



*... You will sow your land and gather its produce,
but (in the year of pandemic) ...
you will let it lie fallow and forgo all its produce ...*

(Ex 23:10-11)

In ancient times the 'fallow' year was concerned with the wellbeing of the land/creation and feeding the poor. The fallow year was also associated with Sabbath and time to rest with God. Sabbath is about becoming whole as a person, as a society, and in our case, as a church specifically in regard to the ministry of Christian Initiation with regard to children and families.

Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin - Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

*And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.*

*Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.*

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ



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Overview

Introduction

COVID 19 has changed our lives in ways we did not imagine when 2020 dawned. Our faith in the Paschal Mystery helps us know that amidst the many 'dyings' associated with this pandemic, there are also opportunities for new life. New life always involves change and is sustained by hope because we know God is with us always and everywhere.

In Bishop Bill's March 19 [Pastoral Letter](#) outlining liturgical changes required by government restrictions, Parish Sacramental Programs and the celebration of Confirmation and First Communion were cancelled for 2020. Bishop Bill went on to say,

we shall observe a 'fallow year' with time to reflect on current practice and return to the sacramental journeys for our children in 2021.

The Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) and its Christian Initiation Forum offer this resource document to support parish communities in undertaking the fallow year reflection suggested by Bishop Bill.

This document is long. The intention is not to burden you with something too big to contemplate. Rather we have endeavoured to provide you with a comprehensive resource that: engages with the sacraments of Initiation as the one unified journey, has everything you need in one place, can easily be shared, accommodates parishes differing needs. As can be seen most clearly in the index, the resource unfolds systematically in five parts, with an Overview and Conclusion. It is best used in this order. However, having read this Overview, communities can dive into any part that most aligns with its needs.

As most of the resources contained herein are from scripture and the Rites, we hope the resource will assist parishes in a variety of ways and for more than this fallow year. For example, the fallow year reflection could be an opportunity to invite new people into the ministry of Christian Initiation and to begin to form them with existing members mentoring them through the reflection and sharing this resource provides. Over a number of years, parts of it could assist with the annual review and reflection parishes undertake at the end of the 'initiation season' and the ongoing formation of parish teams.

The document's process is twofold, combining mystagogical and theological reflection. Both focus on God's revelation – in our experience, scripture, the liturgical documents and texts – and our faith response. Both facilitate listening, faith sharing and pastoral planning.

Given our current circumstances we imagine that a first step in any review process might be that parish leaders, members of Sacramental and RCIA Teams, interested parishioners and school staff use the resource individually. Then when possible, parishioners and team members might gather in person or via Zoom to reflect together.

When appropriate and over time, the DLC and the Christian Initiation Forum will invite those who are interested to engage in some wider listening and dialogue gatherings to facilitate the sharing of wisdom across parishes.

More specifically, before we even heard the word 'pandemic', 2020 was the scheduled year to engage in a review of the Diocesan '[Pastoral Guidance for the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation](#)'. Given our fallow year, we have situated this review within this broader reflection on the *Sacraments of Initiation* for children and their families.

The DLC will host gatherings specifically focused on the review of this document and its associated resources and processes. The document and resources will then be amended in light of the experience and shared wisdom of the community, and in consultation with Bishop Bill. Finally, the revised document will be made available on the diocesan website.

Even as we begin this fallow time reflection, we can be sure of one thing: there will be no going back to doing things the way we did them in 2019. We have been changed by the experience of pandemic and the new experience of social isolation and suspension of public worship. The ongoing implications for society in general and our faith communities, particularly regarding the process of Christian Initiation, will be revealed over time and will no doubt require a lot of re-imagining. Taking time now to deepen our understanding of the nature and purpose of Christian initiation in the life and mission of the Church, will ensure that any changes we make embody and shape the faith of the Church and provide rich nourishment for those who hunger for the God we know is the source of life in all its fullness.

As the land of Christian Initiation of children and their families lies fallow, let us firstly rest with God. And as we rest in and with God, let us focus on the wellbeing of the initiation landscape so that we might nurture it and ourselves.

To do this let Christ be our light. To listen click [here](#).

Christ be our Light by Bernadette Farrell

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

**Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.**

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

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Wishing you every blessing,
Louise Gannon rsj (Manager of Worship and Prayer)
With the Diocesan Liturgy Council and Diocesan Liturgy Forum: Christian Initiation

June 25, 2020

Some things about Process

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi

As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

Central to our Catholic tradition is a Latin phrase: **Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi**. It means: **As we worship, so we believe, so we live**. So, if we want to understand some aspect of our faith, we look to what the liturgy says about it in word and ritual action. The liturgy is part of the Tradition of the church and a primary locus of theology.

When we gather to celebrate the liturgy, particularly our sacraments, we are expressing the faith of the church and being shaped by Christ to live what we believe.

The Vatican II document, [‘The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy’](#) expresses this belief when it says:

*In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for **it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit**; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work. [a. 14]*

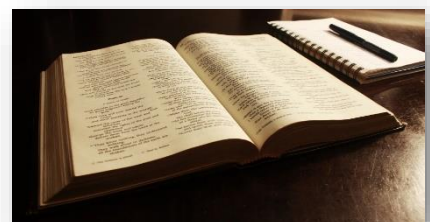
We can say this because in the liturgy, through the action of the Holy Spirit, we encounter Christ in the Paschal Mystery. It is Christ who is the source of the true Christian spirit. This belief informs the process that shapes our ‘fallow time’ reflection.

We have a unique opportunity to immerse ourselves once again in the texts that express the Church’s understanding of Christian Initiation and shape our pastoral practice. It is hoped that the overall process of prayer, reflection and discernment will enable us to listen to what God is revealing to us in our local Church of Maitland-Newcastle, in your parish community, at this time.

Overall process

With some exceptions, each section of the document follows a similar pattern:

- Introduction
- Mystagogical reflection on the Word in
 - scripture,
 - the liturgical texts
 - the liturgical documents
 - the community, particularly the experience of ministry
- Theological reflection
- Pastoral reflection and imagining
- Resources
- Prayer



Mystagogical Reflection

Many, including those familiar with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), will come to this resource with an understanding of mystagogical reflection.

All mystagogical reflection is based on an experience/event in which we seek to attend to the presence of God in order to identify what God is revealing to us and asking of us. It is not primarily about explaining and teaching as in a classroom. Rather mystagogical reflection draws us ever more deeply into the experience of the mystery of God and evokes an ever-deepening faith response that has the nature of communion – abiding with God and each other – and mission and is the source of ongoing conversion.

Throughout this resource, the ‘event’ will sometimes be our experience of liturgy and ministry. Often it will be a scripture or liturgical text.

Mystagogical reflection takes time and is most fruitful when it follows the six-step process outlined here:

1. Event:
An encounter with God in reading the text
2. Recollection:
What do you remember from the text? What is it about? What happened?
3. Reflection:
What was most engaging? Unsettling? What moved your heart ... in this encounter with Christ?
4. Catechesis:
What is Christ teaching us in this encounter? What are we learning about the Christian faith?
What questions do you have? What does it mean? What connections do you see to Scripture and our Tradition including the liturgy?
5. Connection:
How does it connect to my/our life and ministry?
6. Conversion:
To what change is this prompting you? How is it deepening your relationships with Christ? How will you live differently as a disciple as a result of what God has revealed in this encounter?

These six steps lead people on a journey of deepening reflection beginning with the less threatening ‘remembering’ and ending with a call to conversion.

The process may be abbreviated to a simple three-step process:

- What did you notice?
- What is God revealing to you/us?
- What is God asking of you/us as disciples and as the Church community?

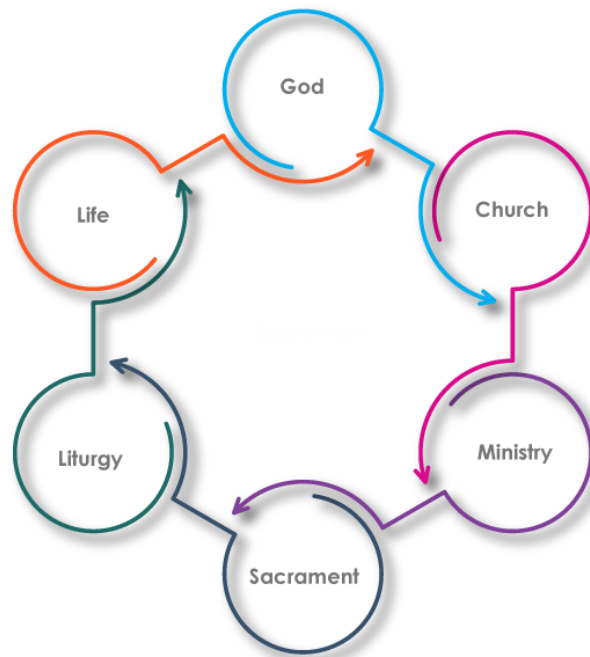
The choice between the full or abbreviated process will depend on the pastoral situation and desired outcome. Reflection by those engaging in the ministry of initiation will be best served by the full six-step process. Ministers need deeper insight if they are to shape pastoral practice to be at once true to the faith of the Church and an authentic response to our pastoral reality. The abbreviated three step process would best serve engagement with the wider parish community and families seeking to continue their children’s process of Christian Initiation.

Occasionally throughout the document you will find other truncated versions.

Theological Reflection for ministry

Ministry calls us to a more specifically theological reflection that enables us to consider the continuity between belief and pastoral practice. The essential question is: does our practice embody and therefore lead people into the richest dimensions of the mystery of God's love and our belief?

Theological reflection always begins with God. A framework for Theological Reflection on the ministry of Christian Initiation might look like this:



The following questions are suggested to help guide your theological reflection:

1. Having explored and reflected on the relevant resources, consider more critically what they reveal to us about:
 - God: who is God?
 - The Church: who are we, what are we on about and how do we live?
 - The ministry of Initiation: its nature, meaning and purpose?
 - Sacrament: nature and purpose?
 - Liturgy – the celebration of initiation: options, who does what, when, where, how, under what circumstances?
 - Life – discipleship and ecclesial life (the point of Christian Initiation)
2. How does our pastoral practice regarding the *Sacraments of initiation* embody this belief so that children and their families are shaped by and into our Catholic way of life and faith?
 - 2.1. What is working well?
 - 2.2. What changes might we need to make?
 - 2.3. Are there gaps?
 - 2.4. What questions do we need to think about more?

Practical notes

For the most part we have referenced the Gospel of Matthew as this is the gospel we are listening to this year.

Some links to articles are included. If the link doesn't give access to the whole document, please contact [Sharon Murphy](#) who will be able to send you a copy.

Some hymns, movies, books and other resources are suggested. You will have additional ideas. We hope these might both enrich your own reflection and be helpful in ministry.

Given that in the first instance people will probably engage with this resource personally, we recommend keeping a journal to record your reflections, questions and ideas so that when you gather with members of your community you will be able to share your thoughts.

The format of the document is more traditional than creative. Like the liturgy, the document comes to life in the flesh and blood encounter, prayer and reflection, and pastoral planning of the community. However, down the track, we may look at more creative ways of packaging parts of it for ministry if that would be of assistance to you. Also, if at some point it would be helpful to have some part as a separate document, please contact [Sharon](#).

Resources – engaging families where they are

A range of people have suggested the following resources that may assist in building a bridge between families' everyday experience, and Church as the Body of Christ, the community of the faithful, charged with the responsibility of continuing Jesus' mission in the world today.

The resources are in keeping with the mystagogical approach of this document. They are not about 'teaching' information and explaining 'things'. They are a means of linking with people's experience and engaging in reflection on that experience in an attempt to discover the mystery of God's abiding presence.

Not every resource will be totally consistent with the Gospel message. Some may have glimpses of the message in the midst of other ideas. Such resources are still helpful because they can be used as a 'foil' to help clarify the Gospel message, sometimes over and against a predominant cultural message.

For the most part the following resources explore the notion of identity and change, who we choose to become and how we choose to live, even in the most difficult of circumstances. They may suit ministry at any point in the journey of Christian Initiation.

Some music ideas

'The Difference' by *Missy Higgins* Click [here](#) to listen.

© 2018 Missy Higgins Productions., under exclusive license to Eleven: A Music Company Pty Ltd

'Higher Ground' by *Rasmussen*. Click [here](#) to listen and view.

Songwriters: Niclas Arn / Karl Ulrik Eurén / Gustav Richard Eurén. Lyrics © Warner Chappell Music, Inc

'Try Everything' by *Shakira*. Click [here](#) to listen with words.

Songwriters: Tor Erik Hermansen / Mikkel Storleer Eriksen / Sia Kate Isobelle Furler. Lyrics © O/B/O Apra Amcos

'Fight Song' by *Rachael Platten*. Click [here](#) to listen and view words.

'This Is Me' from the Greatest Showman. Click [here](#) to listen. We used this song quite effectively in the 2019 Project Compassion Liturgy.

'Firework' by Katy Perry. To listen and watch click [here](#). To listen with the lyrics click [here](#).

'We're All In This Together' by Ben Lee. To listen and join in click [here](#).

This [link](#) takes you to a resource that suggests a feast of songs that might be helpful.

Some movie ideas

A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood (2019) has much to say about identity and change. Directed by Marielle Heller. For a review [click here](#).

Saving Mr Banks (2013 PG) Directed by John Lee Hancock

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013 M) Directed by Ben Stiller

100 Foot Journey (2014 M) Directed by Lasse Hallstrom

Life is Beautiful (1998 M) Directed by Roberto Benigni

Amelie (2001 M) Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Whale Rider (2003 PG) Directed by Niki Caro

The Truman Show (1998 M) Directed by Peter Weir

Into the Wild (2007 MA15+) Biography directed by: Sean Penn

Pay it forward (2000 PG) True story directed by: Mimi Leder

The cross and the towers (2006 M) Documentary directed by The Erwin Brothers

Beasts of the southern wild (PG 2012) Directed by Benh Zeitlin

Free Solo (2019 PG) Documentary directed by Jimmy Chin, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi

All is lost (PG 2014) Directed by J.C. Chandor

Boyhood (2014 MA15+) Directed by Richard Linklater

Man on Wire (2008 PG) True story directed by James Marsh

Searching for Sugarman (PG 2012) Documentary, True Story directed by Malik Bendjelloul

Jiro Dreams of Sushi (PG 2012) Documentary directed by David Gelb

The Untouchables (MA15+ 2011) Directed by Olivier Nakache & Eric Toledano

As it is in Heaven (subtitled 2006, no rating given) Directed by Kay Pollak

The Chorus (subtitled PG) Directed by Christophe Barratier

The Grizzlies (2020 MA15+) Directed by Miranda de Pencier

Sorry we missed you (2020 MA) Directed by Ken Loach

Burden (2020 MA15+) Directed by Andrew Heckler

Rush (2013 PG) Directed by Ron Howard

Hidden Figures (2016 PG) Directed by Theodore Melfi

The Theory of Everything (2014, PG) Directed by James Marsh

[Sorry We Missed You](#), is the story of an English family on the brink of financial collapse that will catalyse your empathy for poor and middle-class families.

The Australian Catholic Bishop's website has a section on [Film Reviews](#).

More movies and reviews can be found [here](#).

Some literature ideas

Fiction

The Cellist of Sarajevo by Steve Galloway (Also a film)

Sarajevo Roses (2016 M) Steven Galloway (Also a film)

The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change (2014) by Adam Braun

The Divine Bell and the Butterfly True Story. (Book 1997, Film 2007 PG SBS) by Jean-Dominique Bauby

The Dutch House (2019) Anne Patchett

When the Emperor was divine (2002) Historical novel by Julie Otsuka

The Overstory (2018) by Richard Powers

The loudness of things unsaid (2020) by Hilde Hinton

A Different Sun (2013, 2017) by Elain Neil Orr (Also a film)

Life of Pi (2013 M) (Also a film directed by Ang Lee)

Boy Swallows Universe by Trent Dalton

All the Light we Cannot See by Anthony Doerr

The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri

The Unlikely pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce

The Yield by Tara June Winch

Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult

Wonder by R.J. Palacio (Also a film. 2012 and 2017 PG. Directed by Stephen Chbosky)

Non Fiction

Phosphorescence (2020) by Julia Baird

Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir (2015) by Margarita Engle

Any Ordinary Day (2018) Autobiography/True Story by Leigh Sales

Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe

Something Beautiful Happened: A story of Survival and Courage in the face of evil. A memoir by Yvette Manassis Corporon

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead. By (Cassandra) Brene Breen

Romulus my Father. Biographical memoir by Raimond Gaita

Hymns

These are just a few suggestions that might help break open the meaning and challenge of Christian Initiation. You will have plenty from the community's repertoire

'Come as You' Are by Deirdre Browne Click [here](#) to listen and view.

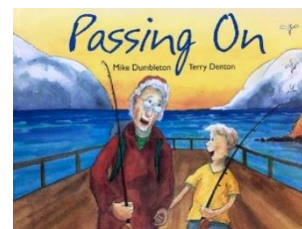
'All are Welcome' by Mary Haugen. Click here to [listen](#). The words to this hymn contain everything you might want to reflect on with families. It could be used as part a simple liturgy that is celebrated and reflected on mystagogically.

'Open my eyes Lord' by Jesse Manibusan. Click [here](#) to listen and watch.

'It Was Good' by Tony Alonso. To listen click [here](#)

Other resources

- *Passing on* by Mike Dumbleton and Terry Denton, Red Fox an imprint of Random, Sydney, 2002. This is a lovely children's book about families 'pass on' the family story from generation to generation.
- *How to use your parish as your RCIA textbook* from Team RCIA. Ask your RCIA team for a copy.



Having reflected mystically and theologically, some, particularly those engaged in the ministry of Christian Initiation, may want to engage in reading what other people are saying, both to critique and expand our own thoughts. The following may be of interest:

- To explore the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) visit [Team RCIA](#) which offers a feast of resources that will help turn your world upside down and inside out, and in the process, hopefully excite you.
- One of our perennial challenges is sharing faith in ways that speak to and capture the imagination of people today. A recent book by Timothy Radcliff op is all about this very issue. It is a very good read and highly recommended. *Alive in Christ: A Christian Imagination*. 2019. Bloomsbury Continuum, London.
- [We are celebrants not consumers](#) by Thomas O'Loughlin
- From America Magazine: [Social Distancing and the Sacraments](#): How the Coronavirus has changed our sense of communion. It is American and so requires some 'translation' into our context.
- [The Call of the Spirit](#) by Jim Quillinan from '[Along the Track](#)'. To see the range of articles available in this series, click on the link. They are all one page.
- Lennan, Richard and Pineda-Madrid, Nancy (Ed.) *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*. 2019: Paulist Press, Manwah, New Jersey.
Many will be familiar with this book, in part because Richard is an editor! Some members of the community may find some chapters interesting.
- A recent publication we have found very insightful is:
Rush, Ormond. *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles*. Liturgical Press Academic, Collegeville, Minnesota: 2019
The size of the book may be off putting. However, the chapters are readable packages. Chapters or principles relevant to our Fallow Year Reflection on Sacraments of Initiation include:
 'Revelation/Faith'. p. 39
 'Mystery/Sacrament'. p. 81
 'Communion/Missio' p. 200

Sacrament

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi

As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

Often when people hear the word 'sacrament' they think only about the seven Sacraments. As a community of faith, the church has a rich and deep understanding of 'sacrament' that holds, and is not limited to, the seven Sacraments. In many ways the notion of sacrament defines our Catholic way of life. We are already, and at the same time, constantly becoming a sacramental people whose standing place in the world is, 'There's more to this than meets the eye!' It is a standing place that proclaims the Gospel and has the power to change the world. It is a different standing place to those who proclaim, 'What you see is what you get.'

The following resources are an invitation to engage with the Church's rich and deep notion of sacrament, listening always for what God is revealing ...

Some food for thought ...

Everyday God

Bernadette Farrell

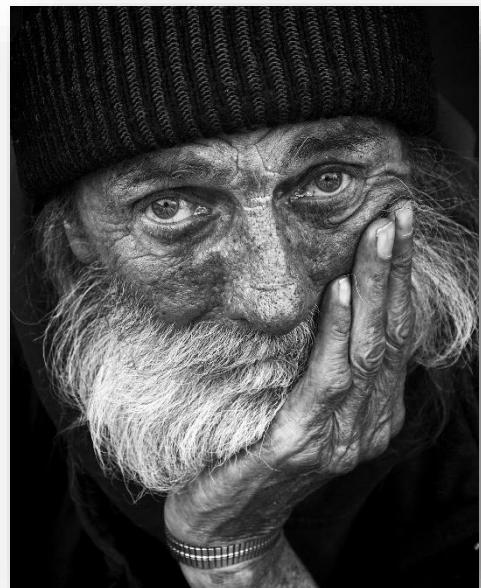
To listen click [here](#).

Earth's creator	Everyday God	Strong and patient ...
Loving Maker...	O Jesus,	Way of freedom ...
You who shaped us...	O Spirit	Star of morning ...
Recreate us ...	Come be with us.	Timeless healer ...
In your presence ...	Everyday God	Flame eternal ...
We are gathered ...	O Jesus,	Word of gladness ...
You have called us	O Spirit,	Word of mercy ...
To restore us ...	Come be with us.	Word of friendship ...
Life of all lives ...		Word of challenge ...
Love of all loves ...		Gentle father ...
Hope of all hopes ...		Faithful brother ...
Light of all lights ...		Tender sister ...
In our resting ...		Loving mother ...
In our rising ...		Our beginning ...
In our hoping ...		Our unfolding ...
In our waiting ...		Our enduring ...
In our dreaming ...		Journey's ending ...
In our daring ...		Alleluia ...
In our searching ...		Now and always ...
In our sharing ...		Alleluia ...
God of laughter ...		Through all ages ...
God of sorrow ...		
Home and shelter ...		

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*The universe unfolds in God who fills it completely.
Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found
in a leaf,
in a mountain trail,
in a dew drop,
in a poor person's face.*

Laudato Si a. 233



Living Sacramentally Helen Carboon

When we hear the word ‘sacrament’ we might think of those rituals and ceremonies, rich in symbolism and deep in meaning, that happen in a church or occasionally by a bedside. These rituals mark in word and symbol significant moments in our lives when we want to name and celebrate God’s presence with us.

For most of us though most of our lives is lived outside such significant moments. It could be said that most of our lives is the ‘living out’ of these very moments in the ordinary experiences of our every day.

“God comes to us disguised as our lives” wrote the late Daniel O’Leary. It is within the sacrament of our everyday experience that our God is revealed to us.

We baptise our babies, welcoming them into the loving and life-giving community of family and church. And the loving and the giving of life happens at the bath-times and the bed-times and the getting the homework done right through to the testing-the-boundaries teenagers.

We make our commitments – for better and for worse – and spend the rest of our lives living these every day, through all the joys and sorrows, the giving and receiving that come with being given to another. From the occasions of celebration, to the testing of trust, to the stresses and strains that come with every dynamic relationship – this is where a commitment is ‘made flesh’.

We celebrate God’s forgiveness and live this in the patient forbearance and humble apologies we experience every day. In the seemingly mundane ordinary moments, the irritations and annoyances, the “rubs” of relating – this is where the accepting and forgiving become real.

We are fed from the Eucharistic table and go out to live lives of Eucharist. We give ourselves to be broken and shared in our love and living for and with our families, our friends, the world outside ourselves. When we cook yet another meal, hang out one more load of washing, get up in the night to a sleepless child – this is our self-giving. The grand gestures may be all very well, but it’s in the warp and the weft of every Sunday right through to the next Saturday that the real and constant giving, the real ‘eucharist’ happens.

We take a walk in the park and delight in the magpies’ carolling and the tossing branches of the graceful gum trees; we are greeted with a smile from our neighbour or receive an unexpected email from an old friend; a courteous driver stops to let us into the stream of traffic; we are greeted with kindness and care when we join the queue in the doctor’s waiting room... A myriad of ‘small’ moments such as these can be moments of revelation for us wherein we glimpse, however fleetingly, that there is a depth, a mysterious life, within and beyond such seemingly ordinary encounters. And we can be grateful.

Perhaps “sacrament” should be a verb whereby we are “sacrament-ing” in each of those moments where we meet this God at the heart of all life. Where, as the poet e e Cummings expresses it

*“the ears of my ears awake and
[and] the eyes of my eyes are opened”.*

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Mystagogical reflection

Having engaged with the resources above you are invited to use a version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** to help you ‘listen like a disciple’ to what God is revealing.

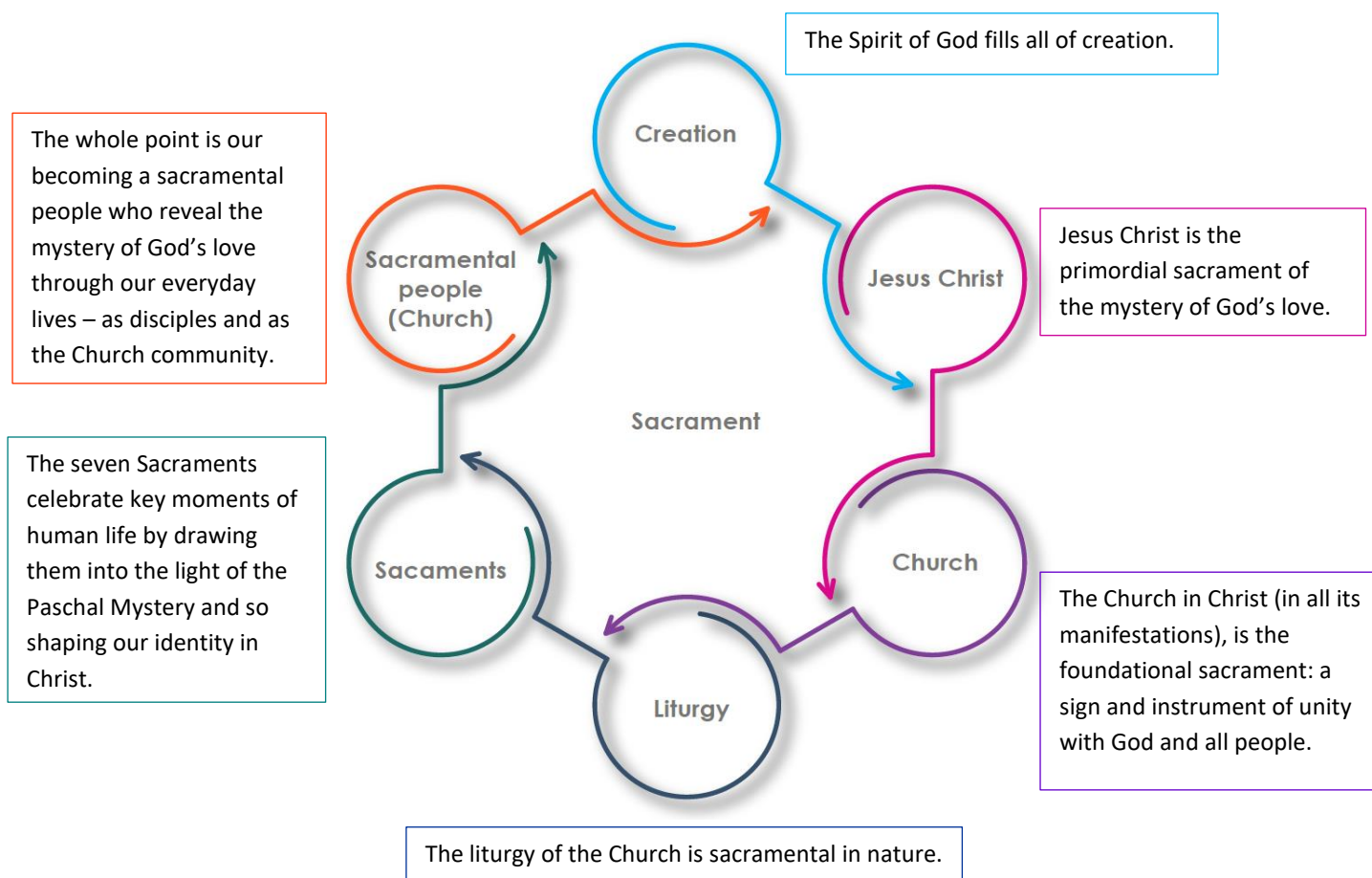
You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with the community when that is possible.

You might also like to reflect on:

- a precious sacrament in your home ...
- a sacrament in creation ...
- someone who is a sacrament for you ...
- how you are a sacrament of God's presence for others ...

Theological reflection

A Sacramental Framework that embodies the church's rich, deep and wide understanding of sacrament would look something like this.



To gather your insights from your reflection on 'sacrament' you are invited to use the **Theological Reflection process on p. 8-9**. This will inform your pastoral reflection.

Pastoral reflection and imagining ...

1. What insights, ideas and hopes are emerging for you?
2. What questions do you have?
3. What challenges do you see?
4. What in your current pastoral practice affirms this deep and rich understanding of sacrament?
5. What change to your existing pastoral practice is suggested?
6. Develop an 'Action Plan' that prioritises your ideas so that you move forward one step at a time.
7. What else are you reflecting on and thinking about?

Let us pray ...

Christ Has No Body Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) (Adapted)

Christ has no body but ours,
No hands, no feet on earth but ours,
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Ours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,
ours are the eyes, we are his body.
Christ has no body now but ours.
No hands, no feet on earth but ours.
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but ours.

To listen to a hymn version of the prayer click [here](#).

It Was Good *Tony Alonso and Jeanne Cotter* To listen click [here](#)

Final refrain: And God sees that we are good,
and God sees that we are good.
And God sees that we are good,
and God sees that we are good.

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A Note: This hymn was used at the 2020 Launch of Project Compassion. There were many comments about the impact of the positive message that continued to echo in people's minds and hearts after the liturgy. See the refrain above. It is part of a larger work based on the writings of Pope Francis. [Encounter: from the Heart of Pope Francis](#). It is available on Apple music and Spotify.

Sacraments of Initiation

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi
As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

The previous section noted the seven Sacraments of the Church within the broader context of sacrament. This section focuses on the three [Sacraments of Initiation](#): Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion. The Catholic Church understands Christian Initiation as one unified process.

Penance is not one of the Sacraments of Initiation. It is one of the [Sacraments of Healing](#)

In the Church of Maitland-Newcastle the Sacraments of Initiation for children are administered in the order indicated above and according to the diocesan policy [Becoming Disciples](#). The sacraments may be spaced variously according to the circumstances and faith journey of individual children and their families.

Having reflected on the nature of 'sacrament', we now focus our fallow time reflection on the whole process of Christian Initiation for children and their families.

And so to begin with what lies at its heart

Fall in love, stay in love, it will decide everything

*Nothing is more practical than finding God,
than falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.
It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in Love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.*

Often attributed to Pedro Arrupe SJ the actual author is Father Geger SJ

Mystagogical Reflecting ...

1. What does this reflection reveal to you about God and about us?
2. What does it reveal about the process of Initiation? What is engaging? Unsettling? Affirming?
3. Christian Initiation is an expression of love – God's love for us and our love for God and each other. It is a love that changes everything (as the [song](#) goes).
 - 3.1. To what change is God's love inviting you?
 - 3.2. To what change is God's love inviting us as ministers of Christian Initiation?

Listening to the Word in scripture

Scripture is an important source for reflection and prayer. You are invited to reflect on any or all of the following passages. There is a flow in the progression of the following passages. Listen for what God is revealing to us, as members of our diocesan and your parish community and at this time, particularly about the ministry of Initiation.

After you have read a passage, the six step **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

Jesus' Mission

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him.

He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. [Lk 4: 14-22]

The Great Commission

[Jesus said to the disciples] 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to command all the commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.' [Mt 28:20]

[Jesus said to the disciples] ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses Indeed to the ends of the earth.' [Acts 1:8]

The Greatest Commandment

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?' Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.' [Mt 22:34-40] [see also Mk 12:28-31, Lk 10:25-28, Jn 13:34-35]

Listening to the Word in church documents

We Catholics talk about 'scripture and tradition'. Next we focus on the relevant documents which are part of our tradition. The overarching document for Christian Initiation is 'Christian Initiation: General Introduction'.

It is most easily found at the beginning of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) p. X (Roman numeral). It can also be downloaded [here](#). You will also find it on LiturgyHelp: under 'Sacraments and Rituals' and then under 'Rite of Christian Initiation'.

The screenshot shows the LiturgyHelp website interface. On the left, a navigation sidebar lists categories like 'LITURGICAL YEAR', 'SEASONS & FEASTS', and 'SACRAMENTS & RITUALS'. The 'SACRAMENTS & RITUALS' category is circled in red, and 'Christian Initiation' is selected. The main content area displays the 'RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION' page, specifically the 'Christian Initiation - General Introduction'. A table of contents on the right side of the page lists sections such as 'Overview', 'Roman Missal', 'Lectionary', and 'Rite of Christian Initiation'. The 'Rite of Christian Initiation' section is circled in red, and 'General Introduction' is highlighted. The main text on the page begins with a numbered list: '1. In the sacraments of Christian initiation we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.'

You are invited to read the document and then to use a version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** to help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

Listening to the Word in local church documents

In the Church of Maitland-Newcastle the Sacraments of Initiation for children are administered according to the diocesan policy '[Becoming Disciples](#)'.

You are invited to read this policy, listening for what God is revealing to us. A version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** may assist you.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal.

Listening to the Word in community and ministry

God is with us in all of life and ministry. We therefore turn our focus to God's Word in our human experience. Attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, we are constantly discerning our response and the way forward in this time and in this community.

Listening to the Word in ministry

1. Recall a 'sacraments of initiation' experience in which you had a strong sense of the presence of God ...
2. Remember it: What happened? What did you see? What did you hear? Who was there?

3. What is God revealing to you in this experience?
4. How will you live differently because of this encounter with God?
5. What meaning does this reveal for the ministry of Christian Initiation in your community?

Reflecting on your experience of ministry

Ministry is always mutual. The minister is also nourished and changed in the experience of ministry.

How have you changed through your participation in the ministry of Christian Initiation?

- Your appreciation and understanding of **your** baptism and its meaning for daily life ...
- Your awareness of the presence of the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own life ...
- Your comfort in sharing your faith
- Your comfort in praying with others using the scripture

You might like to record your reflections in your journal.

Theological Reflection

To gather your insights from your mystagogical reflection on our sources, you are invited to use the **Theological Reflection process on p. 8-9**. This will inform your pastoral reflection.

Pastoral reflection and imagining ...

A fallow year provides us with the gift of time to reflect, discern and change according to what God reveals and the promptings of the Spirit. You are invited to do some pondering and imagining ...

We have inherited a mission – Proclamation and Initiation

Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary. [Attributed to St. Francis]

You might like to watch [this](#).

Any reflection on the Sacraments of Initiation leads quickly to consideration of the nature and purpose of the Church: Why does the Church exist? Why does the parish exist?

Cutting to the chase we could say the Church exists to continue the ministry of Jesus: to proclaim the Good News and call people to discipleship, a call that implies conversion or repentance. [Mt28:20] The other word we use for 'proclamation' is 'evangelisation', though many Catholics are uncomfortable with this word.

'Proclamation/evangelisation' and 'initiation' are therefore core to our being as Church and the continuation of the mission of Jesus in the world today. Responsibility for both these ministries lies with the whole community. At the end of every Mass we are all dismissed to 'Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord'.

The lay apostolate ... is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. ... Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth (2). Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself*
"according to the measure of Christ's bestowal"

Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the People of God, this sacred synod invites all to a deep interior renewal; so that, having a vivid awareness of their own responsibility for spreading the Gospel, they may do their share in missionary work among the nations.

Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church a. 35

Parish Leadership and Sacraments of Initiation Teams enable and facilitate the ministry of all.

Conversations over many years with parish leaders, Sacraments of Initiation Teams and RCIA teams have noted the following challenge: that the community at large – together and individually – lacks an appreciation of its responsibility for the ministries of proclamation/evangelisation and initiation. That is not to imply that the faithful are not proclaiming the Good News of God’s love in the world. They are and in amazing ways. What seems to be the issue is that they do not appreciate that by their lives they are participating in the mission Christ left to the Church.

Several Liturgy Matters articles have considered this challenge, primarily in relation to RCIA. You might like to read the following articles:

[An Initiating Parish](#) and [A Missionary heart is the foundation of Christian Initiation](#)

Reflecting on this challenge ...

1. List all the ways your parish community goes out to proclaim the Good News of God’s love to all the world. You might like to share this ‘good news’ with the whole community. Sometimes we forget all the good we do.
2. During the 2020-2019 bushfires and the COVID 19 pandemic, here and across the world, we have applauded the selfless service of those at the front lines of essential services such as health care and supermarkets. Sometimes this service has led to death.
 - 2.1. How does your community affirm every parishioner’s essential service in proclaiming the good news by their everyday lives?
 - 2.2. Did you count the discipleship of all members of the community in your response to question 1?
 - 2.3. What could be done to ‘wake up’ members of the community to their baptismal responsibility to proclaim the Good News AND to affirm that they are already doing this in their everyday lives? They are missionary disciples.
3. How is the whole parish community and all its groups involved in the ministry of Initiation, particularly for children?
 - 3.1. How could you ‘wake up’ the community and its groups to their responsibility for the ministry of initiation and provide them with opportunities to be involved?
4. What might the ministry of a ‘Sacraments of Initiation Team or Coordinator’ look like if the focus was on involving the whole parish in the ministry of initiation?
5. What else are you pondering ...

Reimagining the ministry of Christian Initiation through the lens of RCIA

The model for all Christian Initiation is the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). This is why members of Sacramental Teams were invited to the 2019 RCIA workshop day facilitated Nick Wagner and Diana Macalintal who are Team RCIA.


While RCIA is for adults and children of catechetical age, its principles and values have wisdom to bring to our fallow time reflection on the *Sacraments of Initiation* for children. The table to the right identifies the six principles that guide the practice of RCIA.

Reflecting on this ...

Six Keys to Making Lifelong Disciples



1. How would you imagine the process of preparation for and celebration of the *Sacraments of Initiation* if the stated goal was to make life-long disciples? What would be the same? What would be different?
2. What might the process of Christian Initiation via the *Sacraments of Initiation* look like if it were: gradual, community based, focused on the paschal mystery, about conversation, adapted for families and pre-catechetical aged children, and varied?
3. The *Sacraments of Initiation* are for children of a pre-catechetical age. What does this mean for the way we prepare children?
4. Following from the question 3, is the primary focus of preparation parents or children? If the former, what wisdom might Part II, Chapter 4 of the RCIA on 'Preparation of uncatechised adults' bring to our pastoral practice with families?
5. What might preparation for the *Sacraments of Initiation* be like if its primary form was prayer and liturgy followed by mystagogical reflection? Might such a format lead people on a journey to Sunday Mass, rather than starting with an expectation that those who are not mass goers would start going 'cold turkey'?

	Key principle of the RCIA (4-5)	How to put this into practice
1	"The initiation of catechumens is a gradual process....	Believe that we are initiating every day of the year. Start by making every day a day for evangelization.
2	that takes place within the community of the faithful....	Use the activities of your parish as primary ways you form catechumens and candidates. Make your RCIA gatherings secondary to what your parish is already doing.
3	By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery ...	Share your personal experience of the paschal mystery. Tell stories of your own dying and rising.
4	and by renewing their own conversion , the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously....	Move from imparting knowledge to entering into intimacy with Jesus. Pay attention to what you see the Spirit doing in the lives of each catechumen and candidate.
5	The rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults ...	Practice adult learning principles . With children, help their families teach them adult faith behaviors adapted for their maturity level. Don't short-change child catechumens with "RCIC."
6	that varies according to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the many forms of God's grace, • the free cooperation of the individuals, • the action of the Church, • and the circumstances of time and place." 	Attend to the specific needs of each person . Account for differences between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unbaptized • baptized uncatechized • and baptized catechized. Don't put people in the RCIA who don't belong in the RCIA.

At its heart initiation is about loving Jesus and growing in the Catholic way of life, at the heart of which is conversion. And the aim of initiation is the formation of lifelong missionary disciples. Consider the preposition highlighted in this scripture passage?

*May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge **of** him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you ...*

Ephesians 1: 17 – 18a

Everyone is different: A true story ...

Once upon a time (actually last year) in a parish far, far away (actually in this diocese), a young woman is consumed with frustration about her child's preparation for Confirmation and First Communion. She is an experienced Religious Education Co-ordinator in one of our primary schools. She and her family are at mass in their parish every weekend. They exercise liturgical ministries and are integrally involved in parish life.

What is driving her nuts? She and her family have to jump through the exact same sacramental ‘hoops’ (her words) as families who are not regular members of the church community. To add further frustration, she knows more about ‘sacrament’ than some members of the sacramental team.

And so the story continued to unfold ...

Is her frustration justified? Her children and her family don’t need to do a ‘program’. Her children are by virtue of their life within the community ready for the next step in the process of Christian Initiation. Truth be told, they were probably ready before this. Is not this natural process of readiness for the next step in Christian Initiation the ideal dream come true?

Reflecting on this ...

1. What questions does this true story raise?
2. How can this story help us sift and discern – as we listen to the Word of God in scripture, our tradition and our experience – so that we might shape our pastoral practice to embody emerging wisdom?
 - 2.1. How does our pastoral practice regarding the Sacraments of Initiation accommodate and respect the difference amongst children and families, and therefore their differing needs in preparing for the next step in the process of Christian Initiation?
 - 2.2. What other ways might this woman and her family have been able to participate in the ‘program’? Perhaps accompanying other families less familiar with the Catholic way of life?
3. What else are you pondering ...

Gathering in your pastoral reflection and imagining ...

1. What wisdom does the RCIA bring to pastoral practice for the *Sacraments of Initiation*?
2. What insights, ideas and hopes are emerging for you?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What challenges do you see?
5. What in your current pastoral practice would you like to affirm?
6. What would you like to change – add, eliminate, reinvent ...?
7. Develop an ‘Action Plan’ that prioritises your ideas so that you move forward one step at a time.
8. What else are you reflecting on and thinking about?

Let us pray ...

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him.

[Ephesians 1:17]

Christ Has No Body Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) (Adapted)

Christ has no body but ours,
No hands, no feet on earth but ours,
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Ours are the hands, with which he blesses all the
world.
Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,

ours are the eyes, we are his body.
Christ has no body now but ours.
No hands, no feet on earth but ours.
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but ours.
To listen to a hymn version of the prayer click [here](#).

Sacrament of Baptism

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi

As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

A pithy little [article](#) appeared on the [PrayTell](#) website in the middle of 2019. It explores the question of whether Baptism is treated as a credential or as a continuation of the Christian journey. The question could be rephrased as: Do we treat baptism as a credential or a commission?

Listening to the Word in scripture

We start our reflection on Baptism with scripture. You are invited to reflect on any or all of the following passages.

After you have read each passage, the **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing to us, particularly about the Sacrament of Baptism as the first step in the journey of Christian Initiation.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with the community when that is possible.

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him. 'It is I who need baptism from you,' he said 'and yet you come to me!' But Jesus replied, 'Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.' At this, John gave in to him.

As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. A voice spoke from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.'

First Peter 2: 9

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Listening to the Word in the liturgical texts

We turn our attention now to some of the baptismal texts. You are invited to pray with one or more of these, listening for what God is revealing to us – particularly about initiation and Baptism – in our local Church of Maitland-Newcastle, in your parish community, at this time.

The **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing in each text. You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with the community when that is possible.

Prayer of exorcism and anointing before baptism

86. After the invocation, the celebrant says:

Minister: Almighty and ever-living God,
you sent your only Son into the world
to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil,
to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness,
and bring him into the splendour of your kingdom of light.
We pray for this child:
set him (her) free from original sin,
make him (her) a temple of your glory,
and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him (her).
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

We anoint you with the oil of salvation
in the name of Christ our Saviour;
may he strengthen you with his power,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

He anoints the child on the breast with the oil of catechumens.

Blessing of the Oil of Catechumens

During the Chrism Mass the Oil of Catechumens is brought before the Bishop, and members of the Assembly who are holding the Oil of Catechumens for their parish are asked to raise the oil for the blessing.

Bishop Bill: O God, strength and protection of your people,
who have made the oil you created a sign of strength,
graciously bless ✠ this oil,
and grant courage to the catechumens
who will be anointed with it,
so that, receiving divine wisdom and power,
they may understand more deeply
the Gospel of your Christ,
they may undertake with a generous heart
the labours of the Christian life,
and, made worthy of adoption
as your sons and daughters,
they may rejoice to be born anew and to live in your Church.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing and Invocation of God over Baptismal Water

91. Then, turning to the font, he says the following blessing (outside the Easter season):

Minister: O God, who by invisible power
accomplish a wondrous effect
through sacramental signs
and who in many ways have prepared water, your creation,
to show forth the grace of Baptism;

O God, whose Spirit
in the first moments of the world's creation
hovered over the waters,
so that the very substance of water
would even then take to itself the power to sanctify;

O God, who by the outpouring of the flood
foreshadowed regeneration,
so that from the mystery of one and the same element of water
would come an end to vice and a beginning of virtue;

O God, who caused the children of Abraham
to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea,
so that the chosen people,
set free from slavery to Pharaoh,
would prefigure the people of the baptised;

O God, whose Son,
baptised by John in the waters of the Jordan,
was anointed with the Holy Spirit,
and, as he hung upon the Cross,
gave forth water from his side along with blood,
and after his Resurrection, commanded his disciples:
"Go forth, teach all nations, baptising them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"
look now, we pray, upon the face of your Church
and graciously unseal for her the fountain of Baptism.

May this water receive by the Holy Spirit
the grace of your Only Begotten Son,
so that human nature, created in your image
and washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism
from all the squalor of the life of old,
may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children
through water and the Holy Spirit.

May the power of the Holy Spirit,
O Lord, we pray,
come down through your Son
into the fullness of this font,

so that all who have been buried with Christ
by Baptism into death
may rise again to life with him.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Renunciation of sin and profession of faith

93. The celebrant speaks to the parents and godparents in these words:

Minister: You have come here to present this child for Baptism. By water and the Holy Spirit he (she) is to receive the gift of new life from God, who is love.

On your part, you must make it your constant care to bring him (her) up in the practice of the faith. See that the divine life which God gives him (her) is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in his (her) heart.

If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, renew now the vows of your own Baptism. Reject sin; profess your faith in Christ Jesus. This is the faith of the Church. This is the faith in which this child is about to be baptised.

94. The celebrant questions the parents and godparents.

Do you renounce Satan, and all his works and empty promises? **I do.**

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? **I do.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered death and was buried,
rose again from the dead
and is seated at the right hand of the Father? **I do.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who today through the Sacrament of Confirmation
is given to you in a special way
just as he was given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost? **I do.**

Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting? **I do.**

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.
We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Baptism

97. The celebrant invites the family to the font and questions the parents and godparents:

Is it your will that **N.** should be baptised in the faith of the Church, which we have all professed with you?
It is.

He baptises the child, saying:

N., I baptise you in the name of the Father,

He immerses the child or pours water upon it.

and of the Son,

He immerses the child or pours water upon it a second time.

and of the Holy Spirit.

He immerses the child or pours water upon it a third time.

Explanatory Rites

Anointing with Chrism

Minister: God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.

Amen.

Then the celebrant anoints the child on the crown of the head with the sacred chrism, in silence.

Clothing with the White Garment

Minister: **N.**, you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ.

See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven.

Amen.

The white garment is put on the child. It is desirable that the family provide the garment.

Lighted Candle

100. The celebrant takes the Easter candle and says:

Minister: Receive the light of Christ.

Someone from the family (such as the father or godfather) lights the child's candle from the Easter candle.

Parents and godparents (**or: godparent**), this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (**she**) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (**she**) keep the flame of faith alive in his (**her**) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (**she**) go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

Ephphetha or Prayer over Ears and Mouth

101. If the conference of bishops decides to preserve the practice, the rite of Ephphetha follows. The celebrant touches the ears and mouth of the child with his thumb, saying:

Minister: The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Listening to the Word in the liturgical documents

Next we focus on the relevant liturgical documents. The overarching document, 'Christian Initiation: General Introduction' informs our reading of the 'Introduction' to the *Sacrament of Baptism*.

You will find the Introduction to the *Rite of Baptism* on LiturgyHelp: under 'Sacraments and Rituals' and then under 'Rite of Baptism for Children.'

The screenshot shows the LiturgyHelp website interface. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like 'LITURGICAL YEAR', 'SEASONS & FEASTS', and 'SACRAMENTS & RITUALS'. Under 'SACRAMENTS & RITUALS', 'Baptism' is highlighted with a red circle. The main content area displays the 'Rite of Baptism for Children' document. A table of contents on the right side of the document lists sections: 'Overview', 'Missal Texts', 'Liturgy', 'Rite of Baptism for Children', 'Introduction', 'I. Baptism for Several Children', 'II. Baptism for One Child', 'III. Large Number of Children', 'IV. Administered by a Catechist', 'V. Children in Danger of Death', 'VI. Reception of Baptised Child', 'VII. Various Texts (I)', 'Appendix', 'Music', 'Prayer of the Faithful', 'Book of Blessings', and 'Certificates'. The 'Rite of Baptism for Children' section is highlighted with a red circle. The document content includes the heading 'I. IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISING CHILDREN' followed by five numbered points, and 'II. MINISTRIES AND ROLES IN THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM' followed by two numbered points.

You are invited to read the document and then use a version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** to help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing. You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

Listening to the Word in community and ministry

God is with us in all of life and ministry. We therefore turn our focus to God's Word in our human experience. Attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, we are constantly discerning our response and the way forward in this time and in this community.

Listening to the Word in ministry

1. Recall a 'baptism' experience in which you had a strong sense of the presence of God ...
2. Remember it: What happened? What did you see? What did you hear? Who was there?
3. What is God revealing to you in this experience?
4. How will you live differently because of this encounter with God?
5. What meaning does this have for the ministry of Christian Initiation in your community?

Reflecting on your experience of ministry

Ministry is always mutual. The minister is also nourished and changed in the experience of ministry.

How have you changed through your participation in the ministry of Christian Initiation relating to baptism?

- Your appreciation and understanding of **your** baptism and its meaning for daily life ...
- Your awareness of the presence of the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own life ...
- Your comfort in sharing your faith
- Your comfort in praying with others using the scripture

You might like to record your reflections in your journal.

Theological Reflection

To gather your insights from your mystagogical reflection on our sources, you are invited to use the **Theological Reflection process on p. 8-9**. This will inform your pastoral reflection.

Pastoral reflection and imagining ...

A fallow year provides us with the gift of time to reflect, discern and change according to what God reveals and the promptings of the Spirit. You are invited to do some pondering and imagining ...

1. What wisdom does the RCIA bring to baptismal ministry?
2. What insights, ideas and hopes are emerging for you?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What challenges do you see?
5. What in your current pastoral practice would you like to affirm?
6. What would you like to change – add, eliminate, reinvent ...
7. Develop an 'Action Plan' that prioritises your ideas so that you move forward one step at a time.
8. What else are you reflecting on and thinking about?

Celebrating Baptism in Sunday Mass

In the *Rite of Baptism*, the ideal is for Baptism to take place at Sunday mass. Apart from Sunday mass it is very difficult to make clear that Baptism is in fact an incorporation into the church – the community of the faithful. The symbol of this that is 'perceptible to the senses' is the presence of that community. The presence of the community is also an exercise of its baptismal responsibility for the ministry of initiation.

Some parish communities regularly celebrate Baptism at Sunday mass and find it a very positive experience embraced enthusiastically by both the community of faith and the family presenting their child.

For a range of pastoral reasons, many if not most baptisms take place after Sunday mass with only the families and a few ministers present.

Anecdotally we know that both the members of the community of the faithful and families have had poor experiences of baptism in Sunday mass. Stories indicate that this is sometimes due to a lack of understanding of how to incorporate baptism into Sunday mass.

While some liturgical books can be confusing, the outline for the 'Rite of Baptism within Mass' is clearly outlined in the Rite as follows:

RECEPTION OF THE CHILD

Greeting
Opening Dialogue (*the questions*)
Signing of the Child with the Cross
Collect
Invitation to the Celebration of the Word of God (*procession with song*)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading
Responsorial Psalm
Second Reading
Gospel Acclamation
Gospel
Homily
Intercessions

PREPARATORY RITES

Prayer of Exorcism
Anointing before Baptism (Oil of Catechumens)

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

Invitation to Prayer
Prayer over the Water
Profession of Faith
 Renunciation of Sin
 Profession of Faith
Baptism
Acclamation
Explanatory Rites
 Anointing after Baptism (Oil of Chrism)
 Clothing with White Garment
 Lighted Candle
 Ephphetha

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Gifts
Prayer over the Offerings
Eucharistic Prayer
Communion Rite
 Lord's Prayer
 Sign of Peace
 Communion
 Prayer after Communion

CONCLUDING RITE

Blessing (which could be over the parents)
Dismissal

Let us pray ...

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And they left their nets at once and followed him.

[Mt 4: 18-20]

Christ Has No Body Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) (Adapted)

Christ has no body but ours,
No hands, no feet on earth but ours,
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Ours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,
ours are the eyes, we are his body.
Christ has no body now but ours.
No hands, no feet on earth but ours.
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but ours.

To listen to a hymn version of the prayer click [here](#).

Sacrament of Confirmation

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi
As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in them the fire of your love*

Pentecost Sunday Gospel acclamation

Confirmation is sometimes referred to as ‘a sacrament in search of a theology’. The fact that it is ‘tricky’ can be seen in varied pastoral practice around its placement. When placed after first communion there is a sense that it is being hijacked to serve our own pastoral agenda. While we have resolved this issue in our diocese, occasionally the desire to move Confirmation to after First Communion is heard in some parishes.

So how do we understand Confirmation and how does our understanding or confusion impact on our pastoral practice?

Our appreciation and understanding of the Holy Spirit and her place in the life of the disciple and the Church community is key to our understanding of Confirmation. The theology of the Holy Spirit in the Western Catholic Church continues to develop. Our ongoing reception of Vatican II, and our own Plenary Council with its clarion call to ‘listen to what the spirit is saying’, are pushing us in this area.

The Holy Spirit is essential to us being Church and doing churchy things like liturgy, sacraments and mission. Without the Spirit there is no Church, there is no liturgy. The Spirit is the principle of unity, a unity strengthened by the diversity of gifts the Spirit brings to each member of the community.

Our insight into synodality as constitutive to the nature of the Church emphasises discernment as essential to the life of faith. It is the gift of the Spirit – the Spirit of Truth – which enables us to do the work of listening and discerning. To be a life-long disciple requires constant attentiveness to the Spirit.

How are our growing insights into the mystery of the Holy Spirit and her role in the life and mission of the Church informing our pastoral practice regarding the preparation and celebration of Confirmation?

We might consider for example:

- How are we initiating children and families into the need to be attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, as it blows where it wills in our world and in our lives as disciples and as members of the church?
- How are we opening them to an appreciation of unity in diversity?
- Have we placed the Holy Spirit and Confirmation in a box that is only as big as the sevenfold gifts named in scripture?
- We receive the Holy Spirit at baptism. So, what is happening at Confirmation?

What ponderings are you bringing to our reflection on our pastoral practice relating to the preparation and celebration of Confirmation?

Let’s begin by calling on the Holy Spirit to come ...

Litany of the Holy Spirit *Dan Schutte* To listen click [here](#)

Come, O Holy Spirit ... *renew the face of the earth*

Come, O Bringer of Blessing ... *renew the face of the earth.*

Come, O Font of Knowledge ...

Come, O Promise of Plenty ...

Come, O Word of Kindness ...

Come, O Mother of Mercy ...

Come, O Light of Wisdom ...

Come, O Giver of Gladness ...

Hope of all who hunger ...

Teacher of truth and justice ...

Breath of life eternal

Fullness of God within us ...

Voice of God within us, ...

Dwelling of Christ among us ...

Song of joy and gladness ...

Author of Love's great story ...

Come, O Spirit of Jesus ...

Kindle your fire within us ...

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Listening to the Word in scripture

We start our reflection with scripture. You are invited to reflect on any or all of the following passages, listening for what God is revealing to us, particularly about the *Sacrament of Confirmation* as part of the journey of *Christian Initiation*.

After you have read each passage, the **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing, particularly about the Holy Spirit. You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with the community when that is possible.

Acts 8:5-8. 14-17

Philip went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them. The people united in welcoming the message Philip preached, either because they had heard of the miracles he worked or because they saw them for themselves. There were, for example, unclean spirits that came shrieking out of many who were possessed, and several paralytics and cripples were cured. As a result, there was great rejoicing in that town.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, and they went down there, and prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet he had not come down on any of them: they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-17. 22-25

If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence, since self-indulgence is the opposite of the Spirit, the Spirit is totally against such a thing, and it is precisely because the two are so opposed that you do not always carry out your good intentions. What the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires.

Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit.

First Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13

No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.

Revelation 2:29

If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

Listening to the Word in the liturgical texts

We turn now to reflect on some of the liturgical texts from the Feast of Pentecost, the Chrism Mass and the Order of Confirmation. Quite a range of texts follows endeavouring to accommodate the differing needs of individuals and communities. You are invited to pray with one or more of the following texts, listening for what God is revealing to us.

You might like to use the **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing in each text, particularly about the Holy Spirit and the Sacraments of Confirmation, in our local Church of Maitland-Newcastle, in your parish community, at this time.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

Pentecost Sequence

Holy Spirit, Lord of light,
From the clear celestial height
Thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, thou Father of the poor,
Come with treasures which endure;
Come, thou light of all that live!

Thou, of all consolers best,
Thou, the soul's delightful guest,
Dost refreshing peace bestow;

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;
Pleasant coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, light divine,
Visit thou these hearts of thine,
And our inmost being fill:

If thou take thy grace away,
Nothing pure in man will stay;
All his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour thy dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.

Thou, on us who evermore
Thee confess and thee adore,
With thy sevenfold gifts descend:

Give us comfort when we die;
Give us life with thee on high;
Give us joys that never end.

From the Order of Mass for Pentecost Sunday.

Prefaces

PREFACE I FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

The sending of the Spirit by the Lord upon the Church.

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Christ our Lord.

Ascending above the heavens
And sitting at your right hand,
he poured out the promised Holy Spirit
On your adopted children.

Therefore, now and for ages unending,
with all the host of Angels,
we sing to you with all our hearts,
crying out as we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy ...

PREFACE II FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

The action of the Spirit in the Church.

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For you bestowed gifts suited to every season
and guide the governing of your Church in wonderful ways.

By the power of the Holy Spirit
you come unailing to her aid,
so that with a heart always subject to you
she may never fail to seek your help in time of trouble
nor cease to give you thanks in time of joy,
through Christ our Lord.

And so in the company of the choirs of Angels,
We praise you, and with joy we proclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy ...

From the Missal. Votive Mass The Holy Spirit

Consecration of the Chrism

The Oil of Chrism is consecrated by the Bishop during the Chrism Mass. This takes place after the Prayer After Communion and immediately following the Blessing of the Oil of Catechumens. Facing the concelebrating Priests, the Bishop says:

Let us pray, dear brothers and sisters, to God the almighty Father,
that he bless and sanctify this oil;
may those who are signed with it outwardly
be inwardly anointed
and made worthy of divine redemption.

The Bishop breathes over the Oil of Chrism. Then extending his arms over the Oil, he continues:

O God, author of all growth and spiritual progress,
receive in your goodness the grateful homage
that the Church joyfully offers to you through our voice.

For in the beginning you commanded the earth
to bring forth fruit-bearing trees,
among which olive trees would arise
as providers of this most rich oil,
so that their fruit might serve for sacred Chrism.

In the spirit of prophecy,
David foresaw the sacraments of your grace
and sang of the oil that would gladden our faces.
After the world's offences were washed away by the flood,
a dove announced the restoration of peace on earth with the olive branch,
foreshadowing the gift to come.
In the last days all this has been clearly revealed:

when every offence is removed through the waters of Baptism,
the anointing with this oil makes our faces cheerful and serene.

You also commanded your servant Moses
to make his brother Aaron a priest,
by pouring this oil upon him
after he had been washed in water.

Still greater dignity was added to this
when your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord,
insisted that he be washed by John
in the waters of the Jordan:
you sent the Holy Spirit from on high
in the likeness of a dove;
you declared by the witness of the voice that followed,
that you were well pleased in him,
your Only Begotten Son;
and you were seen to confirm clearly
what the prophet David had foretold in song,
that Christ would be anointed with the oil of gladness
above his companions.

The concelebrating Priests extend their right hands over the Oil of Chrism in silence as the Bishop continues:

Therefore we beseech you, Lord:
be pleased to sanctify with your ✠ blessing this oil in its richness,
and to pour into it the strength of the Holy Spirit,
with the powerful working of your Christ.
From his holy name it has received the name of Chrism,
and with it you have anointed your priests, prophets, kings and martyrs.

May you confirm the Chrism you have created
as a sacred sign of perfect salvation and life
for those to be made new in the spiritual waters of Baptism.

May those formed into a temple of your majesty
by the holiness infused through this anointing
and by the cleansing of the stain of their first birth
be made fragrant with the innocence of a life pleasing to you.

May those anointed with royal, priestly and prophetic dignity
be clothed with the garment of an incorruptible gift
in keeping with the Sacrament you have established.

May this oil be the Chrism of salvation
for those born again of water and the Holy Spirit,
and may it make them partakers of eternal life
and sharers of heavenly glory.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen

The Laying On of Hands

Dearly beloved,
let us pray to God the almighty Father,
for these, his adopted sons and daughters,
already born again to eternal life in Baptism,
that he will graciously pour out the Holy Spirit upon them
to confirm them with his abundant gifts,
and through his anointing
conform them more fully to Christ, the Son of God.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who brought these your servants to new birth
by water and the Holy Spirit,
freeing them from sin:
send upon them, O Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete;
give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and fortitude,
the spirit of knowledge and piety;
fill them with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

From the Order of Confirmation a. 24

The Blessing

May God the Father almighty bless you,
whom he has made his adopted sons and daughters
reborn from water and the Holy Spirit,
and may he keep you worthy of his fatherly love.

Amen.

May his Only Begotten Son,
who promised that the Spirit of truth would abide in his Church,
bless you and confirm you by his power
in the confession of the true faith.

Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
who kindles the fire of charity in the hearts of disciples,
bless you and lead you blameless and gathered as one
into the joy of the Kingdom of God.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God
the Father, ✠ and the Son, ✠ and the Holy ✠ Spirit.
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

Amen.

From the Order of Confirmation a. 33

The Prayer over the People

Confirm, O God,
what you have brought about in us,
and preserve in the hearts of your faithful
the gifts of the Holy Spirit:
may they never be ashamed
to confess Christ crucified before the world
and by devoted charity
may they ever fulfil his commands.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God
the Father, ✠ and the Son, ✠ and the Holy ✠ Spirit.
come down on you and remain with you for ever.
Amen.

From the Order of Confirmation a. 33

Listening to the Word in the liturgical documents

Next we focus on the relevant documents. These documents are found at the beginning of the 'Order of Confirmation'.

'Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation. p. vii
The 'Introduction' to the Order of Confirmation found on p.1

Having read the documents, the **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing about the nature and purpose of the Sacrament of Confirmation within the Process of Christian Initiation.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with the community when that is possible.

You will also find these documents on LiturgyHelp: under 'Sacraments and Rituals', 'Confirmation' then under 'Order of Confirmation'

LITURGICAL YEAR

SEASONS & FEASTS

SACRAMENTS & RITUALS

- Christian Initiation
- Baptism
- Confirmation**
- Matrimony
- Other Sacraments
- Funerals
- Sunday Celebrations
- Other Rituals

OTHER MASSES

free-guide-how-to...pdf

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. It is one of the three sacraments of Initiation.

By the laying on of hands, and the anointing with the holy oil of Christ, the sacrament of Confirmation enriches the Church with the gift of the Holy Spirit and seals Baptism. Together with the Eucharist, it brings the baptised fully into the Church. It is

Confirmation

Confirmation is the sacrament which enriches the baptised with the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that they may grow in stature as Christians and give witness to Christ more fully. Baptised in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit at Confirmation, the Christian is then called to the table of the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The celebration of Confirmation calls to mind the faith professed in Baptism and confers the gifts needed to build up the Christian community in unit love. By the laying on of hands and anointing with the Sacred Oil of Confirmation seals and completes Baptism. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, candidates are filled with the grace to follow the example of Christ and serve others.

Baptised infants celebrate confirmation when they are older. Adults are confirmed as part of a complete process of initiation into the parish community. This involves prayer, reflection and discussion over a period of time and culminates in the celebration of the three sacraments of initiation one time: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, most commonly at the Easter Vigil. Older children who have not been baptised also follow this process.

Children who have been baptised as infants undergo a period of preparation for Confirmation when they are older. In some dioceses, Confirmation is

- Overview
- Missal Texts
- Introduction
- Order of Confirmation**
- Apostolic Constitution
- Introduction
- Conferral of Confirmation Within Mass
- Conferral of Confirmation Without Mass
- Conferral by an Extraordinary Minister
- Conferral of a Person in Danger of Death
- Texts for Use in the Conferral of Confirmation

Listening to the Word in community and ministry

God is with us in all of life and ministry. We therefore turn our focus to God's Word in our human experience. Attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit we are constantly discerning our response and the way forward in this time and in this community.

1. Recall a confirmation experience – a gift – that has stayed with you?
 - 1.1. What happened?
 - 1.2. What did God reveal to you?
 - 1.3. What meaning does it have for the ministry of *Christian Initiation* in your community?
2. What is God revealing to you in this experience?
3. How has your understanding of the *Sacrament of Confirmation* grown over the last three years?
 - 3.1. What insights have you gained?
 - 3.2. What questions are you pondering?
4. How have you changed through your participation in the ministry of Christian Initiation?
 - Your awareness of the presence of the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own life ...
 - Your comfort in sharing your faith ...
 - Your comfort in praying with others – with and without scripture ...

You might like to record your reflections in your journal.

Theological Reflection

To gather your insights from your mystagogical reflection on our sources you are invited to use the **Theological Reflection process on p. 8-9**. This will inform your pastoral reflection.

Review of Diocesan Pastoral Guidance for the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation

As the documents introducing the *Order of Confirmation* indicate, the various levels of the local Church are responsible to provide direction and support to the community for the preparation and celebration of the *Order of Confirmation*.

In 2017, in response to requests from parishes for some guidance, the Diocesan Liturgy Council engaged the community and Bishop Bill in a process of listening and dialogue which resulted in the promulgation of the current 'Pastoral Guidance for the Preparation and Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation'. The document includes Guidelines, procedures and resources.

A commitment was made to undertake a formal review after three years. Bishop Bill's declaration of 2020 as a 'fallow year' for the *Sacraments of Initiation* provides the community with the gift of time to undertake this review within the broader context of reflection on the whole journey of *Christian Initiation* for children of pre-catechetical age and their families.

All the documents for review are available on the diocesan [website](#). There is one large document that contains everything. p. 1-14 of that document remain current. The appendices have been constantly updated in light of parish feedback. Please access these as individual documents on the website as these are the current versions.

Having reflected on the Church's understanding of the nature, meaning and purpose of Confirmation we are ready to begin to reflect on and review or diocesan documents.

Reflecting on the diocesan document ...

Please read and reflect on each aspect of the document using the questions below as a guide.

The quote from Pope Francis on p.2

Bishop Bill's Message p. 4-5

The Overview p. 8-9

The Guidelines p. 10-12

Common Pastoral Issues p. 13-14

Resources:

Appendix 1: Presentation of Symbols p. 15-18

Appendix 2: Simplified Renewal of Baptismal Promises

The updated Liturgy Advice form as that appears as an individual document on the website

The updated Templates for Confirmation Within and Outside Mass as these appear as individual documents on the website.

For Listening and Dialogue:

1. What has been most supportive/helpful to you in your ministry?
2. What have you been wanting to ask about?
3. What suggestions do you have for improvement?
4. Is there anything missing that it would be helpful to include?
5. Considering other aspects of our shared ministry ...
 - 5.1 Regional 'Workspace Gatherings' ...
 - 5.2 Involvement of the Assistant Masters of Ceremonies ...
 - 5.3 ...
6. Thinking beyond the document and its resources: what are the most significant challenges you face in the ministry of preparation and celebration of Confirmation that you would like to discuss with others?
7. Is there anything else you would like to have conversation about?

The next step ...

When the process of listening and dialogue is complete all the documents will be revised and made available on the diocesan website. They will continue to be reviewed and adapted in response to our deepening insight and experience.

Pastoral reflection and imagining ...

A fallow year provides us with the gift of time to reflect, discern and change according to what God reveals and the promptings of the Spirit. You are invited to do some pondering and imagining ...

1. What wisdom does the RCIA bring to confirmation ministry?
2. What insights, ideas and hopes are emerging for you?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What challenges do you see?
5. What in your current pastoral practice would you like to affirm?
6. What would you like to change – add, eliminate, reinvent ...
7. Develop an 'Action Plan' that prioritises your ideas so that you move forward one step at a time.
8. What else are you reflecting on and thinking about?

Let us pray ...

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.

[1 Cor 12:12-13]

Christ Has No Body Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) (Adapted)

Christ has no body but ours,
No hands, no feet on earth but ours,
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Ours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,
ours are the eyes, we are his body.
Christ has no body now but ours.
No hands, no feet on earth but ours.
Ours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but ours.

To listen to a hymn version of the prayer click [here](#).

First Communion

Lex Orandi, Lex Credenda, Lex Vivendi

As we worship, so we believe, so we live

Introduction

First Communion is the culmination of the process of Christian Initiation.

This fallow time provides the parish community, particularly ministers of Christian Initiation, with an opportunity to reflect deeply on the nature and purpose of eucharist in the life and mission of the Church. How does the process of preparation and celebration of First Communion initiate families into a rich appreciation of eucharist and not a private, devotional understanding that presents eucharist as an object rather than a communal action – as a noun rather than a verb.

Our COVID 19 experience of lockdown, social isolation and the consequent suspension of public liturgy – particularly Sunday mass – has pushed us all to think more deeply about this.

With something of an echo of the article on baptism referred to earlier – credential or commission – much of our current reflection has focused on whether we understand ourselves as celebrants or consumers of eucharist. Are we coming to mass to get a commodity? Or are we coming to do and become something together?

Using this image invites us to consider many things such as:

- How are we initiating people into an appreciation of the integral connection between eucharist and life? How are we helping them to know that we come to the celebration of eucharist with our hands and hearts full of the joys and sorrows of our lives and the world, ready to hand these to our God of love and mercy, who receives us and embraces us as we are, and shapes us to be sent out to be a sacrament of love for the world?
- How are we opening people's minds and hearts to appreciate that in the presentation of bread and wine we place our lives on the altar so that joined to Christ, God will take, bless, break and give us for the life of the world?
- How are we initiating children and families into an appreciation of communion as a communal action rather than a private action? Are we encouraging people to watch the communion procession attentive to their brothers and sisters with whom we share this meal?
- How are we opening people's hearts to experience Christ's paschal – dying, rising – rhythm in the liturgy, so that they will recognise it in their lives and our world and so have hope even in the darkest of places?
- How are we helping people appreciate what a dangerous word 'Amen' is?

Central to these questions is our understanding of the Vatican II catch cry, 'full, conscious and active participation'. How are we helping people appreciate that participation is something the whole assembly does together (the presider is part of the assembly)? How are we helping families appreciate the three levels of liturgical participation?

1. Participating in the liturgical action via responding, listening, singing, movement ...
2. Participating in the paschal mystery by joining ourselves to Christ's dying and rising action, offering ourselves to be taken, blessed, broken and given for the life of the world ...
3. Participating in the very life of God ...

Are we initiating people as celebrants or consumers? Which mode is essential to lifelong discipleship?

The faith of the Church is that eucharist makes the church. Bread and wine are changed AND so are we, not only as disciples, but most significantly as a community who is responsible for the continuation of Jesus' mission in the world today.

What ponderings are you bringing to your reflection on our pastoral practice relating to the preparation and celebration of First Communion?

Let's begin by acknowledging that we hand ourselves to God ... to shape us and shepherd us ...

The following litany form of *Shepherd me O God* has many verses. Below is a selection that might suit our focus on Christian Initiation and specifically First Communion. A version that also includes the psalm version can be heard [here](#).

Shepherd Me O God *Marty Haugen*

Cantor: Shepherd me, O God.

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: Shepherd me, O God.

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You, the servants' Servant:

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You our truth and teacher:

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: Help us to believe you,
in our hearts receive you,
Grant that we perceive you

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You the voice that calls us:

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You the fire that sends us:

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: Teach us true contrition:
Help us live your mission
Bring us to fruition

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You our hope and shelter ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You our guide and pathway ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You the one who calls us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: You the one who leads us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: God of mercy shape us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: God of love enflame us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: God of wisdom teach us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: God of truth, speak through us ...

All: Shepherd me O God.

Cantor: As you formed and birthed us,
as you call and lead us,
be our one true future,

All: Shepherd me O God.

**All: Shepherd me, O God,
beyond my wants, beyond my fears,
from death into life.**

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Listening to the Word in scripture

We start our reflection with scripture. You are invited to reflect on any or all of the following passages, listening for what God is revealing to us, particularly about the Sacrament of Confirmation as part of the journey of Christian Initiation.

After you have read each passage, a version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing, particularly about Jesus command for us to 'do this in memory of him'.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 'Bring them here to me,' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he **took** the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the **blessing**. And **breaking** the loaves he handed them to his disciples who **gave** them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining, twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

Matthew 26:26

Now as they were eating, Jesus **took** some bread, and when he had said the **blessing** he **broke** it and **gave** it to the disciples and said: Take it and eat; this is my body.

First Corinthians 11:23-26

This is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you: that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus **took** some bread, and **thanked** God for it and **broke** it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.' In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming to his death.

John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was.

They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.' 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter, 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are.'

When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

Listening to the Word in the liturgical texts

We turn now to reflect on some of the liturgical texts. You are invited to pray with one or more of the following texts, listening for what God is revealing to us

You might like to use a version of the **mystagogical reflection process on p. 8** will help you 'listen like a disciple' to what God is revealing in each text, particularly about the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of Confirmation, in our local Church of Maitland-Newcastle, in your parish community, at this time.

You might like to record your reflections in your journal so you can share them with other members of the community when that is possible.

PREFACE I OF THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST

The Sacrifice and the Sacrament of Christ

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Christ our Lord.

For he is the true and eternal Priest,
who instituted the pattern of an everlasting sacrifice,
and was the first to offer himself as the saving Victim,
commanding us to make this offering as his memorial.
As we eat his flesh that was sacrificed for us,
we are made strong,
and, as we drink his Blood that was poured out for us,
we are washed clean.

And so, with Angels and Archangels,
with Thrones and Dominions,
and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven,
we sing the hymn of your glory,
as without end we acclaim:

PREFACE II OF THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST

The fruits of the Most Holy Eucharist

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Christ our Lord.

For at the Last Supper with his Apostles,
establishing for the ages to come the saving memorial of the Cross,
he offered himself to you as the unblemished Lamb,

the acceptable gift of perfect praise.

Nourishing your faithful by this sacred mystery,
you make them holy, so that the human race,
bounded by one world,
may be enlightened by one faith
and united by one bond of charity.

And so, we approach the table of this wondrous Sacrament,
so that, bathed in the sweetness of your grace,
we may pass over to the heavenly realities here foreshadowed.

Therefore, all creatures of heaven and earth
sing a new song in adoration,
and we, with all the host of Angels,
cry out, and without end we acclaim:

Eucharistic Prayer II with Common Preface 3

Presider: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Presider: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to the Lord.

Presider: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right and just.

Presider: It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.
For just as through your beloved Son you created the human race,
so also through him with great goodness,
you formed it anew.
And so, it is right that all your creatures serve you,
all the redeemed praise you,
and all your Saints with one heart bless you.
Therefore, we, too, extol you with all the Angels,
as in joyful celebration we acclaim:

**All: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Presider: You are indeed Holy, O Lord,
the fount of all holiness.

Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray,
by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall,
so that they may become for us
the Body and + Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the time he was betrayed
and entered willingly into his Passion,
he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
FOR THIS IS MY BODY,
WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.

In a similar way, when supper was ended,
he took the chalice
and, once more giving thanks,
he gave it to his disciples, saying:

TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD,
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT
WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.
DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

The mystery of faith.

**All: We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.**

Or:

**When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.**

Or:

**Save us, Saviour of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.**

Presider: Therefore, as we celebrate
the memorial of his Death and Resurrection,
we offer you, Lord,
the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation,
giving thanks that you have held us worthy
to be in your presence and minister to you.
Humbly we pray
that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ,
we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.

Remember, Lord, your Church,
spread throughout the world,
and bring her to the fullness of charity,
together with Francis our Pope and William our Bishop
and all the clergy.

Remember also our brothers and sisters

who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection,
and all who have died in your mercy:
welcome them into the light of your face.
Have mercy on us all, we pray,
that with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with Blessed Joseph her spouse,
with the blessed Apostles,
and all the Saints who have pleased you throughout the ages,
we may merit to be coheirs to eternal life,
and may praise and glorify you
He joins his hands.
through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through him, and with him, and in him,
O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour is yours,
for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Listening to the Word in the liturgical documents

Next we focus on some references from relevant documents. We shall focus on four aspects of the mystery of our celebration of Eucharist:

Firstly, the presence of Christ transcends the consecrated bread and wine ...

27. At Mass or the Lord's Supper the People of God is called together, with a Priest presiding and acting in the person of Christ, to celebrate the memorial of the Lord or Eucharistic Sacrifice.³⁷ In an outstanding way there applies to such a local gathering of the holy Church the promise of Christ: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst' (Mt 18: 20). For in the celebration of Mass, in which the Sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated,³⁸ Christ is really present in the very assembly gathered in his name, in the person of the minister, in his word, and indeed substantially and uninterruptedly under the Eucharistic species.³⁹

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)
Chapter II: THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS, ITS ELEMENTS AND ITS PARTS,
I. THE GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE MASS

Secondly, the Word of God is central to the liturgy. Indeed 'The Liturgy of the Eucharist' cannot be celebrated except as a response to hearing the Word of God.

28. The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship.⁴⁰ For in the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and of the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed.⁴¹ There are also certain rites that open and conclude the celebration.

GIRM a. 28

Thirdly, the eucharist we celebrate today embodies the 'take → bless → break → give' eucharistic action recorded in the scripture. This is outlined in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) as follows ...

72. At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory.⁶⁹

For Christ took the bread and the chalice, gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat and drink: this is my Body; this is the chalice of my Blood. Do this in memory of me. Hence, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ, namely:

a) At the Preparation of the Gifts, bread and wine with water are brought to the altar, the same elements, that is to say, which Christ took into his hands.

b) In the Eucharistic Prayer, thanks is given to God for the whole work of salvation, and the offerings become the Body and Blood of Christ.

c) Through the fraction and through Communion, the faithful, though many, receive from the one bread the Lord's Body and from the one chalice the Lord's Blood in the same way that the Apostles received them from the hands of Christ himself.

The prayers are from the English Translation of the Roman Missal © 2010 International Committee on English in the Liturgy Inc. (ICEL). All rights reserved.

GIRM, Chapter 2, III. THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE MASS,
C) The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Fourthly, through this ritual action the faithful offer themselves with Christ and are changed

95. In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God's own possession and a royal priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves.⁸³ They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.

They are consequently to avoid any appearance of singularity or division, keeping in mind that they have only one Father in heaven and that hence are all brothers or sisters one to the other.

96. Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord's table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful.

97. The faithful, moreover, should not refuse to serve the People of God in gladness whenever they are asked to perform some particular service or function in the celebration.

GIRM Chapter III: DUTIES AND MINISTRIES IN THE MASS
II. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

a. 95 above references the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Chapter two a. 48.

48. The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator (38), they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.

Listening to the Word in community and ministry

God is with us in all of life and ministry. We turn our focus to God's Word in our human experience. Attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit we are constantly discerning our response and the way forward in this time and in this community.

1. Recall a First Communion experience – a gift – that has stayed with you?
 - 1.1. What happened?
 - 1.2. What did God reveal to you?
 - 1.3. What meaning does it have for the ministry of Christian Initiation in your community?
2. What is God revealing to you in this experience?
3. How is your understanding of eucharist deepening?
 - 3.1. What insights have you gained?
 - 3.2. What questions are you pondering?
4. How have you changed through your participation in the ministry of Christian Initiation?
 - Your awareness of the presence of the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own life ...
 - Your comfort in sharing your faith ...
 - Your comfort in praying with others – with and without scripture ...

You might like to record your reflections in your journal.

Theological Reflection

To gather in your insights from your mystagogical reflection on our sources you are invited to use the **Theological Reflection process on p.8-9**. This will inform your pastoral reflection.

Pastoral reflection and imagining ...

A fallow year provides us with the gift of time to reflect, discern and change according to what God reveals and the promptings of the Spirit. You are invited to do some pondering and imagining ...

1. What wisdom does the RCIA bring to first communion ministry?
2. What insights, ideas and hopes are emerging for you?
3. What questions do you have?
4. What challenges do you see?

5. What in your current pastoral practice would you like to affirm?
6. What would you like to change – add, eliminate, reinvent ...
7. Develop an 'Action Plan' that prioritises your ideas so that you move forward one step at a time.
8. What else are you reflecting on and thinking about?

Let us pray ...

This then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen

[Eph 3:16-21]

Christ Has No Body Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) (Adapted)

Christ has no body but ours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but ours,
 Ours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
 Ours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
 Ours are the hands, ours are the feet,
 ours are the eyes, we are his body.
 Christ has no body now but ours.
 No hands, no feet on earth but ours.
 Ours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
 Christ has no body now on earth but ours.

A House of Prayer Tony Alonso To listen click [here](#)

Ref: Let this be a house of prayer, shelter of God's love and care,
 shaped into a house of living stones ...
 by the hands of Christ our cornerstone.
 Let this be a house of prayer for all people.

1. A font of God's love overflowing: Let this be a house of prayer.
 A holy ground where all find welcome: Let this be a house of prayer.
 A temple of the Holy Spirit: Let this be a house of prayer.

2. A refuge in a time of trouble: Let this be a house of prayer.
A vessel of God's grace and mercy: Let this be a house of prayer.
A hospital where wounds are treated: Let this be a house of prayer.
3. A table set for friend and stranger: Let this be a house of prayer.
A body taken blessed and broken: Let this be a house of prayer.
A banquet hall for every hunger: Let this be a house of prayer.

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Gathering in our fallow time reflection

Just as Christ, then, went about all the towns and villages, curing every kind of disease and infirmity as a sign that the kingdom of God had come (cf. Matt. 9:35ff; Acts 10:38), so also the Church, through her children, is one with men of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted. For them, she gladly spends and is spent (cf. 2 Cor. 12:15), sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death's anxieties. To those in quest of peace, she wishes to answer in fraternal dialogue, bearing them the peace and the light of the Gospel.

Ad Gentes a. 12

Where have we come from and where are we going?

Questions we sometimes hear echoing around the community cluster around leadership:

- Are we leading or are we managing?
- Are we leading people forward or keeping them where they are and giving them what they want?

Similar questions concern the whole community:

- Are we a pilgrim people always moving forward in response to the Spirit, open to ongoing conversion and change?
- Are we more comfortable staying where we are and doing what we have always done?

These questions are not irrelevant to our fallow time reflection on our current pastoral practice regarding the ministry of Christian Initiation via the Sacraments of Initiation with children and their families.

It is common to hear parish communities express concern that they are doing in this space is not working. At times this frustration can be with ...

- the motivation of families, and the consequent need felt by parishes to respond with the minimum, so we don't 'lose' them.
- a family-centred process that leaves a significant number of parents feeling inadequate
- a parish-based process that parishioners on the whole fail to engage with
- the constancy of it all that leaves parish teams without time to stand back and reflect
- our own weariness from the never ending cycle of it all

At other times we are energised by sharing faith with amazing people who present their children for initiation. In these encounters our faith is deepened, our energy refreshed, and our commitment renewed.

If we desire to reflect on our current pastoral practice and reimagine what we're doing in this space, then this year is our God given 'once in a 100-year pandemic' opportunity. The Holy Spirit works in strange and mysterious ways.

The process of engagement used throughout this resource is the ancient catholic process of mystagogical reflection. It engages people where they are and invites them to reflect on their experience of life with a focus on prayer and scripture. It affirms Christian initiation as a journey of deepening love of the God of Jesus Christ, and growth in the Catholic way of life through engagement with the community. If there is a 'program' it is the community of the faithful, the experience of the families we meet, and the reflection and dialogue that emerges from shared faith, prayer and liturgy. If the aim and purpose of Christian Initiation is the formation of lifelong missionary disciples, then the mystagogical path, with its focus on relationship and conversion, invites our reflection.

We hope this resource provides opportunities for you to: rest and refresh yourself by listening to what God is revealing to this local church in our primary sources which unite us, and our experience which expresses our diversity and connect with and reflect on your own Christian Initiation and how you live it every day. We hope it provokes and supports your reflection. It is for you to use as you see fit.

As indicated in the Introduction when it is appropriate there will be opportunities for those who wish, to gather to share their wisdom and explore their questions.

If in the meantime you would like to engage in further conversation, or you have questions, please contact [Louise](#). If a parish is interested in exploring the possibility of shaping their pastoral approach to the Sacraments of Initiation with the mystagogical wisdom and lens of the RCIA, we would be happy to support you in any way that you would find helpful. Members of the DLC and Christian Initiation Forum are available.

May we continue to support each other as like Carlo Carretto, we minister together in love, allowing the 'Holy Spirit alone (to) build the Church with stones as ill-hewn as we'.

Wishing you every blessing,

Louise Gannon rsj (Manager of Worship and Prayer)

With the Diocesan Liturgy Council and Diocesan Liturgy Forum: Christian Initiation

June 25, 2020

Reflection: Love Letter to the Church

How much I must criticize you, my church and yet how much I love you!

How you have made me suffer much and yet owe much to you.

I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence.

You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness.

Never in this world have I seen anything more obscurantist, more compromised, more false, and yet never in this world have I touched anything more pure, more generous, and more beautiful.

Many times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face – and yet how often I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms!

No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even though not completely you.

Then, too – where would I go? To build another church?

But I cannot build another without the same defects, for they are my own defeats I bear within me.

And again, if I build one, it will be my Church, and no longer Christ's.

No, I am old enough to know that I am no better than others.

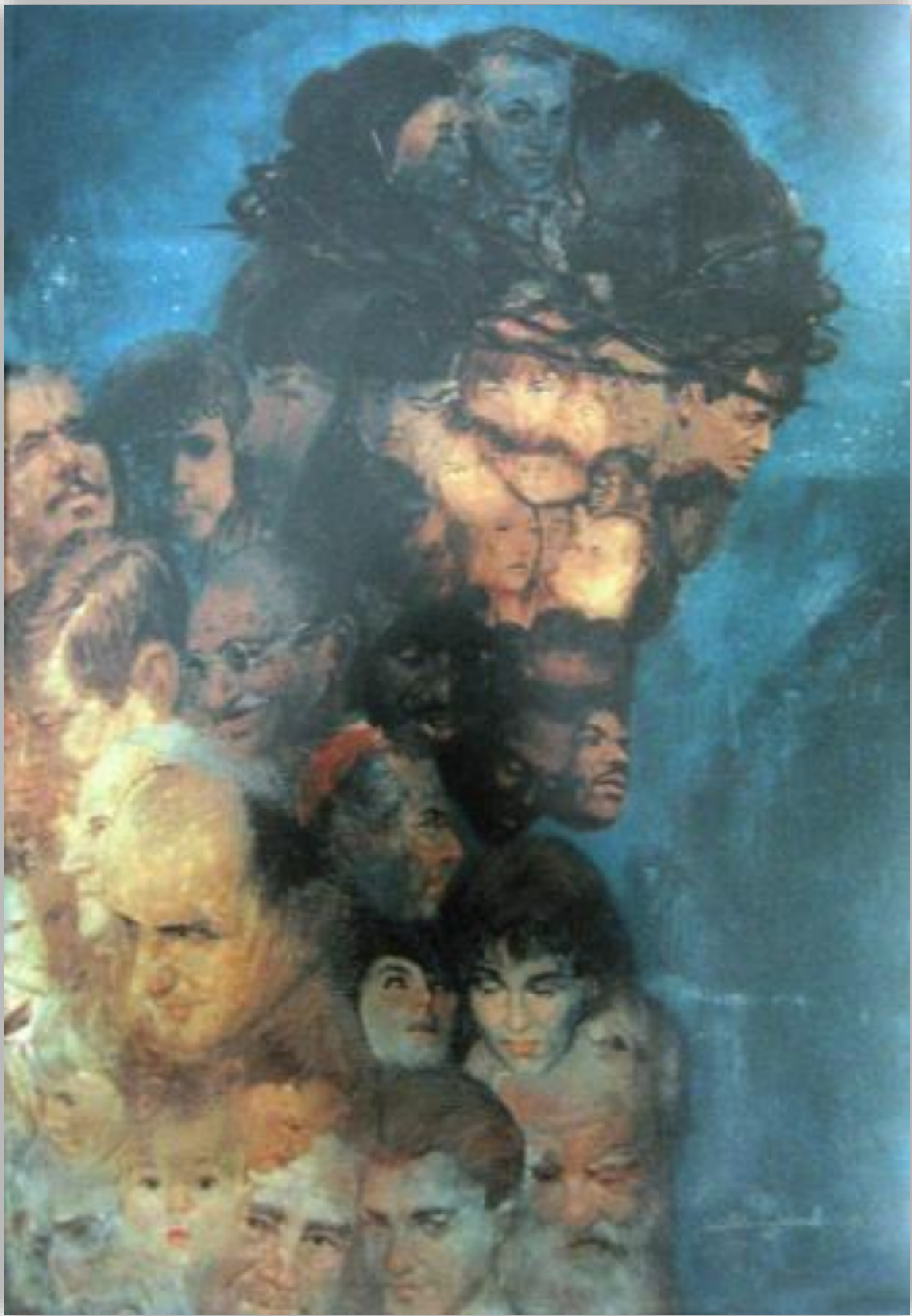
I shall not leave this Church, founded on so frail a rock, because I should be founding another one on an even frailer rock: myself.

And then, what do rocks matter?

What matters is Christ' promise, what matters is the cement that binds the rocks into one: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit alone can build the Church with stones as ill-hewn as we.

From: *I Sought and I Found*. By Carlo Carretto





May God, communion of life, love and joy,
well up in us, around us, beside us, above us, this day, tomorrow and always.