
- Why does the Catholic Church teach that everyone has the same human dignity? How does this compare to our culture’s view about what gives human beings dignity?
- Why is it particularly important for Catholics in the twenty-first century to know the Church’s actual teachings on *people* who struggle with same-sex attraction as compared to teachings on homosexual *activity* in and of itself? (See paragraphs 2357–59 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for more on this topic.)
- As Brandon notes, “maybe the most astonishing Catholic doctrine” is that “God became human so that humans might become God,” or, better, share in God’s very life (p. 148). What is your reaction to seeing the goal of life as a Catholic in terms of *deification*? Can we share in God’s life now? How?

Week Six: Chapter 11 and Conclusion (pp. 151-171)

General Questions

- Which section of the reading most intrigued or confused you? Why?
- Was there a particular quotation that stood out to you? Why?

Chapter 11: Because It's for Everybody

"It's truly a religion for everybody, everywhere. Catholicism is capacious; it's roomy. Regardless of your background or interests, your political or social persuasion, or whatever makes you tick, you'll find a comfy section of the Catholic Church in which to feel at home." (p. 152)

- In what ways does the Catholic Church embrace both diversity and unity? How do you experience this in your life?
- Why is it important to know that Catholicism is for the ordinary person?
- Why might Catholicism's extensive intellectual tradition appeal to a skeptic looking at the Catholic Church?
- Among the categories of people which Brandon lists, where would you place yourself? What other categories would you add?

Conclusion: Join the Rebellion

"Choosing to become Catholic is like entering through a doorway into a vast room filled with endlessly fascinating treasures. One lifetime is not enough to explore it all (which is one reason God gives us eternal life!)." (p. 170)

- How would you assess Brandon's book overall? Does it make a compelling case for the Catholic Church's truth, goodness, and beauty? Did you learn anything from it?
- Which parts of this book helped to strengthen your faith? Which parts were the most challenging to read?
- Which of the three features—truth, goodness, and beauty—is most compelling to you? Why?
- Which parts of this book would be most useful to help you evangelize—that is, to share the Good News which the Church offers?
- Have you ever helped someone to enter the Catholic Church? If so, what would you add to Brandon's suggestions here? If not, how would you go about it?