

Preparing Families to Celebrate the  
Sacraments of Initiation:  
The Eucharist



# The process so far .....



- Session One: **'Baptism'**
- This gave us our 'model' for working with families i.e. follow the pattern of the RCIA and Walk to Emmaus
- Meet as families after Mass to **listen** and **reflect** on our **'lived experience' of 'family' & 'belonging'** to help families discern the meaning for their life of faith in the Catholic community
- Themes included **joining** the community of faith; **belonging**; **building community**; **handing on & receiving the 'Tradition'** of the Church; **empowering** for living the Christian life; **vocation** (priest/prophet/king)

# Session 2 : Confirmation



- We identified the ‘themes’ a parish course of preparation might have explored: the work of the **Holy Spirit in Scripture**; **faith**; **Pentecost**; **strength to witness**; **service**; **gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit**
- We participated in **activities** to **engage** young people as a ‘way in’ to review and remind them of these themes:
  - **Faith**: - the spider in the box
  - **Pentecost** – a guided meditation
  - **Gifts and Fruits of the H. Spirit**: - useful/unusual/unused gifts; match-the-cards
  - **Power for living**: - giants/dwarves/wizards; Oscar Romero; Team Hoyt
  - **Building community**: - Christians to the crocodiles

# Session 3: Eucharist



- What might your course wish to cover?
- If those preparing to receive Holy Communion for the first time are young people, might you wish to prepare parents and young people separately or together?

“...what is needed ... is a *catechesis of evangelisation, impregnated with the Spirit of God* and offered *in language adapted* to the times and the hearers..... Such catechesis helps them discern the gospel and live it in their everyday lives.”

(General Directory for Catechesis in Plain English n.194; Bill Huebsch)

“ The language we use in addressing young people is vitally important to consider. The Church’s jargon must be *translated into their terms* so they can meet Christ.”

(General Directory for Catechesis in Plain English n. 185; Bill Huebsch)

# Celebrating The Eucharist is ...

- A 'memorial' – we remember what Jesus did at the Last Supper and on the cross
- A making present of Jesus' self-offering to God the Father; the power of that one saving sacrifice on Calvary is made present for us today through the action of the priest
- An encounter with the Risen Jesus in Word and Sacrament and community
- A receiving of spiritual food for our journey towards Heaven
- A renewal of our covenant with God & each other
- A self – offering of our work, joys, sorrows to be blessed, transformed and given back to us to ***go out and serve***
- A proclamation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

# From “How to Survive Working in a Catholic Parish”

## *First Holy Communion*

First Communion is a very special event in a family's life – and parents (even non-practising ones) will do whatever it takes to make sure their child is prepared for the big day. The event stirs up memories in parents of the day they first received Communion – and they want their children to have a similar experience. Sadly, though, this is not so easy for the many children who rarely come to Mass on Sunday – and, since nearly all preparatory programmes are based on what happens in the Mass, it makes it difficult for children to make sense of the preparation.

An excellent programme called *Do This in Memory* is in place in many parishes in Ireland. It is a resource that parishes use to support both parents and children alike as they prepare for First Communion. Participants are invited to attend a monthly Sunday Mass through the school year, which is particularly geared for them. Newsletters (for the parents) and worksheets (for the children) create links between the monthly Masses, and families are encouraged to create a sacred space at home, in which the themes of the sacred seasons can be reflected. At the end of the year, the children and parents who have participated feel more at home in their church, and are more prepared to be involved in the Sunday liturgy, more part of the parish life.<sup>4</sup>

A welcome development in recent years is the provision of catechetical support in the parish, where the children meet with catechists and helpers throughout the time of preparation and there are three or four parents' meetings during the programme. Since the aim of the First Communion programmes is to teach the children about the Mass,

there can be a celebration Mass for them at one of the Sunday masses four times during the programme: the first two (celebrating the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word) take place prior to First Communion (which celebrates the Liturgy of the Eucharist) and the last one takes place after the children have received their First Communion. This one can be a sending forth Mass (to celebrate the Concluding Rites of the Mass).

For example, in one parish, they celebrate the Introductory Rites of the Mass by presenting the children to the parish community. The children are invited then to come forward with a parent (who has brought the child's baptismal candle). They stand facing the congregation where the priest and the altar servers light all the candles. The priest tells the children that they were given a lighted candle on the day they were baptised; and, on that day, they were told:

“You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of the light.” He adds that maybe they were too small to understand it then; and he invites the parents to hand the baptismal candles to their children again, now saying, as they do: “Receive the light of Christ and bring it to everyone you meet.”

This enables the children to make the link between receiving Jesus in the Eucharist and taking him out to those they meet. It also enables the priest to make the link between baptism and First Communion. This is the reason that girls wear white dresses for their First Communion – although, somehow, that symbolism has got lost in the elaborate and expensive dresses the girls are now wearing – and, for some reason, the symbolism doesn't extend at all to the boys!

In some parishes, they brace themselves for the extravagant parties and shows of excess as First Communion season comes upon them. One priest reported that a seven-year-old girl was transported to church in a Cinderella coach for her First Communion. Another girl arrived at church with a dog dressed in an identical dress to her own. And, what's more, a few years ago, there was a girl who wore a tiara in church and, when she received the Host for the first time, the tiara lit up.<sup>5</sup>

One mother complained after her daughter received First Communion, saying that there is a long way to go if we are to help our children celebrate this special event in their lives with a sense of the importance and depth of the sacrament. Her solution to the problem would be to teach the children a repertoire of traditional hymns as part of their preparation. She thinks it would be a way of exposing children to a kind of piety that their formation might otherwise lack – and that this would help them receive the sacrament with understanding, awe and mystery.<sup>6</sup>

Some would make the point that many of the traditional hymns this mum suggests were written in the context of static devotion rather than an active participatory liturgy. We have now a new generation of hymns that reflects a post-conciliar understanding of what we do at Mass.<sup>7</sup>

The point is that, if we are to reach the catechetical potential of preparation and celebration of First Communion, anything we can do to help parents and children to want to come to Mass regularly, to learn more about the Mass, how it developed, how it is celebrated and what Holy Communion means, is

essential. This approach is built on the belief that children grow in faith best when their parents and the parish community accompany them on their faith journey.

### *Confirmation*

Young people in their thousands celebrate the sacrament of confirmation each year, ranging in age from birth to fifteen years of age. Some eight-year-olds will be confirmed and receive their First Communion; the others will have received First Communion years before and are being confirmed as teenagers – all depending on whether they are in the Eastern or Western Church and on their diocese.

In the early Church, adults seeking to become Christians would be immersed in water by presbyters or deacons at the Easter Vigil; they would then go to the bishop, who would lay his hands on them and anoint them and they would then receive the Eucharist. As Christianity grew, bishops could not always be present for baptisms. The Eastern Church continued to confirm immediately after baptism, sacrificing the bishop's personal involvement; but, in the West, the bishops reserved the "anointings" after baptism to themselves, wanting to keep a role in the ritual of initiation (thereby sacrificing the immediacy of confirmation). The bishop, so to speak, confirms the baptism performed earlier by the priest or deacon.

The Eastern Churches gave Holy Communion immediately, even to newly baptised infants; but from the Council of Trent on, the Latin Church reserved admission to Holy Communion to those who had attained the age of reason. In fact, children's catechesis regularly began around the age of seven, when confirmation could be administered, and

# History; His-story; Our story

Approx 1300 B.C.E.



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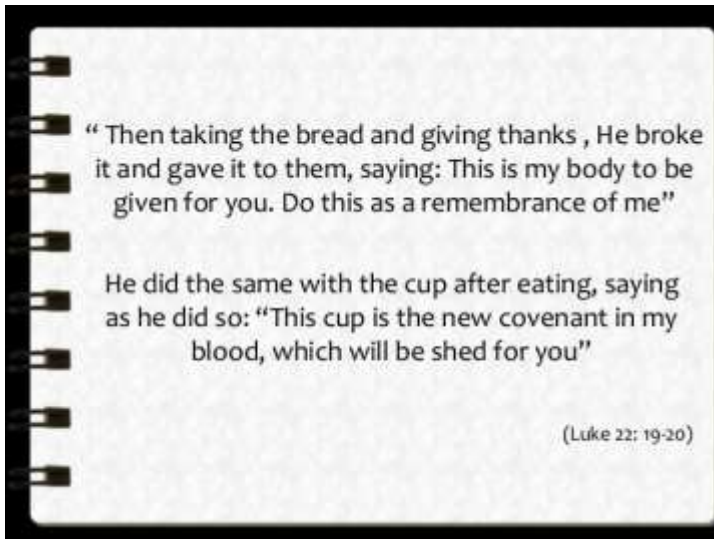


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# History; His-story; Our story



# History; His-story; Our story

What are the signs that we belong to a family?  
(Our name; looks; values; traditions; our family story; sharing meals, shared joys, hurts; meeting places)

As a family:  
When do we gather?  
Where do we gather?  
Why do we gather?



In a family why are meals important?  
What gets talked about at meal-times?  
(joys, past events, future plans, difficulties, disagreements, apologies, people)

What things do our family meals and our Eucharist (Mass) have in common?  
What are the important differences?

## Moses and the Israelites

The people of Israel held captive by the Egyptians (circa 1300 B.C.E.)

**The first Passover Meal** – a *sign* of belonging to **God's chosen people**

A sacrificed lamb as **food for the journey** towards the 'Promised Land'

The blood of the lamb is a **covenant** agreement - **God's protection** against the Angel of Death

The Jews celebrate this meal as a '**memorial**' of the first Passover & affirm God's **continuing** work among them

## Jesus and his disciples

'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full' (Jn. 10:10)

**The Last (Passover) Supper** given a new meaning for the **chosen followers of Jesus** (circa 33 C.E.)

'This is **my body**' broken for you

'This is the cup of **my blood**, the blood of **the new and everlasting covenant**'

"Do this in '**memory**' of me"

## The Church: You and Me

The people of God held 'captive' by our 'slavery' to sin & self-centredness

**The Eucharist** - the **Church community** gathering, listening; thanksgiving; **in communion**

'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'. **Jesus is truly present – our spiritual food as we journey towards Heaven**

As we drink from the chalice we **renew our covenant commitment** with the Lord

"When we eat this bread and drink this cup **we proclaim your death .. Until you come again**'.  
**We make present again the one saving sacrifice of Jesus**

## How to help children/parents who attend Mass infrequently? (1)

- All of the following are to support (***NOT*** replace) a programme of preparation / formation:
- The booklet / 'away card' – stamped and brought forward at the Presentation of the gifts



## How to help children/parents who attend Mass infrequently? (2)

- Additional (teaching) Masses for children and parents once per month:
  - Explanations are given during Mass
  - Maximum participation encouraged
  - Practical links made with the Mass and living the Eucharist e.g. guided by prayer and Scripture; opportunities to serve, help at the food-bank, raise money for charity etc.

# How to help children/parents who attend Mass infrequently? (3)

- Give 4 parish masses a special emphasis for those preparing for first Holy Communion
- **Mass 1** – focus on the **introductory rites**;
  - Children & parents come to the front
  - Parents re-present their baptismal candle
  - Explain about receiving & sharing the ‘light of Christ’
- **Mass 2** – focus on the **Liturgy of the Word**
- **Mass 3** – Is the actual **First Holy Communion Mass** so the focus is on the Real Presence of Christ
- **Mass 4** – a ‘**sending forth**’ Mass
  - Emphasis on “go out to witness”

# Order the Basic Structure of the Mass

| Liturgy of the Word                                    | Liturgy of the Eucharist   |
|--|--|
| Gathering  | Offering our gifts (work, joys, sorrow)  |
| Giving praise and asking forgiveness                   | Giving thanks (Eucharistic prayer)   |
| Hearing the Word of God                                | Consecration (Jesus becoming truly present under the appearance of bread & wine) |
| Praying for our needs and those of the wider community | Sign of peace (re-affirms community)   |
|  | Communion (we renew our covenant with the Lord)                                  |
|  | Dismissal "Go – announce the Gospel"   |

MATCH CARDS to show links with family life and Mass

**Gathering as family**

**Sharing our stories and memories**

**Parents & elders give guidance**

**Offering/receiving forgiveness**

**Sharing a meal for nourishment**

**Parting & returning to our wider life**

**Deepening our family bonds**

**Showing our love for each other**



MATCH CARDS to show links between family life and Mass

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>We gather</b><br/><b>“In the name of the Father and of the Son<br/>and of the Holy Spirit”</b></p>               | <p><b>“A reading from the letter of .....</b><br/><b>“A reading from the Holy Gospel according<br/>to .....</b></p>  |
| <p><b>“The Body of Christ’ ; “The Blood of<br/>Christ”</b></p>   | <p><b>The Homily</b></p>   |
| <p><b>“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”</b><br/><b>“Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your<br/>life.”</b></p> | <p><b>“Let us offer each other the sign of peace”</b></p>  |
| <p><b>“Our Father, who art in Heaven ....”</b></p>   | <p><b>“Do this in memory of me”</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Prayers of the faithful / Bidding prayers</b></p>  | <p><b>When we eat this Bread and drink this<br/>Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until<br/>you come again</b></p>                                      |
| <p><b>The presentation of the gifts at the altar</b></p>   | <p><b>“Take, eat, this is my Body given for you”</b><br/><b>“Take, drink, this is the chalice of my<br/>blood ... of the new and eternal covenant”</b></p> |

# Building bridges, making connections ..

Gathering as 'family'

“In the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit” / “Our Father ...”

Elders & parents share

“a reading from the letter of ...”

Stories & memories;

“a reading from the Holy Gospel...”

Teaching & guidance

The homily

Shared experiences / joys  
and sorrows

We bring our gifts to the altar

Giving/receiving forgiveness

“Lord have mercy”

“Let us offer the sign of peace”

Shared meals = self-giving

“The Body of Christ; the Blood of Christ”

Returning to the world

“Go and announce the Gospel ...”

# Eucharistic living ... “Go .....”

| In Mass ...   | Therefore in life we should ... |
|---|---------------------------------|
| when the Scriptures are proclaimed, it is the <u>Lord who speaks</u> ...                          |                                 |
| we pray, “ <u>Our Father</u> ” and “forgive us our trespasses <u>as we forgive others</u> ” ..... |                                 |
| share the <u>sign of peace</u> before receiving Holy Communion....                                |                                 |
| pray “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, <u>have mercy on us</u> ” ....            |                                 |
| renew our <u>covenant</u> with God as we receive Holy Communion ....                              |                                 |
| hear “Go in peace <u>glorifying the Lord by your life.</u> ”                                      |                                 |