



# Received

Your Journey to First Communion

## PARENT INFORMATION SESSION

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## 1. Introduction

As a catechist, you have been blessed with the opportunity to share the faith. For First Holy Communion preparation, you are going to work with children who are around 7–8 years old (2nd grade). In addition to the good work that you are going to do, it is important to keep parents in mind. They are very important to the development of a child's faith life.

The *Received* program keeps this reality in mind by providing resources to assist you in the important—and sometimes challenging—job of engaging and motivating parents.

The goal is to set a tone that encourages and empowers parents to be deeply integrated in sacramental preparation. For many, this will be a big shift and departure from their previous experiences. Some have been struggling through the reality of weekly Mass attendance with young children, and others, though they are seeking the sacraments for their children, haven't had much engagement with the parish.

The parents that you are going to encounter have a desire for their child to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist. There will be some parents who are confident in the faith, and there will be some who don't know why they want their child to receive the sacraments; they are simply following family tradition. Be encouraging and give them the support, tools, and guidance that they will need to fully participate in this journey. It is important to engage parents in their faith as well. Whether they realize it or not, their child had been called at this time and at this point in their lives to prepare for these sacraments, and God is eager to do something in their hearts as well and the hearts of the whole family. It is important to remember that learning about and meditating on the mysteries of the faith can benefit everyone, whether it is their first time, or their one thousandth time.

Keeping all of this in mind, as you prepare to lead your class through *Received: Your Journey to First Communion*, we recommend that you begin with a Parent Information Session to engage parents and to get them excited to journey with their child.

The four goals of the Parent Information Session are to:

1. Introduce parents to the *Received: Your Journey to First Communion* program
2. Educate them about the Sacrament of First Holy Communion
3. Encourage them to take seriously their role as the primary educators in matters of the Faith
4. Equip them with the *Received Online Parent Certification* course and other resources that will help guide them through the journey

The purpose of this guide is to assist you in preparing and conducting a Parent Information Session. Here you will find:

- A checklist of things to consider before, during, and after the Parent Information Session
- A sample framework for a one-hour Parent Information Session
- Sample letters for parents

Ideally, the same instructor(s) who will lead candidates through the *Received: Your Journey to First Communion* program will also facilitate (or at least be introduced at) the Parent Information Session. This will provide optimal continuity between parents and their children.

## 2. Preparing for the Parent Information Session

- Plan and schedule your Parent Information Session prior to beginning the program. Allow approximately one hour for the session.
- Use the sample “Invitation Letter to Parents” to announce your meeting.
- Prepare to watch and discuss the first the *Received Online Parent Certification* video “Session 1: An Invitation.” This video was designed to be shown during the Parent Information Session. *Note: This video can be viewed within your Leader’s Access course, and it is featured within the Renewed Online Parent Certification course.*

In this powerful, 14-minute video, Father Mike Schmitz, Emily Wilson Hussem & Daniel Hussem, and Sister Josephine Garrett connect to parents’ hearts in a down-to-earth way, encouraging them to take an active role in their children’s First Holy Communion preparation.

- [Optional] Prepare to watch and discuss the *Received Online Parent Certification* video “Session 2: The Greatest Gift” video. Depending on time and your goals for the session, this video can be shown during the Parent Information Session or parents can watch the video on their own within the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course. *Note: This video can be viewed within your Leader’s Access course, and it is featured within the Renewed Online Parent Certification course.*

In this 10-minute video, Father Mike Schmitz will present the beauty of the mass.

- Prepare to review the *Received Online Parent Certification* course and embedded Parent’s Guide.

During the session, it would be good to highlight the features of the course and the Parent’s Guide, as well as focus on the “Family Time” activities so parents can prepare to engage with their children after each lesson. If you have time, walk through a sample lesson, so they know what to expect!

- Review the *Received* “Frequently Asked Questions” resource (available at AscensionPress.com), which is a great overview of the program and will equip you to answer questions during the information session.
- Consider offering refreshments and snacks for the session.
- Keep track of attendance (i.e., have a registration/welcome table). Follow up with parents who do not attend. A sample “Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session” is included.

### 3. Parent Information Session Outline

#### I. Introduction (3 minutes)

Introduce yourself and any other leaders who will be facilitating the program. Explain the outline for the session.

First, they will view and discuss a video introducing them to *Received: Your Journey to First Communion*, their child’s preparation program for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion.

Second, they will discuss the sacrament and their role as parents in their child’s preparation for receiving it.

Finally, you will present the *Renewed Online Parent Certification* course. This is also a good time to share your schedule for the year.

#### II. Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Open the session with a prayer. If a priest or deacon is available, ask him to offer the prayer and a blessing. If not, you can (in your own words) ask for the Holy Spirit to guide the meeting, and then ask everyone to join in a well-known prayer such as the Hail Mary or Our Father.

#### III. Parent Video & Discussion (20 minutes)

Play the *Received Online Parent Certification* video “**Session 1: An Invitation.**”

**Talking Points:**

- Begin by asking for a show of hands of how many people can remember their own first communion.
- Then ask how many remember the experience as a pivotal moment in their life of faith. Few will likely remember it this way, but the main point is to get them engaged and thinking about the sacrament.
- Ask how many were taught as kids and now maybe even tell their kids to sit down, be quiet, and watch at Mass.

- Our hope this year is to help your child know that Mass is not just “sit down, be quiet, and watch.” Our hearts have been made to worship. When we see something awesome we want to praise God, when we receive love, we want to give love and say thank you
- We aren’t made to sit and watch at Mass, but to participate in the saving work of God. At every Mass, the world is sanctified (made more holy) and God is glorified. When you and I participate in the Mass, the world is brought closer to God.
- Your child has a special heart and the worship they give the Father is unique and unrepeatable. God is pleased when they are present before him at Mass.

**Discuss the following questions:**

1. Father Mike shared three rules that he was told as a child when he attended Mass: Rule 1: Show up; Rule 2: Be quiet; and Rule 3: Watch. Were you told this as a child? Do you tell your children these rules? While these rules can be helpful to calm young children, what can we as parents say and do to help ourselves and our children see how we are called to worship during Mass?
2. Emily & Daniel called attention to all the stressful moments during the Mass with young children, but they also spoke about the wonderful, joyful, beautiful moments. Can you recall any of these special moments within your own family?
3. Sister Josephine said right in the heart of the family is the love of God and your family brings something that no other family can bring. Reflect on your family and consider how important you are to the Body of Christ.

**[Optional] Play the *Received Online Parent Certification* video “The Greatest Gift.”**

**Discuss the following questions:**

1. Up until this point, how have you viewed Mass? Is it an obligation to watch or an opportunity to worship?
2. Fr. Mike says that Liturgy is a “public work done in service of another.” Liturgy, the Mass, is always done publicly and in community. How can you increase your child’s sense of belonging to the community of the Catholic Church?

## IV. Explanation of the Sacrament of the Eucharist (15 minutes)

Use the following points as a guide to explain the sacrament in your own words.

### An Overview

*Note: You may want to present to parents that the following information is meant to help them connect with their child when talking about the sacrament. It can be hard to break down such big concepts for little minds that most adults have a hard time understanding.*

### Source and Summit

- Explain that the Eucharist is the most important Sacrament in the Catholic Church.
- Within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the bread and wine that we bring to the altar become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.
- It is through the Eucharist that the God of the universe comes to dwell in us. After we receive Communion, the leftover Hosts are placed in the tabernacle. The Host that we consume is in us, and we become living tabernacles.
- Ask them to think about that for a moment. God loves us so much that he wants to dwell within us.
- When we are hungry, we know that we need food and drink to nourish our bodies to give us strength to carry on. Likewise, our souls get hungry. As we journey through this life on our way to Heaven, it is important that we feed our souls with the “Bread of Life.”
- CCC 1407: “The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church’s life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church.”

### Real Presence

- A miracle takes place at every Mass. When the priest says the words of consecration “This is my Body, which will be given up for you. ... This is the chalice of my Blood” the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This change is called **transubstantiation**. The *substance* of the bread and wine has changed, but the appearance has not.
- CCC 1374: “In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.*’<sup>202</sup> This presence is called “real.”

- Our goal this year is to help your child encounter the living presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We want them to understand that they are not just receiving a piece of bread, or a symbol, or even just the body of Jesus Christ. They are receiving his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. He comes to dwell in their hearts, so they can carry him to the world.

### A Gift

- The Eucharist is the greatest gift that God has given us. If a stranger gives you a present, it can be hard to value that gift. We receive and then we toss it aside or maybe even give it away. When someone we love gives us a gift. It means a lot to us. We treasure it and hold onto it. Jesus wants to come to your child in a special way this year. If they do not know Jesus, then the gift is just something to toss aside.
- This is why taking your child to Mass is important. Your child sees you receive this gift of the Eucharist and learns to desire it themselves. If they know Jesus, and the gift they are receiving, then they will appreciate it that much more.

### Closing Reflection Questions

- What is the greatest gift you have ever received from someone? What made it the greatest gift; was it the gift itself, or was it the thought of the person giving you the gift?
- During this time of preparation, what can you do to ensure that your child knows both the giver (Jesus) and the greatest gift (the Eucharist) he wants to give them.

## V. Review the *Received Online Parent Certification* course / Final Instructions (5 minutes)

- Display the *Received Online Parent Certification* course.
- Review the layout and move through a sample lesson of the embedded Parent's Guide.
- Encourage parents to make a commitment to complete the certification and hand in the certificate of completion, so they are more prepared to engage their son or daughter throughout the journey.
- Distribute any additional resources (e.g., schedules, checklists, forms) and communicate any logistical details concerning the retreat, rehearsals, and other requirements.
- Ask if parents have any questions or comments.
- Assure parents that you will be available throughout the program to address any questions or thoughts that they would like to share.

## VI. Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

If a priest or deacon is available, ask him to offer a final prayer and blessing. If not, you can thank God in your own words for the time together and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide and fill all of your hearts as you begin this journey. End with a well-known prayer like the Hail Mary or Our Father.

## 4. Following the Parent Information Session

Follow-up with parents to ensure they are all set-up in the *Received Online Parent Certification* course, and remind parents that you are available to answer any questions that they may have.

Send along a letter of explanation, to those parents who did not attend the Parent Information Session. Use the sample “Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session”.

Remember to actively engage with parents during the preparation session. Face-to-face conversations, emails, phone calls all go a long way to help keep parents connected.

**Photos:** Parents love to see photos of their children. Ask parents to sign a photo release, so you can take and share pictures of fun class activities.

## 5. Sample Letters

### Invitation Letter to Parents

*To be used to invite parents to the First Communion Parent Information Session. We recommend that you print it on the official letterhead of your school, parish, or organization. Please modify as needed.*

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation]

We are thrilled to introduce our First Communion preparation program, *Received: Your Journey to First Communion*. The goal of the program is to offer your child a powerful, life-changing experience as he or she prepares to receive Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

It is our hope that *Received* will not only offer your child a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith but also win over their hearts at this critical time in their lives. The program has been carefully designed to address and answer your child’s fundamental questions about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and why we believe in such an important mystery. This program will call your child to embrace a life of faith.



Let's face it—our world is full of distractions and detours that can easily set a young person on the wrong path. Nothing can take the place of a strong faith in God: not friends, money, or education. It is our faith that gives us our identity and our direction in life. The Church recognizes that you, as parents, are the primary educators of your children in matters of faith and morals—and the *Received* program offers you a unique opportunity to join your child as he or she journeys through the Catholic Faith.

To learn more about the program and your role in preparing your child for the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we invite you to attend a Parent Information Session on [add date/time] to be held at [location]. The meeting will not only inform you about the program but also offer you ideas and tools to confidently engage and encourage your child during their preparation.

At the Parent Information Session, we will get you set-up with the *Received Online Parent Certification* course, which answers questions you may have about Reconciliation and provides helpful conversation starters and family activities to help you play an active role in your child's faith journey. We will begin teaching *Received* on [start date].

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your child's spiritual development. We look forward to seeing you at the Parent Information Session.

Sincerely, [Name]

## **Letter to Parents Who Did Not Attend the Information Session**

*To be sent to parents who were unable to attend the Parent Information Session.*

[Date]

Dear Parents of [customize to fit your situation]

We are sorry you were unable to attend the Parent Information Session on [add date/time].

It is our hope that our First Communion program *Received: Your Journey to First Communion* will not only offer your child a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith but also win over their hearts at this critical time in their lives. The program has been carefully designed to address and answer your child's fundamental questions about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and why we believe in such an important mystery. This program will call your child to embrace a life of faith.

Let's face it—our world is full of distractions and detours that can easily set a young person on the wrong path. Nothing can take the place of a strong faith in God: not

friends, money, or education. It is our faith that gives us our identity and our direction in life. The Church recognizes that you, as parents, are the primary educators of your children in matters of faith and morals—and *Received* offers you a unique opportunity to join your child as he or she journeys through this sacramental preparation period.

The *Received Online Parent Certification* course answers questions you may have about the Sacrament of the Eucharist and provides helpful conversation starters and family activities to help you play an active role in your child's faith journey. We will begin teaching *Received* on [start date].

Thank you for your time and interest in this important stage of your child's spiritual development.

Sincerely, [Name]

**More questions?** Please contact us, we'd love to hear from you!

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