



Catholic
Charities
USA®

WHOLE HEARTED

PARTICIPANT JOURNAL

This journal provides information on trauma, reflective exercises on one's personal response to trauma, and offers some restorative spiritual practices. It is not a substitute for clinical assistance.

Catholic Charities USA recommends that you seek professional assistance for any mental health issue that may be causing you difficulty.

If at any time you find that the information, journal exercises, or discussions in *Whole Hearted* surface difficult or overwhelming feelings for you, please stop, take a break and /or ask someone for assistance.

Credits

"The Wire Fence" from *Prayers* by Michel Quoist (1985), in Session 3 is used with permission of Rowan & Littlefield Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

The five practices in Session 4 are from The Five Loaves ministry of Tom and Kimi Tomaszek. Used with permission. www.thefiveoaves.com

All Scripture is from *The New American Bible, revised edition*, except Jer 29:11-13 in Session 4, which is from the *New Living Translation*.

Praying Our Goodbyes (Ave Maria Press, South Bend, IN, 2012 revised) by Joyce Rupp in Session 3 is used with permission of the author.

The quote from Pope Francis in Session 2 is from his address to detainees at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility, September 27, 2015.

Whole Hearted was written by Michael Carotta, Ed.D., and edited by Scott Hurd.



SESSION 1

Whole Hearted

We make commitments with our *whole* heart. We commit to a relationship, a calling, a career path, a community, a spiritual way of life. We commit to our family, individuals, a church, a company, a vocation, a vacation.

Our commitments bring challenges and costs, potential and problems, responsibilities and purpose, mentors and tormentors.

Our commitments come from the heart, and what we experience along the way shapes our *whole* heart.

Your *whole* heart beats inside you today. Your heart has both fueled your journey and been affected by it. That is why this session invites you to begin by looking at your *whole* heart.



For Reflection

1. What have been some moments of grace or blessing for you? Moments that have warmed your *whole* heart?
2. What moments of childhood grace do you still carry in your heart?
3. What has been one blessing experienced from a commitment you've made? Was it a relationship? An accomplishment? An experience?
4. Was this blessing a momentary or a longer-lasting one?
5. Who or what is "a solid" for you at this time, providing support or strength to you? (choose all that apply)

family member

church program

friend

church minister

co-worker

financial or legal helper

social service provider

a spiritual practice or resource

therapist or counselor

a quiet or special place

agency or organization

other

These people, places, prayers, or activities are "assets" that support and strengthen you. We will return to these assets in the last session of this program.

Collecting Moments of Grace

Most of us have had someone give us a memento, a small gift, or some sort of physical object as a token of appreciation and affirmation. We collected it and kept it as a heart-warming reminder.

Yet our *whole* heart can be nurtured by collecting moments of grace that do not come with concrete objects. These are moments when we see love, beauty, truth, a virtuous act, or vulnerability shared.

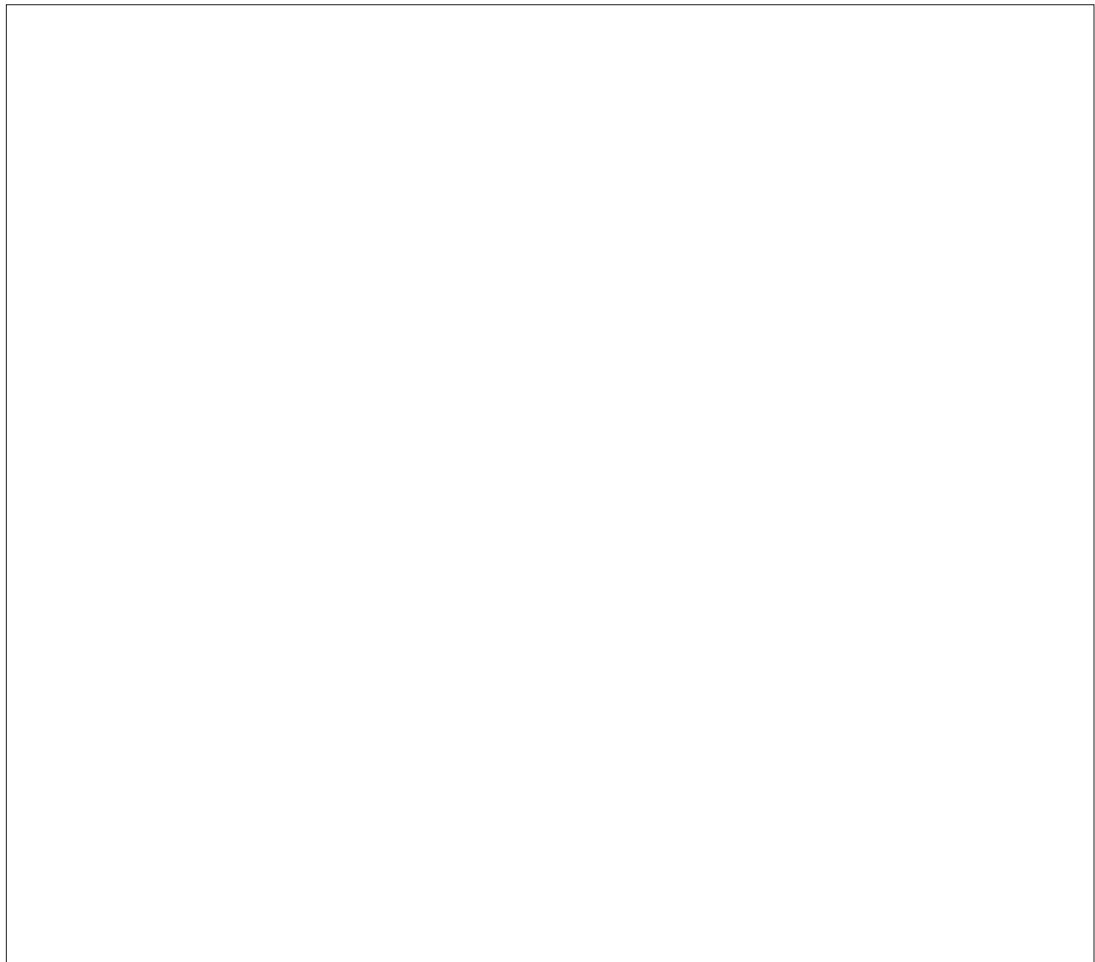
Collecting moments of grace like these — putting them in your memory box and calling them to mind once in a while — can help warm your *whole* heart when you need it. It requires an intentional and ongoing effort to engage in a process of recognition.

For Discussion

1. Feel free to share a moment of grace that you have collected and still keep with your *whole* heart. What you say will not be spoken of outside of the group.
2. When have you recognized or experienced a moment of dis-grace: something painful, unkind, damaging, demoralizing? The term "dis-grace" does not suggest that this was something to be ashamed about, but that it was not part of God's plan; it is the opposite of grace.

Personal Exercise

Sometimes it is better to express something without having to use words. Take a few minutes to draw a picture or symbol of a moment of dis-grace below. Take your time and don't worry about artistic talent.



Feel free to explain what you tried to capture in your drawing if you wish.

The *whole* heart you come with today has absorbed the spectrum of positive and negative experiences.

The *whole* heart you come with today has been shaped by all your commitments to relationships, work, and faith.

You are here today with everything your *whole* heart has seen, heard, felt, done.

You stand here today with your *whole* heart still working.

A Time for Everything



There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.
A time to give birth, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them;
a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
A time to seek, and a time to cast away.
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Which of these times have you been through? Which are you experiencing now?

Notes:

SESSION 2

wHOLE Hearted

The marriage is over.

One of your kids is losing a battle with drugs.

A family member with mental health issues refuses treatment or meds and has become abusive.

You are assaulted.

A dream dies or is stolen.

Someone you trusted betrayed you.

You are publicly humiliated.

You are displaced.

Years of verbal abuse have left their mark on you.

The electricity is turned off.

A flood has destroyed your house.

*It is impossible to please those you work with
and the stress has taken its toll on you.*

“Hard Times” Exercise

Choose one of the situations above and try to put yourself in that person’s shoes for a few moments. Remember that this is an imaginative exercise and stay grounded in the present.

Answer the following questions privately, or voluntarily take a turn in the group. Take your time, enter into that person’s experience, and keep it real.

- What does it feel like?
- What effect did it have?
- What helps to work through it?

The Impact of Trauma

Sometimes our heart suffers a serious wound and the injury has real consequences. We call it “trauma” when an experience changes how our brain works, or the way we talk, act, think, or cope through the day or the night.

It’s not the painful incident that is traumatic; it’s the impact it has on you that is traumatic. Trauma can come from events of different sizes and weights, but the impact can be the same. All trauma seems to result from loss, death, pain, betrayal, violence, illness, broken promises, broken dreams, lost innocence, or mental, verbal, or physical abuse. Trauma can also come from being part of something that is against your conscience, resulting in what is called “moral injury.”

It’s as if your *whole* heart has a **WHOLE** in it.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, signs of trauma include:

- Flashbacks, bad dreams, and frightening thoughts. Certain situations, objects, or words can trigger a re-experience of the trauma.
- Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience, and avoiding thoughts, feelings, or actions related to the traumatic event.
- Feeling tense and on edge, becoming easily startled, having angry outbursts, and difficulty sleeping.
- Difficulty concentrating on daily tasks, or even remembering details of the traumatic event itself.
- Negative thoughts about yourself and the world, distorted feelings of guilt or blame, and/or a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy.
- Self-isolation and detachment from friends and family.
- Depression, substance abuse, and anxiety.

We are not talking about the temporary or immediate impact of a trauma that can last a few weeks; we are talking about symptoms that last months and even years after a traumatic event. We are talking about the way you are injured. Again, sometimes a whole heart has a **WHOLE** in it.

You may find Whole Hearted difficult to engage with. That’s a normal and natural response to trauma. You are encouraged to do all you can to care for your safety and well-being. This may include stepping away from the program or seeking professional support, especially if you are unable to complete daily tasks, are thinking of harming yourself or others, are experiencing depression, or imagining things not real.

The Wire Fence

From *Prayers* by Michel Quoist:

The wires are holding hands around the holes;
To avoid breaking the ring, they hold tight the neighboring wrist,
And it's thus that with holes they make a fence.

Lord, there are lots of holes in my life.
There are some in the lives of my neighbors.
But if you wish, we shall hold hands,
We shall hold very tight,
And together we shall make a fine roll of fence to adorn Paradise.

For Reflection

How would you describe the **wHOLE** in your heart? (check one or add one)

On the mend An open wound One I keep scratching open Healed up

Other: _____

What part of "The Wire Fence" stands out to you?

Notes:

Working through Trauma

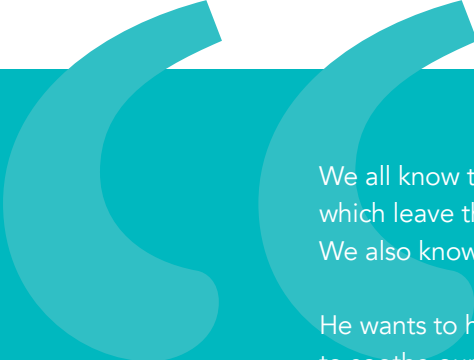
The path through trauma is a process that involves different dynamics such as grieving, blaming, prayer, despair, denial, depression, false hopes, and even the myth of a quick and easy remedy.

We all make our way through trauma in different ways and at different speeds. The process of working through trauma is neither all at once nor once and for all. But each of us has to be intentional about how we want to respond to our **WHOLE** heart in a healing manner.

Here are some ways you can attend to your **WHOLE** heart:

- Develop a regular routine of exercise, meditation, sleep, or other activities that help reduce stress.
- Try to maintain routines for meals even when you don't feel like eating.
- Set realistic goals and do what you can as you are able.
- Develop a regular form of prayer that suits your style and sustains your spirit.
- Keep company with trusted friends or relatives.
- Telling someone about your **WHOLE** heart.
- Avoid use of alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism.
- Talk with your doctor about treatment options, and follow your treatment plan.
- Expect your progress to happen slowly, not immediately.





We all know that life is a journey, along different roads, different paths,
which leave their mark on us.

We also know in faith that Jesus seeks us out.

He wants to heal our wounds,
to soothe our feet that hurt from traveling alone,
to wash us clean of the dust from our journey.

Jesus comes to meet us, so that he can restore our dignity as children of God.

He wants to help us set out again,
to resume our journey,
to recover our hope,
to restore our faith and trust.
...to all of us he stretches out a helping hand.
Pope Francis

For Discussion

1. What physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, economic, relational, or professional impact has trauma had on you?
2. Have you found a spiritual way to respond to trauma, and how has it helped the process? Please explain.
3. Have you made any attempts to respond or been given advice on ways to respond that was not helpful? Please explain.



So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet,
that what is lame may not be dislocated
but healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

Of the petitions in the scripture above, what would you like God's help with: strength, a straight path, or healing?

SESSION 3

whOLE Hearted

As a 13-year-old, she was sexually abused by an uncle. She wonders if her father, who left the family, knew about it the whole time. Several years of on-and-off counseling helped. Now she is 30 and the anger and resentment in her heart seem to be growing stronger.

Two years ago, he came home from the war and it was clear that he was not the same. He took his life six months ago. His parents carry a heart heavy with the thought that they could have done more to help him.

A 60-year-old has nightmares about the painful way mom died, feels guilty about the quality of care given to mom in the end, and for the last six months has been crying with regret over not being the kind of child mom deserved.

Your middle child is found guilty and sentenced to prison. He had a good future right in front of him. Ever since he was in pre-school, your heart held a dream of the type of life you and your child would enjoy. Now it is shattered. And you won't even get to see him.

They were happily married and their three teenagers were doing well. Then the car accident left one of the teens permanently disabled. Mom and Dad's future plans have changed permanently. It's still awfully hard to adjust. They are losing sleep and are hyper-vigilant about a zillion little things they do to take care of their child.

A talented and successful worker is suddenly let go from the job that felt like a vocational calling. Nothing in life seems worthwhile or satisfying. How can it when you are not able to do what you know in your heart you were born to do?

Your partner's alcohol use is severe. Years of verbal abuse have taken a real toll on you. You have accepted it because you love this person and have always planned on spending your life with this person. Can you really live apart? It seems like this is what should be done. But it's scary.

The kids are now in their twenties, out on their own and making crazy choices: unhealthy relationships, unstable living conditions, dangerous lifestyles, debt, alcohol issues and who knows what else. After weeks of sleeplessness and loss of appetite, one parent heads to the church at midnight and finds a pew.



A clean heart create for me, oh God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit...

Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalm 51:12,14

The Psalmist who wrote the words above knew that sometimes the healthiest step forward is to seek to change our **wHOLE** heart with one that is new.

Trauma may help us see the value in:

- Changing our original dreams about how life would be.
- Changing the expectations we have always held about our career paths.
- Changing our perspectives.
- Changing the way we push on, pursue, plan, or participate.
- Changing how we relate to God.
- Changing the way we sustain the Spirit within us.
- Changing what we see as the most treasured things in life.
- Changing the company we keep.



Sometimes a change in heart involves forgiveness. Forgiveness is about deciding to let go of our resentment or grudge toward another. In that way, forgiveness lightens the burden we carry with our **whOLE** heart.

But forgiveness does not necessarily mean resuming a relationship, or re-enabling a pattern of harmful behavior.

Forgiveness is not about pretending the pain was not severe. Nor is it about automatically trusting someone again.

We often falsely believe that forgiveness offers us a quick return back to normal or a fast track to healing.

Forgiveness requires God's grace to cut the cord of a wrongdoing that still has its grip on our **whOLE** heart.

For Discussion

Trauma's impact on the heart is different for all of us. Trauma can leave us:

Cold-hearted: closed off from needs of others, no longer excited about relationships.

Hard-hearted: defensive when questioned, lacking in feelings.

Light-hearted: minimizing or denying impact of trauma, using pleasure to replace pain.

Heavy-hearted: burdened by the weight of it, focused on problems of yours or others.

Down-hearted or disheartened: loss of motivation, hope, energy, confidence, and/or willingness to engage with life.

Broken-hearted: deep pain and sadness; a fear that something once cherished is gone forever; a sense that repair is not possible.

Take 10 to 15 minutes to discuss which of these comes closest to describing the way trauma has shaped your **whOLE** heart. You are welcome to pass if you wish.

Praying A Goodbye

Sr. Joyce Rupp, in her book *Praying Our Goodbyes*, points out how we can ritualize the letting go of something in our **whOLE** heart:

- Share a goodbye meal with a friend and include storytelling/recalling of memorable moments.
- Empty a potted plant as a way of symbolizing something we, too, have to empty and cultivate to new growth.
- Light a candle to symbolically dispel the darkness of past pain and shed light for the new path forward from here.
- Clean out closets as a way of reminding ourselves to toss out our inner clutter.
- Sort through old photos when we need to remember love, joy, and past moments of grace.
- Write a letter of goodbye to some aspect of our **whOLE** heart.

Letting go of something from the **whOLE** heart doesn't mean you stop praying for your adult child's difficulties or the troubles of another family member. It doesn't mean you stop caring. It means that you recognize the need to intentionally focus your energy, thoughts, and pursuits in a different direction and for a specific purpose.



Guided Imagery Exercise

Here is a prayerful exercise to do now. It is also something you can do again and again.

1. Begin by taking several slow and deep breaths.
2. Gently inhale, filling your lungs.
3. Then gently exhale, pushing your breath out as if you are trying to reach the wall on the other side of the room.
4. Do this three times to quiet yourself.

When you have slowed yourself down and are ready, read this summary account of an event found in the Gospel of John (Jn 20:19-29):

After Jesus' crucifixion, the traumatized disciples were gathered in a locked upper room. Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you."

They saw his wounds.

And again he said, "Peace be with you."

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

The disciples had a change of heart when they saw him.

Thomas had not been there and did not believe them. "Unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands and the gash in his side I will not believe you."

A week later Jesus appeared to them again, and once more said, "Peace be with you."

He invited Thomas to see his wounds.

Thomas expressed his belief and Jesus asked him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Please read it again slowly a second time.

After reading the passage a second time, once again take several slow and deep breaths. Gently inhale, filling your lungs. Then gently exhale, pushing your breath out as if you are trying to reach the wall on the other side of the room. Do this three times to quiet yourself.

Now imagine that you are alone in one of your favorite quiet places.

Imagine Jesus joining you there. He looks at you with a smile, says your name, and greets you the way he greeted the traumatized disciples.

“Peace.”

You can see some old scars on the hairline of his head.

He smiles and again says, “Peace.”

Described by the prophet Isaiah as “spurned, a man of suffering, knowing pain,” he says again: “Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit.”

He sits next to you and you see the old scars of trauma still on his hands.

He then says, “There are physical wounds and there are heart wounds. Our wounds and scars have a story. Tell me about yours.”

Take time now to do so. Slow yourself down with your breathing.

When you are finished sharing, he quietly says, “I have something I want to say about being wounded.”

You listen. What does he say? Remembering that the past is not the present, feel your feet on the ground and your back in your chair as you reflect on Jesus’ words to you.

Notes:

Praying a Psalm

1. Use the prayer of Psalm 51 at the top of this session as your own.
2. Take a slow, deep breath and, as you gently exhale, slowly say a line from the Psalm.
3. Rest a moment after each line before repeating the inhale/exhale process with the next line.

Inhale..... then exhale
A clean heart create for me, God;
Pause

Inhale..... then exhale
Renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Pause

Inhale..... then exhale
restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
Pause

Inhale..... then exhale
uphold me with a willing spirit.

Now pray it the exact same way a second time.

For Discussion

So far you have explored what you might need to let go of.
Now try to identify the commitments, interests, or relationships you still want to invest in.
What is it that still seems worthwhile and life-giving?

For Reflection

The writer of Psalm 51 asks God to “renew within me a steadfast spirit.”
Why do you think this process is described as *renewal*?

Peace by Piece: A Personal Prayer Experience at Home

On your own at home, you can privately conduct this deeply symbolic prayer experience, asking God for a change of heart. To do so you will need five things:

- An old pillow case
- A small inexpensive clay flower pot to go inside the pillow case
- A cardboard shoe box or plastic tote in which to place the covered flower pot
- A hammer
- A permanent marker

Place the small flower pot in the pillow case. Now place the pillowcase containing the small flower pot inside the shoe box or small plastic tote. Then:

1. Begin the prayer by silently thinking about the experience(s) that contributed to your **whOLE** heart.

When you are ready, strike the small clay flower pot hard with your hammer once or twice as a symbol of the pain caused by the experience(s). The plastic or cardboard container and pillow case will prevent any piece of the flower pot from going airborne.

2. After a few moments of silence and breathing, reach into the pillow case (or empty the pillow case into the container) and remove a piece of the broken clay flower pot. Hold it, look at it, and spend a moment or two determining the way that past painful experience(s) broke your **whOLE** heart.
3. On one side of that broken piece, use your marker to write a word, initial, or symbol that represents the way the trauma has shaped your **whOLE** heart. On the other side, write a word, initial, or symbol to indicate the change of heart you want to pray for.
4. Take a few slow deep breaths and slowly pray this prayer from Psalm 51, stopping after each line to take another slow deep breath:

*A clean heart create for me, oh God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit..
Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.*

Then pray it the exact same way a second time.

5. As a prayerful sign of your sincerity and faith, offer the broken piece of the pot to God, both the pain in your **whOLE** heart and the change of heart you desire. If you are home, you can put it away in a drawer and let it serve as a reminder of your prayer, whenever you see it again.



SESSION 4

Wholehearted

The author of Psalm 51 in the previous session not only prayed to be renewed but to be *restored*. When it comes to responding to trauma, *restoration* represents the *healthy, intentional, and hard work you set out to do for yourself with God's grace*.

To be restored is to be brought back to living the life God has given us, scars and all.

Think of restoration as getting your strength back.

Or getting your health back.

Your courage back.

Your faith back.

Think about it as getting your motivation back.

Or getting your joy back.

Your ability to feel back.

Your ability to cope back.

Think about it as getting a clear head back.

Or getting your giggle back.

Your interests back.

Your "haven't talked to you in a while" back.

Restoration is the process of getting your God-given life back and going forward with it.

For Reflection

1. What have you noticed coming back to you, or what do you wish to see come back to you, as part of the process of *restoration*?

2. St. Paul writes:

*Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Romans: 12:2

What word or phrase from this advice of St. Paul means the most to you at this time?

