



Family Retreat for First Eucharist

The Eucharist is who we are—each and every day. It’s not just about *First Communion*, as important as that is. Eucharist is about the weekly celebration of the liturgy for the rest of our lives, and how we live the Eucharist each day of our lives.

The preparation and ongoing understanding of Eucharist (and all the sacraments) is not just for the children; this sacred time of preparation touches and affects the entire family. The opportunity for a retreat helps families not only prepare for *First Communion* but understand and appreciate every Communion throughout our lives.

How to Use this Resource

There is much, much more in this resource than you could ever use in one retreat. Several ideas for activity centers are given so that you can choose which would be

most helpful for your families. And/or—you might use all of them in designing and hosting three retreats for families throughout the year...or even one after the celebration of *First Communion* (reminding people that our learning and appreciation of the sacrament never ends).

One activity center (“The Gift of the Holy Spirit”) is designed for parishes that are celebrating the restored order of the sacraments.

In addition to the various activity centers, there is also:

- a full-group beginning activity that culminates in a simple soup and bread lunch (dinner) at the end;
- a full-group closing activity that could precede the soup and bread lunch (dinner).

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Depending upon how you design your time, it might not be possible to use both the beginning activity and closing activity. Pick and choose, or use one at one time, the second at another time.

All of these activities are designed to be continued at home. A mother once told me, “I want to pray at home; I want to talk about God at home, but I don’t know where to start.” These activities—begun at the parish and continued at home—show the way.

Preparation

PRELIMINARY PREPARATIONS

- Read through this resource. Choose the activities that will be most helpful for your families.
- Schedule the time and place for this family retreat, reserving the necessary space(s) on the parish calendar.
- Design a flyer/registration form to publicize the gathering to all families (see “Communicating with Families,” page 4).
- Gather and prepare the materials needed.

SPACES NEEDED

- One large room (with tables and chairs) for the opening and closing activities (near a kitchen).
- Several rooms or spaces within a large room (with tables and chairs) for the number of small group activities/stations that you decide to use (e.g., if each family is going to have the

opportunity to move around to three different activities, you will need three rooms (or three spaces within a large room).

- If the “What do I see at church?” activity is one of your choices, families will need to have access to the church.

STAFF

- A catechetical leader is needed to lead the families through the welcome and directions for the movement to the different locations/activities and the opening and closing activities.
- It would be helpful to have catechists/catechetical leaders available in/near each activity center to answer questions, offer help, and provide encouragement to the families.
- A hospitality team of three or four people can assist in welcoming the families and overseeing the simple lunch of soup and bread (if you choose to do the opening activity).

RETREAT SCHEDULE

As you read through this entire resource, you will see that each parish’s schedule might be very different. There are multiple possibilities of activities. Choose those that are best for your families, your timing, and your spaces. You might use:

- The full-group opening and closing activities (without any family-group activities).

- The opening and closing activities with time for two or three family activities.
- The opening activity and family activities (and not the closing activity).
- Two or three family activities and the closing activity

There are also several different ways to bring the retreat to a close. See page 10 for some possibilities.

MATERIALS

Name tags If you choose three activities, divide your families into three groups. As you make their name tags, $\frac{1}{3}$ are made in one color; $\frac{1}{3}$ are made in a second color; $\frac{1}{3}$ are made in a third color. (If you are using two activities, divide your families into two groups.)

Agenda Using card stock or a half sheet of paper, prepare an agenda to give to the families with their name tags. (Depending on what you decide to do, your schedule could look different.)

9:15 AM Prayer and Opening Activity
Room _____

10:00 – 10:20 AM
Yellow Group – Room (or station) #1
Blue Group – Room (or station) #2
Green Group – Room (or station) #3

10:25 – 10:45 AM
Blue Group – Room (or station) #1
Green Group – Room (or station) #2
Yellow Group – Room (or station) #3

10:50 – 11:10 AM

Green Group – Room (or station) #1
Yellow Group – Room (or station) #2
Blue Group – Room (or station) #3

11:15 – 12:00 NOON Closing Activity;
Prayer and Soup: Room _____

Bell or chimes Ring to alert families when it is time to move to the next activity.

Directions sheet When you decide which family activities you will use, you will need copies of the directions sheet (one for each family).

Handouts If the activities you choose to use include handouts, copies will need to be made for each family.

If using the opening activity with its closing lunch: plates, bowls, napkins, silverware, cups, drinks, bread and butter.

If using the opening activity but not having lunch, provide containers for each family to take soup home for a family meal.

Closing activity Assemble materials for the closing activity.

Many other materials are needed for each activity. Be sure to check the list of supplies for each activity you choose to use.



Leader's Guide

On the following pages you will find:

- ▶ directions and talking points for the day's welcome and prayer, the opening and closing activities, and the closure/closing prayer
- ▶ the directions sheets (which will be given to each family) for the possible family activities (These are written for the families; be sure to check the items needed in the preceding list on pages 6-7.)
- ▶ the handouts needed for the opening activity, some of the family activities, and the closing activity

Welcome and Prayer

PREPARATION

Choose a leader, reader, and parent for the prayer.

Thank families for their presence, for their faith and their desire to grow together, to deepen their understanding and love for the Eucharist.

Invite families who are near one another to introduce themselves to each other.

Set the day in context. Say something similar to:

- *“You’re here today because we are thinking about one of the greatest gifts in our faith: Jesus’ presence to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist.”*
- *“Moms and dads, several years ago you celebrated the first sacrament with your young child: baptism.”*
- *“As we begin today in prayer, let us remember our baptism.”*

Leader: Loving God, these parents love their children so much that they continually pray for them: that you will protect them, guiding them from all harm; that you will fill their days with love and joy; that you will help them—as they learn and grow—to always know they are loved.

A parent: Protecting God, because of our love for our children and our desire for you, we brought our children to church to be baptized. United with you, and all your family here and around the world, may we and our children always be friends of Jesus. Amen.

Reader: Many places in Scripture tell us about baptism. We listen to this passage from the Acts of the Apostles: “Once they began to believe Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike were baptized.” (Acts 8:12)

Leader: On our baptismal days, our parents and godparents, traced on our foreheads the Sign of the Cross, reminding us that we belong to God, that we are followers of Jesus. Moms and dads, take a quiet moment to reverently trace the Sign of the Cross on your child(ren)’s foreheads.

Invite all to pray the Our Father together.

- Continue with the opening activity or, if you are not using it, give directions (referring to the card that they have with their color), of how to proceed to the first family activity.

Opening Activity: Stone Soup and the Eucharist

Invite everyone to think for a moment: *what family meal do you remember most from this past year. Why?*

When you remember that meal, how did everyone help with the preparations and clean-up for that meal?

Is every family meal as special as the one you just thought about? Probably not...

Invite families to talk together for a moment about: *What are some things you can do to make each meal special...less busy...less rushed...more peaceful?*

(If time), invite people to share one of their ideas with the whole group.

Continue by explaining: *We have a story we'd like to share with you about a special meal that occurred once. During our "play" today, the making of a unique soup takes place—and you will have a part in the play.*

Use the script (pages 11-13) and the list of materials needed.

After the story, invite discussions using some of these talking points:

- Ask the whole group:

What did you like about the story?

Did you ever go to a dinner that was something like what happened in this story?

- As Catholics, we have a special meal celebration that is sort of like stone soup.

The Eucharist is not just the priest's job; everyone who is there brings something.

Some of the things we bring are things all of us bring.

Some people bring things that others don't (the gift of reading as a lector, etc.)

Invite families to talk for a few minutes, and then hear their ideas (adding to them, if necessary): *What are some of the gifts people in our parish and all of us bring to Mass? (Our acts of love from the past week; our singing; our prayer; lectors bring their gift of proclaiming God's word...)*

After this discussion, give directions for the activity centers and the order in which to move to them. (See suggestions for their agenda card in the materials section; this might differ depending on your timeline.) Remind them that everyone will reconvene at _____.

Other activities you choose take place here.

Closing of the Retreat

Prepare materials for the closing activity. There are several options to close the family retreat:

Option 1 Reassemble as a full group for a simple lunch of bread and soup (the Stone Soup that was made earlier) and a closing prayer (page 32).

Option 2 Reassemble for a full-group closing activity (page 29), followed by soup and bread and closing prayer (page 32).

Option 3 Closing Prayer (page 32) and give each family a container of soup to take home for their family meal.

ACTIVITY

"What do I see at church?"

PARENTS: *You will not be able to visit all these places in church in our short twenty minutes. Begin today and visit whichever ones you'd like—and then continue the others on Sunday mornings after you've celebrated Mass with your parish community.*

If you are using the card and stickers

- » Find the place/the item in church.
- » Talk together about the explanation on the back of the card.
- » After you have completed the suggestion or answered the question below for each one, place your sticker on your card. (If you don't know some of the answers, look them up when you're at home or ask someone on the parish staff.)

Doors

- Why do you think we have churches?
- What do your church doors look like?
- If you were designing a church door, what would it look like?

Baptismal font and holy water fonts

- Was anyone in your family baptized at this baptismal font?

- What's the shape of your baptismal font? What do you think this shape means?
- How many holy water fonts are in your church?
- Slowly pray the Sign of the Cross together. Why do we sign ourselves each time we enter (and leave) church?

Candles

- What is the Paschal candle? When is it used?
- What are the decorations on the Paschal candle?

Prayerful art

- What statues are in your church? Why do you think these were chosen?
- What stories are told in the stained-glass windows?
- Can you find the Stations of the Cross? When, and how, do we pray these?



Vestments

- Can you name the different colors that are used for the vestments? What might each color mean?
- What color is being used right now?

Hymnals and missal

- What is your favorite hymn to be sung at church?
- Can you find a hymn in the hymnal that you don't know but would like to sing?

The Lectionary

- Stand, sit, or kneel near the ambo from which the word of God is proclaimed. Using one of the missals, can you find the readings for next Sunday?
- Read one of the readings. What one word or phrase jumped out at you?
- Pray together:
May the word we just heard, and will hear again proclaimed on Sunday, live in us; may we be God's word for each other and for our world, this week and always. Amen.

Pews and kneelers

- In addition to pews and kneelers, we also genuflect and bow. We genuflect to the tabernacle, which holds the Body of Christ. We bow to the altar and at the name of Jesus; we bow when we say “*and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man*” in the Nicene Creed; we bow before receiving the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ.
- Go to the tabernacle; genuflect in front of it.
- Go to the altar, bow before it.

The altar

- Is this altar similar in any way to your family dinner table?
- God calls us to gather around this dining-table-turned-altar. At Mass, we give God our gifts of bread and wine; God makes them holy, giving them back to us as the Body and Blood of Jesus. Very slowly and reverently, kiss the altar as a sign of respect and gratitude for the gift of Jesus' life.

Bread and wine

- Because we do what Jesus said—“Do this in memory of me”—the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus.
- Not only are the bread and wine changed, but we are changed. We, too, become the body of Christ in our world.
- What can you do to be the body of Christ to and for all the people you know?

Tabernacle

- Where is the tabernacle in your church?
- Is the sanctuary lamp lit? Why (and when) is it lit?

Crucifix

- Jesus was killed because some people didn't like his teachings. They wanted him to stop, but Jesus couldn't stop teaching and living God's love and God's call to us. How is God asking you to live the teachings of Jesus?
- In some churches, the cross is a resurrected Christ to remind us that Jesus is alive with us and always brings us new life.

Confessionals

- Does your church have confessionals or reconciliation rooms?
- How many are in your church?

ACTIVITY

We Listen to God's Word

PARENTS: Talk with your family about:

- God is present with us in many ways. One of them is in **Scripture**—God's word to us.
- At **Mass**, we experience God's presence with us as we listen and respond to God's word.
- The **first reading** is usually from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season when it is from the Acts of Apostles). Take a few minutes to find the Old Testament and the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible.
- The **second reading** is usually from the Letters written by some of the apostles—most often, Saint Paul. During Eastertime, we read from the Book of Revelation. As you look at your Bible, who does Paul write to? Who else wrote some of the letters?
- The **gospel** is our third reading. What are the four gospels?
- After the first reading, everyone prays the **responsorial psalm**. We pray these words, which have been prayed for centuries and centuries. (It would be a wonderful idea to use the response verse from each Sunday in your family prayer during the following week.)
- Listed here are some **response** verses from the psalms. Choose one that your family likes. Letter it on a poster, and decorate it with designs and/or with pictures of what the verse means to each of you.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad. PSALM 118:24

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God. PSALM 98:3

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. PSALM 91:15

Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. PSALM 104:30

The Lord is my light and my salvation. PSALM 27:1

For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord my God. PSALM 62:2

I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living. PSALM 114:9

Hang the poster in your family room or one of the hallways.

Some things to talk about and do at home:

- » What do you think makes a story good?
- » Did a story or a book ever make you want to live differently?
- » What is your favorite part of the Bible? Who do you like in that story? Are they like you?
- » Write your own family psalm of praise or thanksgiving.