



R A D I C A L
G R A C E

**Catholic
Discussion Guide**

RADICAL GRACE



How to use this guide

Please feel free to customize the activities, adding time or removing elements to suit your group's needs. We recommend that whatever discussion style you choose that you begin with the Safe Space creation activity. If you want to do all elements of the guide, allocate around 75 min. (in addition to the film screening).

Certain activities, such as the Safe Space creation, Terminology, and the Meditations, can be done in large or small groups. We recommend that the Reflection, Discussion and Action sections take place in small groups of 3-4 people. This fosters greater intimacy and trust and provides ample time for each participant to engage.

Structure and Time

Introduction (5 min)
Introduce group leader(s) and welcome participants
Watch Film (80 min)
Safe Space creation (5 min)
Meditation (10 min)
Reflection in Small Groups
- Discussion (20 min)
- Inspired Action (20 min)
Light reflection (10 min)

Materials Needed

For the Discussion Leader:

Pen or Pencil
Paper
A large piece of paper and marker or access to a white/blackboard
A watch to keep time

For Participants:

Pen or Pencils for each person
Paper (one sheet or two for each person)
Watch the film

Who this guide is for:

This guide was created for Catholics and Catholic organizations who want to explore the interrelation between personal faith, social justice, and women's leadership in Radical Grace as well as in the greater Catholic Church.

The purpose of the guide is to stimulate reflection and discussion, encouraging participants to take action from a place of depth and authenticity.

RADICAL GRACE



Meditation and reflection

🕒 10 Minutes

After watching the film, lead the whole group in a short meditation. This will help the participants remember what parts of the film struck them the most. It is important that the group leader keep track of time during this exercise.

If you've led a meditation exercise before, feel free to begin it however you wish, bringing in the reflection questions below. If you haven't led one before, simply follow the steps below and read each one aloud. Just remember to take the allotted time for each section. Make sure you leave time for people to ponder each question.

Meditation to Read Aloud (5 min.)

🕒 5 Minutes

1. Please settle yourself comfortably in your seat. If possible, put both feet on the ground, and your hands in your lap or on your legs. You can meditate with your eyes open or closed, whichever you are most comfortable with. (The leader should pause for 15-30 seconds while everyone gets settled. When the room is quiet, move on to the next question.)
2. Now focus on your breath. Pay attention to your in breath and your out breath. (Pause for 5 seconds) Feel as your lungs empty and fill completely, allowing your abdomen to expand rather than your upper chest. (Pause for 5 seconds). As you breathe, feel the air bring energy to your whole body, from your toes to the top of your head. (Have them practice this quiet breathing for about a minute. When the room seems calm, move on to the next question)
3. Now bring to mind a moment from the film that particularly struck you. (Pause for 10 secs.) Who was in the scene? (Pause for 10 secs.) What was said? (Pause for 10 secs.) Does it remind you of an experience in your own life? (Pause for 10 secs.) While you remember, pay attention to the feelings that come up. (Pause for 1 min. of reflection)
4. Next, reflect on the term "social justice." What do you think of when you hear the term? (Pause for 15 secs.) How does it relate to your experience of the Catholic community? Have you experienced acts of social justice within the Catholic community or another community? (Pause for 15 secs.)
5. I would like you to recall a scene from the film that either challenged or reinforced your understanding of social justice. (Pause for 10 secs.) Who was in the scene? What was said? (Pause for 10 secs.) Does it remind you of something that has occurred in your own life? (Pause for 10 secs.) Again, while you remember, pay attention to the feelings that come up. (Pause for 1 min. of reflection.)
6. As we end this meditation, slowly become more aware of your surroundings. (Pause for 5 secs.) Also become more aware of your body. Gently wiggle your toes and fingers. (Pause for 3 secs.) When you are ready, open your eyes.

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Safe Space Creation

🕒 5 Minutes

Radical Grace touches on a variety of issues people may have strong and differing feelings about. **To have a meaningful and deep discussion, it is important to create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable expressing their feelings and opinions.** Before the discussion begins, the group should come up with a series of agreements to help make a safe space. Write the group's ideas on the big sheet of paper or the white board so they can be referenced throughout the discussion. Here are some we recommend:

Avoid value judgments of other people's experiences and opinions.

Example: "Your opinion is wrong" or "That's a crazy thing to do."

Instead, hear another person out and express your feelings and opinions without judging what someone else has said.

Use "I" statements to avoid speaking for other people.

Example: "You must have been thinking or feeling this way." Instead say, "What you said reminds me of an experience I had. This is how I felt."

Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak.

Individuals should monitor themselves during the discussion, asking if they hear themselves speaking more than others in the group.

Remind participants that silence is not a bad thing and sometimes people need time before sharing their thoughts.

As discussion leader, help create space for people who may not be participating actively. If someone is speaking too frequently, you can open space by saying, "Thanks for that point, Name. Let's see if other people have things they'd like to share."

Ensuring confidentiality is important, especially when an individual shares a personal experience. Make sure that if a person asks you not to speak about something outside of the group, you do not.



Reflection in Small Groups

Divide into small groups. We recommend doing in small groups of 3-4 people. This fosters greater intimacy and trust amongst participants.

Reflection:

After everyone has divided into small groups, have everyone in the group share what came up for them in the meditation. You can ask, “What moments from the film stood out for you? Why?”

Breaking into Small Groups:

As the leader, you can have people choose their own groups or divide them yourself. If you meet frequently, we suggest that the group leader divide the group so people can get exposed to new opinions and ideas.

How to divide a large group by counting off:

Decide if you want groups of 3 or 4 people.

Divide the number in your large group by the number of the number of people you want in the small groups.

- This is the number you need to count off by.
- For example, if you have 40 participants and would like no more than 4 people in a group, then ask the group to count off by 10.
- Have participants join with others who said the same number.

R A D I C A L G R A C E

Discussion & Inspired Action: What are you passionate about?

 40 Minutes

Radical Grace touches upon a variety of important issues in the Catholic Church. We have divided these activities into the following themes:

- Women's Equality - Role Models for a New Church
- Living in Solidarity - Mending the Gap
- Unconditional Love - Serving your Community with Love

Each theme has discussion questions and corresponding action items. You can pick one theme to focus on or allow each small group to pick the one they are most passionate about.

Each discussion section has between 2-3 questions. You can either write the questions on the large piece of paper/white board or copy the following pages and provide relevant sections to each group.

Women's Equality - Role Models for a New Church

Discussion:

Reflect on the quote from Sister Chris below briefly before moving on to the questions:

“Women leaders from early Christianity don't show up in the literary records so much, because almost all of the literary records were written by men. But you find evidence in the archaeology. These tombs speak beyond the grave to say, ‘Yes we were here. Yes we were witnessing to Jesus, and yes, our leadership was valid.’

Jesus did not discriminate... How do we find support and courage to challenge our own religious leaders when we feel they are not being true to the values of Jesus?”

1. Sister Chris finds inspiration for her church reform work from her “foremothers in faith.” Who are some of your “sheroes” from the early Church? In the Church today?
2. While women held key leadership roles in the early church, today’s institutional sacramental and decision-making power rests exclusively with men. How has that impacted today’s church and your faith?
3. Religious inequality and exclusion affects the treatment of women in Church and society. How have you experienced or seen the effects of oppression under the guise of Catholicism in the world? How have you responded in the past? How would you like to respond in the future?

DISCUSSION NOTES:

Women's Equality – Take Action

Participate in **A Church for Our Daughters**:

A grassroots coalition working to strike down every oppressive practice, teaching, and law that assigns women and girls to a subordinate status: “We call on our leaders to create a Church that is truly inclusive and alive with the gifts, spirit, and potential of all its members.”

- **Read** the powerful Church for our Daughters Declaration in the appendix to this guide
- **Host a Church for our Daughters liturgy** or ritual in your community:
<http://achurchforourdaughters.org/resources>
- **Share the campaign** on social media using **#AChurchForOurDaughters**

In *Radical Grace*, Sister Chris works to restore the lost **tradition of women deacons** to the Catholic Church. Today, Pope Francis has commissioned a panel to study the history and nature women of deacons.

- **Write a letter to your local bishop** expressing your hopes that Pope Francis' new commission on women deacons will lead to an ordained female diaconate with the same authorities as male deacons. Find a sample letter in the appendix to this guide and at www.FutureChurch.org

Join organizations working on women's equality in the Catholic Church. *Radical Grace* partners include:

- **FutureChurch** seeks changes that will provide all Roman Catholics the opportunity to participate fully in Church life and leadership. www.futurechurch.org
- **Women's Ordination Conference** works for women's ordination as priests and bishops into a renewed priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. www.womensordination.org
- **The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)** is a nonprofit educational center committed to theological, ethical, and ritual development by and for women. Founded in 1983, WATER's mission is to use feminist religious values to create social change. www.waterwomensalliance.org
- **Call to Action** educates, inspires and activates Catholics to act for justice and build inclusive communities through a lens of anti-racism and anti-oppression principles. <http://cta-usa.org>
- **Visit the Women Church Convergence** to find even more organizations working to build to build just social and ecclesial structures at www.women-churchconvergence.org

Right now, make a plan with your small group to support each other in taking one action. **Schedule a time** to either get together to make the next step or check in with each other about your progress.

Living in Solidarity - Mending the Gap

Reflect on the quote from Sister Simone below briefly before moving on to the questions:

“The role of Catholic social teaching is to counter that individualism with a keen knowledge of solidarity, because the only time we are fully human is when we’re connected to each other.”

1. When have you experienced disconnect in your life or community? What did it feel like?
2. Have you experienced an act of solidarity that healed disconnect? What did it look like?
3. How have your personal identities (social class, race, gender, etc) affected your membership in your community? Are there examples in your community of building bridges across the divides created by inequality?

Take Action:

What can you do to live in greater solidarity with your neighbors? Take a look at the actions below for ideas:

Help NETWORK Nuns on the Bus “Mend the Gaps.” Federal policies enacted since 1980 have exacerbated vast economic and social divides in our country. These divides are eroding the very fabric of our society. Here’s how you can “mend the gaps.”

- **Pull out your cell phone right now.** Text “NUNS” to 877-877 to sign up for NETWORK action alerts. The sisters will text you at key moments to call on congress for federal policies that support social and economic justice.
- **Join Simone and the NETWORK nuns in telling Congress to restore the Voting Rights Act.** Millions of voters, particularly people of color and senior citizens, are disenfranchised in states that have a history of discriminatory voting laws. The solution is clear: Congress must restore the Voting Rights Act. Visit <https://networklobby.org/actnow> to contact your member of Congress.
- **Start a NETWORK Mend the Gaps study & action group.** Join the NETWORK nuns in studying the U.S. wealth and income gap, the policies that can help us “mend” the gap by bringing the people at the economic margins closer together, and the gaps in access that are created by economic disparity. Get the study & action guide at <http://bit.ly/MendTheGap> and get your friends together to get started.

Right now, make a plan with your small group to support each other in taking one action. **Schedule a time** to either get together to make the next step or check in with each other about your progress.

Unconditional Love – Serving Your Community with Love

Reflect on the quote from Sister Jean below briefly before moving on to the questions:

“My goal is to try to love people as unconditionally as I can, so that they have that experience at least once in their life. I think that that’s a sacred duty, and that’s what I expect of the Church.”

1. How have you experienced unconditional love in your life?
2. How can we learn to cultivate unconditional love?
3. In the film, Jean talks about how people’s lives have ripple effects on others, even after they die. How do you understand the ripple effect unconditional love has on others?

Take Action:

Sister Jean embodied Rev. Dr. Cornel West’s idea that “Justice is what love looks like in public.” Is there an issue in your community that you’d like to bring unconditional love to? Brainstorm an action that your community can engage in. For example, if your community is concerned with issues of immigration, discuss ways to build relationships between neighbors or research organizations that may be able to help you. Or, if you are already active in your community, brainstorm ways that you can be more loving in your social justice work.

Right now, exchange information with your group members and schedule a future date to check in with each other on your process.

DISCUSSION NOTES:

RADICAL GRACE



Light Reflection Closing

🕒 10 Minutes

Gather back as a single group and return to your meditation position. When you are settled, read the quote from Sister Chris below and reflect on the questions with the group..

“We have been carrying a light on behalf of God, who is inclusive, who loves, who welcomes, but it’s not yet embodied in the structures of the Church. That is going to be the next big challenge.”

Light is an important symbol in the Catholic tradition, a symbol of hope, given by God to a despairing world. Have everyone in the group reflect on where light needs to shine on a struggle within the Church or in another community you belong to. Where is the light guiding you? Who is it asking you to help or include? After reflecting on these questions for 5 min., have individuals share their thoughts with the rest of the group.

REFLECTION NOTES:

RADICAL GRACE

Appendix A: Declaration for Our Daughters

We are women and men, sisters and brothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, godparents -- members of the Catholic community who are deeply committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and who believe the Body of Christ must include all genders equally. Today, we call on our Church leaders to work with us to build a Church that strikes down every oppressive practice, teaching, and law that assigns women and girls to a subordinate status. We call on our leaders to create a Church that is truly inclusive and alive with the gifts, spirit, and potential of all its members.

A Church for our daughters is a community that:

- recognizes that all people are created in God's image and equally endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good.
- honors the vocations and ministries of all its members, fostering and welcoming all called to priesthood, diaconate, and liturgical leadership.
- opens its sacred sacraments to all, as nourishment and ritual without limitations based on gender or sexuality.
- celebrates the witness and contributions of our foremothers in faith – those in Scripture, those in our tradition, and those who walk with us today.
- affirms the spirit of the divine present in the gifts, needs, and dreams of all God's people.
- celebrates and promotes a spirituality that recognizes an inclusive God, beyond gender, and incorporates language that is inclusive and representative of God's feminine, masculine, and non-gendered attributes in liturgy, doctrine, and pastoral practice.
- honors women's moral agency to make decisions that impact their health and family life.
- takes a firm and proactive stand opposing all forms of exploitation and violence perpetrated against women.
- advocates for social structures that support and sustain the basic needs of women including access to clean water, clean air, adequate housing, food, security, education, the workforce, political and social engagement, and freedom of movement.
- advocates for education for all our children, but especially for our daughters around the world who face daily acts of discrimination and violence in their quest for knowledge.
- works to dismantle oppressive structures and customs that disproportionately impact women creating inequality in pay, employment opportunities, development of public policy, and property ownership.
- works to eradicate destructive forces that triply oppress women of color such as racism, religious intolerance, and unequal access to social goods.
- honors and justly compensates the contributions of women working in the Church including equal pay, equal access to job opportunities, healthcare, and paid family leave.
- commits to reflect on its own participation in the oppression of women; to repent for unjust acts, systems, and teaching; and to renew structures of leadership to be more inclusive of the People of God at every level.

We pray together as a family of the faithful with the vision of a Church community that at its core upholds the full equality of all of its members. So that our daughters and yours may know radical inclusion and justice, equality without qualification, and an institution that transforms oppression into love without bounds, let us build a Church for our daughters.

Appendix B: Letter to your Bishop

Download letter at <http://bit.ly/RG-Letter-to-Bishop>

[Date]

[Address]

[Address]

Dear Bishop [Last Name],

I am writing today to express my hope that local Churches would be able to call forth both men and women to serve as ordained deacons in the ministries of liturgy, word and charity.

Jesus has entrusted the Church with the mission to embody and proclaim the Good News of the love and mercy of the Father to all nations. In our part of the world, we have both great missionary opportunities and formidable pastoral challenges. We need the gifts of every Catholic to serve this mission.

[Name and address some of those opportunities and challenges, speaking from your own Catholic identity and practice]

I have the conviction that we need to hear the voices of women from the pulpit. We need to recognize the gifts of women for sacramental ministry, like presiding at baptisms and marriages. If women could be ordained as deacons, it would create an opportunity (outside of religious life) for women to make a life commitment to the Church, and it would expand your resources for the mission of the local Church by allowing you to train, ordain and give faculties to women.

On May 12, in an audience with the leaders of religious congregations of women, Pope Francis agreed to constitute an official commission to study the history and nature of women deacons in the Church. The membership and precise scope of the commission has not yet been determined. I believe it is a great opportunity for the Church to engage in a *pastoral discernment* involving prayer, dialogue, listening and a full assessment of missionary opportunities, pastoral needs and the gifts, charisms and actual ministry of women in the Church today.

I encourage you to learn more about the ministry of women deacons, to publicly support the work of this commission, and to publicly identify how your local Church would benefit from this ministry. With this letter, I have attached two pages of what I consider essential information about the ordination of women as deacons.

The people are hungry. Let us give them something to eat.

I am grateful for your prayerful consideration of the possibility of women deacons. If I can be of any assistance to you, please let me know. Meanwhile I will continue to pray for you and your ministry as the chief shepherd of your local Church.

In Christ,

[Signature]

[Your name]

[Your contact information]

For Discernment: The Ordination of Women as Deacons

On May 12, 2016, in an audience with the leaders of religious congregations of women, Pope Francis agreed to constitute an official commission to study the history and nature of women deacons in the Church. "It will be good for the Church to clarify this point," he said. The membership and precise scope of the commission has not yet been determined.

In 2002, the International Theological Commission issued a lengthy report on the historical development of the diaconate, but only two brief sections (comprising 2,660 of 42,000 total words) examined the ministry and subsequent disappearance of women deacons. Notably, the ITC arrived at no definitive conclusion about whether women can be ordained as deacons today, saying it "pertains to the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church to pronounce authoritatively on this question."

The present commission presents an opportunity for the Church to explore the matter in greater depth and breadth and to engage in a *pastoral discernment* involving prayer, dialogue, listening and a full assessment of missionary opportunities, pastoral needs and the gifts, charisms and actual ministry of women in the Church today. The recent Synod of Bishops, which involved a global survey of Catholics and the encouragement of Pope Francis to bishops to speak with *parrhesia* (boldness and courage), provides a model for a pastoral discernment concerning whether local Churches should be able to call forth both men and women as deacons for the *diaconia* of liturgy, word and charity.

History

- *Scripture*. The only person in Scripture with the title "deacon" is Phoebe (*Rm* 16:1), and the First Letter to Timothy lists characteristics of women who are deacons (3:8-11). A majority of Christian scholars for a thousand years believed women deacons were sanctioned by Scripture and had an apostolic foundation.
- *Tradition*. Women deacons were ordained in the West until the 12th century, and still exist today in the East. Women deacons were sacramentally ordained by bishops in the sanctuary with an epiclesis and the laying on of hands. The Council of Chalcedon (451) required women deacons to be 40 and celibate. Pope Benedict VIII (1018) perpetually authorized a cardinal bishop to ordain women deacons. The Orthodox Church of Greece and the Armenian Apostolic Church, which have valid sacraments and orders, presently allow for the ordination of women as deacons.
- *Ministries*. At various times in various places, women ordained as deacons assisted at the altar, administered finances, cared for sick and poor women, assisted women in baptism, proclaimed the Gospel, maintained order in the women's part of the assembly, catechized children, and preached.
- *Recent developments*. The Second Vatican Council suppressed the minor orders and major order of subdeacon, and revived the diaconate. For the first time in one thousand years, people are ordained solely and finally into a major order other than presbyterate.

Benefits for the Church

- *Mission*. Having women ordained as deacons would allow the Church to expand its ministries of liturgy, word and charity. These ministries are modeled on servanthood of Christ, embody the Servant Church, and help the Church fulfill its mission to proclaim the Gospel and baptize all nations.
- *Grace*. Women already engaged in diaconal ministries like preaching, ministering the works of charity and leading a parish would be able to receive the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction, serve in offices currently restricted to clerics, and be officially recognized by the Church in a lifetime commitment to its ministry.

- *Pastoral need.* The early Church called forth deacons out of pastoral need. In many places today facing severe shortages of clergy, women ordained as deacons could assist in the sacramental ministries of baptism and marriage, preside at funerals and give homilies. Women deacons could also exercise ministry in places where it is difficult for men to serve, like the homes and hospital rooms of women, domestic violence shelters and in women's prisons.
- *Empower local Churches.* The local Church should be allowed to call forth and ordain men and women who can effectively serve in this ministry. It would expand the resources of local bishops by allowing them to train, ordain and give faculties to women, and it would also expand the presence of ordained ministers in many spheres of life, connecting them with parishes, pastors and local bishops.

Some Concerns

- Women deacons will lead to women priests. *Response:* The Magisterium has already decided against the possibility of women priests. Pope Francis has confirmed this teaching. The ordination of women as deacons does nothing to change it. The diaconate is a proper and distinct ministry in the Church. In the one Sacrament of Holy Orders, there is unity and distinction. The Catechism explains: "Bishops and priests receive the mission and faculty ('the sacred power') to act *in persona Christi Capitis* [in the person of Christ the Head]; deacons receive the strength to serve the People of God in the *diaconia* of liturgy, word and charity, in communion with the bishop and his presbyterate." (No. 875)
- It is against Canon 1024: "A baptized male alone receives sacred ordination validly." *Response:* This canon was developed only after the permanent diaconate faded in the West, so it relates to priesthood, not the diaconate as a separate and permanent ministry. The present prohibition of women deacons is an administrative law, not doctrine, and can be changed. All papal and curial statements against the ordination of women specifically address the "ministerial priesthood" and "priestly ordination," not the diaconate.
- The permanent diaconate is not working well. *Response:* Many local Churches in the United States and other countries are served very well by permanent deacons. It is up to each local Church whether to ordain permanent deacons or not. It need not be universal practice.
- Cardinal Walter Kasper and others have suggested that women could serve as non-ordained "deaconesses." *Response:* Women did not always belong to a separate order of "deaconesses." In fact, women deacons were ordained by a bishop in the sanctuary with an epiclesis and the laying on of hands. The argument that women cannot be ordained suggests that women are not ontologically equal to men and cannot image Christ, which contradicts the Catechism.
- Women are not asking to be ordained as deacons. *Response:* Many women are already leading parishes, preaching, teaching and serving in the ministries of charity, and some of these women have expressed a desire to be ordained as deacons. If the diaconate serves important pastoral needs in the Church today, then it should be open to men and women.

Resources

- Gary Macy, William T. Ditewig, Phyllis Zagano, *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* (Paulist, 2012)
- Emil A. Wcela, "Why Not Women? A bishop makes a case for expanding the diaconate," *America Magazine* (October 1, 2012), <http://americamagazine.org/issue/5152/article/why-not-women>
- Phyllis Zagano, *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church* (Crossroad Publishing, 2000)
- Phyllis Zagano, "It's Time: The Case for Women Deacons," *Commonweal* (December 10, 2012), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/it's-time>
- Phyllis Zagano, editor, *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers* (Liturgical Press, 2016)