

Teaching Guide for
Celebrating
the Eucharist

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The characteristics for young people listed on page 9 are from a study by the Search Institute as reported in "Characteristics of Early Adolescent Growth," a handout compiled by John Roberto and Brian Reynolds (Nauvaton, CT: Center for Youth Ministry Development, n.d.).

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Introduction



THIS COURSE AND THE DISCOVERING PROGRAM

On the night before he died, Jesus gathered his friends for a meal. Through ritual actions Jesus identified himself with bread that was broken and wine that was poured out. He then commanded his followers to celebrate this meal in memory of him, and in this way to become identified with him in his life, death, and Resurrection.

Jesus did not give us a book or a list of rules or an inspiring motto to frame and hang on our wall. He asked us to act—to do something in memory of him. He commanded us to gather and share in the breaking of bread. The actions of the assembly taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing became the celebration of the Eucharist.

The sharing of daily bread is a universal experience that is available to all generations for all times in all places. Gathering with one another in self-giving, open, wholehearted praise and thanks to God is as right as the rain. It is no small thing that the meal of thanksgiving and praise—the Eucharist—

has endured through twenty centuries. It is no small thing that each generation of Christians has followed Jesus' command and, in doing so, has handed on to the next generation the gift of the Eucharist.

It is nearly impossible to overestimate the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the church, but it is quite possible to misestimate the interest that it holds for young adolescents. This course aims to offer a clear and accurate picture of the Eucharist and its importance to the parish community. At the conclusion of the course, the young people should have a strong understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist. If called on they should be able intelligently to help plan and participate in eucharistic celebrations.

The success of what is *taught* in this course will depend greatly on what is *caught* both in the classroom and outside of it. For example, the care with which your parish celebrates the Eucharist, and the students' personal history of "going to church" and unspoken assumptions about the Eucharist, will all affect the outcome of your teaching. How much the young people care about this topic may or may not show in their words or bearing as they begin the course, but by the time they finish it, they should know that their parish teachers care and their parish community cares—about both the Eucharist and them.

Celebrating the Eucharist can be successfully taught with sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. It may be more successful if it is preceded by at least one of the more relational Discovering courses, such as *Understanding Myself* or *Becoming Friends*. Because of the close connection between the Eucharist and the life of Jesus, it will also help if *Meeting Jesus* is offered before this course. Finally, *Gathering to Celebrate* (on the seven sacraments) and *Being Catholic* deal with concepts that are closely related and complementary to the content in *Celebrating the Eucharist*, and may be scheduled with that in mind. See the coordinator's manual for a further discussion of curriculum options.

This course lends itself to a variety of formats. For example, its six 1-hour sessions can be combined for three 2-hour meetings or two 3-hour meetings. Because each session is immediately applicable to the Saturday evening or Sunday Eucharist, a dialog about these sessions and the liturgy is possible. Therefore, this course is most successful when it is taught every week or every other week. It is not recommended that the course be used in a weekend or overnight format.

The six session plans of this course are each designed for a 1-hour meeting. If your group is scheduled to be together for more than an hour, the sessions can be extended with the optional approaches suggested at the end of each session plan. Also consult these approaches as alternative strategies if your teaching style or the students' learning style calls for changes.

The time estimates suggested for the session steps are based on a group size of about fifteen participants. If your group has considerably more or fewer members, you may need to make minor adjustments in the session plans. This course, like all Discovering courses, works well with larger groups, but in such cases you will have less opportunity to address the students' individual contributions and needs.

BACKGROUND

No one has yet participated in a “perfect” or totally satisfying celebration of the Eucharist. No parish is perfect, nor are any people. We are not asked to function with machinelike precision; rather our perfection is to be shown in the mercy or compassion that describes God. In a nutshell, we must keep in mind that Jesus did not command perfection; he asked for compassion. We must also keep in mind that we are fallible. But this does not excuse us from doing what we can to make sure that the celebrations of the Eucharist in our local parish are the best they can be.

The Young Adolescent and This Course

This course guards against offering a bigger bite of information than young people can chew, and thus attempts to fit the content to their learning level. Those who work with young adolescents are keenly aware that many of them have just begun to stretch from childlike, here-and-now thinking to abstract thought. Many can now reason on the basis of possibilities, instead of being restricted to what they are experiencing or have experienced. This ability puts them in good stead as they ask why not, why, and what if. Because a group of typical junior high students will display as much as a six-year span of physical and cognitive maturity, some among your group will likely be quite comfortable dealing with abstractions, while others will likely be less comfortable. The activities in this course offer concrete, specific cases that call on the students’ abilities to deal in the concrete as well as the abstract.

A study conducted by the Search Institute documents the following additional characteristics for young people who affiliate with a church:

- Peer relationships are crucial. In peer relationships young people teach one another about values, morality, sex roles, and acceptable behavior.
- The influence of peers increases during early adolescence but does not outweigh that of parents.
- Young adolescents incorporate positive values and behaviors into their life when they experience religion as a liberating force.

Throughout this course, peer, family, and church influences are kept in mind.

The positive value of peer relationships. This course invites young adolescents to work together in a setting of mutual respect and seeks to provide an environment of support.

The values of the family. As the young people discover their own power to choose, they quite naturally begin to ask why, what matters, and who cares. This course provides a setting in which to explore the why and wherefore: it explains that the Eucharist matters, and we all care—about praise and thanks, about community, about self-giving, about communions that are holy, and about service.

The importance of positive religious experience. The course assumes that the students attend the Eucharist with their family and participate in parish activities, or at least are not total strangers in the parish.

The Young Adolescent and Parish Life

The junior high person who once uncomplainingly went along to Mass often is vocal in his or her rebellion. Young people advance the potent arguments that they can pray better alone at home or that nothing ever happens or that the singing is awful and the homilies dull. Frequently parents and other responsible adults are sympathetic to these concerns of young people, and they do their best to address them. But they know that the Eucharist is too valuable to ignore or skip, too vital to Catholic life to simply replace with private prayer or a meditative walk in the woods. These fundamentally private activities are valuable and can complement the public prayer of the church, but they cannot replace it.

We must address this resistance to attending Mass. The young people's complaint is but a single expression of their general need and willingness to test limits. "Do I have to?" points to another, unspoken question addressed to parents and teachers—"Do you really care enough about this?" In whatever words or actions parents and teachers choose, their response must communicate: "Yes, we really do care about this, and we mostly care about you. I know it is difficult for you right now, but we will miss you if you are not with us."

The parish needs to ask itself how it can meaningfully involve middle school and junior high students in celebrating the Eucharist. Young adolescents are willing and able to participate in activities that they see as worth joining. If they consistently perceive the Eucharist as having nothing to do with their life, they may, understandably, try to skip out of it.

Early adolescence is a time to assume personal responsibility in making decisions and choosing values. Young people can decide to belong to a worshiping community and to have a meaningful place in it. However, curiously, beyond attending the Eucharist, they are often not expected to contribute at any other level, except perhaps as altar servers or choir members. When young people become aware of their role as a member of the celebrating assembly (which takes everyone), they have a right to wonder and then ask how they can be appropriately included. The local parish needs to be ready to include them meaningfully in ways that challenge them. In recent years in the church, a more inclusive youth ministry has arisen that encompasses and reaches beyond mere catechesis (teaching). The coordinator's manual for the Discovering Program provides additional insights into this holistic or comprehensive youth ministry.

The Theology of This Course

All of Christian life can be summarized as a dialog—God's call in Christ, and our response in Christ. We are summoned not because we are wonderful and worthy, but because God is wonderful. Christianity is not simply a good philosophy or a neat idea; it is a way of life, a response to God, who has first called us.

We recall that whenever we assemble to celebrate the Eucharist, it is the Holy Spirit who gathers us into the one Body of Christ (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1097–1109). We would not be here at all were it not for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

The communal “work of the people” (*liturgia*) is bigger than this century, bigger than each of us, and bigger than all of us together. The liturgy of the Eucharist is a memorial of the death and Resurrection of Jesus. It puts us in touch with this saving event. It proclaims “the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). In our own time and place, we are called to offer our sacrifice of praise in the best way we know how, using all the skill and talent and reverence available to us.

The first followers of Jesus gathered for the breaking of bread, and in so doing discovered who and whose they were. Initially, they were not even sure whether they were still members of the local synagogue or of the Temple in Jerusalem. They went on worshipping in their holy places—at home on Sabbath eve, in the synagogue, in the Temple—as they had done all their life. But now they also gathered separately in the evening for the first celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, not on the Sabbath (Saturday) but on the day of the Resurrection (Sunday).

The stories of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper recorded in three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians were liturgical formulas—statements of what was already done when the followers of Jesus assembled in their homes. The Lord’s Supper was first celebrated and lived. And as might be expected, its words and actions found their way into forms and rituals that connected the people to Jesus’ actions and to one another. This ritual remembrance and meal encompassed and celebrated all of life. The early Christians understood that they must become one with the Lord in his death and in his Resurrection. They realized that they must become a holy communion of men and women and children; they must be for one another and for everyone in need who came to them.

To understand the Eucharist is to understand the church. The church created the form and structure of the celebration of the Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist, in turn, created and continues to create the church. It is no wonder, then, that the church is “a little more careful of the Eucharist than of everything” (to paraphrase e. e. cummings’s thoughts on love). The following guiding principles and corollaries on the Eucharist can help young people grow into a fuller understanding and appreciation of it.

The Eucharist is a ritual, or a symbolic action. Rituals form us; they deepen our insight; they call treasured events to mind. By their nature rituals are repetitive, and their movement and actions predictable. We look forward to rituals in family celebrations of holidays; we expect rituals at community or school events like pep rallies or graduation; we follow (or long for) the all-important rituals that strengthen and connect us as family. The most crucial and vital rituals, or symbolic actions, are those that speak for us, that say more than our words can say. They tell us who we are; they remind us of our radical meaning as creatures before God.

The Eucharist is public prayer. We pray together. Our Eucharist is an act of the community. Liturgical prayer casts a large, inclusive net. Although liturgy provides opportunities for quiet, private prayer (such as after the homily and after receiving Communion), it does not demand individual self-disclosure. That is reserved for private prayer alone or among trusted friends.

The Eucharist is a celebration of the whole church. Eucharistic celebrations for small groups or for groups separated from the local assembly are appropriate for special occasions. But normally the liturgy for the day is celebrated on weekdays, and the Sunday liturgy is celebrated on Saturday evening or on Sunday.

Note: The Saturday evening, or anticipated, celebration of the Eucharist restores an ancient Christian tradition of beginning the celebration of the Lord's day at sundown on Saturday.

The Eucharist is a service. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we acknowledge that we are called to be of service to one another—whether our role is that of member of the assembly, eucharistic minister, lector, minister of hospitality (usher), or presider. When we assume a role during the celebration of the Eucharist, we render a service to one another. Sometimes special clothing makes this role clear; for example, distinctive garments are worn by the presider, the acolytes, and perhaps the choir.

The Eucharist is a call to service. The church understands that Jesus commands his people to reach deeply and give what they possess. As we gather to celebrate, we are equipped and strengthened to carry out the ministries that flow from our eucharistic celebration. As members of the Body of Christ, we are commanded to make an honest assessment of our skills and abilities and then to give them away. We are reminded that we and our work are in God's hands—and at our fingertips. We are enjoined to love and serve the Lord in one another.

Definitions of Terms

The terms *breaking of the bread*, *Mass*, *Eucharist*, and *the Lord's Supper* all refer to the same eucharistic celebration and are used interchangeably throughout this course. The term *Mass* has a long history and endures to this day. The term *Eucharist* (based on the Greek word for “to give thanks”) also has deep roots; it emphasizes that our celebration is one of thanks and praise.

The term *assembly* describes the people who gather to celebrate the Eucharist. It derives from the Hebrew word *kahal*, which signifies both the divine call that summons and gathers a people, and the people's response. The Greek term *ekklesia*, from which the term *ecclesial* derives, carries the same connotation. The broader, familiar (though less exact) term *community* is also used in this course.

The term *presider* is sometimes used to designate the role of the ordained leader—a bishop, a priest, or less frequently a deacon.

You may find it helpful occasionally to remind the students of the meanings of these terms.

This Course and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

All Discovering courses rely on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a primary resource and a guide to theological accuracy. The *Catechism* can also serve as a valuable source of information and inspiration for the teacher. We encourage you to review and reflect on certain sections of the *Catechism* as you prepare to teach this course.

The *Catechism* section “The Sacrament of the Eucharist,” comprising numbers 1322 to 1419, provides extensive information about the celebration of the Eucharist. Though this course of six sessions cannot cover all the aspects of the Eucharist set forth in the *Catechism*, it does provide a good deal of help in understanding the following:

- the Jewish Passover tradition (nos. 1333–1335)
- the Last Supper narrative (nos. 1337–1344)
- the Eucharist as celebrated in the early church (nos. 1345–1347)
- the order of the celebration of the Eucharist (nos. 1348–1355)

In addition, the *Catechism* poses the question, “How Is the Liturgy Celebrated?” and answers it by exploring the signs and symbols, words and actions, singing and music, and holy images that are proper to the celebration of the Eucharist (nos. 1145–1162). This section provides particularly fruitful background reading as you prepare to teach this course.

Teaching This Course

Each course in the Discovering Program consists of two components: a teaching guide like this one that fully describes the course goals, objectives, content, and session plans, and a companion student booklet. The booklet is not a conventional textbook, in that the students are never expected to read it outside of the sessions. In fact, substantial reading is never required as a regular feature of the learning process. Nor does the booklet look like a textbook; for instance, it contains no recognizable chapters as one would expect in a standard text. The student booklet for each Discovering course, rather, is to be used only in conjunction with the session plans described in the teaching guide. It is effective in this way because of the following features:

- The booklet provides a kind of running summary of the themes and essential information that are presented through the engaging session plans. This gives the students a record of what they have learned in the course. It is also a helpful feature when a student misses a session; at the next session, you can ask him or her to briefly review relevant pages from the booklet.
- The booklet uses sidebars related to the main topics to draw the young people further into the material and enrich their learning. You may use the sidebars in any way that seems appropriate—perhaps as discussion-starters, topics for journal entries, or simply focal points for a brief silent reflection.
- The booklet includes an occasional personal reflection or journal-writing activity that students are asked to complete quietly on their own.

- The booklet presents activities designed for use in small groups—such as discussion-starters, role-plays, and vignettes.
- Finally, the booklet's attractive design—using original art, bold colors, interesting type, evocative photos, and so on—is intended to support the total learning process.

Student Booklet Sidebars

The student booklet includes a number of quotes that are not central elements of the course content. Set off graphically from the other booklet materials, these sidebars are generally not referred to in the session plans. They are included in the booklet to spark the students' interest and imagination. As you prepare for each session, reflect on the sidebars and decide if you wish to use any of them in your teaching.

Student Booklet Bound into the Teaching Guide

For your convenience and easy reference, a complete copy of the student booklet for *Celebrating the Eucharist* is bound into the back of this guide. You may find it helpful to tab or mark the booklet pages related to a given session as you prepare to teach it. That will make it easy to flip back and forth between the guide and the booklet.

Student Booklet Pages in the Session Plans

As a visual aid, reduced versions of some student booklet pages are reproduced in the left-hand margin of the session plans. Such pages appear at the beginning of the related instructions. If more than one booklet page is involved in an activity, only the first of those pages is reproduced in the margin.

Prayer Experiences

Establish a prayer area within the room where you will meet with your group. This area will become a focal point for a time of prayer during each session. An enthroned Bible in a designated place in the prayer area attests to the importance of the Scriptures and of shared prayer. Items such as a candle and a plant or flowers are recommended for the enthroned Bible.

Prayer opportunities are part of each session. Everyone is called to prayer through simple words and actions, such as lighting a candle, moving to a new location in the room, asking for silence, or playing music conducive to silent reflection. These simple gestures help settle everyone down and center them for reflection and prayer.

The Bible

The Bible is another key tool in the Discovering curriculum. The students in this course occasionally use Bibles and must be able to look up scriptural citations.

If possible, provide a Bible for each of your students. Ideally, everyone would get the same translation. If this is not possible, try to divide your group into smaller groups of people with the same translation. Comparing the various translations can add a further dimension to your discussions throughout the course, though it may slightly complicate some activities and discussions.

The following translations are among the best available for Catholic young people:

- The New American Bible (1991). This version is a modern translation of the Scriptures that is faithful to ancient sources. It is approved for use during the liturgy of the word and therefore will be somewhat familiar to the students.
- The New Jerusalem Bible (1990). This translation uses contemporary language, comes closest to using inclusive language, and provides theological insights through extensive notations that accompany the text. It is also an approved translation for use in the liturgy of the word.
- The New Revised Standard Version (1989). This translation uses gender-inclusive language when such use is consistent with rigorous biblical scholarship.
- The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version (1993). This translation attempts to capture and convey the meaning set forth in the original texts, in language that is accessible to a broad readership. It is truer to the original meanings than paraphrased versions, and it is presented in language that young people can more readily understand. Most students respond enthusiastically to this translation. It can be obtained from the Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson.

Some of the scriptural excerpts in this course are cited as adapted. Such passages generally have been adapted to make the language more accessible and to avoid exclusive language.

Some Preparation Needs

Involving other parish staff and preparing yourself. Passing on to the next generation the gift of celebrating the Eucharist is the challenge and privilege of the parish community. This course, *Celebrating the Eucharist*, aims to help you do that. Of all the courses in the Discovering Program, this one is most closely related to the week-in-and-week-out life of the local church. It is designed with the full awareness that many of the young people who gather in its sessions to explore the Eucharist together on a given weekday are also at Mass in the parish church on the weekend. The two experiences—this course, and the Saturday evening or Sunday celebration of the Eucharist—should be mutually enriching. In your work with *Celebrating the Eucharist*, make every effort to enlist the interest and cooperation of your pastor and parish ministry staff. Also ask them to help you approach this course like an *amateur* in the best sense of that term—“one who teaches and celebrates because she or he loves it.” Young people know “professional amateurs” when they see them. These devotees, if given half a chance, will choose to do what they love, and they will do it well. So, commit to this course as you do to your most loved, free, creative activities—reading and writing poetry, playing the piano, golfing, fishing, or whatever.

Creating a welcoming environment. Try to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for the group by making the room in which you meet less formal than the typical classroom with its rows of desks. For example,

you might want to rearrange desks or chairs in circles rather than in rows. At the same time, keep the environment conducive to learning. Young people blossom in an atmosphere that is accepting and open, but they also want clear structures and limits within which to learn. Unclear limits can contribute to an atmosphere of confusion, lack of respect, and chaotic behavior. Keep in mind that the site and your budget will influence how much you can do with your environment.

Facilitating participation in the Eucharist. Although this course may be complemented by a class celebration of the Eucharist, directors of religious education and religion teachers in parish schools indicate that such a celebration is highly unlikely in most underserved parishes today. Instead it might be possible for the young people to expand their participation in the parish's Saturday evening or Sunday Eucharist, by taking an active role in its celebration.

If a class celebration of the Eucharist is possible, the following general preparations need to be made:

- Well before the celebration, meet with the pastor to plan a time and a place for it. Check with him about his views and wishes concerning the extent of the students' participation. Give him a copy of the student booklet. Tell him about the work you will be doing with the students.
- Consider inviting parents or other family members to your group's liturgy. However, keep in mind that if family members are invited, the tone of the celebration will change considerably, and the students might see the celebration as a kind of performance in which they are the actors and their families are passive spectators.
- Make clear to the students the areas in which they may participate and contribute. Tell them about the roles they may play. Your diocese will have requirements for various liturgical roles. Check with your diocesan liturgical, or worship, office for these requirements. Normally, young people may assume the following roles:
 - acolyte, or altar server
 - minister of hospitality, or welcomer or usher
 - lector, or reader (if they have received the sacraments of initiation)
 - musician or leader of song
 - bearer of the gifts of bread and wine
- Consider also having two students prepare the altar by spreading out the altar cloth and placing the sacramentary on the altar as well as arranging lit candles and flowers near the altar and ambo.
- Consider involving the students in making the bread for the Eucharist. Ask your pastor about this; many dioceses have specific guidelines regarding the use of bread for the eucharistic celebration.
- Consider whether you want to share a meal after the celebration of the Eucharist. Here, too, enlist the young people's ideas. If you do gather for a meal, let it be a respectful sharing of the fruits of the earth and "the work of human hands."

Optional exercises at the end of the procedure plans for sessions 4, 5, and 6 provide more details for planning this celebration.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Discovering Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways.

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Discovering Program provides the goals for all the courses in the curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. The coordinator’s manual identifies the objectives for each course in the curriculum. Each course, in turn, supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Celebrating the Eucharist*

Goals

The goals for this course in the Discovering Program are as follows:

- that the students understand the Eucharist as a community celebration commemorating the Lord’s Supper
- that they identify themselves as active members of the eucharistic assembly who become one with Christ and with one another
- that they assume greater individual responsibility to consciously and intentionally celebrate the Eucharist

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the course goals. The objectives of *Celebrating the Eucharist* that follow are phrased as tasks for the young people.

Session 1: “Celebrating Rites”

The students will do the following:

- identify the characteristics of a ritual
- demonstrate their understanding of a familiar ritual
- recognize that rituals create and strengthen communities

Session 2: “Gathering a People”

The students will do the following:

- relate the Jews’ celebration of Passover to the Last Supper
- relate the church’s celebration of the Eucharist to the Last Supper
- assess their participation in the celebration of the Eucharist

Session 3: “Journeying Together”

The students will do the following:

- identify how the eucharistic celebration evolved
- recognize that the eucharistic celebration is rooted in the Scriptures and in the Tradition of the church

Session 4: “Sharing the Word”

The students will do the following:

- recognize the value of sharing stories
- recognize that the liturgy of the word invites the assembly to hear and respond as God’s people

Session 5: “Breaking Bread Together”

The students will do the following:

- connect the liturgy of the Eucharist to the Last Supper
- identify the actions of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving in the liturgy of the Eucharist
- be aware of the church’s teaching on the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament

Session 6: “Being Called and Sent”

The students will do the following:

- recognize that the celebration of the Eucharist calls them to loving service
- recognize that the call to service is a gift and a task
- identify ways they can serve

RESOURCES

Background

The following books can provide a rich background for your teaching and for your own study and prayerful reflection on the Eucharist. In addition to these, you can trust any materials on the Eucharist and the liturgy published by Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, and by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Bausch, William J. *A New Look at the Sacraments*. Rev. ed. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983.

Guzie, Tad. *The Book of Sacramental Basics*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

- Hellwig, Monika. *The Meaning of the Sacraments*. Dayton: Pflaum Press, 1981.
- Huck, Gabe, ed. *It's Liturgy: A Sourcebook About Liturgy*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, Archdiocese of Chicago, 1994.
- Searle, Mark. *Liturgy Made Simple*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981.
- Stoutzenberger, Joseph. *Celebrating Sacraments*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1993.

Music

- GIA Publications. *How Excellent! Songs for Teens*. Vols. 1 and 2. Available from GIA Publications, 7404 South Mason Avenue, Chicago, IL 60638; 800-442-1358.
- Neil Diamond. *The Greatest Hits, 1966–1992*. Columbia, 1992. Compact disc 52703.



SESSION

1

Celebrating Rites



AN OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION

Objectives

The students will do the following:

- identify the characteristics of a ritual
- demonstrate their understanding of a familiar ritual
- recognize that rituals create and strengthen communities

Session Steps

This session uses pages 1 to 5 of the student booklet and includes the following steps:

- A. an introduction (15 minutes)
- B. the student booklet activity “Red-Letter Days” (5 minutes)
- C. the student booklet activity “Let the Games Begin!” (10 minutes)
- D. the student booklet activity “You Can Tell a Rite” (15 minutes)
- E. the student booklet activity “The Gift,” and a closing prayer (15 minutes)

BACKGROUND

Ritual gives our life a rhythm and a shape that we may not always realize or appreciate. Ritual is a shared, repeated, symbolic set of actions that are deeply rooted in a life-sustaining past. At their best ritual observances nourish people in the present and strengthen them for the future.

This session invites the students to step back and reflect on the place and value of ritual activity. They are asked to identify a favorite holiday and then determine the specific tradition they most value as part of that holiday.

The students go on to explore the place of ritual celebration. They read about the Olympic Games, which are filled with ritual observance. Even the most inattentive inhabitants of the earth may recognize the Olympic flag and thrill to the passing and lighting of the Olympic torch. In studying the opening ceremony, the students identify the characteristics of a rite. They then return to the traditions of their favorite holiday and seek to name the ways in which these reflect the characteristics of a rite.

The closing activity considers what happens when something that should be remembered and honored is not. A story invites the students to consider a gift given but not remembered and perhaps not received. The story brings into sharp focus the value of memory and gratitude. The closing brief comments and prayer invite the students into an initial consideration of the celebration of the Eucharist. The eucharistic celebration is introduced as a gift that is given and that must also be received by all who are called to the eucharistic table.

PREPARATION

Materials Needed

- name tags
- colored markers
- shelf paper
- masking tape
- student booklets, one for each student
- blank self-adhesive labels, one for each student
- pens or pencils
- a table and a tablecloth; a Bible; a pillow or a Bible stand; a candle and matches; a plant or a vase of flowers; a cross or a crucifix; a chalice or a goblet; a large plate; and wheat and grapes, or pictures of them (These items are referred to in subsequent materials needed lists simply as an enthroned Bible.)
- music for reflection, and a tape or CD player (optional)

Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Purchase or make name tags large enough to accommodate the students' first name and a word or phrase they are asked to write as part of step A.
- For step A.* Post a 6-foot-long sheet of shelf paper about shoulder height along the front of the meeting room.
- For step E.* Prepare the meeting room for the closing prayer as described in step E.
- For step E.* Choose music for the closing prayer if you so desire, as suggested in step E.
- If you wish to change the procedure to better fit your teaching preferences or the learning style of your group, see the Options section at the end of this session plan.

Teacher Prayer

We read in 1 Kings 19:9–13 that Elijah waited for the Lord to pass by. Elijah endured a wind forceful enough to crush rocks, but the Lord was not there. Elijah experienced the frightening power of an earthquake and a fire, but the Lord was not there. Then Elijah heard the quietest possible whisper. And there he found the Lord.

When the Lord came, Elijah was ready. He was present and open. He showed up and paid attention. At the beginning of this course, take time to settle on a small ritual that puts you in the best possible attitude of prayer. Select a place and put there an object that helps your prayer—a holy picture, a cross, or any other item.

Turn to 1 Kings 19:9–13 and slowly read this passage. Find in yourself the quiet place where your prayer can continue to grow.

PROCEDURE

A. Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Make everything ready before the session. Then greet the students and talk casually with them for a few moments as they arrive.

2. When everyone is ready, pass out name tags and colored markers, and ask the students to write on their tag the name they wish to be called. Also make a name tag for yourself. If the young people seem to resist the use of name tags, emphasize that this is for your benefit, so that you can get to know them more quickly.

3. Give the young people a minute to think of a favorite holiday and of the tradition they like best about it. Emphasize the importance of settling on a holiday that has a specific favorite tradition they are willing to share with the whole group. You might give them a few examples, such as the Fourth of July with a special tradition of going on a family picnic in the mountains,



Booklet page 2

C. Booklet Activity: “Let the Games Begin!” (10 minutes)

1. Ask the students to turn to “Let the Games Begin!” on pages 2 to 3 of their booklet. Read the title and invite the students to tell one another what they know about the Olympic Games. This discussion should give you an idea of the depth and breadth of their interest in and awareness of the games.

2. Read aloud the essay “Let the Games Begin!” or ask strong readers to take turns reading it.

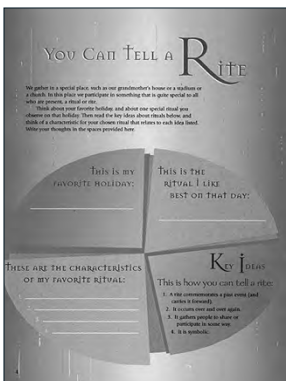
D. Booklet Activity: “You Can Tell a Rite” (15 minutes)

1. Direct the students to “You Can Tell a Rite” on page 4 of their booklet. Recall that the Olympic Games are a ritual celebrated by nations from all over the world. Refer to the four characteristics of rites listed under the title “Key Ideas” on page 4 of the booklet. Using the Olympic Games, check to see if the students can give examples of each characteristic. Responses might be the following:

1. The Olympic Games commemorate the original Greek Olympics and the past Olympics of the modern era.
2. They occur every two years, alternating between Winter and Summer Games.
3. They gather those present as players, spectators, and fans, as well as the larger world community, whose participation is significant but less evident.
4. They use symbolism in the procession of the nations with their flags, the raising of the Olympic flag, and the carrying and lighting of the torch. [Invite the students’ comments about other symbolic words or actions, such as the Olympic oath.]

2. Refer back to the students’ favorite holiday and the associated tradition or ritual they like the best. Ask them to read the introductory paragraphs on page 4 of their booklet and to write their favorite holiday and ritual in the spaces provided. Point out that they are then to identify how their special ritual embodies each of the four characteristics listed under the title “Key Ideas.” Emphasize that they may not be able to do this for all the characteristics, but they should do so for as many as they can.

Give the students about 5 minutes to complete this task, and circulate and help where necessary. Expect the young people to use terms such as *tradition* rather than *ritual* in their responses. Keep in mind that at this point they may not be able to make the connections fully. Though young adolescents sometimes are conservative about maintaining family rituals, or traditions, they generally have not had much experience analyzing them.



Booklet page 4

3. Read aloud the section “A Place at the Table” at the bottom of page 5. Then check to see that the students recognize that they are part of the church “family,” which remembers and celebrates, and that its celebration is the Eucharist, or Mass (the latter term may be more familiar to the students).

4. Gather the students around the bare table you set up earlier. Invite them to help turn the table into a focal point for a closing prayer. Give as many students as possible a role to play. For example, assign each student one item to carry forward and place on the table. After the cloth is brought forward and spread on the table, the order in which the other items are brought forth is not important. You may want to begin playing reflective music quietly while the young people are working.

5. When the table is all set, light the candle. Then read the following litany, inviting the students to respond after each invocation, “We offer thanks and praise”:

- ▶ Lord, you bless us with the gift of life . . .
- Lord, you gather us in your name . . .
- Lord, your life teaches us how to live . . .
- Lord, you give us the gift of yourself . . .
- Lord, you ask us to share a meal in your memory . . .
- Lord, you call us to imitate your self-giving love . . .

Bring this litany to a close by offering a prayer such as the following:

- ▶ It is good and right that we offer you our thanks and praise this day. Help us to see that we have a place at the table of the Eucharist. Draw us close to you. Draw us close to one another as we grow to understand that we have a place at your table. Amen.

6. Extinguish the candle. Then thank the students for their contributions, and gather the booklets as they leave.

OPTIONS

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then the following optional approaches.

For step A. Solicit the students’ help in establishing a set of ground rules for class discussions. As they offer their ideas, translate them into brief, positive statements. Include the following guidelines if the students do not offer them:

- Everyone deserves respect; therefore, no put-downs are allowed.
- One person speaks at a time; everyone else listens.
- Everyone makes an effort to contribute positively to each activity.

Write the guidelines on newsprint and mount it in the meeting room for this and subsequent sessions.

For step C. Entertain a broader discussion of rituals that create and strengthen communities of all kinds. Draw on rites of initiation (such as initiation into clubs), rites of passage (such as graduation from high school), and ritual activities peculiar to some sports (such as high fives, handshakes, the use of symbolic colors, and the use of mascots).

For step D. Refer to the four characteristics of a rite listed under the title “Key Ideas” on page 4 of the student booklet. Encourage the students to name other rituals, or traditions, besides those associated with their favorite holiday, and to see if they can identify the characteristics that qualify them as rites.

For step E. Locate the CD *The Greatest Hits, 1966–1992*, by Neil Diamond, and read the lyrics from the song “Morningside” (see the Resources section at the end of the course introduction for details). The story “The Gift” in the student booklet is based on this song. Decide if you think the students would be interested in hearing the song on the CD. Keep in mind that this kind of music might strike them as old-fashioned!

For step E. If you are aware of a recent experience or event that the students shared and that lends itself to ritual, you might want to help the students create such a ritual to express their awareness and emotions. For example, they might create a ritual to mourn the loss of a person or place, to celebrate a victory that means a lot to them, or to share some other sorrow or joy that particularly affected them as a class.

For step E. Invite the students to make a flag that represents them as a group. Suggest a cooperative effort rather than a competition. Divide the class into teams of four or five each. Give each team a set of colored markers and two or three sheets of white paper. Challenge each team to make a religion class flag that includes the following:

- a symbol that shows they are members of their parish
- a symbol that shows they are studying the celebration of the Eucharist, or Mass
- a symbol that shows they are a unified group

If you judge it feasible, spend some time brainstorming ideas. List these on newsprint as the students offer them. They might suggest a star, a heart, a tree, or a sun to represent them as a group, or religious symbols such as a cross or such as a cup and bread. Parish symbols may be drawn from what they have observed around them. For example, if the parish is Holy Spirit, the students might want to incorporate a flame or a dove.

Note: This option will likely take considerably more time than the exercise described in the procedure plan itself. If you choose this option, you will probably need to adjust the other steps to give more time for this one.