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We Gather

Background

God Gathers Us

What does it mean to be Church? Understanding the Latin and Greek roots for *church* will help. First, the word *church* comes from two Greek words that mean “to call out of” and “what belongs to the Lord.” Second, the English word *church* comes from a Latin word meaning “convocation” or “assembly.” All of these root words help us come to an understanding of the Church as the assembly of those, belonging to the Lord Jesus, whom God has called together. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 751 and 752.)

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament the term for *church* refers specifically to the chosen people assembled before God (see Exodus 19). In the New Testament the term has three interrelated and inseparable meanings. The Church is the universal community of believers in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:9), the local community (see 1 Corinthians 1:2), and the liturgical assembly (see 1 Corinthians 11:18). The early Christians’ use of *church* designates the belief, handed down from the apostles, that the followers of Christ, who have embraced the New Covenant and New Law, are the New People of God. In other words, the church community is the heir and fulfillment of the first assembly of Jewish people called together by God to be his holy and chosen people.

More background: For further reading and reflection see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 748–801, 1066–1070, 1136–1144, and 1348.

FOR REFLECTION

What difference does
it make in my life that
I follow the cross of Christ?

First Thoughts

Processions

The People of God, the Church, are a pilgrim people, a people on a journey. One way the Church proclaims this faith in our identity as a pilgrim people is through the use of processions in the celebration of the liturgy. Processions involve movement, and movement helps children learn. Use processions in your prayer celebrations with the children. Add appropriate music and song to accompany these processions. This will inspire the children to give thanks to God for calling them to be his children. It will also help them grow in their understanding of what it means for the Church to be a pilgrim people.

Signs and Symbols

The Church uses many signs and symbols in the celebration of the liturgy. All of these, in some way, relate to Christ. Each of these signs and symbols points to the mystery of the covenant of love that God has entered into with humankind that reaches its fulfillment in Christ. Prominent among these signs and symbols is the cross. When the children take part in the celebration of Mass, they sign themselves with the cross. They also see the crucifix carried in procession and placed visibly near the altar. Help the children come to see the cross as a symbol of Jesus’ love for his Father and for us. Talk about how signing ourselves with the cross shows that we are followers of Christ and is a sign that we desire to love God and others as Jesus taught.

Overview

FAITH FOCUS

God calls our church family together to celebrate Mass. We worship God, listen to God's word, and break bread as the first Christians did.

OBJECTIVES

After completing the chapter, the children, in an age-appropriate way, should be able to:

- Describe their experience of the ritual action of processing behind the cross.
- Retell and share their understanding of the meaning of the New Testament story of the communal life of the first Christians.
- Understand and participate more fully in the introductory rites of the Mass.
- Appreciate the difference that living as followers of Christ makes in their lives.
- Choose to do one thing the first Christians did to live as followers of Christ.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Large cross
- Recording of instrumental music, and lyrics and music for a hymn related to the theme of the opening ritual
- Scripture card "The First Christians"
- Pencils

ENRICHING

Here are several suggestions for enhancing the presentation of Chapter 2 and for helping families participate in the preparation of their children for Eucharist:

- RCL's *Eucharist* music CD, Song 2, "Table of Plenty"
- RCL's *Eucharist Family Guide*, pages 16 to 19
- Scripture play "The First Christians" on page 131
- FaithFirst *Eucharist* interactive calendar
- **Children's Books**

—*Birthday Blizzard* by Bonnie Pryor (Morrow Junior Books). A huge blizzard cancels a birthday party, but unexpected visitors arrive to create a winter picnic.

—*Child's Guide to the Mass* by Sue Stanton (Paulist Press). An engaging guide through the various parts of the Mass to help children understand and appreciate what is going on.

- **Children's Videos**

—*Amanda Goes to Mass* (Twenty-Third Publications).

—*Mass for Young Children: Parts 1 and 2* (St. Anthony Messenger Press/Franciscan Communications).

—*My Father's House* (St. Anthony Messenger Press/Franciscan Communications).



Visit the RCL sacraments web site by following the link titled "Sacraments" at www.FaithFirst.com.

Opening Ritual

Gathering at the Cross

Ritual Entrance Procession

Invite the children to process silently to the church or chapel. Lead the children in procession. Hold a large cross in your hands over your head. Upon arrival in the church, tell the children to settle themselves and become aware of God's presence with them.

Alternative 1: Play a recording of instrumental music or an appropriate hymn. Hold a large cross in your hands over your head. Invite the children to process silently behind you to the prayer area. Upon arrival at the prayer area, tell the children to settle themselves and to become aware of God's presence with them.

Alternative 2: Place a large cross in the prayer area. Invite the children to come forward silently and gather around the cross. Tell the children to settle themselves and to become aware of God's presence with them.

Gathering

LEADER: Let us begin by praying the Sign of the Cross, which reminds us of our Baptism.

ALL: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER: God, our loving Father,
we gather around the cross of your Son,
Jesus.
Open our hearts to the Holy Spirit.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

Scripture Reading

LEADER: Let us listen to the word of God.

Read aloud or invite a volunteer to read aloud the Scripture story "The First Christians" (Acts of the Apostles 2:41–47) from the Bible. An adapted version of the Scripture story is found on page 16 of the child's book. Conclude the reading, saying,

READER: The word of the Lord.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Closing

LEADER: God, our loving Father,
today we gather around the cross of
your Son, Jesus Christ.
Send us the Holy Spirit
to help us remember to follow Jesus
every day.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

Ritual Closing Procession

Play a recording of instrumental music or an appropriate hymn. Invite the children to follow the cross in procession back to their places.

We Gather

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thank you for our
church family.*



14 We Gather

OBJECTIVE

Engage the children in the experience of the ritual action of processing and gathering around the cross.

Celebrate

Celebrate the Ritual

Lead the children in the celebration of the opening ritual, which is found on page 43 of this guide.

Reflect

Read aloud the first paragraph on page 15 of the child's book. Invite the children to share what it was like for them to experience the celebration of the opening ritual.

Discover

Ask the children to open their books to pages 14 and 15. Invite volunteers to describe what they see happening in the photographs.

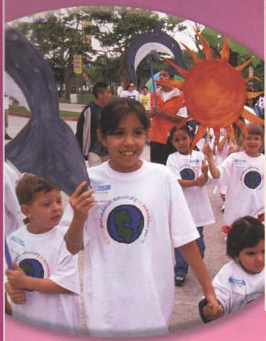
Apply

Integrate

- Read aloud the second question on page 15. Allow time for the children to share their responses.

- Invite responses to the last paragraph on page 15.
- Explain to the children that processing behind the cross as we begin Mass reminds us that Jesus Christ is present with us, his followers.

Teaching Notes



Sharing Together

In the opening prayer we made the sign of the cross. We gathered together and walked in procession behind the cross. What was it like for you when you were following the cross?

Where do you gather with people?

The cross is a wonderful sign of Jesus' love for us. Give one example of a place where you see the cross.

We Gather 15

CONSIDER THIS ...

Liturgical Processions

Children of all ages love parades. Throughout the world parades celebrate the spirit, achievements, and identity of people. Parades in the form of religious processions have been celebrated since 3000 B.C., which is about 1,500 years before the time of Abraham. Processions are an essential part of the celebration of Mass. During Mass there are five processions: the entrance procession, the gospel procession, the procession at the preparation of the altar and gifts, the communion procession, and the recessional/dismissal procession. The procession of palms on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion and the procession with the newly lighted Easter candle at the Easter Vigil are two more dramatic processions celebrated during the liturgy.

The First Christians

Christians are followers of Jesus. The first Christians often gathered in one another's homes. Read this Bible story to discover why the first Christians gathered in one another's homes.

Many people were baptized and became followers of Jesus. They shared their food and everything they had. They helped one another live as Jesus taught them.

They spent time together learning about Jesus and praying together. They broke and shared bread with one another as the disciples did with Jesus.

BASED ON ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 2:41-47

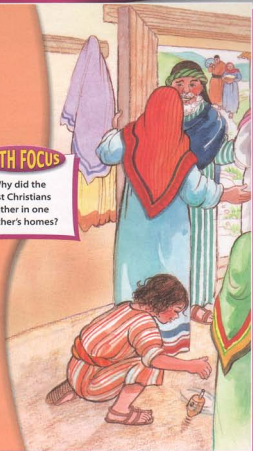
FAITH FOCUS

Why did the first Christians gather in one another's homes?

OBJECTIVE

Tell and reflect on the Scripture story about the first Christians, and help the children understand the meaning of the story.

16 We Gather



Teach

Connect

- Share with the children that they are going to hear a Bible story about the first Christians.
- Introduce the story by reading the opening paragraph on page 16 of the child's book.

Discover

- Ask the children to open their books to pages 16 and 17. Invite everyone to look at the illustration and to imagine why the first Christians are gathering in the home.
- Read the "Faith Focus" question, and have the children discover the answer as they listen to the Bible story.

Reflect

- Invite responses to the "Faith Focus" question.
- Use the question in the circle on page 17 to guide a discussion of the Scripture story.

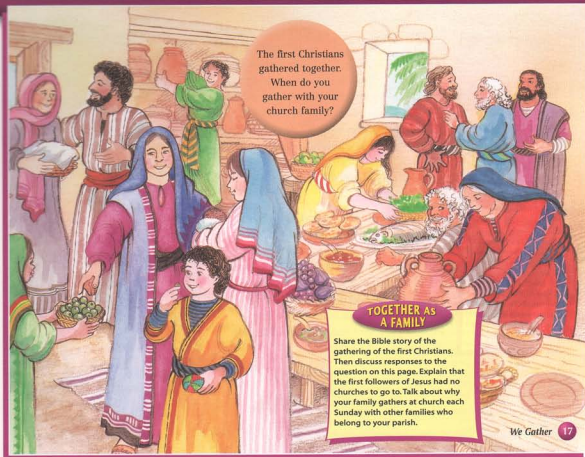
Apply

Integrate

- Explain to the children that their parish is their home in our church family. Their parish family gathers together just as the first Christians did.
- Point out that the first Christians did not have churches to gather in as we do today. They gathered in homes to listen to God's word, to listen to the teachings of Jesus, to pray, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to share their food and other possessions with people in need.
- Share with the children ways that their parish family does things similar to those named in the Scripture story.
- The additional activity "The First Christians," found on page 52 of this guide, can also be used.

At Home

Point out the "Together as a Family" activity on page 17. Encourage the children to ask their families to do the activity with them this week.



CONSIDER THIS ...

Churches

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that, in the earliest days of the Church, Christians met in homes to pray, to study the teachings of the apostles, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to organize their works of charity. As the number of Christians grew, larger buildings were needed for their gatherings.

Christians began to build these buildings in the fourth century when they were given the legal protection to worship and gather publicly. When they came to worship in these buildings, called basilicas, Christians brought food and other items to share with those in need. After gathering at the front of the basilica, or church, they processed inside, carrying their gifts, which they placed near the altar.

Our Church Family

FAITH FOCUS

What happens at the beginning of Mass?

WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR

The people who gather for Mass are called the assembly. The priest who leads the assembly in celebrating Mass is called the presider. The priest wears special clothes called vestments. The color of the vestments reminds us of the season or feast of the church year.

We gather as a church family. Our church family is the community of people who belong to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Church is the Body of Christ and the People of God. It is made up of people all over the world. Our church family also includes all the faithful members who have died.

Each Saturday evening and Sunday our church family comes together for Mass. The Mass is the most important celebration of our church family. At Mass we do what the first Christians did. We listen to God's word. We break bread. We receive Holy Communion. At the end of Mass we are sent out to live as followers of Jesus.



18 We Gather

OBJECTIVE

Prepare the children to participate in the introductory rites of the Mass.

Teach

Connect

Recall the responses the children gave to the question on page 17 of their books.

Discover

- Invite the children to open their books to pages 18 and 19. Have them look at the photographs and describe what they see.
- Ask the children the "Faith Focus" question. Invite several responses and list them on the board.
- Point out the word *church*. Explain the meaning of *church* by reading aloud the first paragraph on page 18 to the children. Emphasize that the Church is the Body of Christ and the People of God.
- Present the second paragraph on page 18 and the first paragraph on page 19.
- Have the children look at the photographs on pages 18 and 19 again and present "What We See and Hear." Then present the second and third paragraphs on page 19.

Reflect

Discuss with the children the invitation "The Lord be with you" and the response "And also with you."

Reinforce

Read the "Faith Focus" question aloud and review the list of responses. Allow the children to add or change anything on this list in light of the discussion of pages 18 and 19. You might wish to use pages 62 and 63 of the child's book to reinforce the children's understanding of the introductory rites of the Mass.

Apply

Integrate

- Read aloud the question on page 19. Invite the children to share their responses.
- Extend the children's understanding of what it means to worship God. Emphasize that we worship God by the way we live too.
- The additional activity "Card to Friends," found on page 52 of this guide, can also be used.

At Home

Point out the "Together as a Family" activity on page 19. Encourage the children to ask their families to do the activity with them this week.



The priest leads our church family in the celebration of Mass. The Mass begins as the priest and other people walk in procession into the church. Everyone stands and sings a hymn. We remember that we all belong to our church family.

The priest greets us, saying, "The Lord be with you." We respond, "And also with you." We believe that God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are present with us.

At Mass we worship God. We give adoration and honor to God. Together with Jesus we thank God the Father for his mercy. We praise God for his love. We ask God to help us live as his children. We are now ready to listen to the word of God.

Why do we gather for Mass?



TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Share responses to the question on this page. Remind your child that God is present with your family, right in your home. Use the words "The Lord is with you. And also with you" to begin family prayers and family discussions. Use "Celebrating the Mass" on pages 62 and 63 of this book to help your child learn the responses for the introductory rites of the Mass.

We Gather 19

CONSIDER THIS . . .

Sing to the Lord

Song fills the hearts of children. From our earliest years, our life is nurtured by song. Singing simple lullabies or humming melodies bond parents with their children, nurturing a deep feeling of belonging and of peace. As children learn to walk and talk, they soon play games that involve singing songs such as "London Bridge" and rounds such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" that bring people together. Music and song also give expression to the identity and unity of a people, a nation, a college, and so on. There seems to be an irresistible natural urge in the human heart and soul to express our joys and fears, our dreams and longings, our beliefs and our very identity in song. No wonder, then, that music and song are so integral to the liturgy of the Church.

What Difference Does This Make in My Life?

Each week on Sunday our church family gathers for Mass. We begin by signing ourselves with the sign of the cross.

Circle the names of the people you see at Mass.



20 We Gather

Draw a picture of yourself and of the other people you see at Mass.



MY FAITH CHOICE

Talk with someone about one thing you will do this week that shows you belong to our church family.

Connect

Summarize

Review with the children the Scripture story "The First Christians." Point out that our church family today gathers to pray and listen to stories about Jesus as the first Christians did.

Respond

Reflect

Ask the children to think about the many people who do special things at Mass, for example, the priest, the altar servers, the readers. Share with the children some of the things these people do.

Discover

- Read aloud the opening paragraph on page 20.
- Point out the activity and review the directions with the children. Read aloud each of the names listed to be sure the children can complete the activity. Have the children complete the circling activity.
- Have the children complete the drawing activity. Invite the children to share their drawings.

Choose

- Read aloud the faith choice activity. Discuss some of the ways people can show that they belong to the church family.
- Expand the faith choice activity by discussing with the children one thing that they can do as a class that shows the class is part of our church family.
- Have the children turn to the back of their books and punch out the Scripture card "The First Christians." Or you may wish to give the cards to the children as part of the "Sending Forth Ritual." Encourage the children to share it with their families.

At Home

Invite the children to share the "Together as a Family" page with their families.

Sending Forth Ritual

Bless the children and send them forth to love and serve God and other people. A more extended "Sending Forth Ritual" is found on page 52 of this guide.



Remembering Together

In this chapter your child learned about the first Christians. They gathered in their homes. They shared all things in common. They prayed together and cared for one another. This is a good time for you to talk with your child about your own parish community. Review with your child the names of:

- your church or parish community
- your pastor
- other special people you know at church



Sharing Together

Choose one of the following activities to do together or design a similar activity of your own:

- The first followers of Jesus shared their food and other possessions with one another. Find out how your family can donate to a local food collection or shelter or parish service group that serves people in need.
- Find your family's photo albums. Look at the pictures and point out photos that show people following Jesus.

- Talk about ways your family can join in welcoming new members into your parish community. Then choose one thing that you will do together.



Visit the RCL sacraments web site by following the link titled "Sacraments" at www.FaithFirst.com.

Praying Together

Pray this or a similar prayer at family meals or at other family prayer times this week:

Loving God, our Father,
today we gather together in honor
of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Send us the Holy Spirit
to help us remember to follow Jesus every day.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Getting Ready Together

Use pages 62 and 63 of this book to go through the introductory rites of the Mass with your child. Review with your child the assembly's responses. This will help your child participate more actively and more fully in the celebration of Mass.

We Gather 21

CONSIDER THIS...

Family Diversity

The faith life of the families of the children in your group is likely very diverse. Some families may take a very active part in the life of the parish. Others may be less active. Still others may rarely participate or not participate at all. Be aware of this diversity and be sensitive to every child's experience of Church. The faith of children is ready to grow and be nurtured. In your dealings with the children keep in mind the gospel story of Jesus' invitation to the children to come to him. You have the privilege to join with the children's parents and bring them to Jesus, who is inviting the children to come to him.

Additional Activities



Vocabulary

Have the children make a file of important terms and words they are learning as they prepare for the celebration of First Communion. Ask the class to brainstorm some of the words and terms they have learned thus far that relate to their preparation for First Communion. Include terms that are found in chapters 1 and 2. List these terms on the board or on newsprint. Give each child ten index cards. Have the children write each term on one side of an index card and a short definition or explanation of the term on the reverse side. If it is appropriate, have the children illustrate the term. Help the children punch a hole in the upper left corner of each card. Then fasten the cards together with a ring or yarn. Tell the children that they will keep this file and continue to add other terms as they complete their preparation for the celebration of sacraments.

The children can mention in the card that they are glad to be a member of a worshipping Catholic Christian community and are happy to meet and know other Christians. Encourage the children to present their cards to one of the parishioners the next time they go to church for Mass.



The First Christians

Review with the children the story of the first Christians gathering in one another's homes (see Acts of the Apostles 2:41–47). On a large sheet of butcher paper or posterboard, invite the children to work together to create a mural depicting the story of the first Christians gathering in one another's homes. Display the completed mural in the hallway or some other place where other people can see it.



Card to Friends

When the children go to church to participate in the celebration of Mass, they gather with the parish community. Often they will recognize some of the people. Invite the children to make a card for one of the parishioners they see at Mass.

Sending Forth Ritual

Play the recording of the instrumental version of an appropriate hymn from RCL's Eucharist music CD. Then invite the children to gather in the prayer area. Once the children are settled, begin the ritual.

- ALL:** In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- LEADER:** God, our Father and Creator,
we praise you for your generous love for us.
Send us the Holy Spirit to help us live
as your children.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- ALL:** Amen.
- LEADER:** Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
- ALL:** Thanks be to God.