

saint mary's press

Celebrate
and
Remember

Eucharist

Program Director Manual



Celebrate and Remember Eucharist

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Margaret Savitskas



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Program Overview

Welcome!

First Holy Communion day! These words are enough to send a quiet thrill into the heart of every Catholic, no matter how old. It is said that the memories of childhood are the last to leave us, and certainly the memories of First Communion day are, or should be, among the most joyful of all. This is because the day of First Communion is truly a day of initiation into a new life with Christ.

Most children are baptized as infants and have no memory of this celebration. The Sacrament of the Eucharist, however, is received at a later age and can be solemnly celebrated with deep awareness on the part of the child, the family, and the parish community. First Communion day gives all of us a chance to reflect on the great gift of the Eucharist and to remember what this day of initiation, of new beginning with Christ, was like for us.

Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist is an engaging Sacrament preparation program that will assist you in preparing children, parents, catechists, and your entire faith community for this important day. Through the dynamic process of liturgical catechesis, children and families are prepared for this Sacrament by not only learning *about* the rite but also *through* the rite they are going to celebrate. It is a process that will result in a deeper understanding and more meaningful celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The following additional components accompany this program director manual. Each component is described in detail, including how it supports a rich and fruitful Sacrament preparation program.

- The child's book follows the Order of the Mass and presents content that is solidly rooted in Scripture and doctrine.
- The catechist guide provides helpful background information and detailed session outlines for each chapter of material.
- The home guide offers a specific teaching format for parents who want to teach the material presented in the child's book to their children.

In each of these components, you will find everything you need to create an effective and engaging Sacrament preparation program. Welcome to *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist*.

Overview of Program Components

Child's Book

The *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist* Child's Book is designed to lead young children to an understanding of the Eucharist and active participation in the Mass. It is the basis for the other *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist* components.

The child's book consists of ten chapters that are ten pages each. Each chapter begins with a ritual prayer experience. This ritual prayer allows the learners to ground the chapter content in an experience of prayer that is directly related to the liturgy and the prayers and essential understandings that are linked to each part of the liturgy. A prayer icon, music icon, and ritual icon give visual signals to help the catechist lead the opening prayer. The core content is then developed in We Listen, We Learn, and We Live. The chapter ends with a closing prayer in We Pray.

We Listen is a two-page section that features Scripture that is tied to the focus of the lesson.

We Learn is a four-page section that presents the doctrinal and liturgical points of the lesson.

We Live is a two-page section that applies the lesson to the lives of the children.

We Pray is a one-page prayer that ends each lesson. It brings all of the chapter content together and allows the group to pray together for growth in faith and for strength to live as disciples of Christ.

The chart below illustrates how each chapter is constructed.

Page 1	Opening Prayer Ritual
Pages 2 and 3	We Listen (Scripture)
Pages 4 through 7	We Learn (Doctrine)
Pages 8 and 9	We Live (Application)
Page 10	We Pray (Closing Prayer)

Each chapter offers additional learning features, which may include the following:

With My Family This feature appears three times in each chapter and provides quick and simple activities that a family can do together. Each activity reinforces the content in the lesson.

Faith Highlights This feature highlights points of Catholic doctrine the children should be familiar with as part of their preparation for the Sacrament.

Saint Spotlight This feature includes short biographies of saints. It familiarizes the children with other people of faith who can be examples for our own lives.

Living Our Faith This feature includes specific teachings of the Church that have an impact on our daily lives.

In addition to the lessons, the child's book also includes a resource section with the following special features:

Inside My Catholic Church This section presents an illustrated interior of a Catholic Church and identifies places and items that are important in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy.

The Order of the Mass This is an instructional outline of the Eucharistic liturgy. It describes the different parts of the Mass and explains the actions required of the assembly.

How to Receive Communion This resource identifies the steps and guidelines involved in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

Catholic Prayers This section contains some key prayers, including: the Sign of the Cross, the Lord's Prayer, the Glory Be, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, and grace before and after meals.

Glossary This is a compiled list of terms and definitions that are helpful for those who are preparing for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Certificate The child's book contains a frame-ready certificate that can be signed and used to mark the date of First Communion.

Catechist Guide

The catechist guide for *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist* was developed to support sacramental catechesis in a parish classroom or parochial school setting. It consists of detailed teaching procedures for each lesson as well as directions for using the resource section in the back of the child's book.




The planner chart for chapter 1 is shown on page 9. This planner is available for each lesson and clearly details the objectives, teaching steps,

activities, materials, and everything that the catechist needs to know or assemble before the class begins. Catechists can also consult the planner to decide if they want to use additional activities and to determine if there are ways they can enhance the learning, such as using a particular parish location or resources, inviting a speaker, and so on.

Each chapter also provides the catechist with to-the-point background information and suggestions on how to best incorporate the features of the child's book into a lesson. Boxed features for the catechist that appear throughout the guide include the following:

- Scripture Background
- Additional Activity
- Liturgy Background
- FYI
- More Saints and Holy People
- Cultural Connection
- Reviewing the Lesson

Planner Pages Chapter 1

	Objectives	Teaching Steps	Activities	Materials
Opening Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pray the Sign of the Cross as a sign of our Baptism, and to participate in a naming and signing ritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo. Explain that the Sign of the Cross reminds us of our Baptism.  Together pray the Sign of the Cross. Follow the ritual directions for naming and signing. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prayer table White cloth Bible Cross or crucifix White candle Lighter or matches CD player Music CD or songbook
We Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn the Scripture story about Jesus calling his first Apostles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the illustration.  Proclaim the Scripture story about Jesus calling four fishermen to follow him, based on Matthew 4:18–22. Discuss why Jesus wanted these people to follow him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing a feeling word and drawing a picture about being called by Jesus <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role-playing the Scripture story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand that as members of the Church, we belong to Christ To name the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation that begin our life in the Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and discuss the text about the Church. With the children looking at the photos, read aloud the text about the Sacraments. Discuss the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing a picture of one's Baptism <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making a Church family collage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers <p>Additional Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drawing paper (1/4 sheet per child) Crayons or colored pencils
We Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recall that Baptism welcomes us into the Church and takes away all sin To learn that Confirmation strengthens our faith and that in the Eucharist, we receive Jesus' Body and Blood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and discuss the text about Baptism. Read and discuss the text about Confirmation and the Eucharist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking at photos and writing the names of Sacraments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils
We Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To learn what is involved in preparing for First Eucharist To realize that Jesus will be with them along the way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and discuss the text about preparing for First Holy Communion. Discuss the photo and have the children look through their books. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing names of people who are helping them prepare for First Communion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pencils and crayons or markers
We Pray	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pray a thank-you prayer to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the photo.  Follow the directions for praying "A Thank-You Prayer." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CD player Music CD or songbook

Home Guide

The home guide was developed for home-based catechesis. It is designed to help parents share and celebrate their Catholic faith and traditions with their children. It gives parents encouragement and support in this undertaking and equips them to feel confident in presenting and discussing the lesson materials with their child. It provides the following:

- an invitation for parents to claim their rightful place as first teachers of the faith
- an overview of the parental role in Sacrament preparation
- reassurance that today's Catholic families, though diverse, can pass on their beliefs to their children
- guidance in creating a family prayer and a promise for both parent and child to share faith time as they prepare for First Eucharist
- a walk-through of both the child's book and the home guide to help parents get comfortable with the books they will be using
- an explanation of the teaching process used in *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist*
- background for parents, which will help them review and learn more about the content of the lessons
- complete lesson plans for all ten lessons
- a variety of activities parents can choose from to help their child integrate the lessons
- ideas for involving other family members in the teaching process
- practical tips for parents as the day for First Eucharist draws near

Program Director Manual

The program director manual was developed to provide a framework and order to the process of catechizing the parish, parents, catechists, and children about the Eucharist. It offers the following resources:

- theological background on the Sacrament of the Eucharist
- a summary of the process of forming faith within the Catholic community with insights into the role of the pastor, the parish, the director of religious education, parents, and catechists
- an introduction to the *Celebrate and Remember: Eucharist Child's Book*, Home Guide, Catechist Guide, and Program Director Manual
- an overview of the catechetical methodology employed in the program
- options for implementing the program in a parish-based catechetical setting with family involvement and in a home-based catechetical setting with parish involvement
- an abundance of strategies, guidance, and teaching resources for catechists and families
- tools for creating a calendar, recruiting catechists, and organizing sessions for catechist and parent training
- guidelines for determining a child's readiness for Sacrament preparation and accommodations for children with special needs
- planning aids for catechist and family sessions, prayer celebrations, and retreats
- ideas for nurturing an understanding of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist with children
- additional resources and activities for use with the program

Child's Book Contents

Chapter Title	Scripture	Key Church Teaching
1. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit	Jesus says, "Follow me." Matthew 4:18–22	Baptism washes away sin and gives us new life. The Eucharist is the Church's most important Sacrament.
2. The Lord Be with You	Jesus feeds the hungry. Matthew 14:13–21	In the Mass the gifts of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.
3. Lord, Have Mercy	Jesus welcomes everyone to his table. Matthew 9:10–13	Jesus came to save us all from sin. In the Mass Jesus' sacrifice is made present again.
4. Glory to God	All our gifts come from God. Genesis 1:1–31, 2:1–3.	Sunday is the Lord's Day, a day to honor and worship God for all of his blessings.
5. The Word of the Lord	Jesus accomplishes the words of the prophets. Luke 4:16–22	God speaks to us in the Liturgy of the Word. The Gospels are special because Christ is their center.
6. I Believe	Jesus heals a blind man. Mark 10:46–52	We believe in the Blessed Trinity, one God in three Divine Persons.
7. Do This in Memory of Me	Jesus shares the Last Supper with his Apostles. Matthew 26:18–20, 26–28; Luke 22:19	Jesus gave us the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, who is truly present in the Eucharist.
8. Thy Kingdom Come	Jesus teaches his followers how to pray. Matthew 5:1–2, 6:9–13	The Kingdom of God is the power of God's love ruling over the world.
9. The Body of Christ	The Risen Jesus comes to his followers. Luke 24:13–32	In Holy Communion we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. We are united to Jesus and the Church.
10. Go in Peace	The early Church lives as the Body of Christ. Acts 2:41–47	The Eucharist nourishes and strengthens us to live as God calls us to live.

Liturgy	Prayer	Living the Eucharist
Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sign of the Cross • A Thank-You Prayer 	We are called to be followers of Jesus.
Introductory Rites of the Mass: The priest welcomes and greets the assembly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Prayer of Thanks and Praise • Prayers of Faith, Hope, and Love 	Participating in Sunday Mass keeps us close to Jesus.
Penitential Act of the Mass: We pray for God's forgiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Prayer for God's Mercy • A Forgiveness Prayer 	We prepare to receive Jesus by saying we are sorry for our sins.
The Gloria: We give God praise and thanks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Creation Praises God • Glory to God 	It is important to remember everything God has done for us.
The Liturgy of the Word: We listen to readings from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Gospel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Prayer to Open Our Minds and Hearts to God's Word • We Pray as Disciples of Jesus 	Reading the Bible teaches us how to be faithful to God.
The Creed: Our profession of faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Profession of Faith • A Prayer of Faith 	We show our faith by what we say and do.
The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Jesus is truly present on the altar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Prayer to Jesus • Our Eucharistic Prayer 	Receiving the Eucharist gives us strength to be who God wants us to be.
The Lord's Prayer: A summary of the whole Gospel message.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's Prayer • Our Father 	We honor God and we ask for his Kingdom of love and peace to come.
The Communion Rite: We receive the Body and Blood of Christ; we are united to Jesus and one another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I Walk with Jesus • We Pray to the Risen Jesus 	When we participate in Mass and receive Communion, we meet Jesus in a special way.
The Concluding Rites: The priest blesses us and sends us to be Christ for the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Litany of the Holy Spirit • We Pray after Mass 	We can bring the love of Jesus to others by what we say and what we do.



2

Preparing for the Program

This section offers background information that can help you as you are developing and organizing an effective Sacrament preparation process. It begins with an article focusing on Eucharistic theology. This information can serve as a quick review or as the basis of a talk that might accompany catechist or parent training and formation. The section continues with a look at the essential roles that various people in the Christian community have in regard to Sacrament preparation and highlights how parents are crucial to this process. The section ends by providing several worksheets and planning resources to help organize a calendar, plan events, and communicate important information to others regarding the Sacrament preparation program.

The Eucharist: Shaping the Faith of the Church

If one thing distinguishes Catholics from other Christians, it is our devotion to the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Though all the Sacraments are important, the Eucharist is the spiritual center of Catholic life. Through the Eucharist we remember what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We celebrate the Eucharist as part of other sacramental celebrations, such as Confirmation or Marriage, making those Sacraments fuller and more complete expressions of the mystery of our faith. We celebrate the Eucharist at retreats, pilgrimages, and other spiritual events, giving those activities Catholic identity. And we celebrate the Eucharist when Catholics gather for important meetings, as a sign of our unity.

Why does the Eucharist hold such an esteemed place in Catholic life? It is because the Eucharist brings together in a single ritual all the important elements of the Catholic faith. In it we recall what God has revealed to us through history in the Liturgy of the Word. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we remember and make present the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We actually receive Jesus Christ—physically and spiritually—when we receive the consecrated bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In our celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, we are united across time and space

with the communion of saints, who are praising God on earth and in Heaven, all celebrating the same divine liturgy.

A Short History of the Eucharist

The roots of our celebration of the Eucharist are found in the Old Testament story of the Exodus. It is the story of how God freed the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. One particular event, the Passover, involved a sacrifice and a meal (see Exodus, chapters 11–12). The Passover is connected to the tenth and final plague that God sent to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. In this plague God's messenger killed the firstborn son of every Egyptian family and the firstborn of all the livestock. To be spared, every Israelite family had to kill a young lamb (called the Passover or Paschal lamb) and spread its blood over their doorway. Then the angel of death would "pass over" their household, and their oldest son would live. They were to cook the lamb and serve it with unleavened bread, as their final meal in the land of Egypt. The Israelites were commanded by God to celebrate this Passover meal every year to remember their escape from slavery through God's divine power.

Jump ahead now to Jesus' earthly mission. Jesus was always eating and drinking. In fact, he and the disciples were accused of being gluttons and drunkards (see Luke 7:34). Jesus loved a good meal and conversation; mealtimes often became teaching moments (see Luke 11:37–52, 14:1–24, 19:1–10). Jesus also could not stand to see people go hungry. One of his greatest miracles is the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, a story found in all four Gospels (see Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:1–15).

The story of the loaves and fishes in John, chapter 6, is particularly important, because in it Jesus goes on to teach about the Eucharist. This chapter is a summary of what the early Christians came to understand about the Eucharist. Here are a few highlights of Jesus' words in chapter 6:

- "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst" (verse 35).
- "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (verse 51).
- "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (verses 54–56).

All this emphasis on eating and drinking, on hunger and thirst, on flesh and blood reached its culmination in Jesus' Last Supper with his Apostles. Again, this event is recorded in all four Gospels, although the Gospel of John has a different emphasis (see Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–25, Luke 22:7–23, John 13:1—17:26). The meal Jesus shared on this occasion with his closest followers was the Jewish Passover meal. Jesus knew that his death was at hand, and wanted to leave his disciples a special memorial as a sign of his continued presence with them. So Jesus blessed bread, broke it, and passed it to them, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26–28).

After Jesus' death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven, the early Church put together the Old Testament understanding of the Paschal lamb and sacrifice with the words and actions of Jesus. They understood that although the sacrifice of the original Passover lamb saved the firstborn from physical death, Jesus' sacrifice saves us all from the eternal death that is separation from God. He is the new Paschal lamb (see John 1:29, 1 Corinthians 5:7). The old sacrifices by the Israelite priests were not enough to overcome the damage caused by Original Sin, but Jesus' sacrifice completely restored our relationship with God once and for all (see Hebrews 10:1–10). The Church understood that Jesus wants us to repeat the ritual of the Last Supper, and that when we do so, he will be physically and spiritually present (see 1 Corinthians 11:23–26). These are the core understandings of the Eucharist that we still celebrate today.

The Meaning of the Eucharist

Our look into the historical beginnings of the Eucharist has already begun to point out the meaning of this great Sacrament. Like all Sacraments, the words and actions are a symbol of what is happening in the spiritual reality. The Church has developed some clear descriptions of the spiritual reality of the Eucharist that are helpful.

Thanksgiving and Praise

The word *Eucharist* comes from a Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." In the Sacrament we give God thanks and praise for all that God has given us: life, love, family, friends, creation, and most important, Jesus' sacrifice of love on the cross and the promise of the resurrection. Think for a moment about some of the prayers we say: "Glory to God in the highest,"

"Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation," and "Holy, holy, holy Lord." They are all about praising and thanking God!

But in the spiritual realm, it isn't just us who are praising and thanking God, it is Christ himself, with us and through the Holy Spirit. Remember that one of the names for the Church gathered is the Body of Christ. It is Christ himself, our high priest (see Hebrews 8:1), who leads our praise and thanksgiving to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, our earthly praise and thanksgiving is joined to the perfect worship of God by the saints and angels in Heaven (see Revelation 19:1–5).

Memorial of Christ's Passover Sacrifice

The Eucharist is also a memorial of the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ. This happens in a number of ways. In the Gospel reading and the homily, we hear and reflect on the meaning of a particular teaching or event from the life of Jesus. In the creed we profess our belief in the mysteries of our faith, including the saving events of Jesus' life. And in the Eucharistic prayer, we specifically recall the events surrounding his death and Resurrection.

But the spiritual reality is something much more than just remembering these events. In the Eucharist these saving actions are made present and we are actually participating in these events. Through the words and actions of the priest, Jesus himself is blessing the bread and wine. Jesus is making his Body and Blood present in the form of bread and wine. The saving power of Jesus' Passover, that is, his sacrifice on the cross, strengthens us and renews us. It isn't that we are resacrificing Jesus, but making his original sacrifice real and present during the sacramental ritual.

Presence of Christ

In the Eucharist Jesus is present in the fullest possible way. He is present in the assembly, the people gathered as the Body of Christ. He is present in the Word, the Scripture readings that are proclaimed at every Mass. Christ is also present in the priest or bishop who presides over the Eucharist. But he is particularly present in the bread and wine, which, after the consecration, become the Body and Blood of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although the bread and wine retain their physical forms, they have truly become Jesus' Body and Blood, nourishing us to live as his disciples.

The Eucharistic Rite

The Eucharistic rite, or ritual, is the most complex of the sacramental rites. The Lord's Supper, the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, Holy Communion, and the Mass (from the Latin word *missa*, meaning "sending forth") are all names for the Eucharistic liturgy. The entire rite consists of four parts: (1) the gathering rite, (2) the Liturgy of the Word, (3) the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and (4) the dismissal rite. The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are the two main parts; together they create one single act of worship. The following outline shows the words and actions that typically occur in each part.

An Outline for the Eucharist

The movement of the Sunday Mass usually follows this outline:

1. Introductory Rites

- Entrance (usually with gathering song)
- Penitential Act
- *Kyrie* ("Lord, have mercy . . .")
- *Gloria* ("Glory to God . . .")
- Collect ("Let us pray . . .")

2. Liturgy of the Word

- First Reading (usually from the Old Testament)
- Responsorial Psalm (usually sung)
- Second Reading (usually from the New Testament letters)
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel Reading
- Homily
- Profession of Faith (the Nicene Creed)
- Prayer of the Faithful

3. Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts
- Eucharistic Prayer (The central prayer in which the priest thanks God for all his gifts, calls down the Holy Spirit, and consecrates the bread and wine, making it the Body and Blood of Jesus. Includes the preface and the "Holy, Holy, Holy.")

- Communion Rite (Includes the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, the Fraction of the Bread, the reception of Holy Communion, and a song of praise or silence.)
4. Concluding Rites
- Final Blessing
 - Dismissal (usually with a closing song)

Receiving the Eucharist

All Catholics have an obligation to attend Sunday Mass. They are encouraged to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord whenever they attend the Eucharistic celebration, and are obligated by the Precepts of the Church to receive Holy Communion at least once a year.

Receiving Christ in the Eucharist has a number of beneficial effects in our life. It builds up our relationship with Jesus, and it strengthens our relationship with his Body, the Church. It unites all the members of the Church together, making the entire Church stronger and more vital. Participating in the Eucharist brings forgiveness for our venial sins and strengthens us to resist serious sin. The Holy Spirit sends us forth from the Eucharist, strengthened to be Christ's presence in the world.

Ministries of Sacrament Preparation

Preparation for the Sacrament of the Eucharist is a process that involves many more people than just a child and his or her catechist. The pastor, the program director, the family, and the entire faith community also share individual ministries, or roles, at this important time of preparation. By understanding the unique nature of these ministries, the Sacrament preparation process will be better understood as something the entire parish participates in and supports. This understanding will ultimately enrich the experience of the children directly preparing for this important Sacrament.

The Role of the Pastor

Since the celebration of the Sacraments continually integrates children into the Body of Christ, preparing children for reception of the Sacraments should always be undertaken in collaboration with the local pastor and catechetical leader. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, page 260)

One of the earliest Christian images, found both in worship and burial places in the catacombs under the city of Rome, is a youthful shepherd. The image of the Good Shepherd speaks eloquently to the ministry of Christ in the Sacraments of both the Eucharist and Penance and Reconciliation. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep until he finds it, then puts it on his shoulders and carries it home. He is the Good Shepherd who watches over and cares for his flock, leading them to green pastures and springs of life-giving water.

Jesus calls each of us by name and gathers us into the sheepfold of God the Father. This gathering is the Church, the assembly at every celebration of the Eucharist. At Mass the Good Shepherd gives up his life for his sheep: "This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood . . . it will be shed for you and for all" (*Roman Missal*). With these words, Jesus is saying to us: "This bread and this wine are me. I give you all of myself. I am the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep."

A bishop's crosier is shaped like a shepherd's crook to signify his role as chief shepherd in his diocese. In that capacity he guides and teaches the People of God. He shares this ministry with parish priests, so it is most appropriate that we use the word *pastor* to describe the role of our priests who lead a parish. The pastor is the one who, on a local level, gives his life for his sheep, celebrates God's forgiveness, and provides nourishment in the name of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

One of the key responsibilities of a pastor is to bring people to God the Father. And one of the main ways a pastor accomplishes this, in addition to the Sacraments, is through catechesis. The pastor is charged with overseeing the catechesis of everyone in his parish at every stage and, in particular, determining if they are properly prepared for the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation, the Eucharist, and Confirmation.

The pastor, through his own ministry, can support those preparing for the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the following ways:

- Make every effort to help the children move toward readiness for the Sacraments.
- Provide Sacrament preparation for all children of his parish, including those with special needs.
- Respect the right of parents to teach the faith to their own children.
- Meet with catechetical leaders regularly, keep up to date about what is going on, and maintain pastoral guidance and prayerful support.

- Ensure that the program is theologically and catechetically sound, and in conformity with the directives of the local bishop.
- Take part in Sacrament preparation meetings, retreats, and parent-education opportunities whenever possible.
- Visit with the children shortly before the celebration of First Eucharist to answer questions, calm nerves, and remind the children of the importance and meaning of what they are about to celebrate.
- Communicate with the Sacrament coordinator, the liturgy director, and all who are involved in the celebration of First Eucharist.
- Sign the First Eucharist certificates that will be given to the children after celebrating the Sacrament.
- Speak to the children directly in a short homily at the First Eucharist Mass, mindful that parents, other adults, and older children in the congregation are also hearing the teaching and direction he offers to the children.

What are the ways in which your pastor best supports the Sacrament preparation process in your parish?

What are some ways in which your pastor could be encouraged to further support the Sacrament preparation process?

The Role of the Parish Community

The most important task of the catechesis of children is to provide, through the witness of adults, an environment in which young people can grow in faith. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, page 205)

Welcome the Children

Jesus' words, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them" (Mark 10:14), are important to keep in mind as we look at how our parish is called to take an active role in our Sacrament preparation programs. Welcoming children in Jesus' name is perhaps the most crucial role of the parish in preparing children for their first reception of the Eucharist. As disciples in tune with the Word of our Lord, a parish community must welcome every child with open arms and hearts. Only then can we bring the children to Christ so he can bless them and fill them with his life and grace.

It is important to note that in the biblical story of Jesus blessing the children (see Mark 10:13–16), parents are bringing their children to Jesus. In much the same way, parents entrust their children to the parish for catechesis. They believe that the parish, their community of faith, is a help to them in forming their child in the faith. The parish, for its part, is well prepared and suited to welcome the children and their families and to invite all of them more fully into the life of the parish.

The Church, the Body of Christ, is enriched by the presence of all of its members, even the youngest ones. There is no one more trusting or believing than a child. This is what Jesus referred to when he said we must all become as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (see Matthew 18:3). The generosity, openness, joy, curiosity, and innocence of children are gifts to the Church. The Church can embrace these gifts by welcoming and supporting the children and families who are involved in the process of Sacrament preparation.

Live the Faith

Following the Profession of Faith during the Sacrament of Baptism, the priest or deacon proclaims: "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, 59). All present respond, "Amen."

No one believes alone, and no one receives a Sacrament alone. Rather, faith is formed and celebrated within a community of believers. For

most of us, that community of believers is our parish. The parish provides an ongoing community of faith in which its members can live and grow.

Sacraments are key moments in the life of a faith community. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation make us members of the community, and all of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, help us grow within and contribute to the vitality of the community.

The celebration of First Eucharist presents an opportunity for all members of the parish to reflect on the great gift of the Eucharist, to remember their own First Communion day, and to renew their commitment to serve Christ in the world.

The parish is a model of what it means to be Christ for others. All of the works of the parish—from Sunday worship to the parish picnic, from preschool to adult catechesis, from serving within the parish to reaching out to the larger community—give witness to the children and families who are involved in the Sacrament preparation process.

Pray and Learn

Sunday liturgy is an optimal time for the parish community to welcome children and lead them to Jesus. It is a key place where the parish community assumes its important role as a model for young parishioners. With that in mind, the period of immediate preparation for First Eucharist presents an ideal time to remind the parish community that they are living examples to the children who are present at Mass. Parishioners can be encouraged to reflect on how they are fulfilling this role through active participation in the liturgy, reverence when approaching and receiving the Eucharist, and taking time to acknowledge the children around them.

Many parishes also use the time of Sacrament preparation to offer sacramental catechesis for the whole community. In this way the whole community is focused on Sacrament preparation and learning at the same time. It is not only the children and families who are going through the process. The entire parish is acknowledging their own continuing sacramental journey and need to grow in faith and understanding.

The following is a list of some of the ways a parish can take an active role in supporting those preparing for First Communion:

- Have a welcoming ceremony during Sunday liturgy when the children begin their preparation for First Eucharist. This provides an opportunity for the assembly to show their support. (See resource 2-E, “Parish Welcome for First Eucharist.”)

- Create a prayer card with the names of all the children preparing for First Eucharist. Distribute the prayer cards to the children during the welcoming ceremony and to the assembly, to students in the religious education program and the Catholic school, and to other groups in the parish.
- Make a poster that features the pictures and/or names of the children preparing for First Eucharist. Display this in a place where the whole parish will be able to view it.
- Encourage the whole community to pray for those preparing for First Eucharist by including petitions in the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass each week during the preparation process.
- Feature one or two children who are preparing for the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the bulletin each week.
- Ask members of various parish groups to include the children preparing for the Sacraments in their prayers.
- Offer a day of reflection on the Eucharist, an instructional Mass to which everyone is invited, or gatherings for parishioners of all ages to reflect on and learn more about the great gift of the Eucharist.
- Create an exchange program with fifth graders or older children from the parish school or faith-formation program. These older children can partner with the younger children for various activities. They may share lessons, attend school and parish Masses together, or exchange notes and prayers. (See resource 2-G, "Community Notes of Support.")
- Provide catechesis on the Sacrament of the Eucharist as a column or insert in the bulletin or on the parish Web site.
- Feature updates on the children's program in the parish bulletin or Web site.

What are the ways in which your community best supports the Sacrament preparation process in your parish?

What are some other ways your parish community could be encouraged to show support to those in the Sacrament preparation process?

The Role of the Program Director

The coordination of catechesis is not merely a strategic factor, aimed at more effective evangelization, but has a profound theological meaning. Evangelizing activity must be well coordinated because it touches on the *unity of faith*, which sustains all the Church's actions. (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 272)

Have you ever known young children who were hoping to get a particular teacher for the following year of school? When you ask them why they want this teacher, they often say something like, "Because she's always laughing and smiling." Children know a good thing when they see it. Joyful teachers prepare children in a very special way to feel the love of Jesus as they encounter him for the first time in the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

As the program director, you are a human face of the Church and Christ for children and their families. Therefore, your actions and attitudes are extremely important. It is essential to strive to be welcoming, understanding, and patient with children and their families. These actions will have a big impact on the experience of those involved in the Sacrament preparation process.

Preparing children and their families for their first celebration of the Eucharist is a blessing and a privilege. You are the one who is charged with the responsibility of keeping all of the pieces working together, making sure everyone and everything is on schedule, encouraging collaboration, and planning for good liturgical celebrations. As the program director, you have many components to coordinate.

Select Materials

It is your responsibility, along with your pastor, to choose catechetically sound and age-appropriate materials. That is likely why you have chosen