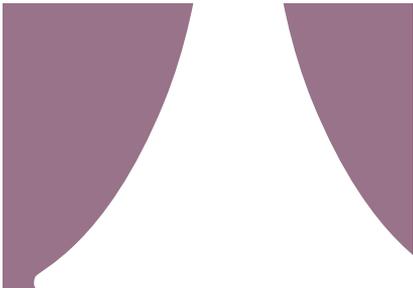
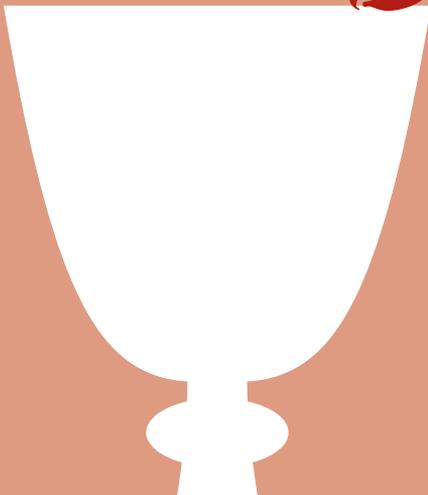


Family Activity Booklet



Living 
the Eucharist®

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Welcome to Living the Eucharist

Mealtime is perhaps the most important part of children's experience of family. In sharing food, time, and news of the day, we deepen our relationships with one another and shape our family identity. The altar at church is the place where the family of God gathers to share its meal, deepen relationships with God and the parish community, and shape its Christian identity.

Our parish meal includes almost fifty prayers (songs, readings, and gestures) in a very short time. This booklet will help the family to focus on prayers that illuminate the meaning of Eucharist; reflect on the Gospel for the following Sunday; and consider ways to live the Eucharist throughout the week. A family begins its Lenten gatherings during the week before the First Sunday of Lent and ends the week before Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. The family gathers for a total of six times. If your family is accustomed to praying together, be sure to include the habits of prayer already comfortable for you. If this is a new family activity, use our suggestions to help you get started, choosing those that seem to fit your family best.

Here are some guidelines to assist your gatherings:

1 ■ Choose a time and place. All together, choose a day and time to gather weekly for about thirty minutes. Then decide where to gather. In the space you choose, prepare a small table (or part of a dining table) for gathering. Cover this with a purple cloth, for the season of Lent. Add a candle, a Bible, a small crucifix, and any additional articles needed for each week's gathering. Keep handy matches, a snuffer, songs and prayers the family likes, and this booklet. Leave your prayer table up during the entire season of Lent. Finally, talk a bit about the courtesy needed for the gathering. The children can generate ideas such as not interrupting, taking turns, and using a quiet voice. Make a short list of agreed-upon expectations. Let the whole family participate in these decisions so they will all be committed to them.

If there is no Bible in the home, this would be a good opportunity to present a Bible to the family to keep on the prayer table during Lent and in a special place thereafter. A good translation such as the New American Bible is preferable to a paraphrased children's Bible. This provides you access to the Word of God itself, and your readings at home will be more familiar when the children hear them in church. As you look at various editions, consider the supportive material such as footnotes and cross references, size of the type (not too small), thickness of the paper (not easily torn), and sturdiness of the cover and binding.

2 ■ Children under six are significantly different from older children and adults in several important ways.

■ *Young children need to move, to touch, or to experience the topic in some way to assist their understanding.* Suggestions for creating this experience are offered, and these will support the abstract reasoning of older children as well.

■ *Young children do not have moral concerns, and are not capable of moral judgments. Their understanding of right and wrong is "borrowed" from adults, rather than internal.* During these early years, while religion is free from

the consideration of right and wrong, children are exceptionally capable of relishing the gifts and presence of God. In this way they model for adults the true purpose of spirituality: to enjoy our relationship with God.

As parents, we will guide the behavior of our children during these years, but it's best to avoid attaching that behavior to moral judgments or their love of God.

■ *Young children are “metaphorical” and “metaphysical.” The signs of our Eucharist, such as the bread and wine, embody a greater reality. Young children are quite able to interpret the signs and stories for their spiritual meaning.*

For this reason some open-ended questions are suggested for each reflection. Use them to invite the family deeper into the meaning of the sign or story. Allow a little time to consider the question. Each response offered, while different, may in some way be part of the answer. Don't end the consideration by saying, “Right!” and implying that the matter is closed. Rather, keep an attitude of ongoing reflection, expecting insight to continue to develop long after the session ends.

■ *Young children do not have the kind of imagination that allows them to grasp the experience of a time or place they have never experienced.* The nomadic life of Abraham, the tribal life of ancient Israel, life in first-century Israel: these are very hard for them to perceive. This limits their ability to explore texts that require some understanding of the cultural context. For this reason the family gatherings focus on the Gospels rather than the Old Testament readings we hear at Mass. And at times even these will be difficult.

In acknowledgement of these characteristics, any questions or suggestions that are not appropriate for children under six will be followed by **(6+)**, to indicate not to expect too much of the littlest ones. If all your children are under six, you may omit these ideas altogether.

3 ■ The family gathering will include a short prayer at the beginning, at the end, and during the transition from consideration of the Eucharist to consideration of the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday. A variety of ways to pray together are

listed below. Choose one or two that suit your children and introduce them if necessary. Each week before the gathering, invite each child to choose a prayer, and to lead that prayer when the time comes. This ensures that the prayer will be appropriate for the children, and will actively involve them in the gathering.

- **Song.** Singing unites a group and is an easy way to pray together. Appropriate music can be found at the website www.LivingtheEucharist.org/family. If children are not reading, make sure you introduce simpler songs that change only one or two words in each verse, or sing only the chorus.
- **Silence.** Help children to get comfortable and still. It may help them if you strike a lovely chime and set a timer for one, two, or three minutes.
- **Prayers of intercession or thanksgiving.** Choose a small crucifix to pass around the circle. As each one holds it, he or she can share a prayer, ending with an agreed-upon formula, such as “Let us pray to the Lord,” to which all respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.”
- **Formula prayers or blessings.** Prayers such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory to the Father, or a decade of the Rosary are most appropriate for older children. You can make a small binder to collect these longer prayers and blessings. Also, pay attention to the prayers offered by your children; write them down and include them in the binder. All these prayers can be read by a child or recited together by everyone. If you want to add more prayers in the binder, do a search on the Internet using the key words “Catholic Prayers.”

4 ■ Read the material well ahead of time to think about the themes of the gathering. The “Notes for Parents” at the end of each session will help you prepare for your weekly family gatherings. You can tailor the sessions to your children by including songs, family stories, and examples familiar to them. This will deepen their grasp of the material. Take a few minutes as well to gather the simple materials needed, enlisting the help of the children when appropriate. Think about sharing the tasks of the gathering. Perhaps one parent can lead the reflection on the Eucharist, and the other the reflection on the Gospel and the

section titled “Living the Eucharist.” Each child can take a prayer to prepare, or do something simple such as snuffing the candle when you are finished.

5 ■ In addition to parents and children ages three to twelve, your household may include babies, teens, grandparents, and other family members. Make every effort to include the whole family. The greater the age range of children involved in the sessions, the more challenging it is to involve everyone. This booklet is written primarily for families with children ages three to twelve. The teen component of *Living the Eucharist* is meant to address directly the needs and interests of teens. Acknowledge that this program is “young” for your teens and written for their younger siblings. Invite your teens to make a contribution, such as preparing the space or an element of the prayer, to sit with or help a younger sibling, and to participate in the reflections. The unique experience and insights of each person enrich the whole family.

Wiggly toddlers may also be hard to accommodate. If the family is young you may shorten the session to the first half only. If you are planning the whole session you may want to involve the toddler in the first half (choosing songs s/he loves with movements) and then settle the toddler with coloring or a snack for the second half, with an agreement about who will tend to his/her needs. Remember this is informal, so toddler chatter need not be a problem.

The readings and prayers of this booklet are used by the whole Church. We do not outgrow them, but return to them again and again in the light of our own lives. For example, we begin with the temptation of Christ, the gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent. But our understanding of living with temptation changes significantly as we move from childhood to adolescence and through adulthood. Ask family members to share what the reading or prayer from the Eucharist means for them.

During your gathering be aware of the presence of God among you, speaking in the Gospel, the children, the silence, and the song. Relax and enjoy your family and the blessings offered.

The Altar Table

⊕ OPEN WITH A PRAYER LED BY A CHILD.

PREPARING FOR THE EUCHARIST: THE ALTAR TABLE

Introduction

Read or say the following in your own words:

“When we are getting ready for dinner, we have to set the table. What are some of the things we put on the table? At church, we also have a table. It is called the altar. It’s very big because it is for a much bigger family: the family of God. We have a meal there as well, called the Eucharist, or Mass. Before Eucharist begins, we also have to prepare the table. Today we will see some of the things we use on the altar.”

“We’ll use our prayer table as our altar today [if you are not using a separate table]. We already have a cloth on it. It is the altar cloth and it’s always white. Remember this is much smaller than the altar at church.”

“This is the paten. It holds the bread that becomes Jesus.”

PREPARATION

■ Invite your children to choose the three prayers, one to begin, one to use in the middle, and one to close. See no. 3 on page 5 of this booklet for suggestions. (Don’t try to use all the suggestions in one session.)

■ This session requires a small table to serve as a model altar, covered with a white cloth. If necessary use the prayer table for this, but use a second table if one is available.

■ Have ready two candles and holders, a standing crucifix (if available) — preferably with the Risen Lord on it — a small glass to use as a “chalice,” and a small glass plate to use as the “paten.” (Note: we use glass to distinguish this model paten and chalice from the precious metals of the ones in church.)

■ Have a Bible and another candle ready (have matches and snuffer available).

■ Place a marker in the Bible at Matthew 4:1-11.

You or a child put the glass plate on the table.

"This is the chalice. It holds the wine that becomes Jesus."

You or a child put the glass goblet on the table.

"It is Jesus who invites us to this meal. So we have a crucifix."

You or a child put the crucifix on the table.

"The crucifix reminds us that Jesus died and rose from the dead."

"Finally, we have candles for our celebration."

You or a child place two candles on either side of the crucifix.

Light the candles, saying, "Christ has died. Christ is risen."

Reflection

"The family of God invited to the Mass is very, very big. Let's think of people we see there every week."

Begin to name friends or family in your parish.

"And are people from our parish the only ones at the table for Mass? Who are other people at this table?"

Name distant friends or family who also share in this meal.

"What about people far away? People we don't know? People who have died? Are they also part of this great meal? How big is the family of God? I wonder why Jesus wants us all together at this meal we call the Mass?"



PRAYER LED BY A CHILD

LISTENING TO THE GOSPEL

Introduction

Read or say the following in your own words:

"At the beginning of his work on earth, Jesus fasted for forty days. He didn't eat and he was hungry. Then he was tempted to use his power to turn stones into bread to feed himself. Let's listen to what he said about this."

An older child or parent lights the remaining candle and reads Matthew 4:1-4, the first part of the Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent.

Reflection

"Let's review what we just heard. What did Jesus say? 'One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"

"Let's think about the bread at Mass. Is it 'bread alone'? What did Jesus say about this bread? 'This is my body.' So the bread we share at Mass with all the family of God is...Jesus himself."

6+ "Can you think of other words God has given us to help us live?"

6+ "There are two other ways Jesus was tempted to use his power for himself. Listen to the rest of the Gospel (Matthew 4:5-11) and consider what Jesus is tempted to do with his power. What does he do?"

Reread Matthew 4:1-4.

6+ *Read the entire Gospel for Sunday: Matthew 4:1-11.*

LIVING THE EUCHARIST

This week, begin your family meal by lighting a candle and remembering and blessing your whole family — those present, those distant, those who have died.

⊕ CLOSE WITH A PRAYER LED BY A CHILD.

NOTES FOR PARENTS

Our best sacramental signs are deeply rooted in daily life, and the family meal is the foundational experience of the Eucharist. If your family is rarely able to gather for a meal, make an effort to choose one or more nights a week to set the table, turn off the electronic devices, light a candle, say a blessing, and eat a meal together. Learning to be present to one another as you break bread together is a preparation for participating in the Eucharist.

In the Church we also use the phrase “communion of saints” to refer to the family of God gathered at the Eucharist. This would be a good phrase to introduce to older children who are already familiar with the rest of the language introduced here.

Another preparation is giving the children the names and uses of the articles they see on the altar at church. This is especially appreciated by children under six, who are in a developmental stage of learning language. The elements named in this session are the most important. But as the weeks go by, take any opportunity to introduce the language of other articles used at Mass, such as the purificator for wiping the chalice, or the corporal for catching any crumbs or drips under the chalice and paten. You can also name parts of the church itself: the pews, the altar rail (if present), the stained glass windows, the baptismal font, the paschal candle and so forth.

In this activity for the First Week of Lent, the plate and goblet used are empty. This is to emphasize that we are using them as models to help us learn the names of these articles at Mass and to prepare us to participate more fully there.