
What is the Church?

Parent Leader's Guide: Unit 1

We are the People of God



Main themes

- ◆ Baptism begins our journey into the community we call the Catholic Church.
- ◆ We are reminded of this when we gather for Mass 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.
- ◆ We look at what it means to be welcomed as members of the Church.

Link to the Mass - Introductory Rites

"Everything that happens before the first scripture reading is meant to help us assemble. That means gathering together many individuals as one community of prayer, but it also means recollecting ourselves personally - not by leaving behind the cares and distractions of home and work, but by bringing them into the gospel's light."

(Cardinal Bernardin, *Guide to the Assembly*, page 7)

During the meeting, parents will:

- ◆ discover what the parish catechists or faith friends will do with the children
- ◆ be given details of the celebration of presentation, including their own role
- ◆ be offered suggestions for supporting their child at home
- ◆ consider the idea that the Church is the People of God and that we become members through a journey of initiation which begins with Baptism
- ◆ explore what it means to assemble together as God's People on Sunday 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'
- ◆ reflect on the welcome they receive and offer to other people
- ◆ be invited to pray together

Unit 1 – Approach A

Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -

large bowl / jug of water

paschal candle

baptismal candle

You will also need:

copies of the parents' leaflets for those attending

one large copy of the Cardinal Bernardin quotation

1. Welcome the parents and introduce yourself and any other team members present. Ask the parents to look at the parents' leaflet and work through the main points their children will be covering with their catechist. You may want to include some or all of the following points:

- ♦ Baptism is the first of three sacraments which we call 'sacraments of initiation'
- ♦ in our diocese we celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in the order in which they were first celebrated in the early life of the Church
- ♦ there are a number of signs and symbols used in Baptism: the most important symbol is water; but we also use Chrism, which will be used again in Confirmation; and we use light - the paschal candle and the baptismal candles.

2. At this point invite the parents to remember their child's Baptism - how were they prepared, who were the godparents, what do they remember of the celebration, do they know where the baptismal candle is? Allow a little time for parents to chat through this with the people nearest to them or the person with whom they have attended the meeting.

After a few moments, and a chance for anyone who might want to share anything to do so, continue by explaining that through Baptism we are welcomed into the family of God - "The Christian Community welcomes you with great joy" (*The Rite of Baptism*)

Take a few moments now to explore what we mean by 'welcome' and to consider how we can help people to feel welcome - in our homes, in meetings like this, on Sundays as we gather for Mass.

Then continue to reflect on the link between Baptism and our membership of the Church community, as follows:

- ♦ two promises are made at Baptism - parents promise to bring up their child in the faith; the parish community promises to help the parents in this task
- ♦ we are baptised "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*The Rite of Baptism*). (Possibly link this with Matthew 28:19)

- ♦ our children are beginning a new stage in their faith journey which they began at Baptism. They are supported by their families, the parish and the school
- ♦ the most important way we show that we are part of the one family of God is when we gather on Sunday (the Lord's day) to celebrate Eucharist, to give praise and thanksgiving to God
- ♦ at Mass and in prayer we identify ourselves as Christians when we make the sign of the cross
- ♦ the entrance rite of the Mass helps to gather us together and prepares us to hear God's Word in the readings and to celebrate the Eucharist.

3. Draw attention to the quotation from Cardinal Bernardin's letter about the Mass which is on the parents' leaflet (or displayed on paper or overhead).

Invite the parents to think about how easy or how difficult it is for them to bring their children to Mass on Sunday, the many things which need to be done to get everyone ready, etc. Invite them to think about the idea of bringing 'all the cares and distractions of home and work' into the Sunday gathering, rather than struggling to forget them or leave them behind.

4. Details of the celebration of Presentation should now be given.
5. Invite the parents to be still for a moment and to know God's love for each of them and for their child. Pray the following prayers and invite all to respond: *Lord, graciously hear us.*

We pray for our children as they begin this new stage in their journey of faith - that they may be welcomed, guided and strengthened as they prepare for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist. Lord, hear us...

We pray for the catechists [or faith friends] working with our children on behalf of the parish community - that they may share their love of God generously and help the children feel more fully a part of God's people. Lord, hear us...

We pray for ourselves - that we may be living examples of God's love in all we say and do. Lord, hear us...

Invite the parents to join in making the sign of the cross to finish the prayer.

6. Thank the parents for attending the meeting and encourage them to reflect further on what they have heard.

Unit 1 – Approach B

Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -

large bowl / jug of water

paschal candle

baptismal candle

You will also need:

the room arranged ready for group work (5/6 chairs together, around a table if possible)

1 copy per group of 'People of God' sheet

copies of the parents' leaflet for those attending

1. As parents arrive for the meeting, warmly welcome them and invite them to sit grouped according to the room arrangement. Introduce yourself and any other team members who are present. Draw attention to the sheet provided - 'People of God' - and perhaps read through the questions first. Suggest the parents introduce themselves to one another, and then take about fifteen minutes to work together to offer some answers.

After about fifteen minutes ask everyone to stop and go through the sheet taking suggestions from the different groups. Once all questions have been considered, summarise the points which have emerged.

2. Explain that the children are now beginning a new stage of their journey of faith which began in baptism and that being with the parish community will be an important way in which they can grow more fully as the People of God. Coming to celebrate Mass each Sunday is especially important.
3. Give out copies of the parents' leaflet and begin to reflect with the parents on the work their children will be doing with the catechist. You may want to cover some of the following:

- ♦ Baptism is the first of three sacraments which we call 'sacraments of initiation'
- ♦ in our diocese we celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in the order in which they were first celebrated in the early life of the Church
- ♦ there are a number of signs and symbols used in Baptism: the most important symbol is water; but we also use Chrism, which will be used again in Confirmation; and we use light - the paschal candle and the baptismal candles.

At this point invite the parents to remember their child's Baptism - how were they prepared, who were the godparents, what do they remember of the celebration, do they know where the baptismal candle is? Remind them:

- ♦ we are baptised "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*The Rite of Baptism*). (Possibly link this with Matthew 28:19)

- ♦ our children are beginning a new stage in their faith journey which they began at Baptism. They are supported by their families, the parish and the school.

Allow a little time for parents to chat this through with the people nearest to them or the person with whom they have attended the meeting. After a few moments, and a chance for anyone who might want to share anything to do so, continue:

- ♦ through Baptism we are welcomed into the family of God - "The Christian Community welcomes you with great joy" (*The Rite of Baptism*)
 - ♦ two promises are made at Baptism - parents promise to bring up their child in the faith; the parish community promises to help the parents in this task
 - ♦ the most important way we show that we are part of the one family of God is when we gather on Sunday (the Lord's day) to celebrate Eucharist, to give praise and thanksgiving to God
 - ♦ at Mass and in prayer we identify ourselves as Christians when we make the sign of the cross
 - ♦ the entrance rite of the Mass helps to gather us together and prepares us to hear God's Word in the readings and to celebrate the Eucharist.
4. Details of the celebration of Presentation should now be given.
 5. Invite the parents to make the sign of the cross together, the sign of our faith as People of God. Ask them to picture their child and to pray that God will bless her/him over the next months as he/she prepares to share more fully in the life of the Church.

After a few moments of silence pray the following prayer:

Loving God, we thank you that you have blessed us with our children. Help us to show them how much you love them as we support them in the months ahead. Bless their teachers and the parishioners who give their time to share their faith with them. Help us all to grow together as your people. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Risen Lord. Amen.

6. Thank the parents for attending the meeting and encourage them to reflect further on what they have heard and discussed.

PEOPLE OF GOD

1. What do we mean by 'the Church'? Is it just a building?
2. What goes on at our church and other local parishes?
(You may want to use the list of suggestions to help)
3. Do you find it difficult getting to Mass with the family on Sunday? If so, why?
4. Do you think it is important to arrive at Mass in a calm state without any worries? Please explain your reason.
5. Do you manage to talk with parishioners and friends after Mass? Do you think this is important? Why?

CAFOD

Visits to the sick and elderly

Saint Vincent de Paul Society (SVP)

Social Committee

Altar servers

Choir / folk group

Readers

Eucharistic ministers

Volunteers to do the collection

Volunteers to organise refreshments after Mass

Parish trips out

Activities for young people

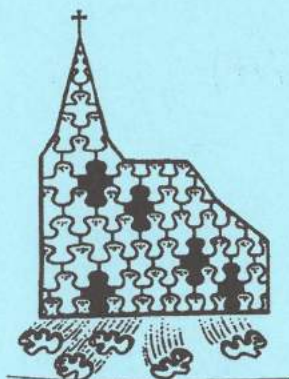
Meeting friends

What else?

Unit 1 – Approach C

Before the meeting begins: have the following clearly displayed -
large bowl / jug of water
paschal candle
baptismal candle

You will also need:
copies of the 'Images of Church' sheet
copies of the parents' leaflet for those attending
one large copy of the Cardinal Bernardin quotation



On a display board, wall or flip chart have a large outline drawing of a church divided into spaces. Make sure there are enough for all who will attend, including team members. If the outline can resemble your church, so much the better.

1. As people arrive, warmly welcome them and invite them to go to the large drawing of the church and write their name, in one of the spaces before taking a seat. Make sure team members have already done this. (An alternative would be to write the name of their child in a space).

Once everyone has arrived and is seated, introduce the main theme for the meeting, reminding parents that we are thinking about ways in which we can answer the question "What is the Church?" Our children will be learning that the Church is the People of God, people who have been called, named, loved and brought into new life through Baptism.

Give out copies of the 'Images of Church' sheet and invite the parents to look carefully at each image before deciding which one is closest to their understanding of Church.

Invite them to talk about this with one or two others who are sitting near them before beginning a general discussion about the images. Emphasise the fact that the Church is people, God's people, called to give praise and thanksgiving and be a sign of God's presence in the world today.

2. Ask the parents to look at the parents' leaflet and work through the main points their children will be covering with their catechist.

You may want to include some or all of the following points:

- ♦ Baptism is the first of three sacraments which we call 'sacraments of initiation'

- ♦ in our diocese we celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in the order in which they were first celebrated in the early church
- ♦ there are a number of signs and symbols used in Baptism: the most important symbol is water; but we also use chrism, which will also be used in confirmation; and we use light - the paschal candle and the baptismal candles
- ♦ through Baptism we are welcomed into the family of God - "The Christian Community welcomes you with great joy" (*The Rite of Baptism*)
- ♦ the most important way we show that we are part of the one family of God is when we gather on Sunday (the Lord's day) to celebrate Eucharist, to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

Take a few moments now to explore what we mean by 'welcome' and to consider how we can help people to feel welcome - in our homes, in meetings like this, on Sundays as we gather for Mass. Then continue:

- ♦ we are baptised "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*The Rite of Baptism*). (Possibly link this with Matthew 28:19)
 - ♦ at Mass and in prayer we identify ourselves as Christians when we make the sign of the cross
 - ♦ the entrance rite of the Mass helps to gather us together and prepares us to hear God's Word in the readings and to celebrate the Eucharist
3. Draw attention to the quotation from Cardinal Bernadin's letter about the Mass which is on the parents' leaflet (or displayed on paper or overhead).

Ask the parents in small groups of 4/5 to consider the following, assuring them that there are no 'right answers' here, but that they are simply being encouraged to share their own thoughts and feelings together.

- (i) How easy is it to think of ourselves as 'one community of prayer' when we come to Mass on Sunday? What can help us with this? How can we help our children with this?
- (ii) What are 'the distractions of home and work' that we might need to bring with us?

After ten minutes, invite some feedback, taking one or two points from each group. It may be helpful if these points are written up on a flip chart or large sheet of paper so all can see.

4. Details of the celebration of Presentation should now be given.

5. Invite the parents to be still for a few moments and to know that God loves each one of them.

Invite them to look at the large picture of the church on which they wrote their names when they arrived. Ask them to pray silently for a moment for all the other names, which make up the People of God in this area. Then read:

"But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel;
Do not fear for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name, you are mine."
(Isaiah 43:1)

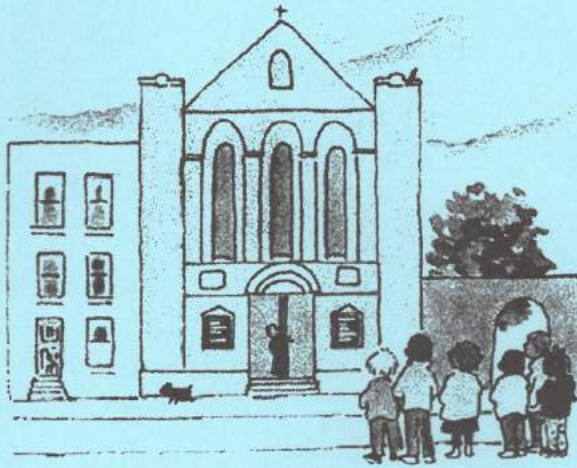
Allow a few more moments of silence, then conclude:

Loving God we thank you that you have called each one of us by name, to be your people. Guide and encourage us as we journey with our children, preparing them for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Risen Lord. Amen.

6. Thank the parents for attending the meeting and encourage them to reflect further on what they have heard and discussed.

Images of Church

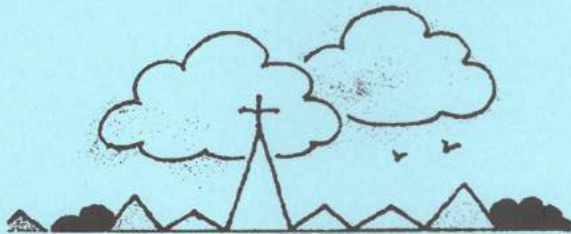
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