

Leader's Guide for
FIRST COMMUNION: TAKING A PLACE AT THE TABLE
A Catholic Update Video

Please note: This leader's guide was originally written for those using this video program in its VHS format. Those now using this program on DVD may find some references that do not apply to their use (i.e., directions for locating segments, time notations, etc.). We trust that both VHS- and DVD-users will find this guide a valuable resource.

The Use of Video in Faith Formation

Jesus used the “media” of his day to teach. He was a master storyteller. His preaching is full of imagery. His parables are calculated to engage his audience. Through the ages, Christian teachers and preachers have followed Jesus in the creative proclamation of his message.

From the culture of Jesus' time, heavily dependent on *oral communication*—to the advent of *print communication*—to our own time and its dependence on *electronic media*—Christian teachers have adapted their proclamation to each new medium and its particular demands.

Media scholars like Marshall McLuhan remind us of the impact of the medium on the message it carries. *How* we communicate affects *what* we communicate. Electronic media offer us new ways to tell the story of our faith. Father Pierre Babin points out (see *The New Era in Religious Communications*, Pierre Babin with Mercedes Iannone, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991) that the message, as well as the sender and receiver, will be re-shaped in the telling.

Catechesis, as a part of the total evangelization process, must touch the learners' hearts and shine the light of faith on their lives. It must connect to the learners' experience or risk being discarded as irrelevant. To be effective, catechists must learn how to make the best use of the electronic media available in our culture, aware of the particular medium's strengths and weaknesses.

Video is a very popular, familiar and accessible part of our electronic culture. It draws us in, captures our imaginations and touches us on a deep, emotional level. As it speaks to our experience and utilizes several of our senses, its message is more likely to be heard and remembered. By integrating quality video programs into the catechetical process, catechists can share the message more effectively.

At the same time, as television becomes a more pervasive part of our lives, we can be lulled into thinking that it can do everything for us—inform, entertain, shop, even worship. The reality is that it can't and shouldn't do everything. As Pierre Babin emphasizes, electronic media function differently than print media. They appeal first to the *emotional* content of our faith rather than the *intellectual* content. Video cannot begin to convey the amount of information print can. It cannot replace the live presence and personal witness of the catechist. But in a catechetical setting, it can be a powerful part of the “mix of

media” used in proclaiming the message.

How effectively video—or any electronic media—is used in the catechetical setting depends primarily on how prepared the catechist is to use it:

- A preview of the video is essential to determine the best use of the program with a particular group.
- The catechist should select a video program (or section of a video) based on the audience, the purpose, and the availability of competent teachers and other resources and activities to support the theme.
- Sufficient time should be available to introduce the video and to process the viewing experience.

Catechists must realize that *they* control the use of video in their sessions. They might approach a video program in one of two ways: as a skeleton on which to build a presentation or as a way to “enflesh” an existing skeleton.

A video program well-tailored to the needs of a group might be used in its entirety. At other times, catechists may creatively manipulate the video to fit their needs:

- An excerpt may be taken from a longer piece to illustrate a point.
- A video may be shown with the *sound off* to highlight an aspect of the program.
- The “pause” button can be used freely to interject explanations and examples or to elicit reactions.
- The program or excerpt may be repeated to emphasize a point.

The producers of this video program have attempted to craft both medium and message with an awareness of the power of the medium as well as its limitations. They encourage those who use it to study this guide and become familiar with ways to allow this program to supplement their own sharing of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Series

Catholic Update Videos are dynamic new media designed for use with today’s adult learners. Use them in RCIA, faith formation, liturgical and pastoral ministry, faith-sharing groups and sacramental preparation. *Catholic Update Video* offers catechists and pastoral ministers multimedia resources to enhance teaching, presentation and training efforts.

Catholic Update Video’s four segments—story, witness, teaching and musical reflection—are short and can stand alone or be used with others in the program. The format is flexible, making it useful in a variety of group settings as well as for individual viewing. The emphasis is on what video can do best, namely touch us through story (story segment), testimony (witness segment) and song (musical reflection segment) with images and the emotions they carry. But a more “didactic” approach (teaching segment) respects the need to convey a concise core of information.

The general model for catechetical process (life experience, message or doctrine, response) is respected by the order of the four segments, although at times a catechist may choose to use them alone or out of sequence:

- Each program begins with a **story segment** designed to draw viewers in and help them connect their life-experience to the faith-topic.
- The testimony of real-life Catholics in the **witness segment** helps viewers reflect on their own life experience and prepare for group sharing.
- Our teacher briefly highlights some aspects of the topic in the **teaching segment**. Relevant images help to illustrate the points being made. *(This segment is not intended to treat a topic exhaustively nor substitute for a more thorough presentation on the message or doctrine.)*
- Viewers are invited to respond in prayer using the *musical reflection segment*.

The program's host provides a context for each segment. This is designed to help viewers who will see the program from beginning to end. Catechists who use segments individually or out of sequence may wish to prepare their own lead-in. On-screen graphics provide viewers with a question for reflection or sharing between segments.

This leader's guide is an important tool for making the best use of this video program.

It includes the following features:

- **Summary and Suggestions for Use** for each segment.
- **Questions for Sharing** for the story, witness and teaching segments; facilitators can choose from them or use them as models for developing their own questions.
- **Suggestions for Use** for the musical reflection segment provide a model for using this segment in a prayer setting.
- **Resources for Further Study** are listed at the end of this guide.
- **Approximate times** are noted for where each segment begins. *(If the VCR is equipped with an "elapsed time" counter, reset the counter to 0:00:00 at the beginning of the tape and fast-forward to the time listed for the beginning of the desired segment. If the VCR does not have an "elapsed time" counter, the facilitator can fast-forward in the "review" mode [while the VCR is in "play"] to find the gray screen and Catholic Update Video logo that indicate the start of a segment.)*

FIRST COMMUNION: TAKING A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Overview of the program

Growing up: It's an experience we all share. For parents, the experience of watching their children grow can be an adventure; occasionally, a source of heartache; and always, a challenge.

But parents aren't just disinterested observers of their children as they grow. They're involved—as the principal teachers in all parts of their lives. They want their children to discover the best life has to offer, and that includes their faith, their commitment to Christ.

Viewers of this program who are parents are about to share an important moment with their children. First Communion is an initial step toward a full, mature, adult commitment in faith. By taking time now to deepen their own understanding of Eucharist, parents also can help their children understand and appreciate this sacrament as they approach it for the very first time.

This edition of *Catholic Update Video* examines First Communion in four different ways. In the story, a child about ready to celebrate her First Communion learns that receiving the Eucharist means taking on more of a “grown-up” responsibility—to care for others as Jesus did.

Next, some real-life parents reflect on their children's First Communion, and how they as parents felt about that special moment.

Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., offers a third approach: what receiving the Eucharist means within the faith-community as part of an individual's baptismal commitment.

Finally, in the music video, viewers can share some of the warmth, joy and sense of family with which the Hispanic community celebrates the Eucharist through the song “Pan de Vida” (“The Bread of Life”).

Audience

This program is intended for parents who wish to deepen their own understanding of the Eucharist in order to help their children prepare for First Communion. It may be viewed in a group setting or in the home.

Children about to receive the Eucharist for the first time may benefit from watching the story segment with their parents. Parents should first preview the segment alone before watching it with their youngsters in order to prepare for questions the children may ask. (For example, young viewers will probably need a little help understanding how they, like Kimberly, should now be thinking of ways that they can act more like Jesus and take on a new responsibility for others. The issue of death—the grandfather's grieving—may also present questions.)

Teachers and group leaders are aware that some parents may feel uncomfortable talking about

God or their Catholic faith with their children. Congratulate them on continuing the sacramental faith journey of their children. Encourage home discussion of Holy Communion that dovetails with school preparation.

STORY SEGMENT

“Welcome to the Table”

(Begins approximately 2:30 into program.)

Summary

“Welcome to the Table” is about Kimberly, a young girl about to make her First Communion, who learns about taking responsibility for others. She learns this lesson through her relationship with her grandfather, whose world has been turned upside down by the recent death of his wife and the new, unwanted challenges retirement has thrown him.

At the beginning of the story, we meet Frank, Kimberly’s “Granddad,” and Sandy, Kimberly’s mother, in the kitchen. We learn from their discussion that Frank is frustrated and depressed due to his recent retirement and the loss of his wife.

Kimberly enters the room and obviously ignores her grandfather during his attempts to engage her in conversation. Sandy informs her that Granddad is staying for supper. Kimberly protests, saying she planned on going to her girlfriend’s home for a meal. Sandy tells Kimberly she must stay home for dinner; the young girl reacts by leaving the room full of anger towards Granddad, complaining that he forgot her birthday.

Sandy goes to her daughter’s room a few minutes later for a heart-to-heart, “time to grow up” talk. She gently suggests to Kimberly that she should start thinking about other people besides herself all the time. Sandy observes that Granddad is still grieving for Grandma and may be doing so for quite some time.

About a week later, Kimberly and a girlfriend are discussing their upcoming First Communion, talking about dresses and parties. Kimberly tells her friend she’s not sure her Granddad is coming to the party—or if she even wants him at the celebration because “he’d probably just be depressed the whole time.”

The girls then go to religious instruction, where they hear that Communion is something that involves the whole parish community, not just oneself, and that the eucharistic community includes more than just friends and family; it reaches out to the world. The teacher stresses that when the communicants receive Christ for the first time, they’re also pledging to commit themselves to be there for others through Jesus’ words, “Do this in memory of me.”

That night, Sandy helps Kimberly with a First Communion poster project requiring pictures of family members. When Kimberly is reluctant to add Granddad's photo to the poster, Sandy explains that Frank still loves Kimberly but is having a hard time adjusting to changes; she pleads for her daughter to understand. Kimberly reluctantly accepts her mother's idea to visit Granddad's home to secure a photo.

Later at Frank's, Kimberly receives a picture of Granddad and Grandma for her project. In the family photo album she sees a photo from his workplace, and learns that Granddad never had a retirement party: He didn't want to celebrate a retirement he didn't initiate. Kimberly is struck by this and begins to reflect on her Granddad's feelings. The visit ends as Frank tells his granddaughter that her First Communion is a special day and he's looking forward to it.

Two weeks later, at Kimberly's First Communion party, Sandy brings out the cake that reads, "Congratulations, Kimberly and Granddad." She tells Frank that it was Kimberly's idea. Kimberly explains that her preparation class taught her to think about more than just herself. So, she decided to share her party with him, to make it a combination First Communion/retirement party. At the end of the story, it's obvious there's a lot of healing love and understanding flowing between Kimberly and Frank.

Suggestions for use

Since family members—e.g., grandparents and godparents—normally are part of a First Communion celebration, parents may want to consider having a special meal sometime before the event, including those people special to the First Communicant. Begin with a brief prayer or sharing about the Eucharist (see prayer service using the *musical reflection segment* later in this guide).

The activity used by the teacher in the story—making a "family" poster that includes not only the immediate family of the First Communicant, but also parishioners and people in need—might be an activity parents can try with their children. The poster might be used in connection with a viewing of "Welcome to the Table."

Questions for sharing

1. How do the characters in the story remind you of yourself, now or in the past?
 - a. When have you acted like Sandy, trying to make peace in the family and help heal the emotional wounds of another family member?
 - b. When have you been like Frank, hurting but unable to help yourself, not sure how to approach family and friends for answers?
 - c. When have you been like Kimberly, unable to understand—or forgive—another family member's behavior?
 - d. When have you acted like Kimberly, thinking beyond selfish boundaries to use the power of

- forgiveness or love to make someone else's life sparkle?
2. How do the ideas of family, parish family and community relate to each other? What parts of this video story remind you of issues or concerns facing your family, parish or neighborhood?
 3. In what ways does your family heed Christ's eucharistic call to "do this in memory of me" and take responsibility for others? Think of immediate or upcoming opportunities which will allow you to give your time, talent or treasure to others in your family, or to those served by parish ministries and community outreach programs.
 4. What are some of the stories of love or perseverance your family shares about your ancestors? What religious or moral values shaped those stories? How do these family accounts parallel stories from the Bible?
 5. Discuss the idea that "Communion = community + union." Add the thought that the community includes people we may not like.

WITNESS SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 13:45 into program.)

Summary

The witness segment consists of a "collage" of excerpts from interviews conducted with ordinary Catholics. The individuals are real people, not actors. All of them place high value on receiving Eucharist, and actively prepared their children to receive the sacrament. Here is an overview of what the three couples shared:

1. **The Vorwalds** This couple deals mainly with the issue of "externals"—how the things we may have formerly stressed, like parties, dresses, etc., "don't last." More lasting are the lessons learned through the kind of preparation done today, where the activities focus more on the Eucharist itself. Jean Vorwald cites the involvement of the children, the symbols used and how this all affected them as parents. Jim talks about the celebration itself, done at a parish Mass—not a special First Communion Mass. He believes it helped both the families and their children appreciate the communal dimension and focus more on this step in a child's life of faith, rather than on the anxiousness concerning the externals.
2. **The Derksens** This couple describes how they knew their children were ready. They talk about their family prayer experience and also the emphasis on actions—doing deeds of kindness for others which helped their boys focus on the meaning of Eucharist. The couple also describes the community's involvement in the celebration; that the children realized they were joining a larger "family" through the parish community—a step which built upon their Baptism.

- 3. The Nichols** They also focus on how their son was ready, and use the example of the preparation textbook which helped him see the need to care about others. Additionally, they cover the idea of community involvement in the celebration and relate a story of some time afterward when their son expressed his need, during a short vacation, to receive the Eucharist as a source of spiritual nourishment.

Suggestions for use

The witness segment should be introduced as the experience of real-life Catholics: people chosen precisely because they are ordinary people of faith. Stress with participants that those interviewed shared their own thoughts and experiences, not ideas scripted by the producers of this video.

Personal witness is important in most, if not all, groups where faith topics are being discussed. As participants share their stories, they can begin to shape a small faith community among themselves. By supporting the personal faith-journey of others, they can better reflect on their own journey and understand questions they may have.

This collage of interview excerpts models what can emerge from a sharing of faith stories in a small group setting. The group leader should pick a time when group sharing seems appropriate.

It is important to present sharing in a non-threatening way by respecting others' privacy and recognizing the possibility that not all participants may be comfortable talking in a group.

Encourage parents to identify key ideas, words or phrases heard in the video which speak to their own experience. Then use the questions below as discussion-starters about the communal dimension, readiness aspects and externals of First Eucharist. An alternative for those who feel uncomfortable sharing would be to write a personal journal for private use.

Questions for sharing

1. Looking back at your own First Communion day, what are some of the memories you have about the externals: the party with family and friends present, the gifts you received? What memories do you have about the sacrament and liturgy—e.g., the moment you received Christ for the first time, the feelings surrounding that special Mass?
2. How have you introduced your child to Jesus and helped make the child ready for First Communion? How are you considering supplementing your child's preparation classes with related religious educational materials you can share at home? How has this preparation time made you think about spending more time as a family in general religious instruction, prayer and activities?
3. How do you expect the lives of your family to change as a result of your child celebrating First Communion?

4. What can you do to help your child continue to learn more about—and better appreciate—Eucharist after “the big day” is over?
5. What questions do you have about this sacrament that haven’t been discussed or talked about in detail?

TEACHING SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 21:00 into program.)

Summary

Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., is the featured teacher for this segment. He explores what First Communion is about as a continuation of our baptismal commitment. The following outline summarizes Father Tom’s presentation:

- A. The Baptism connection.** When we first entered the Church through the Sacrament of Baptism, we were marked with the Sign of the Cross. Now every time we enter a church and make the Sign of the Cross, we symbolically renew the promises made at Baptism. Baptism naturally leads to Eucharist, which is the repeatable or “renewable” part of Baptism. Another way of saying this: We come “through Baptism” each time we receive Holy Communion.
- B. Waiting for First Communion.** In adult initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are celebrated in one liturgical rite. This is also done for infants in Eastern Rite Catholic Churches. But in our Roman Catholic Church, children baptized as infants must wait for First Communion until an age when they can begin to reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist.
- C. Externals of First Communion.** What’s behind the celebration? Traditionally most families celebrate a child’s First Communion with special clothing, parties and gifts. All these things help a child realize this sacramental moment in life is important. These externals also help a child understand how much value the Eucharist has in the lives of parents, other family members and close friends—they are all familiar, loving representatives of the greater faith community that supports the child on this special day!
- D. What is First Communion really about?**
 1. “Do this in memory of me.” These words mean more than simply “repeat the Last Supper.” They’re actually a call from the risen Christ to us, the members of his Church, to “live as I have lived: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; care for my little ones; know that every man and woman is your brother and sister; respect every created thing as part of the fabric woven and sustained by our creator God.” As adults, we have countless ways to answer that call.

2. Being able to “distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food” is not just an intellectual adventure. A typical preschooler understands that the eucharistic meal is somehow different from meals eaten in homes.
3. A child ready for First Communion should also know what “doing this” implies when he or she hears “do this in memory of me.” But more importantly, the child must be willing, according to his or her capacity, to step forward to the table and join with the community in pledging to live as Jesus lived, to do what that pledge implies in our world today.

Suggestions for use

1. **Baptism connection.** Bring up the idea of Baptism leading to Eucharist, a concept some viewers may not have realized, and encourage discussion about it. Think about the relationship of First Communion to Christian initiation. Consider setting up an informal meeting between the children and RCIA participants so they can get to know each other, and talk about how alike or different preparation experiences are in the two groups.
2. **Take action.** The children are “coming to the table” soon, an action which encourages social responsibility not just for the family but for the entire faith community. Explore ideas of how parents can help young people think beyond themselves in everyday living experiences (being kinder to siblings, taking on more household responsibilities for family) as well as in special circumstances (visiting elderly, collecting food for homeless, etc.).
3. **Closing story.** The teaching segment ends with a story about a little boy asking his father if he is going to drink the blood flowing from a shaving nick. The father answers, “No, we don’t drink blood.” His son disagrees, saying, “We do in church!” Of course, the child is right; we do indeed drink and eat the Body and Blood of Christ during Mass. By sharing that meal, we become one on an intimate level not only with Christ, but also with the “Body of Christ,” the Church. Consider introducing the First Communicants to one or more of their parish’s outreach programs to the community or world.

Questions for sharing

1. How can you help your child understand the meaning of Eucharist?
2. How has your own understanding of the meaning of Eucharist changed from childhood to adulthood? What influences caused this shift in understanding?
3. How have you decided to answer Jesus’ call to “do this in memory of me”?
4. How can you help your child “do this in memory of me” by way of word, action or deed?

5. What do you think about the idea of Eucharist building upon the Sacrament of Baptism? How do you understand the connection between these two sacraments?

MUSICAL REFLECTION SEGMENT

“Pan de Vida” (“Bread of Life”)

(Begins approximately 28:30 into program.)

Summary

Using the song “Pan de Vida” (“Bread of Life”) by Bob Hurd and Pia Moriarty (found on the recording *Pan de Vida*, available from OCP Publications, 1-800-548-8749), the musical reflection combines a celebration of Eucharist and visuals, drawn largely from the Hispanic community, that show a wider aspect of family and community life.

Throughout the reflection, we see scenes of happy, joyous groups of people. For example, the camera often shows loving family members together—especially for family meals—without blaring television, radios or other distractions. The emphasis is clearly on the individuals and the relationships they share—the communal “breaking bread” experience. It’s easy to think of these meals as symbols of what we share during Mass as a community of faith.

The words of the song underscore the visual emphasis on family, and connect directly to Eucharist. For example, the first verse speaks of Christians in terms of the humanness that marks the presence of the Body of Christ in the world. Like members of a typical family, the members of the Church are not nearly as strong alone as they are when united together to face the world. They are called to be compassionate, forgiving and kind to one another, and to present that compassionate face to the world.

In the second verse, sung in Spanish, the singer speaks of humble service, in imitation of Christ who washed the feet of the disciples. Every day, family members are called upon to serve each other so that their household runs well, and their relationships will continue to be nurtured and grow in loving ways. It is the same for the faith community.

The last verse stresses the unity of the Body of Christ, amidst its diversity—of nationality, culture and gender. All that matters—in this life and the next—is that we are common members of the Body of Christ, partakers of the Bread of Life. We are called upon to serve each other humbly, because we promise to “do this” when we remember Jesus’ words at the Eucharist.

Suggestions for use

The musical reflection can be used to open or to conclude a session. It could be shown alone, or in conjunction with a prayer service. An outline for such a service might be as follows:

1. Begin with a time of silence.
2. Call the group to prayer in these or similar words:
Let us place ourselves in the presence of Christ, the Bread of Life. (Pause) Let us recall the celebrations of our everyday lives—the meals we share with families and friends, the times of joy and of sadness that mark our lives. (Pause) Let us recall the eucharistic celebration, the Mass, in which we receive the Bread of Life. (Pause) Now, let us listen to the Word of God.
3. Read John 13:1-15 (which describes the moment at the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples); or Galatians 4:28-29 (which talks about how all people, although very different in many ways, are one in Jesus Christ); or John 6:32-40 (a portion of Jesus' discourse on himself as the Bread of Life).
4. Show the musical reflection.
5. Lead the group in a spontaneous litany of thanks—invite individuals to speak out reasons for being grateful to God, and ask the group to respond, "We give you thanks." Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.
6. A family or parish fellowship gathering/meal may follow.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. **Scripture references:** As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1338), the New Testament references to the Eucharist are found in the form of the "institution narratives" set during the Last Supper. They are Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 13:23-26. St. John recounts the discourse of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum in which he refers to himself as the "bread of life" (John 6).
2. ***Catechism of the Catholic Church* references:** In the *Catechism*, the Eucharist is covered in Part Two, Section Two ("The Sacraments of the Church"), Chapter One, Article Three (1322-1419). Also, read about the duties of parents regarding sharing their faith with their children in Part Three, Section Two ("The Ten Commandments in Brief"), Chapter Two, Article Four (2221-2231).
3. **Resources for further study from St. Anthony Messenger Press and Franciscan Communications:** For a complete and updated listing of our resources, visit <http://catalog.AmericanCatholic.org>.

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NOTE: This guide can be printed and cut down in size to be stored with the DVD version of this video program. Simply cut $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from each side of the page for a guide that, when folded, can be placed inside of the DVD case or attached to the DVD or VHS case.

For use with:

First Communion: Taking a Place at the Table on VHS (V2050) and DVD (D2050)

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