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# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat for Children and Parents Preparing to Receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist

Olivia Rico

*University of the Incarnate Word*

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**FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD RETREAT FOR  
CHILDREN AND PARENTS PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENTS  
OF RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST**

A Pastoral Project  
presented to the Pastoral Institute,  
University of the Incarnate Word,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Religious Studies

Sister Olivia Rico, B.A., OSF

Approved by:

*Dr. Elisabeth Ryan, Th.D.*  
Faculty Advisor

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## Theology of Church and Ministry

The Catholic Church is home to a diverse people who profess faith in the risen Lord and who love and serve others under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church symbolizes both the visible and the spiritual. As the Body of Christ, it is also a sign and instrument of the human communion with God. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines "church," *ekklesia* in Greek, as a convocation or assembly of people drawn together by God from all the ends of the earth (CCC, 751). Furthermore, the church, "draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body" (CCC, 752). This is an appropriate definition in that Christ Jesus is the head of his body, the church, and every baptized Christian is given the mission to go out into the world and proclaim the Good News. The Holy Spirit, which is the soul of the church, abides in the baptized and empowers them with charisms needed to be holy, alive, and Christ-like (Pennock, 94). Furthermore, each baptized Christian has the duty to use the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit to be of service in the church by participating in its various ministries. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis describes the church as a presence "in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, charitable outreach, worship and celebration" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28).

In *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles defines the church as, "a union or communion of men with one another through the grace of Christ. Although this communion manifests itself in sacramental and juridical structures, at the heart of the church one finds

mystery” (Dulles, 9). In other theological resources, the church is described as People of God and Body of Christ. These images, however, cannot completely answer the question of what church is, either individually or taken together, because, as noted by Pope Francis, “She is certainly a mystery rooted in the Trinity, yet she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 111).

The Catholic Church, both as people and institution, exists within both human history and God’s eternal plan. As the Catechism teaches, “The Church is in history, but at the same time she transcends it. It is only ‘with the eyes of faith’ that one can see her in her visible reality and at the same time in her spiritual reality as bearer of divine life” (CCC, 770). Pennock adds to this statement when he states, “The Church is both a means and a goal of the great mystery of God’s love for us. Each divine person of the Blessed Trinity was involved in preparing for the Church and helping it come into existence” (Pennock, 95). Christians believe that God the Father, who created the world, chose “to raise up people to share in his own divine life” (CCC, 759). When Jesus Christ came to fulfill God’s plan of salvation, he did this by preaching the coming of God’s reign promised over the ages in the scriptures and offering himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of humankind (CCC, 763). The Holy Spirit came to make the church holy and lead it in its mission of making disciples of all nations. So that the faithful can fulfill this mission, the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts (CCC, 767,768).

The Church is considered a sacrament because it is a visible sign of the people’s inner union with God and with each other. As a sacrament, the Church serves as Christ’s instrument to dispense all the graces necessary for the salvation of all its members. This is



done through the seven sacraments which are, “signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the church which is his Body (CCC, 774). Dulles reaffirms this statement when he states that, “[The Church] appears most fully as a sign when its members are evidently united to one another and to God through holiness and mutual love, and when they visibly gather to confess their faith in Christ and to celebrate what God has done for them in Christ” (Dulles, 61).

Another image for the Church stated in the Catechism is the People of God. As the People of God, the Christian faithful are called to participate in its mission which is to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16, NAB). As noted in the Catechism, “Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet and King. The People of God participate in these three offices of Christ” (CCC, 783). As priests, the faithful are called to offer themselves as sacrifices. As prophets, they are to be Christ’s witnesses through word and action. As kings, they are called to serve and help carry each other’s burdens with dignity and compassion. As the People of God, the Church is called to go forth to evangelize the world. This is done by proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. According to Pennock, “The Church must never cease to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, that the kingdom is present in our midst, that we must repent, believe, and be baptized” (Pennock, 98).

In addition, as the Catechism makes clear, “All Christ’s faithful are called to pass on the faith by professing it, living it, and celebrating it in liturgy and prayer. This handing down of the tradition is called catechesis which is education in the faith for children, young people and adults and includes the teaching of Christian doctrine” (CCC, 3, 4). The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of*

*the Lord* designates the people who participate in official catechetical leadership ministries as "lay ecclesial ministers," which expresses a sense of being called (*Co-Workers in Vineyard*, 12). At the same time, because all members of the Church are connected through faith and baptism, everyone has a duty and responsibility to share their gifts and talents to build up of the kingdom of God. This is done by participating in the ministries offered within and outside the parishes.

The final image of the Church addressed in this essay is that of the Body of Christ. As the Church, the faithful, not only are gathered around Jesus but are also united in his body (CCC, 789). St. Paul referred to the church as the Body of Christ when he stated that, "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all parts of the body, though many are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:12-13, NAB). As the Body of Christ, each baptized Christian is important to the life of the Church, because the services they offer are vital to the building up of the Church.

In conclusion, every Christian has been chosen by God to carry Jesus into the world, to evangelize. And this can happen only when we surrender to God's will and say yes. God has established the Church to be the Body of Christ on earth. Its members are called to serve the Church as Jesus' eyes, mouth, hands and feet. The Church is a mystery described as a communion of the human and divine but transcending through history. "The mystery of the holy Church is already brought to light in the manner of its foundation. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, For the Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures (*Lumen Gentium*, 5). As People of God, the Church is one with Christ who is the head of the Body.

As the Body of Christ, the baptized faithful are called forth to service to those in their midst by using the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. The Church is both a sign that God is acting in the world and the means by which God does act in the world. The Council emphasized this point in the words, "The people of God believe that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Impelled by that faith, they try to discern the true signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, the needs and the desires which it shares with the rest of humanity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 11). When God's faithful are willing to come together in one faith and in one spirit, many exciting and fruitful things are possible. We are all called to embody in our lives the Word of God. We are called to be church. We are called to communion and mission, to gathering and being sent, to coming together and going forth.

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### **First Reconciliation and First Eucharist Retreat for Children and Their Parents**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
May 16, 2013	I met with the Religious Education Coordinator from Christ the King Parish in Lubbock, TX to propose my retreat idea. She liked the idea so I began to organize and develop the two proposed retreats.
September 2013-May 2014	To gain more skills and knowledge of the process for preparing children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, I volunteered as a teacher's aide in the Sacramental classroom at Christ the King Cathedral Parish.
May- July 2014	During these months, I researched and developed two First Communion Retreats for both the children and parents using materials given by Religious Education Coordinator from Christ the King Parish and other material from Diocesan Office. One retreat focused on Reconciliation and the other on Eucharist.
August 8, 2014	I met with the Religious Education Coordinator again to explain the completed retreats. She approved the retreats and a date was set for October 11, 2014 for the Reconciliation Retreat and March 14, 2015 for the First Eucharist Retreat. I asked her for suggestions on people that I could include in my Focus Group to help me implement the retreats. She gave me suggestions along with phone numbers.
August 11-15, 2014	I called people from the list given to me by the Religion Education Coordinator. After making phone calls, the Focus Group was formed. The team consisted of one deacon, the Religious Education Coordinator, two First Communion teachers from the Catholic school, one First Communion catechist from the parish and me.

August 16, 2014	The Focus Group met for the first time for explanation of two retreats and to ask for input. Once all questions were answered, parts were divided and everyone was given the opportunity to share any thoughts about the layout of the retreat. After everyone had the opportunity to share, the schedule of the retreat was discussed.
October 11, 2014	The Focus Group presented the retreat to both the children and parents. Evaluation forms were given to the parents to aid in making improvements when presenting the next retreat.
October 18, 2014	The Focus Group met to read the parent evaluation forms and to make changes for the next retreat based on the suggestions and comments given by the parents and group.
February 28, 2015	The Focus Group met to plan for the second retreat. The changes made to the retreat were discussed and included.
March 14, 2015	The Focus Group presented the retreat to both the children and parents. Evaluation forms were given to the parents to aid in making improvements.
March 21, 2015	The Focus Group met to read evaluation forms and to make changes based on suggestions and comments from parents. After all the changes were discussed, I asked the Focus Group if they envisioned adding the two retreats to the First Communion Religious Education Curriculum. The Focus Group saw the value of the two retreats and voted to continue offering them. In addition, the group expressed the need to invite other people from both the school and parish to assist with implementing of future retreats.

### **Pastoral Project Proposal**

For my Pastoral Project, I will develop and implement two retreats for the First Communion children and parents that attend Christ the King Cathedral Parish and School in Lubbock, TX. These retreats will serve as teaching tools to help participants develop a more in depth theological understanding of the Church's teaching on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Eucharist. Furthermore, the retreats will include prayer experiences that will demonstrate to all participants the need to pray always both within and outside the Christian community. Finally, the parents will receive tools that will assist them in preparing their children for their First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. The first retreat will be a First Reconciliation Retreat and it will be implemented in the fall. The second retreat will be a First Eucharist Retreat and it will be implemented in the spring.

#### **Outline of the Day**

The retreats will be held on a Saturday morning to better accommodate the parents that work on the weekdays. The retreats will begin with a guided prayer experience for all participants. After the opening prayer experience and introductions, the parents and children will be separated for small group lessons and discussions. The presenter for the parents, who will be well educated in teaching others about the Catholic Faith, will speak to them about their responsibility as their children's first teachers in the faith. In addition, the parents will be given educational tools to assist them as they journey with their children during this sacred time. The children will participate in lessons related to the Sacrament of

Reconciliation and Eucharist. In addition, there will be time for Praise and Worship to demonstrate to all participants that singing is another form of prayer. After the small group presentations and lessons, the whole group will reunite for a closing prayer experience.

### **Staff for Retreats**

The Focus Group for the retreats will consist of a presenter for the parents, which will be a deacon, priest, or religious sister, the Director of the Religious Program in the parish, the First Communion teachers and an assistant who will distribute all materials and serve as emcee. Once the Focus Group is created, there will be a meeting to explain the two retreats and to ask for input. After all suggestions have been included in the retreats, there will be another meeting with the Focus Group to assign parts and to do a final review in preparation for the day of the retreats.

### **Evaluation Process**

Everyone participating in the retreats will take part in the evaluation process. The Focus Group will be given hard copies of the First Reconciliation and First Eucharist retreats before they are implemented for their review. Once all suggestions are included in the retreat layout, the children and parents from the sacrament classes in the parish and school will be invited. After each retreat, the parents will be given a hard copy of an evaluation form that will serve as guide in making improvements before implementing the next retreat. During the small group activities and lessons, the students will be invited to verbally express what they learned through the playing of games related to the retreat themes.



## **Project Proposal Points**

### ***1. a. Describe the pastoral setting in which this project will be implemented.***

The two First Communion retreats that I will be implementing will be held in the Family Activity Center at Christ the King Cathedral Parish in Lubbock, TX. The Center is ideal because it has a big hall for whole group gatherings and conference rooms for small group gatherings. The group that I will be working with consists of children and parents from both the Catholic School and Parish who are preparing for First Communion. The group targeted come from a middle class environment and many are not rooted in their Catholic faith. Christ the King Parish is the Cathedral for the Diocese of Lubbock, TX. The mass attendance is 1,300. The demographics consist of 53 percent White, 10 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent Asian. Currently, the parish and school are not offering parents enough resources and tools to support them in assisting their children as they prepare for their First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

### ***b. What makes this community/group particularly appropriate for this project?***

The group targeted need to be better informed on their roles and responsibilities as parents of children preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. In addition, the children need to be exposed to prayerful experiences which will aid them in developing a greater appreciation for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

### ***c. How will you use the strengths of this situation to enhance your project?***

My project will offer both the children and the parents an opportunity to be together in a group setting, to listen to others share their religious experiences, to experience quiet

time to listen to Jesus speak to their hearts, and to better understand the sacredness of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

***d. What are the obstacles you anticipate you will face?***

Due to the busyness of the parents with work and sport related events, I believe that there will be a low attendance and lack of interest.

***e. How do you intend to minimize or overcome these obstacles?***

The project proposed will be short but very informative. Flyers will be sent home at the beginning of the school year informing parents on the upcoming retreats. My hope is that this will encourage parents to plan ahead and include the retreats in their calendars.

***2. Briefly describe the activity that you propose for your project and indicate how you arrived at the idea that such an activity is needed and appropriate in your setting.***

I propose to develop two retreats for children and parents preparing for First Reconciliation and Eucharist. The first retreat will be a Reconciliation Retreat, which will be implemented in the fall. The second retreat will be a First Eucharist Retreat, which will be implemented in the spring. Both retreats will include praise and worship, prayer experiences, hands on activities and resources and tools for those preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist. The idea came to me when one of the First Communion parents commented to me that she wished the school would offer them more resources and tools to enable them to assist their children as they prepare for their First Communion. Later, I spoke to the Director of Religious Education from the parish and asked her if they held any parent sessions for the parents of the First Communion class. When she responded "no," I got her permission to develop two retreats to meet the

needs of both the school and parish parents whose children were preparing for First Communion.

***3. Describe the make-up of your Focus Group and how you determined the membership.***

When I spoke to the Director of Religious Education from the parish, we both concluded that this project needed people with different expertise. We needed teachers for the children, an emcee and someone to speak to the parents. Since I did not have contact information for people from the parish, together we created a list of possible candidates to invite to our Focus Group. I contacted the people on my list and formed our Focus Group, which consisted of one deacon, two religious education teachers from the school, one catechist from the parish, the Director of the Religious Education from the parish and me.

***4. Describe the needs assessment process you used to verify your hypothesis.***

The director of the Religious Education program from the parish and I assessed that we needed people who were currently preparing the children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. In addition, we needed to include a person who had a solid and firm theological training in the Catholic faith.

***5. In what way did you interact with your Focus Group during the planning stage of the project process?***

After forming the Focus Group, we met to discuss the two retreats. The Focus Group was given the opportunity to look at the retreats and make comments. We came together again to implement the retreats. After the retreats, we met to evaluate the comments given by the parents and to see what needed to be improved for the next retreat.

***6. a. What are the goals of the project?***

The goals of the two retreats are to share with the children and their parents the church's teaching on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist and to demonstrate different prayer experiences which they can incorporate into their prayer life.

***b. Include timelines for the completion of each goal.***

The schedule for the retreat is as follows:

9:00- 9:30	Registration in the Family Activity Center at Christ the King Parish
9:30-9:45	Introduction/Opening Prayer Service
9:45	Small Group Sessions with parents and children
9:45-10:00	Parish Catechetical leader (DRE) meeting with parents
9:45-10:00	Praise and Worship with children

After Praise and Worship, children will be divided into two groups for two teachings.

10:00- 11:40	Parents stay in the big hall with presenter
10:00-10:40	Small group lesson with students
10:40-10:50	Break/Small Group rotation
10:50-11:30	Small group lesson with students
11:30-11:40	Lost Sheep Game/ Review of day with children
11:40-12:00	Closing Prayer Service in Big Hall

***c. How will you evaluate the accomplishment of the goals?***

Evaluation forms will be given to the parents. Students will be evaluated verbally through playing of games with review questions from the retreat. After the retreats are presented, I will meet with the Focus Group and ask them for feedback.

***d. Who will be involved in the evaluation?***

The parents, children and Focus Group will be involved in evaluation process.

**7. a. *List objectives and timelines for each objective.***

**Purpose of the First Reconciliation Retreat**

The purpose of the retreat is to provide spiritual, catechetical and personal formation for children preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and for their parents. The presentation on the gospel story of the Lost Sheep will help the retreatants understand God's never-ending love and forgiveness. In addition, using the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as guides, they will be challenged to learn and to practice ways to be more forgiving toward others in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the retreatants will be instructed on the importance of prayer as they prepare to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Finally, the closing Prayer Service will demonstrate to the participants their mission to be light to the world and that this "light must shine before others, that they may see their good deeds and glorify their heavenly Father" (Mat, 5:16)

**Role of Group Leaders for Children**

The group leaders will guide the retreatants in understanding the need for reconciliation with God through listening to the gospel reading of the Lost Sheep and reviewing the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes. By listening to the gospel reading on light, the retreatants will be encouraged to bring light to those around them. After each objective is taught, the group leader will guide the children in doing hands-on activities to aid them in developing a concrete understanding of the objective.

**Role of Presenter for the Adult Group**

The presenter for the Adult Group will guide the parents in understanding what the Catholic Church teaches about reconciliation and how to communicate these teachings

to their children. Furthermore, the presenter will give the parents useful tools to aid them in preparing their children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### **Purpose of First Eucharist Retreat**

The purpose of this retreat is to provide spiritual, catechetical and personal formation for children and their parents as they prepare to receive First Communion. This retreat focuses on bringing the retreatants into a deeper knowledge of the sacrifice of the Eucharist and of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The retreat will also assist parents in deepening their understanding of the Eucharist and to help their children do the same.

### **Role of Group Leaders for Children**

The group leaders will guide the retreatants in a Last Supper experience where the participants will role play the Last Supper and share personal stories of when they celebrated a special meal with their families. They will also discuss the meaning of making sacrifices in order to gain a better understanding that when we receive the Eucharist we remember and celebrate what Jesus did at the Last Supper. After each objective is taught, the group leader will guide the children in doing hands on activities to aid them in developing a concrete understanding of the objective.

### **Role of Presenter for the Adult Group**

The Presenter for the Adult Group will guide the parents in understanding what the Catholic Church teaches about The Sacrament of the Eucharist and how to communicate these teachings to their children. Furthermore, the presenter will give the parents useful tools to aid them in preparing their children for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The schedule for the retreat is as follows:

9:00- 9:30	Registration in the Family Activity Center at Christ the King Parish
9:30-9:45	Introduction/Opening Prayer Service
9:45	Small Group Sessions with parents and children
9:45-10:00	Parish Catechetical leader (DRE) meeting with parents
9:45-10:00	Praise and Worship with children

After Praise and Worship, children will be divided into two groups for two teachings.

10:00- 11:40	Parents stay in the big hall with presenter
10:00-10:40	Small group lesson with students
10:40-10:50	Break/Small Group rotation
10:50-11:30	Small group lesson with students
11:30-11:40	Lost Sheep Game/ Review of day with children
11:40-12:00	Closing Prayer Service in Big Hall

***b. Indicate your role in the accomplishment of each objective.***

Before implementing my project, which was to create two retreats for children and parents who were preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, I researched and volunteered in the First Communion Class at Christ the King Cathedral Parish. Then, I sat down and wrote out the two retreats. In between, I created my Focus Group who reviewed the two retreats and helped to make changes. After the changes were made, I reserved the Family Activity Center, gathered all the supplies needed to implement the retreats, made copies of all the hand-outs and prayer services and kept close contact with the Focus Group. When the retreats were implemented, I was present to work at the

sign-in table, led the Prayer Services, assisted with set-up, passed out materials to the children and lead the verbal evaluation for the children. After the retreat, I assisted with clean-up and led the evaluation meeting when I met with my Focus Group. After the meeting with the Focus Group, I made the recommended changes to the First Communion Retreat and presented to the Focus Group before implementing the next retreat.

**8. a. *What knowledge is needed to accomplish this project?***

To develop and implement this project, I need to understand what needs to be taught to children who are preparing for First Reconciliation and Eucharist. I also need to know the necessary components of a retreat. In addition, I need to know where to locate First Reconciliation and Eucharist resources for both children and parents.

**b. *Of that knowledge, what do you presently feel you already have and how did you obtain it?***

I have been very blessed to have been given the opportunity to assist my religious sisters in planning and organizing retreats for different age groups. This has given me the understanding of what a retreat looks like and what needs to be included. In addition, I have a teaching degree in Elementary Education and was a teacher for 14 years. Finally, my courses at the Pastoral Institute have enriched my theological understanding of Church and ministry.

**c. *What knowledge do you need to get and how you do propose to obtain it?***

I need to learn how to work with children and parents who are preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. I am going to assist with the First Reconciliation and



Eucharist class at my parish and borrow their books to serve as aids in planning for this project.

**9. a. *What skills do you need to accomplish this project?***

I need to know how to do research, teach, read, lead, organize, and guide.

**b. *What skills do you already have and how did you develop them?***

As a teacher, I have the skills of doing research, teaching, reading and organizing.

**c. *What skills do you still need and how will you gain those skills?***

I need to learn how to be a better leader and guide. I will seek ways to be in leadership roles in my parish by asking one of the leaders in the parish to be my mentor and guide.

**10. a. *What attitudes do you need to accomplish this project?***

I need to be positive and believe that I can accomplish this project. I need to have a persevering attitude and trust it is possible to follow through.

**b. *What attitudes do you already have and how did you develop them?***

I have the attitude of being positive and trusting that it is possible to accomplish the project. I developed these attitudes within my family and religious community environment.

**c. *What attitudes do you need and how will you develop those attitudes?***

I need to have a persevering attitude and believe that I can accomplish the project. I will develop this by asking my spiritual director, religious community and friends to challenge me to continue working on the project especially when I begin to procrastinate because I have hit a brick wall and cannot seem to move forward.

**11. a. *How will you involve other staff to insure that leadership is being developed to continue this process?***

When I formed my Focus Group, I included staff members that are very capable of continuing with the project in my absence.

***b. Is it your hope to make this an on-going activity in the pastoral setting dependent or independent of you?***

It is my greatest dream to see this project become a part of the religious education program in the school and parish setting. Because I envision this, in my Focus Group, I have included people that can continue with the project without me.

***12. a. What are your personal learning goals as a result of this project?***

In developing and implementing this project, I hope to develop a more personal relationship with others who belong to my faith community. In addition, I hope to learn how to work with people of different educational backgrounds and who do not belong to my religious community.

***b. What are your professional goals as a result of this project?***

I hope to gain training skills that can be used to teach others how to implement retreats. I also hope to learn how to present the project both verbally and written to a diverse group of people whom I hope will implement this project their religious programs.

***13. What expertise do you want your resource person for this project to share with you?***

I want my resource person to know the layout of the First Reconciliation and Eucharist programs for children and their parents.

## Project Evaluation

*1. Have the participants in your Project complete a written evaluation which is based on your goals for the Project. Summarize their evaluations.*

For the First Reconciliation Retreat, there were 50 parents and 30 children that participated. 60 percent of the parents commented that the retreat met their expectations.

They stated that the retreat was helpful in understanding the importance of going to confession regularly and in encouraging their child to do the same. In addition, the parents expressed gratitude for the insights shared by the presenter. Finally, the participants shared that they would like to see more retreats like these offered in the parish especially for parents of children preparing for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. 40 percent of the parents stated that they benefited from the retreat but felt frustrated having to wait for the presenter to set up his laptop and other electronic devices. In addition, they felt that there were not enough interactive activities for them and their children to bring out the main points being covered. Furthermore, there was a lack of activities for the whole family to help bring out important concepts that both can share with each other later.

For the First Eucharist Retreat 60 parents and 40 children participated. 80 percent of the parents felt that the retreat met their expectations. The participants commented that they enjoyed the praise and worship with their children. They appreciated learning more about the Mass through the viewing of a video titled *A Walk through the Mass*. The parents expressed gratitude for the resources and tools given to them because they now had explanations to some of the questions their children were asking about the Holy

Eucharist. 20 percent of the parents were satisfied with the retreat but expressed frustration in that there was still not enough time spent with their children.

***2. List each of your original goals and indicate whether or not you accomplished the goals as outlined in your original evaluation criteria.***

The goals of the two retreats were to share with the children and their parents the church's teaching on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist and to demonstrate different prayer experiences which they can incorporate into their prayer life. Based on the evaluations completed by the parents and the discussions with the children, the Focus Group felt that the goals were accomplished.

***3. Describe how your Focus Group helped or detracted from your project.***

The people in the Focus Group were very helpful in implementing the project. After studying the project, they offered suggestions and were present on the days the retreats were presented to teach the lessons and assist with passing out material. In addition, they participated in the evaluation process and critiqued all the components of the retreat.

***4. How was your project resource person most helpful? Least helpful?***

Due to my intense schedule in my ministry as assistant to the Vocation Director for the Diocese, I failed to keep consistent contact with my project resource person due to distance. Consequently, I relied on my Focus Group and sisters in my religious community, the Saint Francis Mission Sisters, to be my resource people.

***5.a. How did you gain the knowledge you needed as described in your proposal?***

In implementing the two retreats, I volunteered on Sundays in the First Reconciliation and First Eucharist classroom in the parish I attend and borrowed their teaching resources which I studied during my free time. In addition, I checked out First

Communion books from the Diocesan library which I read to help me gain more knowledge on what children and their parents need to understand in preparation to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

***b. Was there other knowledge you needed that you did not recognize in advance?***

In implementing the two retreats, I discovered that I did not have adequate training in setting up a laptop to a TV monitor, which caused a delay for the parents at the first retreat. In addition, I discovered that the space chosen for the retreats was too big and there was a need for a good sound system, which we did not have for the first retreat.

***c. Will you need that knowledge in the future and, if so, how will you obtain it?***

I have discovered that working with technology is very important. Therefore, I am going to set aside time to take classes on using technology.

***6.a. How were you able to gain the skills you expected to need?***

In working in the Office for Vocations and Seminarian Education, I asked the Director who is well trained in public speaking, to give me tips and advice on how to be a dynamic presenter to high school and college students. In addition, I asked him to allow me to do more presentations. This gave me the opportunity to research a given theme and organize it in a way that would captivate my audience.

***b. Were there other skills you needed that you did not recognize in advance?***

I discovered that I need to practice slowing down when speaking to adults so that my words do not run together. By developing this skill, my audience will be able to understand the theme that is being taught.

***c. Will you need these skills in the future and, if so, how will you obtain them?***

Because in the ministry I am currently involved in, requires delivering presentations to diverse groups, I need to learn how to become a better public speaker. I am going to purchase a book on public speaking and continue to practice.

**7. a. *What attitudes were you able to develop that you expected to need?***

In working on this project I learned that all things are possible and I do have the talent and ability to develop and carry through such a big project. In addition, I learned to work with a team and be a team player for I realized that putting on a retreat is a big task that requires many people.

**b. *Were there other attitudes you needed that you did not recognize in advance?***

I needed the attitude of keeping faith because I experienced moments when I hit a brick wall and felt that it was impossible to complete all the requirements.

**c. *Will you need these attitudes in the future and, if so, how will you develop them?***

In the ministry that I am in right now, I need these attitudes because there will be times when things just will not show any progress. I will develop these attitudes by being consistent in taking time to pray and listening to the spirit of God speaking to me.

**8. a. *How were you able to minimize or overcome the obstacles you expected to encounter?***

Flyers explaining the retreat were sent at the beginning of the school year, which enabled parents to plan ahead. In addition, the retreats were short and to the point.

Finally, the teachers and catechists sent reminders through e-mail and hardcopy a few weeks before the retreats to remind the parents of the dates and times.

**b. *What obstacles did you encounter that were not anticipated?***

The lack of knowledge of technology and the size of the room were obstacles for the first retreat. The Focus Group learned from this experience and for the next retreat in

the spring, the tables were moved closer to the presenter, a good sound system was used and a person knowledgeable in the area of technology assisted.

***c. How did you minimize or overcome them?***

For the next retreat, we had someone who knew about technology assist us and a good sound system with a microphone to be able to project our message to the parents. In addition, the arrangement of the tables and chairs was different.

***9.a. In what way does the Project you completed contribute to the leadership capacity of others?***

The retreats that the Focus Group and I implemented gave the parents the tools and resources to aid them in being the children first teachers in the faith. In addition, the Focus Group learned how to coordinate a retreat as a team by using the gifts and talents of each member.

***b. To the development of pastoral ministry in general?***

The retreats that the Focus Group and I implemented gave the parents a setting to form a faith community with other parents whose children are preparing to receive their First Reconciliation and Eucharist. In addition, with the help of the Focus Group, the parish now has two First Communion retreats that will be offered for both the children and parents which will aid them in deepening their understanding of why the church places great emphasis on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

***10. a. List each of your personal learning goals and your professional goals as outlined in the project proposal.***

In developing and implementing this project, I hope to develop a more personal relationship with others who belong to my faith community. In addition, I hope to learn

how to work with people of different educational backgrounds and who do not belong to my religious community. I hope to gain training skills that can be used to teach others how to implement retreats. Finally, I hope to learn how to present the project both verbally and written to a diverse group of people whom I hope will implement this projects in their religious programs.

***b. Indicate for each goal how well you accomplished that personal learning or professional goal.***

After working with the Focus Group and participants, a friendship was developed and now I know the group in a more personal. When I attend Mass at the parish, I can now greet those who participated by name and feel that there is a bond and friendship with them. Because the retreats were resourceful, they will be added to the yearly calendar for all children and parents who are preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

***11. Personal essay. Respond to the following questions which analyze if/how your project deviated from the theology of church you originally articulated.***

***From your experience with this project, has your own theology of church and /or ministry been affirmed, or seriously challenged?***

In researching, planning, and organizing the two retreats my theology of church and ministry has been affirmed. I have been able to see my Focus Group as the Body of Christ who worked with me to create and implement two retreats for people who were in need of a deeper understanding of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. After the retreats, I was blessed to see the participants' excitement and deepening of faith as they felt reaffirmed in their commitment to their church and children. Finally, on the day



of First Communion, I was invited to take part in the special celebration which allowed me to see the fruits of the retreats.

***How do you find that the practice of ministry, as experienced in this project, differed from the theory which you articulated in the beginning?***

As I reflect on my experiences of ministry gained with this project, I realize that it is very similar to what the research says about ministry. In working with my Focus Group, we had the opportunity to share with each other different gifts and talents that later were used to educate the participants on their roles and responsibilities to their children and parishes. In addition, I was able to experience how just my presence as a religious sister had great meaning to those with whom I worked. As a group, we were able to bond as a family and now when we see each other there is a greater appreciation of that unity that was created through the retreats. Finally, through the reading of all the participants' evaluations, the Focus Group and I saw the need to continue implementing these retreats in the future.

***Conclude with a personal evaluative reflection on the Project overall.***

In reflecting on the two retreats that I researched and developed for the First Communion children and parents, I can truly say that it was a real learning experience. I learned that bringing forth such a project requires working with other people who have the same passion and dedication in serving the people of God as I do. In addition, I discovered the continual need to rely on God and the guidance of his Spirit through prayer, faith and trust.

I also learned that such a project takes hard work, dedication, and the desire to follow through. I discovered this when the project did not seem to be going anywhere. I had an

idea of what I wanted to do and how to go about doing it. But when it came time to research it, I discovered that there was just too much information and it was difficult to narrow it down. After talking to one of my religious sisters in community, I was able to narrow down my project. Praise God for wise and knowledgeable religious sisters.

My next obstacle was finding a parish where I could implement my project. When I first envisioned this project, I was working at Christ the King Cathedral School, which made it easy to get a group of participants. But during this same year, my religious community asked me to apply for a position at the Diocese as assistant to the Vocation Director, for which I was hired.

Now, that I had a new ministry, I was left with no participants for the project. I debated whether to do the same project or to start researching a new project. After intense discernment and prayer with the grace of God, I decided to continue with my original idea because I realized that I belonged to a faith community which also had children and parents that needed evangelizing.

With this in mind, I went to talk to the religious education coordinator at Christ the King parish. When I explained my project, she was excited about the idea and even offered to help me find people to be part of my Focus Group. Wow, I could not believe how awesome God is. When one door closed, He opened another one.

To better understand the faith development of children preparing for the sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist, I volunteered on Sundays assisting the First Communion catechist. The experience I gained while in the classroom really helped me in creating hands-on activities for the children. In addition, I developed a personal relationship with the children and parents which helped me to understand their needs.

After I finished writing the two retreats, I formed my Focus Group. The Focus Group was very instrumental in making revisions to the retreats based on their knowledge of working with different age groups. During this time, flyers were sent to the parents inviting them to the retreats. At first, there was a slow response because the parents had never had to attend a First Communion retreat and did not see the benefits.

Because of this attitude, we had a low attendance for the first retreat but for the next retreat more parents attended. When the Focus Group questioned the parents on the increase of attendance for the second retreat, the common response we got was that they were able to see the benefits of the retreat through the excitement and encouragement of the parents that had attended the first retreat. The children also expressed excitement in the classrooms and shared what they had learned at the retreat with the other children that had not attended. This excitement inspired others to give of their time to come and experience our second retreat.

Because the Focus Group and I saw the good fruits of the retreats and how the parents and children were renewed in their faith through them, the retreats will be presented every year. A three-ring binder with the retreats and all the resources used will be kept in the Religious Education Coordinator's office for future use. I praise and thank God for the many blessings that I received while working on this project. It was an intense project but it helped me to discover many skills that I did not know I had. Finally, I formed a personal bond with people whose greatest desire is to serve others in their faith community.

# **Following the Good Shepherd**

## **First Reconciliation Retreat**



**Sister Olivia Rico, OSF**

# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Reconciliation Retreat Schedule

- 9:00- 9:30      Registration in the Family Activity Center at Christ the King
- 9:30-9:45      Introduction/Opening Prayer Service
- 9:45              Small Group Sessions with parents and children
- 9:45-10:00      Parish Catechetical leader (DRE) meeting with parents
- 9:45-10:00      Praise and Worship with children

*After Praise and Worship, children will be divided into two groups for two teachings.*

- 10:00- 11:40      Parents stay in the big hall with presenter
- 10:00-10:40      Small group lesson with students
- 10:40-10:50      Break/Small Group rotation
- 10:50-11:30      Small group lesson with students
- 11:30-11:40      Lost Sheep Game/ Review of day with children
- 11:40-12:00      Closing Prayer Service in Big Hall



# **Following the Good Shepherd Reconciliation Retreat**

## **First Reconciliation Retreat**

### **Purpose of the First Reconciliation Retreat**

The purpose of the retreat is to provide spiritual, catechetical and personal formation for children preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and for their parents. The presentation on the gospel story of the Lost Sheep will help the retreatants understand God's never-ending love and forgiveness. In addition, using the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as guides, they will be challenged to learn and to practice ways to be more forgiving toward others in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the retreatants will be instructed on the importance of prayer as they prepare to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Finally, the closing Prayer Service will demonstrate to the participants their mission to be light to the world and that this "light must shine before others, that they may see their good deeds and glorify their heavenly Father" (Mat, 5:16)

### **Role of Group Leaders for Children**

The group leaders will guide the retreatants in understanding the need for reconciliation with God through listening to the gospel reading of the Lost Sheep and reviewing the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes. By listening to the gospel reading on light, the retreatants will be encouraged to bring light to those around them. After each objective is taught, the group leader will guide the children in doing hands-on activities to aid them in developing a concrete understanding of the objective.

### **Role of Presenter for the Adult Group**

The presenter for the Adult Group will guide the parents in understanding what the Catholic Church teaches about reconciliation and how to communicate these teachings to their children. Furthermore, the presenter will give the parents useful tools to aid them in preparing their children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Reconciliation Retreat

### Opening Prayer Service

**(Stand.)**

**Hymn:** instrumental music

**Leader:** Loving God, we come together in the name of your Son Jesus, knowing that he is always with us. We celebrate with thanks and praise for all your wonderful gifts, especially for Jesus' promise of everlasting life. Amen.

### Scripture Reading

**Reader:** A reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. (2:6-10)

Yet, we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather we speak of God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew, for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written:

*"What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him,"* this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

The word of the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

(Sit.)

**Leader:** Jesus promises that he will come again. He invites us to be with him in his kingdom forever.

**All:** We celebrate the presence of Jesus with us now and in the life to come.

**Leader:** Sometimes we catch glimpses of what the kingdom of God will be like.

**All:** We celebrate the presence of Jesus with us now and in the life to come.

**Leader:** We feel the comfort of Jesus' presence in the Scriptures.

**All:** We celebrate the presence of Jesus with us now and in the life to come.

**Leader:** We experience God's gift of peace when we seek forgiveness.

**All:** We celebrate the presence of Jesus with us now and in the life to come.

**Leader:** Loving Father, you promise us everlasting happiness and peace. May our lives and actions demonstrate faith in your promise and joyful hope for the experience of your Kingdom.

**All:** Amen.

*The gift of Reconciliation: Program Director's Manual:* Silver Burdett: 2000 (Used with permission.)



## **Small Group Lesson for Children**

### **We Keep the Commandments and Beatitudes**

This 40 minute lesson will aid the children in becoming more aware of the importance of the Commandments and Beatitudes in their lives. With the guidance of the group leader, the children will discuss ways they can observe the Commandments and Beatitudes. In addition the children will understand that God is merciful, and is always ready to receive them with open arms when one repents and comes back to him.

### **Materials needed**

Pencils

Markers

Masking tape

Colors

Poster of 10 Commandments

Envelopes

Poster of the Beatitudes

Copy of Forgiveness letter

### **Directions**

1. Before the lesson, the group leader will post a poster of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes where the children can see them.
2. When the children arrive for lesson, the group leader will invite students to sit in an area where they can see the posters.
3. The group leader will encourage discussion on the Commandments and Beatitudes among the children.

4. After the lesson, the group leader will guide the children in writing a letter to Jesus asking for his forgiveness for all the times they did not follow his commandments and beatitudes.
5. When the children are finished, they will fold the letters and put them in an envelope that will be put in a basket during the Closing Prayer Service.

# Forgiveness Letter to Jesus

*Draw a picture of Jesus and you.*

*Dear Jesus I love you and I want to ask your forgiveness for ...*

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*Love,* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Small Group Lesson for Children**

**We are the light of the world.**

This 40 minute lesson will teach the children how we are all called to bring light to those around us. The children will also listen to a gospel reading on light which will help them to see that everyone has a mission to be kind to others.

### **Materials needed**

Tape/glue sticks      Red, orange, and yellow tissue paper squares

Card stock copy of candle base      pencils      colors

Story of light      scissors      markers

### **Directions**

1. The group leader will read to the children the gospel reading on being light.
2. After the reading, the group leader will encourage discussion on the gospel reading among the children.
3. After the discussion, materials for the project will be distributed. The children will be instructed to color and cut out the candle base pattern.
4. Once the candle base is cut out and colored, the children will be instructed to glue one square of yellow, red, and orange tissue paper on the back of the candle base making sure that the tissue paper is sticking out at the top.

5. The children are then instructed to fold the candle base pattern into a cylinder shape and to tape together to form a flame image.

6. The candles assembled will be used for Closing Prayer Service.

(Reading for *We are the Light of the World* activity)

Mat 5: 14-16

## Light

You are the light of the world.

A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

# I Am Jesus' Light Candle Base Pattern

I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
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I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!

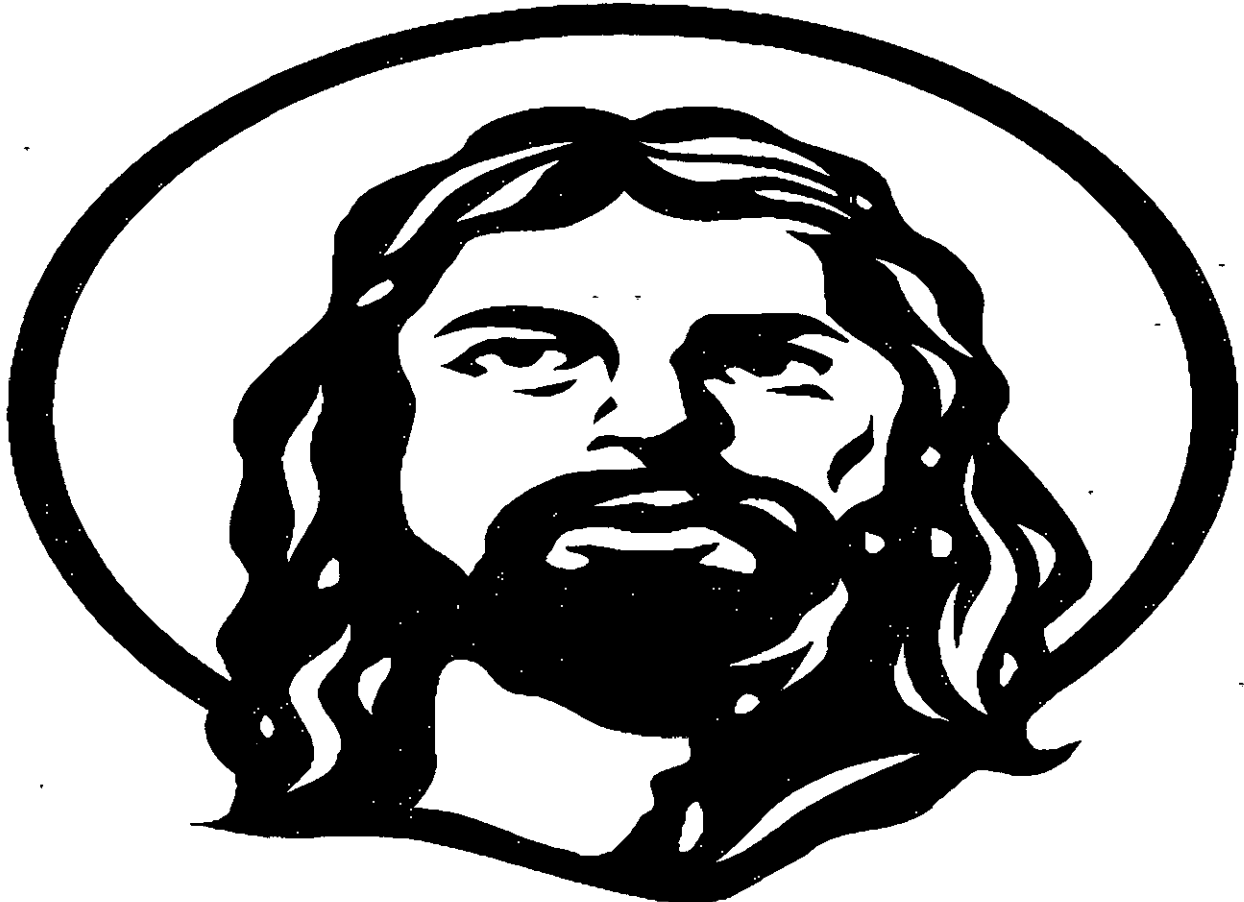
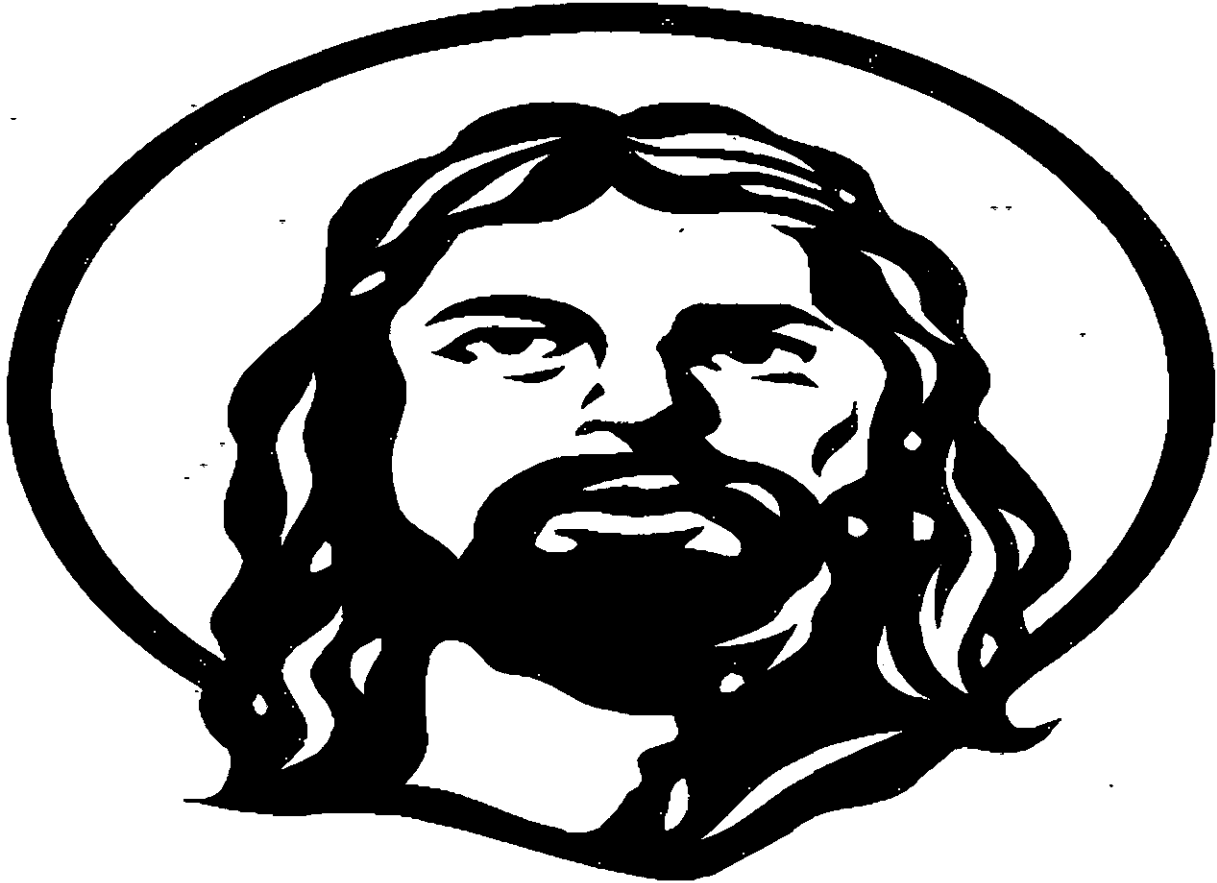
## Lost Sheep Game

1. Before the children come into classroom, the group leader will hide 10 pictures of Jesus with questions on the back.
2. After both lessons have been presented, all the children will come together to listen to the Parable of *The Lost Sheep*.
3. After the story is read, the group leader will explain to the children that in the classroom there are 10 cards hidden with questions related to the 10 Commandments and Beatitudes.
4. The group leader will give the children 10 minutes to find all 10 cards.
5. When all 10 cards have been found, the group leader and children will answer and discuss the questions on the back of the cards.





# Handout for Lost Sheep Game



## Handout for Lost Sheep Game

Questions need to be copied on the back of the Jesus pictures.

<b>1. The First Commandment says that the Lord is our God and we shall not have strange gods before us. What can we do to honor God and live as a child of God?</b>	<b>2. The Second Commandment says that we shall not take the name of the Lord our God in vain. How should we speak of God and Jesus?</b>
<b>3. The Third Commandment says that we should keep the Lord's day holy. What can we do on Sunday to keep it holy?</b>	<b>4. The Fourth Commandment says that we should honor our father and mother. In what ways can we show respect to our parents?</b>
<b>5. The Eighth Commandment says that we should not bear false witness against ones neighbor. How should we treat those around us?</b>	<b>6. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said that happy are people who are kind to others and treat them with respect. In what ways can you show kindness to others?</b>
<b>7. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said that happy are people who forgive others as God forgives them. How can you show forgiveness to those who need forgiveness?</b>	<b>8. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said that happy are people who keep God first in their lives and let nothing take the place of God in their hearts. What actions can you do to keep God first in your life?</b>
<b>9. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said that happy are people who solve problems without hurting anyone and treat everyone with kindness. What can you do to bring peace to the world?</b>	<b>10. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said that happy are people who do what God wants, even when others may laugh at them. Give an example of when you followed God's way even though others made fun of you?</b>

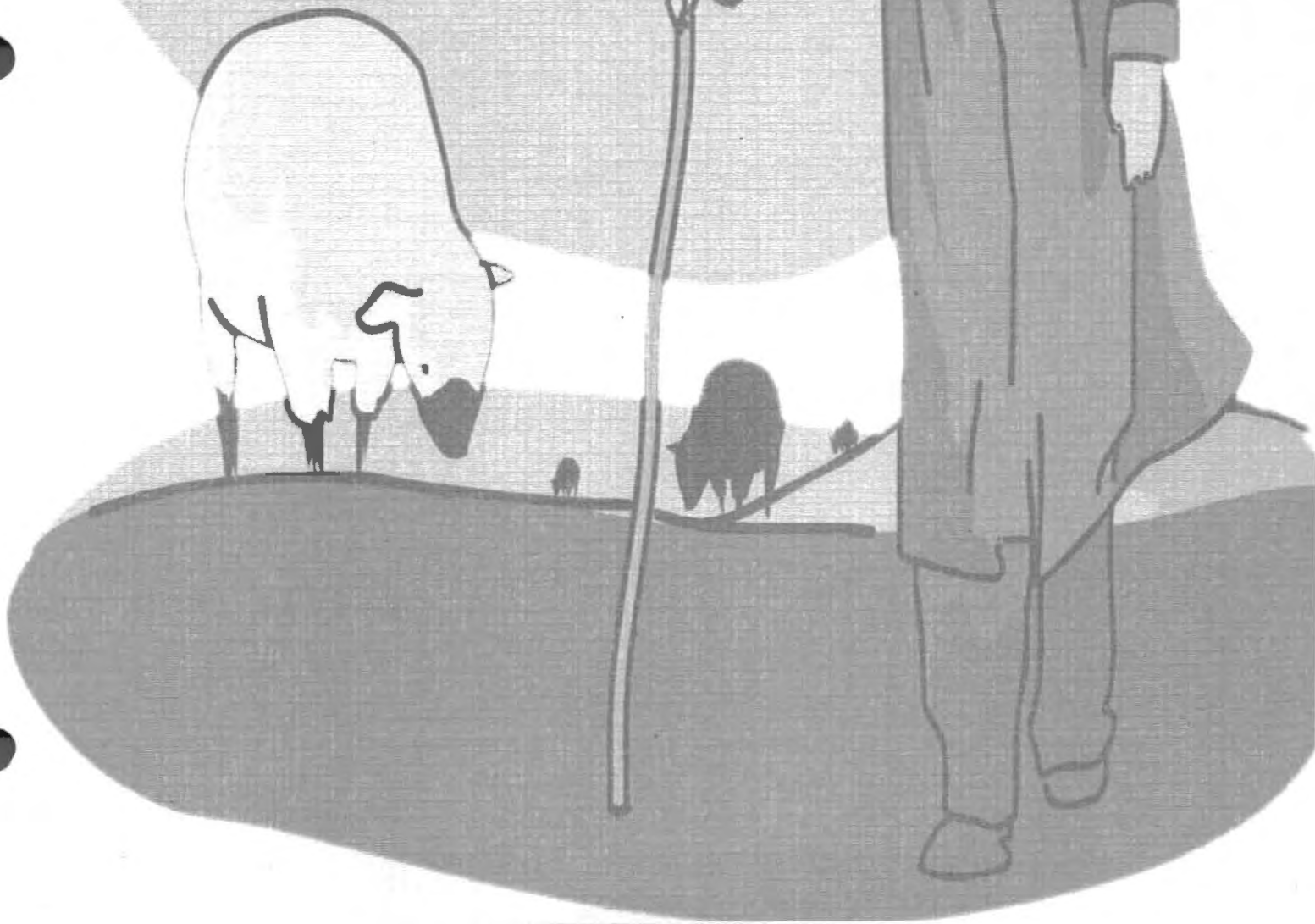
(Reading for the parable of the **Lost Sheep Game**)

Luke 15:4-7

What person among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?

And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep."

I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.



# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Reconciliation Retreat

### Closing Prayer Service

(Stand.)

(Children will walk in with paper candles and envelopes and go sit by parents.)

**Hymn:** *I Want to Walk As the Child of the Light*

**Leader:** Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus who seeks us when we are lost and guides us to your divine light. Help us to bring this light to those around us with love and compassion. We pray this is your name.

**All:** Amen.

(Sit.)

#### Gospel Reading (Luke: 8:16-17)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke:

No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light.

The word of the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.



#### (Psalm 23)

**Leader:** You are my shepherd, you are my friend, and I want to follow you always just to follow my friend.

**All:** Jesus you are my shepherd and I want to follow you always.

**Leader:** When paths are dark, you are there guiding me, keeping me safe.

**All:** Jesus you are my Shepherd and I want to follow you always.

**Leader:** Your goodness I know and your love will be with me all the days of my life.

**All:** Jesus you are my Shepherd and I want to follow you always.

**Leader:** Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness."

*(While soft instrumental music is playing, the children and their parents will take turns going to the front of room to place their letters to Jesus in a basket. As a family, they will pray a silent thank you prayer to Jesus.)*

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** Father, the light of your love surrounds those who walk in the light. But you make your light shine brightest when we're surrounded by darkness. We don't blend into the darkness but instead the light of your love shines in stark contrast so that those walking in darkness can see the way to repentance through our changed lives. Even as we are able to see God in the face of Christ may the world see Christ in the face of believers all over this dark planet. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Prayer Service taken from *The Gift of Reconciliation*  
*Program Director's Manual*; Silver Burdett: 2000. (Used  
with permission.)



## **I Want to Walk As the Child of the Light**

I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus.

God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus.

### **Refrain**

*In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God; shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

I want to see the brightness of God; I want to look at Jesus. Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path, and show me the way to the Father.

### **Refrain**

*In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God; shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

I'm looking for the coming of Christ; I want to be with Jesus.

When we have to run with patience the race, we shall know the joy of Jesus.

### **Refrain**

*In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God; shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

Music: Kathleen Thomerson: Rise Up and Sing: OCP Publications 2000. (Used with permission.)



## **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

### **First Reconciliation Retreat**

#### **Recommended resource material**

- Primary-Grade Sacramental Preparation by Laurel Kalchthaler and Camille Liscinky: Benziger Publishing Company: Mission Hills, California, 1988
- Catholic Parent Know How: Sacraments by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005
- Catholic Parent Know How: Church by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005
- Catholic Parent Know: Preparing Your Child for First Communion by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005

#### **Things to prepare before retreat**

- Contact a presenter for adults
- Contact people to be on retreat team
- Gather supplies
- Reserve place to give retreat
- Contact parents of First Communion Students

#### **Things to prepare one day before retreat**

- Set up all tables and chairs
- Post signs guiding participants to the retreat area
- Check sound system
- Set up table with basket for Closing Prayer Service
- Put all materials for small groups lessons in classrooms

#### **Materials Needed**

- Two CD Players
- Sharpie markers
- Pens for parents
- Praise and Worship music

- Music for Prayer Services
- Basket for Closing Prayer Service
- Table for basket for letters to Jesus
- Name tags with numbers 1 and 2
- Supplies for small groups
- Copies of prayer services
- Snacks

### **For the first part of the retreat**

A sign-in table will be set up with name tags for children and resource packets for parents. To divide the children into two small groups, the name tags will be numbered with either a 1 or 2. After parent and child have signed in, they will be instructed to help themselves to refreshments and wait for further instructions. Once everyone has signed in, the emcee will introduce the team, give an explanation of the retreat including the prayer experiences, and lead the First Prayer Service. Once the first prayer experience is completed, the children will be asked to follow the emcee and the presenter for the adults and Director of Religious Education will begin their presentation. The children will be lead to another room to Praise and Worship.

### **Small Group Gatherings**

After Praise and Worship, the children will be divided into two small groups for small group lesson and activity. Each small group will go to a classroom with a group leader and participate in an activity related to the theme of the retreat. The two groups of children will be rotated after 40 minutes with a 15 minute break between both lessons.

### **Closing Prayer Gathering**

Once the group rotation is completed, the children will be guided back to the main gathering area for the closing of retreat. The emcee will ask the children to go sit with their parents and lead the Closing Prayer Service. After retreat, the emcee will encourage parents to fill out evaluation forms which will be used to make improvements to the next retreat.



### Works Cited

1. Bennett, Art, Getting Kids to Confession, National Catholic Register (November 5-11, 2000).
2. Fragomeni, Richard N., Ph.D, The Gift of Reconciliation: Program Director's Manual, Glenview, IL: Silver Burdett Ginn Religion, 2000.
3. Limb, John J., Rise Up and Sing, Portland, OR: Oregon Catholic Press, 2000.
4. Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life Diocese of Albany, First Reconciliation Preparation: A Guide for Parents
5. Standke, Linda, Christian Crafts, Greenboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa, 2002.

# Following the Good shepherd (Reconciliation Retreat)

October 11, 2014

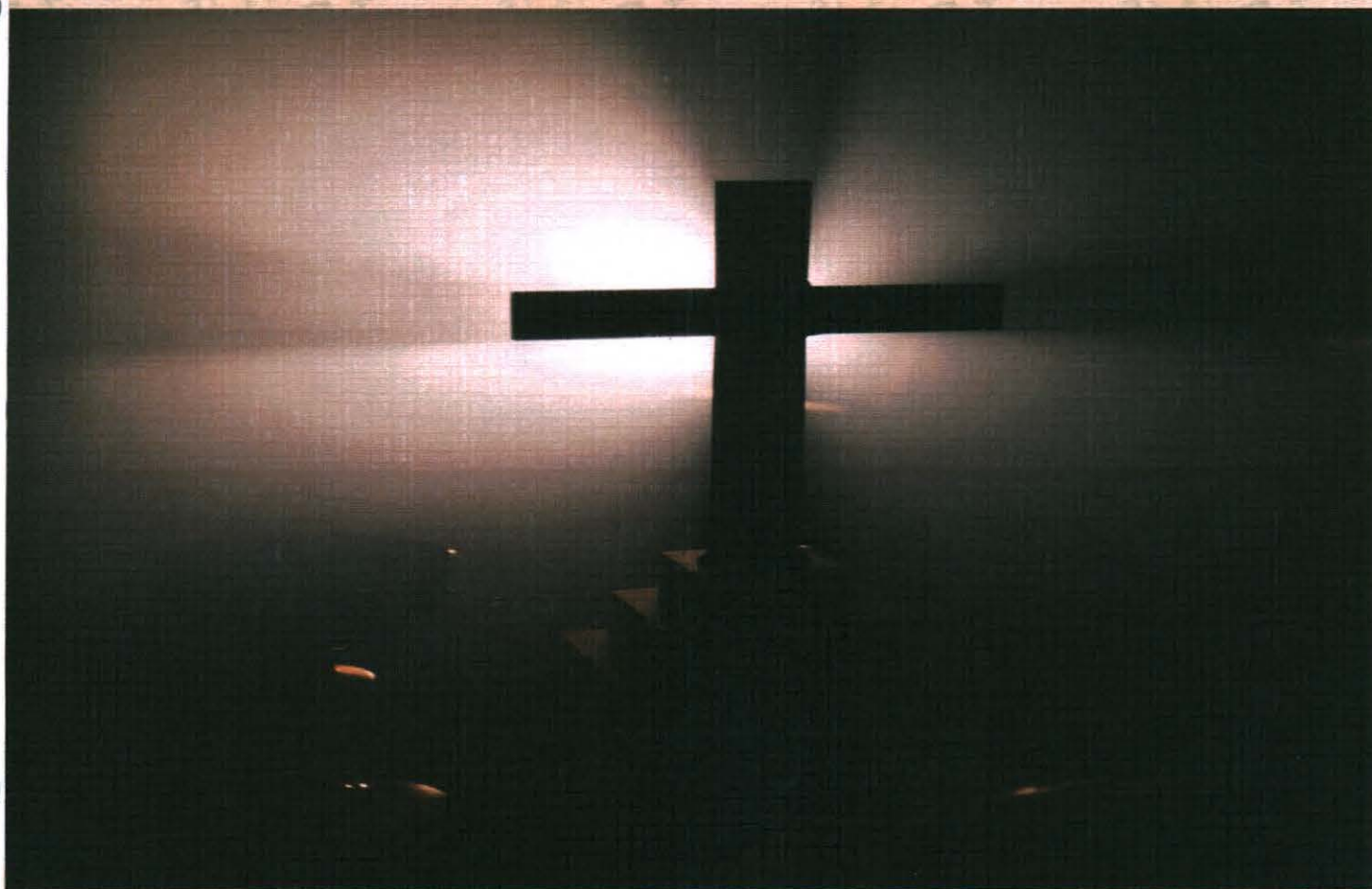
Please check your impressions of the retreat.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The parent session met my expectations.				
2. I will be able to apply what I learned about Reconciliation with my child.				
3. The material distributed was helpful.				
4. The presenter was knowledgeable.				
5. Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion.				
6. The length of the retreat was just right.				
7. The Prayer Services were easy to follow.				
8. The Retreat was organized and easy to follow.				

9. What parts of the retreat could be improved? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Other comments? \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

# First Reconciliation Retreat



The Lord is gracious and  
merciful... PS 145

**Date:** October 11, 2014

**Time:** 9:00 AM –12:00 NOON

**Location:** Christ the King Cathedral  
Family Activity Center

For more information or to register contact:

**Margo Gonzalez at**  
**[mgonzalez@ctkcathedral.org](mailto:mgonzalez@ctkcathedral.org): 806-792-6168**

or

**Raquel Iber at [riber@ctkcathedralschool.org](mailto:riber@ctkcathedralschool.org):**  
**806-795-6477**





# **Following the Good Shepherd Reconciliation Retreat**

**October 11, 2014  
9:00 AM -12:00 Noon**



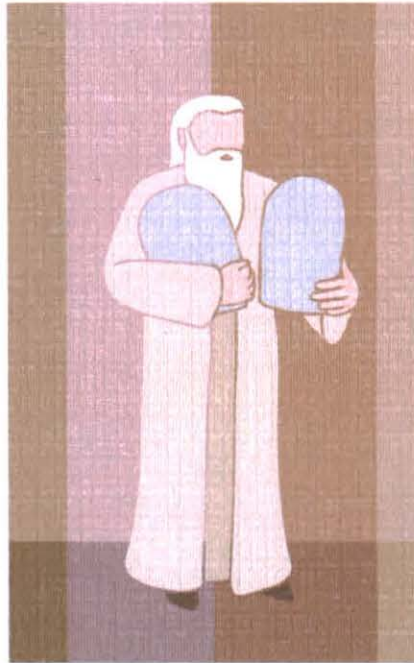
**Family Activity Center  
Christ the King**

**“ The Lord is gracious and merciful.” ~ Psalm 145**

# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **Group 1**

**Keeping the Commandments and Beatitudes**



# I Am Jesus' Light Candle Base Pattern

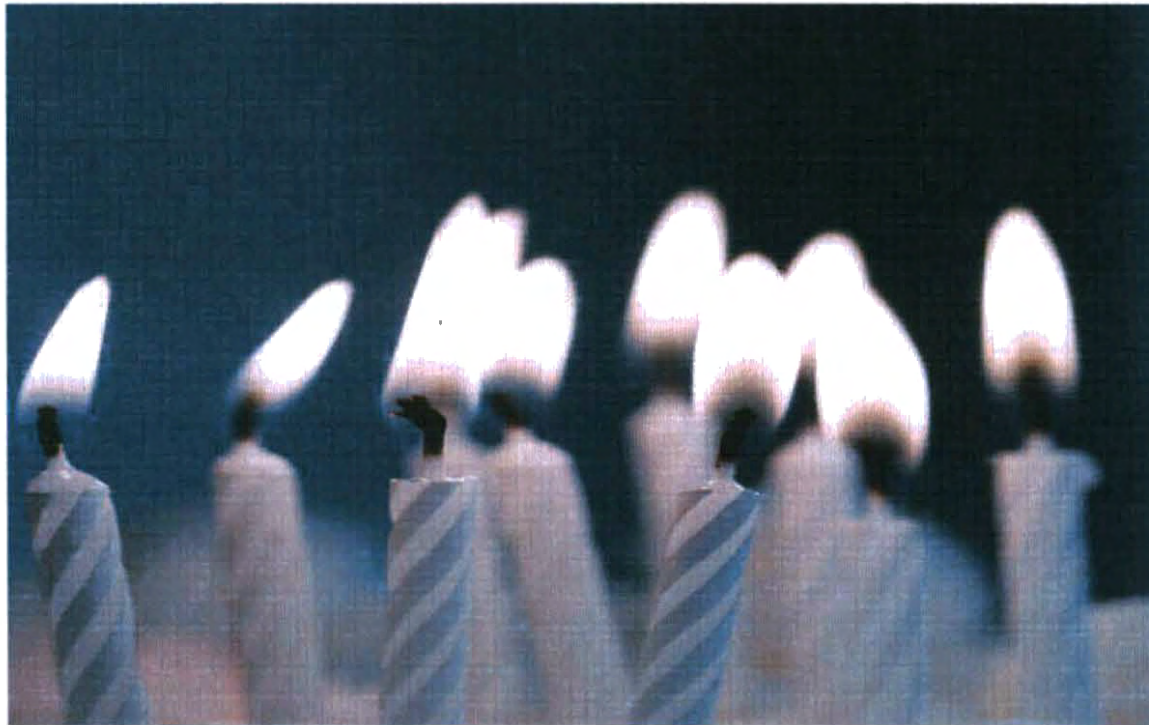
I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!  
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I AM A BRIGHT FOR JESUS!



# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

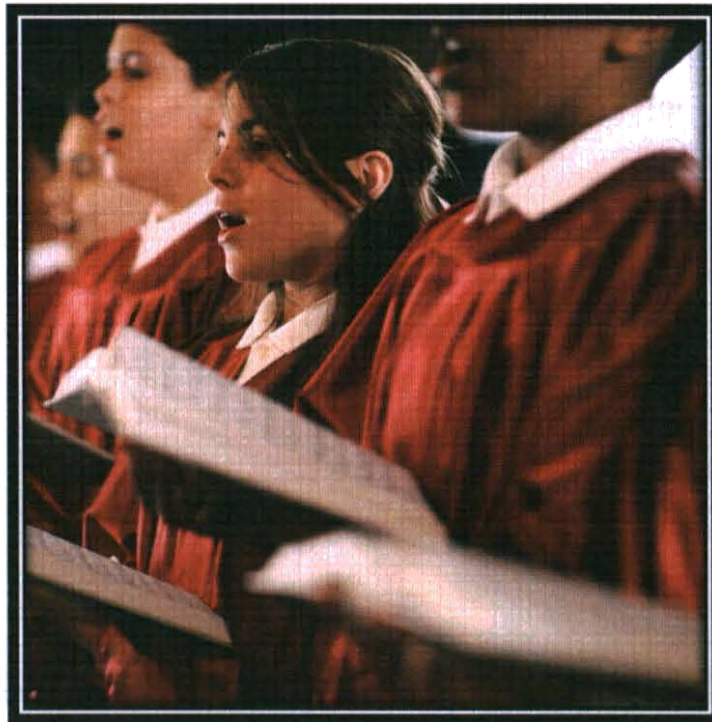
## **Group 2**

**We Are the Light of the World!**



# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **Praise and Worship**





**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



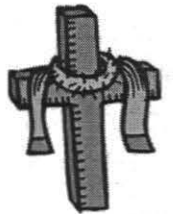
**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



**First Reconciliation Retreat**  
Following the Good Shepherd



**Following the Good Shepherd**  
**First Eucharist Retreat**



**Sister Olivia Rico, OSF**

# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Eucharist Retreat Schedule

- 9:00- 9:30**      **Registration in the Family Activity Center at Christ the King**
- 9:30-9:45**      **Introduction/Opening Prayer Service**
- 9:45**              **Small Group Sessions with parents and children**
- 9:45-10:00**      **Parish Catechetical leader (DRE) meeting with parents**
- 9:45-10:00**      **Praise and Worship with children**

After Praise and Worship, children will be divided into two groups for two teachings.

- 10:00- 11:40**      **Parents stay in the big hall with presenter**
- 10:00-10:40**      **Small group lesson with students**
- 10:40-10:50**      **Break/Small Group rotation**
- 10:50-11:30**      **Small group lesson with students**
- 11:30-11:40**      **Review of day with children**
- 11:40-12:00**      **Closing Prayer Service in Big Hall**



# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **First Eucharist Retreat**

### **Purpose of First Eucharist Retreat**

The purpose of this retreat is to provide spiritual, catechetical and personal formation for children and their parents as they prepare to receive their First Eucharist. This retreat focuses on bringing the retreatants into a deeper knowledge of the sacrifice of the Eucharist and of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The retreat will also assist parents in deepening their understanding of the Eucharist and to help their children do the same.

### **Role of Group Leaders for Children**

The group leaders will guide the retreatants in a Last Supper experience where the participants will role play the Last Supper and share personal stories of when they celebrated a special meal with their families. They will also discuss the meaning of making sacrifices in order to gain a better understanding that when we receive the Eucharist we remember and celebrate what Jesus did at the Last Supper. After each objective is taught, the group leader will guide the children in doing hands on activities to aid them in developing a concrete understanding of the objective.

### **Role of Presenter for the Adult Group**

The Presenter for the Adult Group will guide the parents in understanding what the Catholic Church teaches about The Sacrament of the Eucharist and how to communicate these teachings to their children. Furthermore, the presenter will give the parents useful tools to aid them in preparing their children for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.



# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Eucharist Retreat

### Opening Prayer Service

*(Stand.)*

**Leader:** Loving God, we thank and praise you for sending your Son, Jesus, to us. When we celebrate the Eucharist, help us to gather with sincere hearts, in the spirit of the early Christians. Amen.

**Hymn:** *One Bread, One Body*

*(Sit.)*

**Reader:** A reading from the Acts of the Apostles about the communal life of the early Christians. (Acts 2:42-47)



They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The word of the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

**Leader:** Let us pause for a few moments to reflect on how we participate in the life of our own Church community. *(pause)*

**Leader:** The early Christians gathered together every day to learn more about the teachings of the apostles.

**All:** May we open our minds and hearts to the word of God each time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist.

**Leader:** The early Christians gathered together daily in the temple to thank and praise God for his many blessings.

**All:** May we gather weekly with our Church community to thank and praise God for his marvelous gifts.

**Leader:** The early Christians were in awe of the Apostles' deeds.

**All:** May we be in awe of Jesus' presence in the members of our Church community.

**Leader:** The early Christians broke bread together each day and received the Eucharist with sincere hearts.

**All:** May our hearts be sincere when we gather with our Church community to celebrate the gift of Eucharist.

**Leader:** The early Christians divided their possessions among the members of their community.

**All:** May we show our love for others by caring for their needs.

**Leader:** Father, as we gather here, may you fill us with the spirit of your wisdom and love. Help us to carry this spirit to our Church community and to our children's First Eucharist celebration.

**All:** Amen.

***The Gift of the Eucharist Program Director's Manual, Silver Burdett Ginn Religion,**  
2000.(Used with permission.)*

# One Bread One Body

## Refrain:

One bread, one body, one Lord of all, one cup of blessing which we bless. And we, though many, throughout the earth, we are one body in this one Lord.

## Verses:

1. Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man, no more.
2. Many the gifts, many the works, one in the Lord of all.
3. Grain for the fields, scattered and grown, gathered to one, for all.

*Rise Up and Sing, John B. Foley, S.J., OCP Publications, 2000. (Used with permission.)*

## Small Group Activities for Children

### **Last Supper Experience**

This 40 minute lesson will aid the children in celebrating the Last Supper just like Jesus did with his friends. The children will also have the opportunity to write a story about a time when they celebrated a special meal with their family.

### Materials needed

1 small loaf of bread

grape juice

napkins

paper plates

small plastic cups

handout for story experience

markers

pencils

plastic grapes

wheat

candle

large plate



- The children will be welcomed by the presenter into the room and guided to sit around a table decorated with wheat, plastic grapes, a candle, a loaf of bread, and cups with grape juice.
- The presenter will read the story of the Last Supper from Mark 14:22-24.
- When the presenter gets to the part where Jesus shared bread with his disciples, the presenter will pick up the loaf of bread,



break it into many pieces, and share them with the children.

When the presenter gets to the part where Jesus shared the cup with his disciples, the grape juice cups will be shared.

- After the Last Supper Experience, the children will be invited to share among each other times when the Christian community comes together to share a special meal.
- After the discussion, the presenter will ask the children to think of times when they shared a special meal with their family.
- When everyone has shared, the presenter will invite the children to write about this special meal on a piece of paper and draw a picture of them celebrating the meal with their family.

## The Last Supper (Mark 14: 22-25)

**Presenter:** While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body," (*Give piece of bread to children and ask them to eat it.*)

**Presenter:** Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many." (*Give cup of juice to children and ask them to drink it.*)

**Presenter:** "Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink if new in new kingdom of God."

**Presenter:** Now, that we have celebrated the Last Supper with our friends. Can you think of when we as Christians come together to share a meal? If the children do not know the response to the question, explain that we as Christians celebrate a very special meal called the *Eucharist* at Mass. Next, ask the children to share among each other times when they have celebrated a special meal with their family. (*When children have finished their sharing, invite them to write a story about their celebration on the handout provided.*)



**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write a story about a time when you celebrated a special meal with your family.**

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**Draw of picture of your story.**

## Small Group Activities for Children

### **Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion**

This 40 minute lesson will help the children to understand that when we receive communion we are receiving Jesus. The children will also learn that the word “Eucharist” means giving thanks. Furthermore, the children will learn that the Mass is a sacrifice to God.

### Materials needed

1 large piece of construction paper for each child

1 yellow chalice to be cut out

1 white circle to be cut out

Pencils

scissors

Jesus sticker

glue

Decorative craft jewels



- The presenter will lead a discussion on the meaning of receiving the Holy Eucharist using the handout titled ***Jesus Gives Us the Eucharist*** as reference.
- The children will be given time to share their thoughts on receiving the Eucharist.
- After the discussion, the presenter will demonstrate to the children how to make a First Eucharist poster.

- The children will be instructed to cut out yellow chalice and white host.
- The children will be instructed to glue the yellow chalice in the center of a long sheet of construction paper.
- The children will be instructed to decorate the yellow chalice using the decorative craft jewels.
- The children will be instructed to place a sticker of Jesus above chalice and to glue the white host over the picture of Jesus.

## Jesus Gives Us the Eucharist

Every year the Jewish people celebrated the feast of Passover. During this holy time, they would gather to share a special meal. At this meal they would say prayers of blessing. They would thank God for all he has done for them. On the night before he died, Jesus was with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal with them. The meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died is called the **Last Supper**. At this meal the bread and wine became the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples to remember what he had just done. Jesus wanted them to remember and celebrate this special meal again and again.

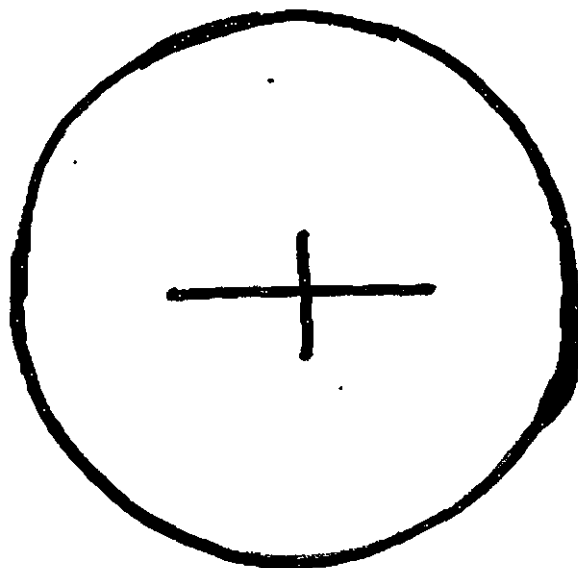
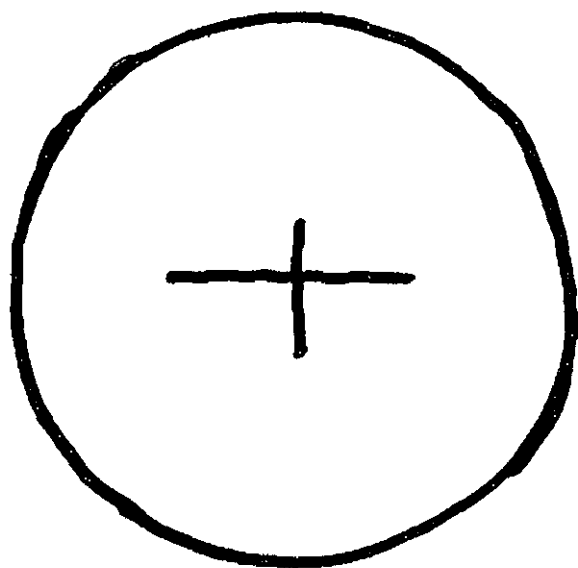
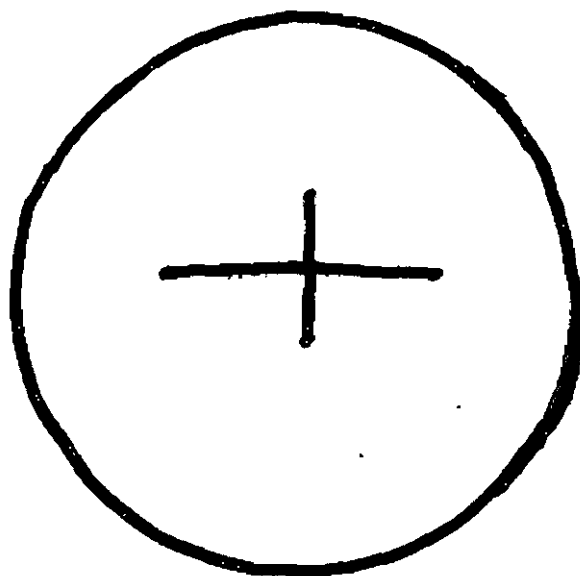
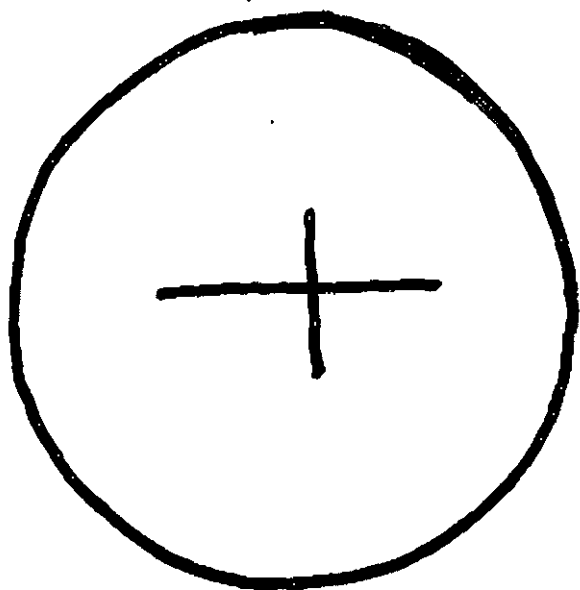
The Church continues to do as Jesus asked when we celebrate the Eucharist. **The Eucharist is the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.** In this sacrament, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the words and actions of the priest.

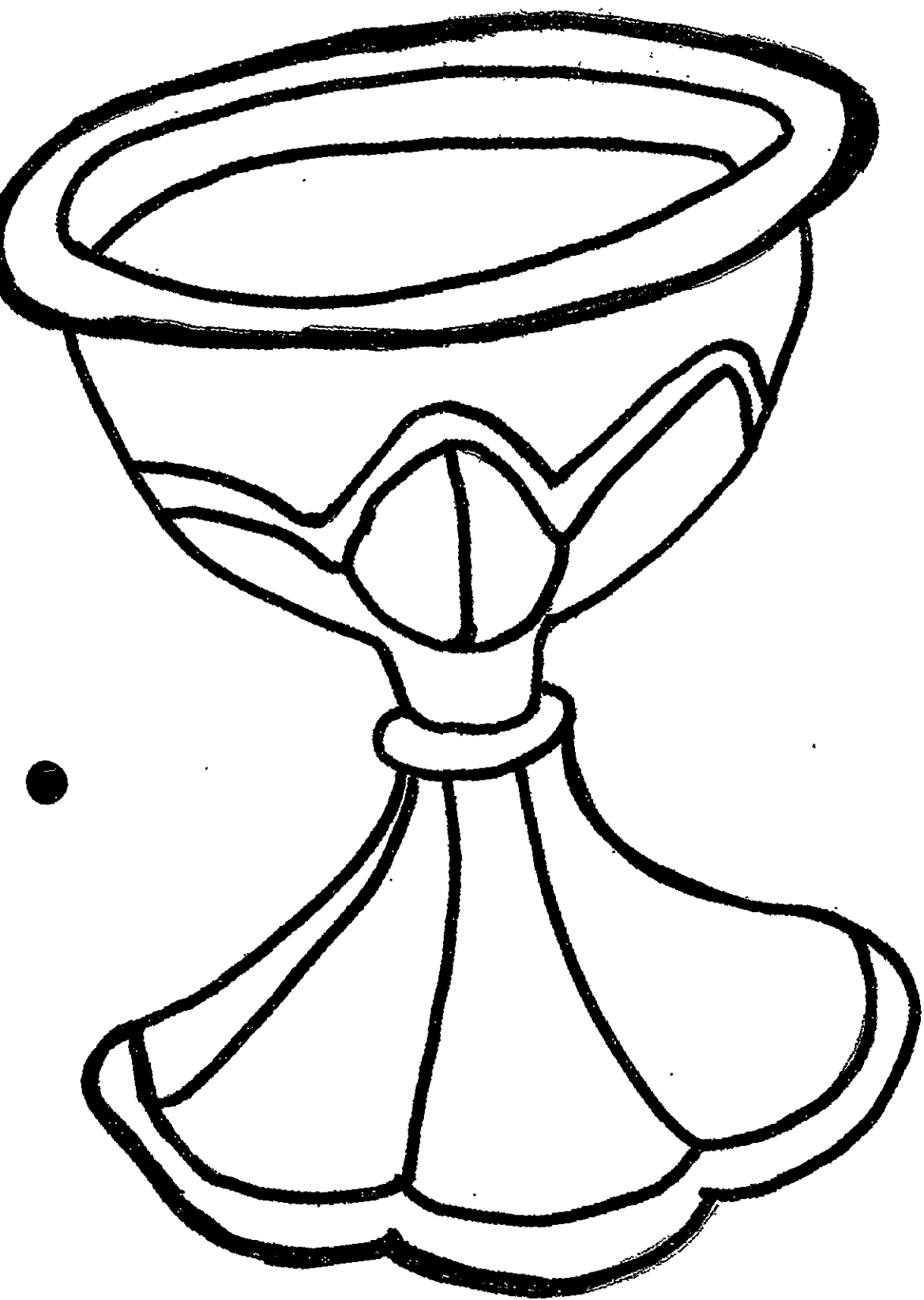
The word **Eucharist** means “to give thanks.” When we celebrate this sacrament, we thank God the Father for his many gifts. We praise Jesus for all he has done. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us grow closer to God and others.

Another name for the celebration of the Eucharist is the Mass. The Mass is a meal. During the Mass we remember what Jesus did at the Last Supper. The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Communion is receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Communion makes the life of God within us stronger.

The Mass is a sacrifice. A sacrifice is an offering of a gift to God. The word offer means “to give” or “to present.” Jesus offered the greatest sacrifice of all time. He died to bring us new life. At every Mass we remember Jesus’ sacrifice. When we take part in the Mass, we remember and celebrate that Jesus offered his life for us on the cross, that he died to save us from sin, that he rose to new life so that we could live happily with God forever and that Jesus gives us His own Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

***The Gift of Eucharist: Family Guide, Chapter 6, Silver Burdett Ginn Religion, 2000.(Used with permission.)***







# Following the Good Shepherd Retreat

## First Eucharist Retreat

### Closing Prayer Service

**(Stand.)**

**Leader:** Lord God, you shared with your friends a way to remember you and your love, to remember all the words you spoke, and the loving and kind things you did. In the meal of the Eucharist we remember and live your life in us. Amen.

**Hymn:** *I Am the Bread of Life*

**(Sit.)**

**Leader:** Jesus asks us to gather as his family around this altar, this table of the Lord. The altar reminds us of our home table where we share our meals; it also reminds us of the table at the Last Supper where Jesus shared a special meal with his friends.

**Reader:** To this table we bring a cloth. Just as we place a tablecloth on our home table for special meals, so we cover this altar. Every Sunday, we gather around this altar for the meal of the Eucharist. *(A cloth is placed on the altar.)*

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, for giving us this table. May we know your presence here. Lord, your table is holy and sacred and so are your people who come to celebrate your love.

**Reader:** We bring candles and place them on this table. As we light the candles, we light a memory, a memory of families who have celebrated God's love through the ages. *(Candles are placed on the altar and lit.)*

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, who has made us lights to one another. By your light, Lord, show us how to celebrate your love and to see your love in others.

**Reader:** We offer this bread as a sign of our oneness. Bread is the work of many hands; it is the staff of life. To break bread together is a sign of friendship. *(Bread is placed on the altar.)*

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, for giving us this bread to eat. In the breaking of this bread, we remember our love for us. Lord, you are the bread of life.

**Reader:** We bring wine as a sign of our gladness. Making wine requires the harvesting of many grapes. When we share a cup of wine, we share in the blessings of one another. (*Wine is placed on the altar.*)

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, for giving us this wine to drink. In the sharing of the cup, we remember your joy and your life is us. Lord, may we share this joy with others.

**Reader:** We offer this bible. Through the reading of scripture we learn of God's constant love and care for us. Every Sunday at Mass we listen to the story of the Last Supper and we share a meal in memory of Jesus. (*The bible is placed on the altar.*)

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, for giving us stories to tell. In remembering the story of the Last Supper, we do as you ask us to do. We share your life in the meal of the Eucharist. Lord, thank you for offering your life for us.

**Reader:** And we also bring our stories as signs of our daily family living. Our stories tell of the way God is present at our family table of the Lord. Some of the boys and girls would like to share with you a story of a special meal that they remember. (*Children share their stories.*)

**All:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, who helps us to remember our family stories. In remembering the meals we share at our home table of the Lord, we know your presence. Lord help us to always place all our family experiences on your altar table.

**Leader:** Lord, you give us your life because you love us. You break bread and say: "This is my body given for you." You offer wine and say: "This is my blood given for you." You ask us to share the meal of the Eucharist in memory of you. We ask you to help these families as they share with their children your actions of remembering, belonging and receiving in the way you lived your life through scripture stories of the Last Supper, the Breakfast at the Lake, and the Road to Emmaus. Let us go in joy remembering that God loves us.

***The Gift of Eucharist: Program Director's Manual, Silver**  
**Burdett Ginn Religion, 2000. (Used with permission.)***



## **I Am the Bread of Life**

### **Verses:**

1. I am the Bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; and who believe in me shall not thirst. No one can come to me unless the Father beckons.
2. The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world, and if you eat of this bread, you shall live forever, you shall live forever.
3. Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of his blood, and drink of his blood, you shall not have life within you.
4. I am the Resurrection, I am the life. If you believe in me, even though you die, you shall live forever.
5. Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who have come into the world.

### **Refrain:**

And I will raise you up, and I will raise you up and I will raise you up on the last day.

***Rise Up and Sing, Suzanne Toolan, RSM, OCP Publications, 2000. (Used with permission.)***

# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **First Eucharist Retreat**

### **Recommended resource material**

- Primary-Grade Sacramental Preparation by Laurel Kalchthaler and Camille Liscinky: Benziger Publishing Company: Mission Hills, California, 1988
- Catholic Parent Know How: Sacraments by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005
- Catholic Parent Know How: Church by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005
- Catholic Parent Know: Preparing Your Child for First Communion by Our Sunday Visitor, 2005

### **Things to prepare before retreat**

- Contact a presenter for adults
- Contact people to be on retreat team
- Gather supplies
- Reserve place to give retreat
- Contact parents of First Communion children

### **Things to prepare one day before retreat**

- Set up all tables and chairs
- Post signs guiding participants to the retreat area
- Check sound system
- Set up table for Closing Prayer Service
- Put all materials for small groups lessons in classrooms

### **Materials Needed**

- Two CD Players
- Sharpie markers
- Pens for parents
- Praise and Worship music
- Music for Prayer Services

- Table for Closing Prayer Service
- White cloth, wine container, two white candles, bible, loaf of bread
- Name tags with numbers 1 and 2
- Supplies for small groups
- Copies of prayer services
- Snacks

### **For the first part of the retreat**

A sign-in table will be set up with name tags for children and resource packets for parents. To divide the children into two small groups, the name tags will be numbered with either a 1 or 2. After parent and child have signed in, they will be instructed to help themselves to refreshments and wait for further instructions. Once everyone has signed in, the emcee will introduce the team, give an explanation of the retreat including the prayer experiences, and lead the First Prayer Service. Once the first prayer experience is completed, the children will be asked to follow the emcee and the presenter for the adults and Director of Religious Education will begin their presentation. The children will be led to another room to Praise and Worship.

### **Small Group Gatherings**

After Praise and Worship, the children will be divided into two small groups for small group lesson and activity. Each small group will go to a classroom with a group leader and participate in an activity related to the theme of the retreat. The two groups of children will be rotated after 40 minutes with a 15 minute break between both lessons.

### **Closing Prayer Gathering**

Once the group rotation is completed, the emcee will gather with the children and explain the different parts of the prayer service. After explanation, the children will be guided back to the main gathering area for the closing of retreat. The emcee will ask the children to go sit with their parents and lead the Closing Prayer Service. After retreat, the emcee will encourage parents to fill out evaluation forms which will be used to make improvements to the next retreat.

### Works Cited

1. Fragomeni, Richard N., Ph.D, The Gift of Eucharist: Program Director's Manual, Glenview, IL: Silver Burdett Ginn Religion, 2000.
2. Limb, John J., Rise Up and Sing, Portland, OR: Oregon Catholic Press, 2000.
3. Office for Divine Worship, Archdiocese of Atlanta, The Body of Christ.
4. Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life Diocese of Albany, First Communion Preparation: A Guide for Parents.

# **Following the Good shepherd (First Eucharist Retreat)**

**March 14, 2015**

<b>Please check your impressions of the retreat.</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>1. The parent session met my expectations.</b>				
<b>2. I will be able to apply what I learned about Communion with my child.</b>				
<b>3. The material distributed was helpful.</b>				
<b>4. The presenter was knowledgeable.</b>				
<b>5. Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion.</b>				
<b>6. The length of the retreat was just right.</b>				
<b>7. The Prayer Services were easy to follow.</b>				
<b>8. The Retreat was organized and easy to follow.</b>				

**9. What did you like most about the retreat?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. What did you like least about the retreat?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**



# First Eucharist Retreat



**Date:** March 14, 2015

**Time:** 9:00 AM– 12:00 NOON

**Location:** Christ the King Cathedral  
Family Activity Center

For more information or to register contact:

**Margo Gonzalez at**  
**[mgonzalez@ctkcathedral.org](mailto:mgonzalez@ctkcathedral.org): 806-792-6168**

or

**Raquel Iber at [riber@ctkcathedralschool.org](mailto:riber@ctkcathedralschool.org):**  
**806-795-6477**





# **Following the Good Shepherd**

## **First Eucharist Retreat**

**March 14, 2015**  
**9:00am -12:00 Noon**



**Family Activity Center**  
**Christ the King**

**Lord you are bread for us!**

# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **Group 1**

### **Last Supper Experience**





# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

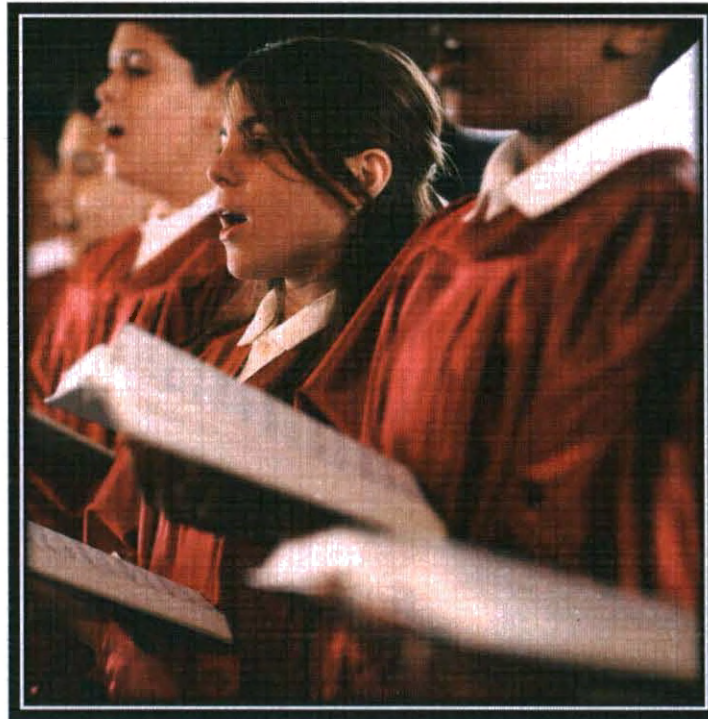
## **Group 2**

**Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion**



# **Following the Good Shepherd Retreat**

## **Praise and Worship**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 1 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## **First Communion Retreat**

**Following the Good Shepherd ( 2 )**



## ***First Communion Preparation: A Guide for Parents***

*Welcome to this important time in your family's life with Jesus Christ and His Church. This preparation time for First Communion marks a new chapter in your family's faith life as Catholics. Your child will be able to participate fully in the worship life of your parish by receiving Jesus in the Eucharist each week. So, this preparation is not just for his/her "first" Communion; it is preparation for a lifetime that only **begins** with First Communion. Your parish is your partner in this preparation, and is committed to supporting you in your responsibility as Christian parents. May God bless you on this faith journey!*

### **Parents – You Are #1**

Parents, you are the #1 influence on your child's faith, and what you do to nurture faith at home and in your parish are vitally important. The Second Vatican Council noted the importance of the home in nurturing faith in its reference to the family as "the domestic church" or the "Church of the Home". In essence, **the family is the most basic foundation of Church.**



*"Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in practice of the faith..." (Rite of Baptism)*

During this time of preparation for First Communion, your parish will provide you with many opportunities to grow in your own faith and to nurture faith at home – prayers and practices, family activities for the home and in the parish, print and web resources, opportunities to serve others. We urge you to take advantage of as many of these opportunities as you are able.

**Sunday Eucharist is the centerpiece of life as a Catholic.** Please make every effort to develop a practice of coming to Mass with your children each week, both now and after they receive their first Communion. Just as we provide our children daily with food at our table, we cannot fail to provide them weekly with food that will sustain them for life – the presence of Jesus Christ in Word and Sacrament.

### ***What Does First Communion Preparation Look Like?***

A child who was baptized Catholic and is at least seven years of age is eligible to receive First Communion after sufficient preparation. It is important to **enroll your child in your parish's faith formation program as early as possible** (most parishes begin children's programs in Kindergarten or Grade 1) so s/he can begin have a basic catechesis before preparing for the sacraments.

*Prior to the preparation for First Communion, a baptized child must receive preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) and have the opportunity to receive it. This preparation most often takes place in the Fall of the year, with the celebration of First Reconciliation taking place normally in the Advent Season, just prior to Christmas.*

The actual First Communion preparation will often begin in the Winter so that the preparation period is completed by Spring, when most parishes celebrate First Communion. The format of the preparation varies from parish to parish, so check with your parish to find out the particulars. Generally, there will be sessions for children or for parents/children together; a retreat; special rituals within the context of Mass; at-home activities. The goal of the preparation period is to:

- nurture a child's/family's understanding of God's love for them and their response of thanksgiving
- nurture a child's/family's relationship to Jesus Christ in prayer and worship,
- enhance a child's/family's appreciation and active participation in the Mass
- develop a child's/family's sense of belonging to a community of disciples who love as Jesus loves



*Eucharist*

### ***How will I know if my child is ready to receive First Communion?***

These are the signs that indicate a child is ready to receive First Communion:

- A desire to receive the Eucharist
- A developing relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church
- A familiarity with the movements, prayers, gestures of the Mass and their connection to life
- A sense of "real presence" – that the bread of Eucharist is not ordinary bread, but Jesus coming to us in a special way

Parents have an important role in helping children become "ready":

- If they see you regularly receive the Eucharist with reverence, and see that it is an important part of your life, they will also desire Eucharist, and know this is Jesus coming to us in a special, tangible way.
- If you have conversations about God, encourage the family to pray, worship and also meet Jesus through life with others in the parish, they will naturally grow in relationship to Jesus Christ and the Church
- If you take the time to help them participate in Mass – to give thanks and praise, to learn the words, gestures, to sing and pray, they will be as comfortable at the Eucharistic meal as they are at their family's table.
- If you "practice what you pray" by living the gospel mandate to "love one another", they will see that the Eucharist nourishes your life every day of the week.

**This guide was developed by  
the Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life  
Diocese of Albany**

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# Getting Kids to Confession

ART BENNETT

My children don't like to go to confession. I want them to go regularly, but sometimes I wonder if it's really necessary because it's so difficult to make it work out. What should I do?

Going to confession can be an important family event. And why not? After all, what's more important?

Reconciliation isn't just like a car wash and wax - it's also an entire tuneup. It doesn't just cleanse us, it also fixes the brakes and, if our examination of conscience is thorough, looks very carefully under the hood. We receive the power of the Holy Spirit and we're better equipped to overcome temptation.

To get our kids inside the box, though, we have to start thinking outside the box.

Asking your kids if they feel like going to confession won't work in most cases. You can guess ahead of time that they'll say No. If we wait for them to want to go, they probably never will.

It's helpful to realize that that's true for a lot of other important things, too: Who waits impatiently through dessert for the opportunity to wash dishes?

The best way to lead our kids to go to confession is usually simple and direct ... but smart.

A "let's get in the car and go to confession!" will likely draw complaints, pleading, claims to have nothing to confess and so on. You would probably get less resistance if you gave more advance notice: "Let's go to confession tomorrow at 3."

Or perhaps you can build a regular expectation of confession: "We'll be going to confession as a family every month (or every two weeks) at 3 p.m. on Saturdays. Does anyone have a big problem with that?"

A covert approach is to tell everyone it's time to head to the mall - or as my wife and I tried recently, the movies. Then on the way you make a quick detour to the Saturday afternoon confessional and say, "Oh, let's stop for confession first."

The car ride over can address the normal anxieties. With the younger kids you might have to rehearse the Act of Contrition. The older kids, if they're like mine, want nothing to do with face-to-face confession. That's fine - remind them that behind the screen will do. Perhaps you could rehearse the commandments or the beatitudes. Pray to Mary for a good confession.

The kids will take their cue from the adults, but they test us to see how important we really think it is. Let them see that we think confession is crucial. It puts us in the concrete, personal presence of Christ's mercy. And therein lies all hope.

After confession you go to the mall or the movies or out to dinner. But do it as a celebration: "Now that we're all in the state of grace and closer to Christ, let's celebrate."

The celebratory aspect of confession is important. Look at that great parenting parable of the prodigal son: ... He was lost and has been found.' Then the celebration began" (Luke 15:11-22).

Somehow, we get our kids to school every morning and to Mass every Sunday and holy day. Somehow, we get them to the dentist, orthodontist or pediatrician.

Use the same skills for confession. Prayerfully ask Christ for help, add yourself and your confession into the mix, and let your family have a great time on the way home.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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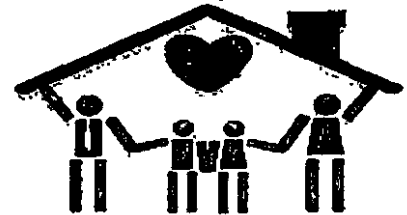
Reach Family Matters at: [familymatters@ncregister.com](mailto:familymatters@ncregister.com)

# ***First Reconciliation Preparation: A Guide for Parents***

*Welcome to this important time in your family's life with Jesus Christ and His Church. This preparation time for First Reconciliation marks another important step in your child's formation in the Catholic faith. This preparation is not just for his/her "first" Reconciliation; it is preparation for a lifetime that only **begins** with First Reconciliation. It is our hope that your child will experience the forgiveness and healing of our loving God through this sacrament many times! Your parish is your partner in this preparation, and is committed to supporting you in your responsibility as Christian parents. May God bless you on this faith journey!*

## **Parents – You Are #1**

Parents, you are the #1 influence on your child's faith, and what you do to nurture that faith at home and in your parish are vitally important. The Second Vatican Council noted the importance of the home in nurturing faith in its reference to the family as "the domestic church" or the "Church of the Home". In essence, **the family is the most basic foundation of the Church.**



*Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith..." (Rite of Baptism)*

During this time of preparation for First Reconciliation, you will have the opportunity to grow in your own understanding and appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Penance. Your parish will provide you with many opportunities to learn along with your children, and to nurture faith at home with prayers and practices, family activities for the home and in the parish, print and web resources, opportunities to love and serve others. We urge you to take advantage of these many opportunities as you are able.

## ***What Does First Reconciliation Preparation Look Like?***

A child who was baptized Catholic and is at least seven years of age is eligible to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation after sufficient preparation. **In fact, a baptized child must receive preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) and have the opportunity to receive it before s/he begins preparation for First Communion.** This preparation most often takes place in the Fall of the year, with the celebration of First Reconciliation taking place normally in the Advent Season, just prior to Christmas.

**It is important to enroll your child in your parish's faith formation program as early as possible** (most parishes begin children's programs in Kindergarten or Grade 1) so s/he can have a basic catechesis before preparing for the sacraments.

The format of the preparation varies from parish to parish, so check with your parish to find out the particulars. Generally, there will be sessions for children or for parents/children together; a retreat; at-home activities.



The goal of the preparation period is to

- Nurture a child's relationship to Jesus Christ as the one who loves us and showers God's mercy upon us
- Nurture an appreciation of the sacrament of reconciliation as a way to experience God's mercy and forgiveness
- Nurture the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation as a way of living

### ***How will I know if my child is ready to receive First Reconciliation?***

These are the signs that indicate a child is ready to receive First Reconciliation:

- A desire to receive the Sacrament
- Ability to distinguish between "mistakes" (non-intentional) and "on purpose" (intentional) actions.
- Ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and the effect of actions and omissions upon others.
- Ability to feel and express "I'm sorry".
- Ability to make amends and change behavior.
- Knowing God as loving and forgiving through Jesus Christ
- Basic familiarity of stories of forgiveness from Scripture and the prayers and gestures of the Rite of Penance

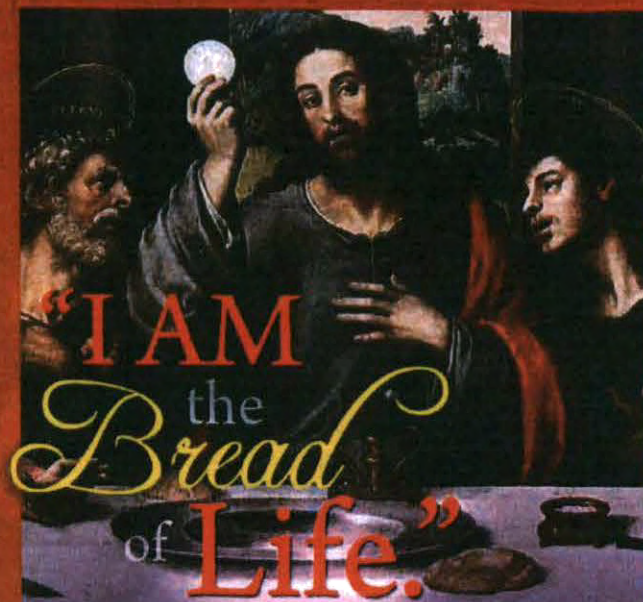


Parents have an important role in helping a child become "ready".

- Use the "teachable moments" in your family's life to reinforce forgiveness and reconciliation. When arguments and conflicts occur in your home, model and encourage taking responsibility, expressing sorrow and making amends.
- Practice forgiveness in your home and avoid re-hashing old arguments; let go of grudges
- Celebrate the "making up" after a family quarrel.
- Reinforce the stories of Jesus forgiving others.
- Thank God each day for his abundant mercy when we fall short.
- Teach children responsibility for others – love takes the form of action.
- Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, at least once a year during Lent.

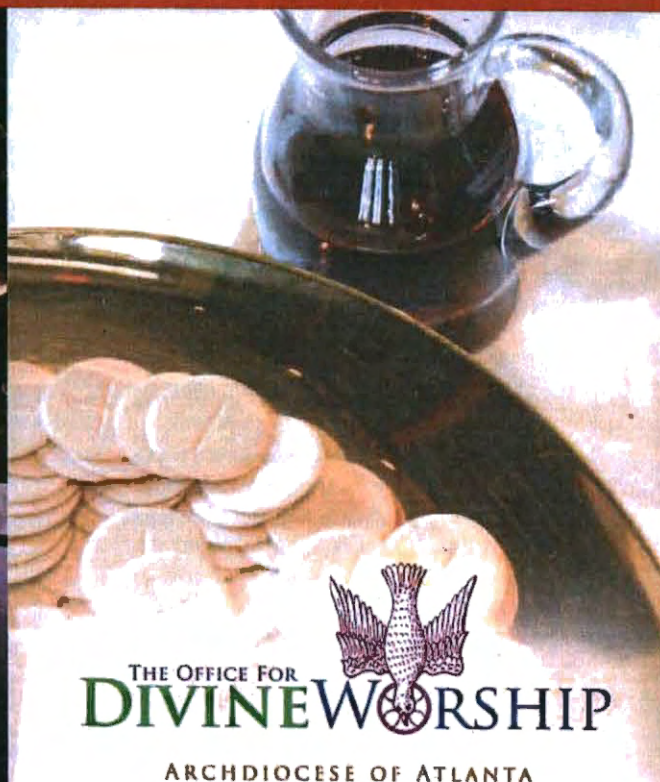
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Jesus did not abandon us when He ascended into Heaven. He remains with us in His Church, which continues His work of teaching, healing, and guiding us. One of the greatest ways that He is with us is in the sacrifice of the Eucharist, where bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, who is fully present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

We worship Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament during the Mass, at Eucharistic Adoration, and where He is present in the tabernacle, but one of the most important and intimate ways that we share in His presence is when we receive Holy Communion. Holy Communion unites us more closely to Jesus, and it is also a sign that we are living in communion with His Church, following the teachings that Jesus has handed down to us.



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For more information, contact your local parish or:

**The Office for Divine Worship**  
Archdiocese of Atlanta  
404-751-2398 • [odw@archatl.com](mailto:odw@archatl.com)

[www.archatl.com/offices/odw](http://www.archatl.com/offices/odw)

*Holy Communion is also discussed  
in paragraphs 1382-1405  
of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.*



# The Body of Christ



**Receiving  
Holy Communion in  
the Catholic Church**

The Office for Divine Worship  
Archdiocese of Atlanta



# What happens at Holy Communion?

In Holy Communion, we receive Jesus Christ, who gives Himself to us in His body, blood, soul, and divinity. This intimate union with Christ both signifies and strengthens our union with Him and His Church. Jesus speaks of the importance of Holy Communion when He states, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (John 6: 53) Because Holy Communion unites us to Jesus, it also strengthens us against sin, helps us to live a Christian life, and prepares us for the heavenly banquet.

## Who Can Receive Holy Communion?

Because Holy Communion is one of the most precious things that Jesus has given to us, it is important to prepare ourselves properly before receiving. In the Roman Catholic Church, once a child is old enough to understand that the Eucharist is the gift of Jesus' own life, he receives careful preparation so that he may receive his First Holy Communion. In addition to learning the truths about the Eucharist, the child prepares himself spiritually, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that he might receive Holy Communion with a pure heart.

For adults, too, careful preparation is necessary before receiving Holy Communion. Because Holy Communion is a sign of unity with the Catholic Church, one should only receive Holy Communion if he believes what the Catholic Church teaches, and is living as a member of the Church, following the way of life that she sets out for her children. If one is conscious of serious sin, he should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before approaching Holy Communion.



## How do I Prepare to Receive Holy Communion?

Holy Communion is a great mystery, to be approached with reverence and awe. On the feast of Corpus Christi, the Church sings that Holy Communion brings "life to these, to those damnation/see how like participation/is with unlike issues rife." (*Sequence Lauda Slon.*) This hymn draws its inspiration from the Holy Bible, where Saint Paul writes, "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." (1 Cor 11:29) Holy Communion is a great spiritual gift, but it also requires great respect.

The most important preparation is spiritual. Many Catholics choose to take some time for private prayer before mass to prepare for Holy Communion. In order to receive Holy Communion worthily, individuals with serious sins first need to receive forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Confession is also a valuable preparation for those with lesser sins, and most parishes provide it at a convenient time for those who desire to receive Holy Communion at Sunday Mass.

The Church offers various aids to help Catholics prepare themselves for Holy Communion. She requires a fast of at least one hour before receiving Communion (Canon 919). This fast includes all food and drink except for water and medicine, but it does not apply to the ill or elderly. Some Catholics find it helpful to fast for a longer time, even from the night before, in order to be better prepared for Holy Communion. Time spent praying in thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion is also well rewarded.

## What if I can not Receive Holy Communion?

There are many individuals who will not be able to receive Holy Communion at any given mass. These include children who have not yet made their First Holy Communion, non-catholics who may be in the congregation, those who have not made the necessary fast before mass, and individuals who are in a state of sin, including those who are living in irregular marital situations.

While the worthy reception of Holy Communion is a great gift, it is not necessary for a Catholic to receive Holy Communion at every mass. Participation in the mass gives glory to God and can be of great spiritual value even when one does not receive Holy Communion. Those who do not receive Holy Communion can join with the whole community in prayer, asking God's blessing upon themselves and upon the whole world.

At times it may be painful not to be able to receive Holy Communion. For Catholics, this may serve as an invitation to speak with a priest who can help them return to full communion. For non-catholics, it can be an inspiration to pray for greater union among Christians. The Catholic Church invites all people to communion, but full communion means a choice to embrace the teachings and way of life that the Church has received from Christ and continues to propose to the people of today.

Each time we receive Holy Communion well, we not only receive the Body of Christ, but become more deeply united to Christ in His Body, the Church. This great gift calls for great preparation, and invites us to give the rest of our lives to Jesus, as well.