

Introduction to *Pray and Celebrate: Exploring the Sacramental Life with Ages 6–8*

WELCOME

The Church, “In the course of the year . . . unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from his incarnation and nativity through his ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord” (Sacrosanctum Concilium 102 § 2; CCC 1194).

Although catechesis is ideally a year-round process, the reality is that many programs have a fall to spring cycle. In recognition of this fact, CTL begins each year in the fall, and includes year-round sessions for all age levels.

Pray and Celebrate opens children ages 6–8 to the awareness of the sacramentality of the Church and the world. Interactive reflections and fun activities make liturgy-based learning interesting and accessible for children as they deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith and the relationship between the sacraments and the Church’s liturgy.

As part of the *Celebrating the Lectionary* series, this multi-dimensional resource was created collaboratively by faith formation experts, Scripture scholars, liturgists, and theologians in order to allow all parish members to engage with the liturgy at their own level without diminishing the depth of meaning and content. The format allows you to tailor the materials to fit your parish’s program, handpicking activities, interactive reflections, crafts, and take-home materials to meet your individual group’s needs and interests. The sessions cover the entire year, from September to August.

Using *Pray and Celebrate*, you will embark on a personal journey of faith as you encourage the children in your group to do the same. As the children develop their understanding of the liturgy and sacraments, you will be given the opportunity to reinvigorate your own faith.

CATECHESIS AND PRAY AND CELEBRATE

Pray and Celebrate, like all the age-appropriate packets for *Celebrating the Lectionary*, serves the faith community’s catechetical task of helping its members to know, celebrate, and contemplate the mystery of Christ (*General Directory for Catechesis* 74). *Pray and Celebrate* does this by blending different forms of catechesis such as the exploration of Scripture in light of the liturgy, teaching, and tradition of the Church; the application of the liturgy, Scripture, and Catholic teaching to our times; and the formation of families in the context of the Catholic faith.

New this year: *Pray and Celebrate* now includes session plans for all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation!

The catechesis in *Pray and Celebrate* is liturgical in nature. Centered on the Lectionary readings for Sundays and Holy Days, the session plans incorporate catechesis on liturgical and sacramental actions, liturgical symbols and rites, and the liturgical year. The catechesis in *Pray and Celebrate* leads the children and their families to a deeper appreciation of the liturgy and their active role in it by encouraging them to continue on the path of conversion to Christ through both prayer and catechesis. Through the children and parents formed by *Pray and Celebrate* and other *Celebrating the Lectionary* resources, the liturgy comes to life in the world. Those who have been evangelized become evangelizers (*National Catechetical Directory* 17D and GDC 58)!

Based on the principle that all members of the faith community are involved in their own journey of ongoing conversion to Christ, the themes, focus statements, and focus passages for each Sunday and Holy Day are the same for every resource within the *Celebrating the Lectionary* program. Whether parishes or schools use *Celebrating the Lectionary* for one age level or for multiple age levels, or whether the sessions happen for groups at the same time or different times, the identical themes, focus statements, and focus passages allow for conversations about the liturgy, the Lectionary readings, and Church teachings to occur in families, among small faith communities, and across generations. Ultimately, liturgy is brought to life, the desire for ongoing catechesis recognized, and communion with God in Christ deepened in the lives of children and adults.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN 6–8 YEARS OLD

Children ages 6–8 love to hear and read stories and to ask questions. They are children of discovery—inquisitive about all life has to offer and curious about themselves, others, and God. As they learn about God and hear stories from Scripture, they are prone to take them as literal and historical truth. The session plans in *Pray and Celebrate* are written to address the children where they are at in their physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development, with the intention of engaging them as whole people.

At every age, faith is a free gift from God to which we freely respond. Faith is also a personal relationship with God that is developed in and through our relationships with others—family, friends, and the Church. God himself is a communion of persons in relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who calls us to himself. Children 6–8 years old develop their relationship with God based on the concepts of good and bad. They think of God like a parent who rewards them when they do good and punishes them when they make bad choices. However, this is not the image of God that we want them to retain. God is Love! God is mystery!

The pedagogy in *Pray and Celebrate* takes the active engagement of the children in the session materials as its core principle. Activities are intended to be tactile and fun, and to provide opportunity for the inquisitive nature of the children to express itself. The sessions also present age-appropriate opportunities for the children to reflect on Scripture readings and Church teaching and draw on their developing reason. Through prayer, song, Scripture, Church teaching, and activities *Pray and Celebrate* develops in the children the belief that the goodness of God is truly with them, in the world around them, and in the Church as we celebrate the Sundays, Holy Days, and other solemnities and feasts of the liturgical year.

PRAYER AND PRAY AND CELEBRATE

For children and adults of all ages, prayer involves the raising of the mind and heart to God. Prayers can be offered in praise of God, in petition to God, in thanksgiving, and in intercession for others. Prayers are also either private or public. When the children in your group pray at the beginning and end of each session, it is a form of public prayer offered as a group. Plan to make these times consistent at the beginning and end of each session. The children will then look forward to them as part of the session routine, but different from the teaching time and the activity time. Liturgical music is an integral part of the prayer and helps connect the children to the parish community's celebration of the liturgy.

During the prayer at the beginning and end of each session, you are much more a prayer leader than a catechist. At these times you will not be conveying knowledge to the children, but will be evoking a sense of the presence of God in and around them. To do this effectively, let go of the details of the session to come or the session just completed and center yourself in God as you prepare to lead the prayer. This will enable you to be a channel for God's grace. Through your example the children themselves will learn to center themselves in God.

Each session plan in *Pray and Celebrate* includes a gathering prayer and closing prayer. These prayers are adapted from the gathering prayer and closing prayer in the Prayer Services found in the *Program Guide*. If your age group participates in a gathering prayer or closing prayer with other age groups, you might choose not to use the prayers in session plans. Or, you might choose to adapt them by simply using the Sign of the Cross and a shorter spontaneous prayer as you open and close your session. The wording of the prayers in the session plan is simply a guide. Use the prayers as given or adapt them to better meet the needs of the children in your group. Occasionally, suggestions are given for how to integrate an activity from the session into the closing prayer. Though a session might often seem rushed at the end because time is running out, you will want to refocus the children, at least for a brief moment, in order to conclude with prayer. Use the closing prayer as given or ask the children to contribute their own prayers based on the session's focus. No matter the prayers you choose, always remember the goal of prayer is a deepening yours and the children's relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

MUSIC AND PRAY AND CELEBRATE

Music plays an important role in good liturgical celebrations. Music evokes a sense of the transcendent God in both children and adults. The words of hymns and songs give voice to what we believe and help draw us closer to God the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Melodies combine with words to bring us in touch with our thoughts and feelings about God, others, ourselves, and the world around us.

The liturgical music suggestions in *Pray and Celebrate* are appropriate for children 6–8 years old. They were chosen to introduce these children to liturgical music, both traditional and contemporary, that is sound liturgically, musically, and pastorally. The suggested hymns and songs are sung in most parishes and Catholic schools, and are available from major liturgical music publishers.

Pray and Celebrate gives four liturgical music suggestions for each session, two for the Gathering and two for the Closing. As the leader of the session, you have a number of options for the use of music. You might choose one song for the beginning of the session and one for the closing. Or, since children are comfortable with repetition, you might choose the same song for both. Prior to a particular season of the liturgical year, you might plan the music you will use and decide on two or three songs that you will use throughout the season. Doing so will help the children connect with and attribute meaning to the season.

If you or an assistant are able to lead the music, that is ideal. Live leadership of hymns and songs in faith formation sessions mirrors good liturgical practice in the Sunday assembly. Another option would be to see if any of the children's parents is a cantor or belongs to a parish choir and ask him or her to lead the music for the session. When it is not an option to have the music led "live" in person, check with your director of faith formation or liturgical music to see if a CD of the music is available. You might also check iTunes to see if the suggested music is downloadable. If the suggested music is not sung in your parish or school community, you might check with the director of liturgy or liturgical music for other appropriate choices.

USING PRAY AND CELEBRATE EFFECTIVELY

The Scope and Sequence chart is available in the *Program Guide* and online at www.LTP.org. Ask your director of faith formation for a copy or download one from the Web site.

See the end of the Introduction for a concise list of the documents and their abbreviations.



Before the Session In preparation for each session, you will want to read through the following:

- *Scope and Sequence*: The Scope and Sequence chart gives the date, liturgical day, theme, focus passage(s), focus statement, and the age-appropriate doctrinal points of each session. Take special note of the focus and theme and reflect on how they tie into the overall direction of the season.
- *Season Background*: The Season Background provides in-depth information on the seasons of the liturgical year, solemnities, and feasts, as well as an overview of the seasonal Scripture readings. This information gives you historical and critical background to rely on as you lead your sessions.
- All of the Scripture readings for the Sunday or Holy Day liturgy.
- *Scripture Background*: The Scripture Backgrounds contain commentaries on all the readings, and, when appropriate, make explicit the connection to the day's theme. They offer a sidebar with doctrinal connections to the readings. These connections come from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Church documents. One or more of these doctrinal references inform each session.

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Introduction to PRAY AND CELEBRATE

Once you have read all of the preliminary materials, plan for your session. Read through the week's Preparation Page, Session Plan, Catechist Sheets, and Activity Sheets. While reading through these resources, do the following:

- Reflect on the meaning of the focus in relation to the overall trajectory of the season.
- Review the Session Plan and decide how you are going to tailor it to your group. Select the activities that you will be using, and make notes in the margins of other resources, such as the Church documents that you plan on using or information that you plan on mentioning, such as information from the Scripture Background.
- Read the Preparation Page for information on what you need to do before the session. Any items that you may need to bring with you are printed in bold. Pay careful attention to the materials that you will need for the activities that you have selected to do.
- Use the Materials Needed space in the margin to make a list of everything that you need to bring with you to the session. You may want to cross or check off items as you put them in your car or bag so that you are sure that you have everything.

A sample pack of Color Activity Sheets is provided with *Pray and Celebrate*. This year the Color Activity Sheets provide a fun, exciting way to experience and learn about the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father, and the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Order copies for all the children in your group online at www.LTP.org.

During the Session Use the Session Plan to lead the following activities:

- *Gathering:* As the children begin to arrive, direct their energy toward a group conversation or helping you with simple classroom tasks. Have each child find his or her nametag. Once everyone has arrived, focus attention by taking attendance, celebrating birthdays, and leading the opening prayer ritual. Begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross. Then, use the prayer text as a guide for the opening prayer.
- *Introducing the Word:* These activities prepare the children to listen to the Scripture reading by helping them to focus on ways in which it relates to their lives.
- *Exploring the Word:* Reading the focus Scripture reading from the Lectionary or Lectionary for Masses with Children or using the Catechist Sheet provided, introduce the children to the focus reading in a way that is interactive and interesting to them. Pay particular attention to the Church Teaching section, which includes an explanation of the focus doctrinal connection for the session. We encourage you to put this in your own words and not simply read it to the children. Use the interactive reflection questions or activities to help the children better understand the Church Teaching.
- *Integrating the Word:* During this part of the session, you will use creative and fun activities, games, and guided reflections to reinforce the Scriptural message and focus of the session.
- *Closing:* End each session with a brief and quiet moment of reflection in which you pray to God and thank him for your time together. Use the text for the Closing Prayer as a guide for your own prayer.

After the Session Use the following tools to help yourself and the children in your group to live the liturgy throughout the week to come:

- You may elect to send some worksheets, activities, or completed crafts home with the children, explaining to their parents that they are to be used as a reminder to keep the focus Scripture reading in mind all week long.
- You might occasionally ask the children at the beginning of the next session what they did during the previous week to live as Jesus taught us based on the focus from your last session.
- Use the After-Session Reflection Questions to guide your own spiritual journey and behavior. The first after-session reflection question is intended to help you evaluate the session and your experience of how it went. The second after-session reflection question is meant to assist you in reflection on your own faith journey as you continue to serve as a faith formation leader with the children.
- Reflect on both what seemed to be readily understood by the children and what engaged the children in interesting and exciting ways. Ask yourself also what seemed to be difficult for them to understand or boring for them. Use your conclusions to inform your plans for the next session. Go to other catechists or your director with any questions.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR YOUR SESSION

- *Setting Up Your Space:* Arrive at least 30 minutes early in order to set up your room. Set out nametags and all prepared materials. Arrange the furniture how you need it. Bring materials to cover desks and tables if you are doing a messy activity. If you use a “borrowed” classroom or other parish or school space, be sure to clean up after yourself, erase blackboards or marker boards, and return all of the furniture to its original position.
- *Creating a Prayer Center:* Set aside a space for a prayer center. See the weekly Preparation Page for seasonal ideas. Cover a small table, sturdy box, or counter with a cloth of the liturgical color for the season (as indicated on the Preparation Page). Add a Bible or Lectionary, candle, and crucifix or cross. Depending on the time during the liturgical year and the content of the session, add a symbol of creation or a liturgical symbol, such as flowers, harvest foods, a Rosary, an Advent wreath, or a saint statue. Have matches or a candle lighter handy. Instill in the children the importance of this small ritual, as it will show them the importance of ritual in establishing our Catholic identity and help them make a connection between the faith formation session and the Sunday or Holy Day liturgy.
- *Welcoming the Children:* Your session starts as soon as the first child arrives. Welcome the children by name and help them to find their nametags. Engage the children as they arrive by providing crayons and paper, asking pre-session reflective questions, or encouraging the children to help you serve the group by setting up the prayer center or distributing materials. You might want to have some soft music playing in the background as the children arrive.
- *Parent and Volunteer Involvement:* Involving parents and volunteers in your group will be a tremendous benefit for everyone involved. If you feel that you could use an extra set of hands during your sessions, solicit some help (parents, youths preparing for Confirmation, and elders are good people to ask). Before soliciting volunteers, however, be sure to check with the director about parish and diocese requirements for volunteers who work with children.
- *Family Considerations:* Learn about your group members’ families and be sensitive to differences of ethnicity and race, socio-economic background, language, religions practiced by other family members, and nationality. Be considerate of single-parent families and familial issues or concerns such as illness or death that may be occurring. Teach the children how their faith can help them

The *Word to Go* /
La palabra para llevar,
bilingual weekly handouts,
can be ordered from
Liturgy Training
Publications at
www.LTP.org.

through times of sadness and how, as members of a community of faith, we can offer encouragement and support to one another in happy and sad times.

- *Multi-lingual Considerations:* You may find that some of the children in your group do not have English-speaking parents. By providing bilingual take-home materials, you can involve these parents in their children's faith formation. CTL provides many English/Spanish resources that you can use, including *The Word to Go/La palabra para llevar*. Contact your director of faith formation if you feel that your group is in need of some bilingual materials or other language-related support.
- *Adapting for Special Needs:* If you have a child with special needs, take time to learn about the situation from his or her parents or guardian. Be cooperative and understanding as you work as a team with them and your director. When preparing your sessions, adapt activities to include the special needs child or children without overly drawing undue attention to them. You may need to leave space for wheelchair access, or make a quiet space with activities or toys for a child who cannot remain seated. In some cases, you may want to explain a child's special needs to the rest of the group, and tell them how they can help. Be sensitive about redirecting any comments, stares, or gestures that might make the special needs child uncomfortable. Remind your class that God makes each person with special talents and needs and loves everyone equally.
- *Establishing Consistency:* A consistent routine helps children to know what is expected of them and stay focused and on task. Establish routines with your class that are repeated each week. Be sure to write down your routines in case you ever need to use a substitute catechist.
- *Discipline:* The words "disciple" and "discipline" come from the same Latin root *discere* which means "to learn." Keep this in mind as you work with your group—discipline should always be instructive rather than punitive. Always let children know that it is the action, not the child, that is unacceptable, and explain what the right course of action might have been in the situation. Follow your parish or school discipline policy if the action requires a more formal punishment. Communicate ongoing problems verbally and in writing to the director of the program.
- *Affirmation:* All persons, especially children, desire encouragement and support when they do something well. Offer a positive word when a child responds to a question with an insightful comment or correct answer. Be generous with your compliments as the children work on craft projects and cooperatively participate in activities.

KEEPING GOD'S CHILDREN SAFE

As adults who work with children and care for their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs for the time in which they are with us, we are morally obligated to provide a safe and nurturing environment for them. As a catechist or assistant who leads the sessions given in *Pray and Celebrate*, it is necessary for you to participate in the training required by your diocese and to cooperate with the mandated background screenings before you undertake your ministry. If you recruit other parents or adult volunteers to help with particular sessions, check with your director of faith formation or school principal regarding the conditions under which they might work with the children. Doing so helps ensure the sessions run smoothly and, most importantly, that God's children can develop their relationship with Christ in a safe environment.

LIVING THE LITURGY TOGETHER

You may feel some anxiety as you prepare to lead or assist in your first session. You may ask yourself: Do I know enough about my religion to share it with others? Do my sins or shortcomings make me unqualified to perform this ministry? Many lay people who serve the Church ask themselves these questions. Remember that Jesus taught us that anyone who does good works in his name is serving as his disciple (Mark 9:38–43, 45, 47–48). By virtue of our Baptism, we are called to embrace our service in the Church according to the gifts and talents God has given us. Love and serve the Lord in your faith formation ministry without feeling you need to be perfect in all you say and do. Just as you

grow in your relationship with God each and every day, so you can build upon your successes and learn from your failures in the sessions with the children.

As you approach the task ahead, remember that you are not alone. Among the many resources available to you are other catechists, the director of faith formation, members of the clergy, fellow parish members, and your friends and family. Rely on these people to help you to explore your faith, serve the children in your group, and brainstorm session activities. You may want to invite the other catechists to set aside a time before each session to meet briefly to share challenges and successes and to pray as a group.

By taking on this ministry, you are embarking on a journey of faith along with the group that you will be leading. This is a tremendous opportunity for you to actively explore your beliefs and celebrate Catholic traditions as you take on the role of a faith formation guide using Jesus Christ as your model. By attending Sunday Mass, praying the liturgy, actively participating in it, absorbing the depths of its meaning, and then approaching each day with a prayerful mindset, you will be given the opportunity to truly live your faith more deeply.

We at Liturgy Training Publications invite you to share your successes and concerns with us. We welcome your feedback on *Pray and Celebrate* and hope that you will take the time to help us make this resource even better. Please email us at ctl@ltp.org.

Doctrinal Connections Key The following is a list of documents that are referenced in the connections to Church teaching and tradition section on the Scripture Background pages. A Scripture Background page appears before each session in *Pray and Celebrate*. Full texts of the following documents can be found in *Vatican Council II, The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Flannery, ed.), on the Vatican Web site (www.vatican.va), on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Web site (www.usccb.org), or online by typing the English or Latin title into a search engine.

- AA: Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.
- AG: Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*.
- BLS: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Built of Living Stones*.
- CGTM: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*.
- CCR: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Called to Compassion and Responsibility*.
- CCC: Interdicasterial Commission for the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- CL: Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*.
- CKS: United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*.
- CSDC: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*.
- CU: Synod of Bishops, *Convenientes ex Universo*.
- DCE: Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*.
- DH: Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*.
- DPPL: Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*.
- DM: Pope John Paul II, *Dives et Misericordia*.
- DV: Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*.
- EM: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Encuentro and Mission*.
- EN: Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.
- GS: Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*.
- GMD: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Go Make Disciples*.
- JPSS: Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*.
- LG: Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*.
- MC: Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*.
- NDC: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*.
- NA: Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*.

NMI: Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Inuente.
OHWB: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Our Hearts Were Burning.
RP: Pope John Paul II, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia.
RH: Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Hominis.
RM: Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater.
RMi: Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio.
RCIA: Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
SCST: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Sharing Catholic Social Teaching.
SRS: Pope John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.
SS: Pope Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi.
SNL: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Strangers No Longer.
TMA: Pope John Paul II, Tertio Millennio Adveniente.
EE: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, To the Ends of the Earth.
USCCA: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.
UUS: Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint.
VS: Pope John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor.
No abbreviation: Pope John Paul II, Day of Pardon Homily.
No abbreviation: Pope Paul VI, Message for the 1976 World Day of Peace.

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