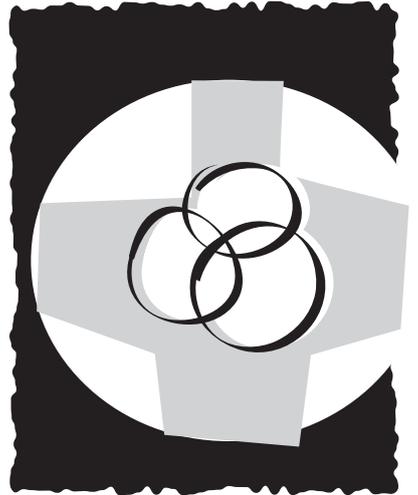


Bread for **New** Life

Reflections on the Eucharist



**Eight Sessions for
Reflection & Discussion**



Acknowledgements

The discussion program *Bread For New Life: Reflections on the Eucharist* was written for the Diocese of Wollongong as part of preparations for its Eucharistic Congress in the Year of Jubilee 2000.

Reprinted in 2004 for the Year of the Eucharist.

Written by Teresa Pirola, The Story Source, with the assistance of Fr Graham Schmitzer and the Diocesan Jubilee Committee (Wollongong).

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All scripture passages appear as part of passages quoted from the text *Jesus Christ, Only Saviour of the World, Bread for New Life*, the document produced by the Vicariate of Rome for the International Eucharistic Congress 2000 and offered to local churches as a focus for reflection. Quotations from this text are referred to throughout the program as '*Bread for New Life*'.

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Stories are from *Real People - the Gospel in Everyday Life*, a publication of The Story Source, some which have also appeared in *Stories from the Prophet Next Door* (David Lovell/Aurora Books, 1998).

Suggested hymns are from *The Living Parish Hymn Book* (Liturgical Press Australia, 1998) and *Gather Australia* (NLMC and GIA, 1995).



A publication of:

The Story Source

PO Box 1106

Maroubra NSW 2035

storysource@ozemail.com.au

Copyright: The Story Source, 1999.

Reprinted as reproducible master sheets, December 2004.

Nihil Obstat: Rev G. Kelly, STL, STD

Imprimatur: Most Rev Peter Ingham, DD

Date: 1st December, 1999

The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are a declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error. It is not necessarily implied that those who have granted them agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed therein.



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Mary leads us to the Eucharist.

Our tradition tells us that God-made-flesh appeared in human history through the trusting assent of a woman, was sheltered and nurtured in her body, was pondered and deepened in her questioning heart, was held - bloodied and broken - in her arms, and loved anew in resurrection and glory.

At every turn, the intimacy of God's relationship with human persons, to which the Sacrament of the Eucharist points, is prophetically embodied in the life of Mary.

May every generation call her blessed!

We are a

Eucharistic people

Introductory notes

ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

The themes chosen for reflection in this program are based on the Roman document underpinning the International Congress held in Rome for the Jubilee Year, 18-25 June 2000: *Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the World, Bread for New Life*. Quotes from this document appear throughout this program, referred to as '*Bread for New Life*'.

Although this discussion program is not based on the readings of the liturgical year, scripture readings thread their way through the text, giving it a scriptural context.

OVERVIEW OF THEMES

Session 1 takes up the theme of the Incarnation as God's gift of love for the world. The Eucharist is a sacrament of intimacy; God's way of being 'with' us and 'in' us.

Session 2 explores the Eucharist as the sacramental ritual through which the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is made present. The Lord's command to 'do this in memory of me' is not a legalistic prescription but an invitation to enter more deeply into a relationship with Christ and his people. The Eucharist is spoken of in terms of sacrifice, thanksgiving, memorial and presence.

Session 3 looks at the Eucharist in terms of the community of faith. The same Spirit that transforms the bread and wine into the Body of Christ transforms the community gathered into Christ's body. Ecumenism and Sunday as a holy day are discussed.

Session 4 describes the Eucharist as fulfilling the deepest hunger of the human heart and showing us the way to new life. The Eucharist calls for active concern for the burdens of others. Issues of mission and justice are raised.

Session 5 highlights the theme of 'presence'. Contemplation of the Eucharist leads us to deeper awareness of the presence of Christ in every facet of life. Eucharistic prayer traditions are revisited.

Session 6 shows the Eucharist to be a gift which comes with a responsibility. The sacrament of unity is to be approached with a sense of humility, with an awareness of our brokenness and our need for repentance and reconciliation.

Session 7 has a missionary focus. The Eucharist commissions us to take the Good News to the whole world, beginning with evangelisation and mission in our own backyard.

Session 8 explores the Eucharist as the 'eternal banquet', the sign of promise that one day we will live with Christ forever. The communion of saints and the virtue of hope feature strongly. Care for the earth is touched upon in discussing the renewal of creation in Christ.

Marian theme. In closing each session, we pray with Mary, the first among us to welcome the Word-made-flesh and to live in glory with the eternal Word.

FORMAT

The Church gathers

Theme

We begin each session with the leader welcoming people and introducing the theme.

Symbols

Symbols, placed in the middle of the group, provide a visual focus for the session's theme. Note that some symbols are provided by the participants themselves; leaders, be sure to remind people ahead of time to bring their symbolic contribution to the session.

Sharing question

We get in touch with our identity as the body of Christ by sharing something of our personal faith journey as Catholics. Naturally, if there are people of other traditions present they would share an equivalent memory from their faith journey.

Opening prayer

We pray together, conscious that we gather in the name of the Lord.

Reading

We read a segment from the document *Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the World, Bread for New Life*.

Reflection

The reflection is punctuated by a number of questions. These questions are for private consideration (there is opportunity to share them later in the session if desired). It is important that the reader pauses at the questions, allowing people to gather their thoughts, before continuing to read.

Likewise, scripture readings are suggested for further meditation.

Living the gift

A story from daily life sheds further light on the theme. This section is read, aloud or privately.

Sharing and discussion

Questions are included as a starting point for sharing and discussion.

Sharing and discussion demand deep respect for persons and a sense of reverence for one another as members of Christ's body. Spirited discussion is fine, but don't get 'stuck' on issues. Remember: behind every 'issue' is a person's heart, a unique history and personal faith journey. The goal is not to solve theological problems but to experience Jesus in our midst.

A eucharistic spirit at home

This section can be discussed in the group or treated as a 'take-home' reflection. It draws attention to the fact that the home is the 'domestic church', the basic cell of Christian life. The ideas here are not just for parents with young children - we are all part of a family and family-like communities.

Into the week ahead

Further ideas are offered for continued reflection during the week.

Praying as one

Before praying together, allow a few moments of prayerful recollection.

Conclude the session by drawing on one of the beautiful prayers from our Catholic ancestry; or choose a prayer which expresses something of your history as a local faith community.

You may like to incorporate music into each session. Choose music that reflects the age, culture and tastes of your group. Even some secular love songs can be used to express our relationship with God. Ideas are included at the end of each session.



Checklist for group leaders

- Take your leadership role seriously - this is a gathering of the body of Christ.
- Greet people with warmth and reverence. Pray for them during the week.
- Familiarise yourself with the whole program.
- Read ahead in preparation for each session.
- Prepare: the room, symbols, bible, refreshments, music.
- You may wish to delegate tasks and appoint readers.
- Remember not to rush the readings, allow time for meditative pauses.
- Use this program as a tool. Adapt as necessary to the nature of your group.
- Enjoy!



Eating the Body of Christ brings with it the audacity of divine love and the scandal of heavenly wisdom, just like Christ's Incarnation: 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him' (Jn 6:51,56)

Bread for New Life, 9

Session 1

Gift of love

That I may live within you

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharist is a gift of intimacy; it is God's way of loving us, enlivening us, transforming us as one body of Christ.

Symbol

Image or statue of Mary and the Christ-child: symbol of the Word-made-flesh.

Sharing question

Describe one of your earliest Catholic memories.

Opening prayer

Lord, thank you for this opportunity to grow in faith. We ask you to be with us, and all similar groups who are meeting at this time, as we reflect on our relationship with you. Give us new eyes to see ourselves, not just as 'people' but as *a Eucharistic people* gathered in your name. Amen.

Reading

Communion with the bread of life and the chalice of salvation revives the awareness that

'God is love. God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away. We ourselves say and we testify that the Father sent his Son as saviour of the world' (1 Jn 4:8-10,14).

Bread for New Life, 12

Reflection

This program is about the Eucharist: that mystery of faith at the heart of Christianity which has been described as 'the source and summit of the Christian life'.

Pause for a moment to consider: What does the Eucharist mean to me? What thoughts or questions about the Eucharist do I bring to this group?

Many people view the Eucharist as a Sunday ritual, and indeed it is. But it is more than that. It is the celebration of a way of life.

We are a Eucharistic people. Every time we enter into the celebration of the Eucharist we are entering into a profound prayer of *thanksgiving* which celebrates all that God has done for us, all that God calls us to be, and all that we stand for as a community of faith. We are declaring our belief that 2000 years ago, in the womb of a Jewish girl, God took human flesh and entered the world in the person of Jesus.

Why would God do this? Fundamentally, out of love. To love someone is to want to truly know that person, to be one with that person, to get 'inside' that person's experience of life and let him/her know that you understand, that he is not alone, that you are with her.

This is what God did for us in the Incarnation. The Word took flesh so as to be one with humanity; to show us that we are not alone, that God is intimately 'inside' us, with us, present to us in all life's joys and heartaches.

St John described this gift in very tangible terms: as something which we have heard, seen, watched, touched.

Read 1 Jn 1:1-14 and reflect for a few moments on the gift of redemption.

From the mundane events of life, to the darkest hour of Calvary, to the joy of resurrection Jesus has shown us that there is no part of our human experience that cannot be touched, blessed, healed and transformed by the Divine Love.

Pause to consider: Do I think of my humanity as blessed by God?

Do I think of God as being close to me in my joys, anxieties and struggles or does God seem far away in some distant heaven?

Fundamentally, the Eucharist is about intimacy, about knowing God at the very core of our beings. This can be unnerving. Perhaps we are not comfortable with being known that well - by anyone let alone our Creator! Yet that is precisely the invitation of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist Christ gives himself to us as spiritual food so that we might become one with him and live always in his Spirit.

How conscious am I of God's love:

- i) in life's special moments?
- ii) in the ordinary day-to-day?

The Eucharistic celebration is a sacramental action; we experience the power of Christ's life, death and resurrection not just as an historical memory but as something dynamic, active, alive and enfleshed in the 'now'. The Eucharist speaks to our past, our present and our future. When we remember and celebrate those events of long ago, we are in fact affirming a mystery of faith that takes hold of our present, which pervades history and transcends time and space. The whole of our lives is taken up in the love-life of God.

Living the gift

Two year old Luke and I often play a little game. I ask how much he loves me and he stretches out his arms and says 'This much!'

*We were at church while on holidays and Luke noticed the crucifix over the altar which was a very prominent piece of modern art. 'Look!' he cried. 'Jesus is saying "This much!"' and he stretched out his arms. I laughed at his cuteness, glad that he recognised the figure to be Jesus. Then, with a lump in my throat, I said, 'Yes, Luke, that is what Jesus is saying. He loves us **that** much.'* (Rachel)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- 'God loves us' can sound a bit cliché at times. Share an experience when these words really came alive. Through whom or what did you experience God's love so intensely?
- In the Incarnate Word, God has spoken to humanity. In what way has God 'spoken' in your life? Share an experience or insight of faith which is precious to you.
- Our sense of gathering at the Eucharistic table begins with our experience of gathering for family meals. What has been your experience of family meals?

Into the week ahead

As preparation for the Eucharist this Sunday, attune yourself to God's messages of love - perhaps in the hug of a child, the laughter of friends, a shared moment of intimacy, prayer or the beauty of nature.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, may we know your love.*

For a deeper awareness that God is near us, within us. R.

For the eyes to see God's presence in one another. R.

For those who feel unloved; may we be Jesus to them.

For our special intentions... R.

Loving God, just as Mary carried the Christ-child, through the power of your Spirit may we bear your gift of salvation to the world. Amen.

Close by saying or singing together the *Hail Mary*.



Nourishment is absolutely necessary for life and eating together is a sign of familiarity. In the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus not only makes us his table companions but he gives himself to us as spiritual food so that we will live in him: 'Our partaking of Christ's body and blood only aims at transforming us into what we are receiving, at making us take on in everything, in body and spirit, the one in whom we have died, been buried and risen again.' (St Leo the Great, Discourses, 12)

Bread for New Life, 9



The word 'eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Grace before meals

Catholics have a tradition of praying 'grace' before a family or household meal.

This is an important opportunity to stop and remember the blessings we receive from God, especially our food, the gift of one another and the faith we share. We also remember those who hunger for food, love and spiritual hope.

Make grace before meals part of your family or household routine. If it is already part of your practice, consider how you might bring fresh vitality to your experience of this prayer.

Music and song

Traditional: *Adoro Te / Humbly We Adore Thee*

Contemporary: *Come As You Are* (Deidre Brown)

Classical: *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* (JS Bach)

Secular: *Beautiful in my Eyes* (Joshua Kadison)



(In the Eucharist) the sacrifice of the Cross is not repeated, just as Jesus' historical events are not repeated, but these mysteries of the Lord's life are made present in the sacramental action: 'Father, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son. We, your people and your ministers, recall his passion, his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into glory; and from the many gifts you have given us, we offer to you, God of glory and majesty, this holy and perfect sacrifice: the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation' (Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer 1).

Bread for New Life, 5

Session 2

Gift of self-giving

On the night he was betrayed...

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharistic celebration is the sacramental action through which the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is made present.

Symbol

A crusty bread roll and a glass of wine.

Opening question

Describe one of your most memorable experiences of the Eucharist.

Opening prayer

Lord, thank you for bringing us together as your church. May we truly experience you in one another's presence. May we continue to grow in understanding of what it means to be a Eucharistic people. Amen.

Reading

'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven...'

Jesus' mysterious words became meaningful for his disciples when they were sitting at table with him on the eve of his Passion and

'he 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' (1 Cor 11: 23-25).

Bread for New Life, 9

Reflection

Our tradition speaks of the first Eucharist as the Last Supper - the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his death on the cross. Essentially this meal was a commemoration of the Jewish Passover, the memorial of the Exodus event which Jesus and his disciples were celebrating as their Jewish tradition required. It was a meal

shared under great emotional pressure. Jesus' enemies were closing in, his life and mission were threatened, the future uncertain. This was the context in which the first Eucharist took place: a Jewish feast of liberation; a young man sharing precious moments with his loved ones before going to his death; a gathering which summed up a lifetime of dedication to the will of God and love for his people, Israel.

How do you picture the scene of the Last Supper? Take a few moments to imagine the scene, the faces, the atmosphere of the room as Jesus says, 'Take this and eat...'

After the Resurrection and the events of Pentecost, the Last Supper came to have profound significance for the early Christians. They took the Lord's command to 'do this in memory of me' very seriously. As they grew in understanding of what it meant to live in the spirit of Christ, the ritual 'breaking of the bread' became central to their way of life. As they drank from the 'cup of salvation' they recognised themselves to be the New Israel, the people of the new covenant.

Pause here to read about the early Christians in Acts 2:42-47.

Today too the Church gathers each Sunday, in the Lord's name, to be nourished by his body and blood.

We do so because we recognise that we are the descendents in faith of those earliest Christians; we too are people of the new covenant.

We do so because we recognise that, in loving his people to the very end, Jesus was also sacrificing his life for us.

We do so because on the night before he went to his death, *Jesus asked this of us*. How contradictory it would be to call ourselves Christians and then to neglect his words: 'Do this in memory of me.'

Do I sense the deep connection between what Jesus did 'then' and his

love for me 'now'?

Do I see myself as standing on the shoulders of my Jewish and Christian ancestors in faith?

As a Church we speak of the sacrament of the Eucharist in terms of:

Thanksgiving: In the Eucharist the Church gives praise to the Father for all that he has done for us: creating us, redeeming us and calling us to share in the divine life.

Memorial: We remember Christ's sacrifice, not just as the recollection of past events, but as an experience of the power of his death and resurrection touching us *now*, in the present.

Presence: The same Christ who died and rose again is present today in his Church: in his word, in his people, in the sacraments, and, in a unique way, in the Eucharistic bread and wine. This presence is brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we call upon the Spirit to transform the bread and wine, we are also praying for our own transformation as the body of Christ.

Living the gift

The sacrament of marriage offers insight into the Eucharist. The significance of the Eucharist as a ritual within the Christian way of life has been compared to the significance of the sexual act within the life of the married couple. Both actions symbolise, celebrate and deepen a life of loving union. Both refer to a relationship which is bonding and lifegiving. One married woman put it this way:

When my husband comes to me in our love-making, I am conscious of something very sacred happening. It is as if he is saying: Take, this is my body, given for you. Sexual intercourse is the sacred 'rite' through which we renew and regenerate the love bond between us.

If the whole marital relationship is not nurtured, sex can be experienced as just an activity, a 'going through the motions'. Likewise, if the Christian way of life is not properly nurtured, the Eucharist can be experienced as simply 'going through the motions'.

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- What important part of your life sometimes feels like an empty ritual? (e.g. Are family meals just a 'feed' instead of a sharing of life?)
- How might you bring a vitality and freshness to your everyday rituals? (See box below on 'Family rituals'.)
- Do I experience the Eucharist as a tedious routine or an act of love? Discuss practical ways we can help one another to experience the Eucharist as an act of love.

Into the week ahead

- At Mass this Sunday, listen intently to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer. Really *pray it* in the depths of your heart.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, you gave your life for us.*

For the grace to place our sufferings and failings on the cross of Jesus Christ. R.

For deeper trust in the power of Christ's resurrection. R.

That we will be faithful to Christ's command, 'Do this in memory of me.' R.

For our special intentions... R.

Lord, hear our prayers. In the footsteps of Mary, may we walk with you in trust and faith. Amen.

Close by praying the *Our Father*.



We know in fact that the command, 'Do this in memory of me', is closely connected with the new commandment which was also given by Jesus to his disciples when he was at table with them: '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' (Jn 13:14-15).

Bread for New Life, 7



Eucharist is about belonging.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Family rituals

Family rituals are simple human acts which point to a deeper truth: the sharing of life and faith in the home. Family rituals are a way of passing on our faith. They also help us to understand why the Church has rituals.

What rituals do you have (or could you institute) in your household? e.g. Sunday morning pancakes after Mass. Trace the sign of the cross on your child's head as part of your 'good night' ritual. Pray the rosary on a long car journey. Make Christmas gift hampers for families in material need.

Music and song

Traditional: *Soul of my Saviour*

Contemporary: *Our Supper Invitation* (Kevin Bates)

Instrumental: *'Moonlight' Sonata*, First Movement (Beethoven)

Secular: *Everything I do, I do it for you* (Bryan Adams)



Obedience to Jesus' words 'Do this in memory of me', is paid as a community. The Eucharist is not a private matter and its ecclesial nature does not allow it to be thought of or experienced as an individual action, even if it involves the individual person. On the contrary, it is always an action of the Church for building up the Church.'

Bread for New Life, 6

Session 3

Gift of unity

one bread, one body

The church gathers

Theme

We are the body of Christ. The Eucharist is inseparable from the community of faith.

Symbols

Everyone is invited to bring to this session a memento of their First Communion Day (e.g. a photo, a certificate, a holy card, rosary beads.)

Sharing question

What do you remember of your First Communion Day?

Opening prayer

Lord God, our faith is 'earthed' in your creation. Open our eyes to the wonder of your presence in your people. In your mercy, free us from all barriers which keep us from the unity that you intend for us. Amen.

Reading

After becoming a part of Christ through Baptism...we recognise one another as children of the same Father around the Eucharistic table:

'The bread we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all share in this one loaf' (1 Cor 10:16-17). By responding to Jesus' invitation, 'Take this and eat it', the Church is built in the bond of unity.

Bread for New Life, 10

Reflection

Through the Eucharist we are called to personal union with Christ. This union includes the call to be in relationship with the people of the Church.

The Eucharist is never a private matter between 'me and Jesus'. Jesus redeems us as a community and makes us part of his body. The Eucharist is always an action of the Church for the building

up of the Church. To treat the Eucharist as a purely private action is a bit like attempting marriage without a spouse - it doesn't make sense. The Eucharist only makes sense in terms of the community of faith, the body of Christ. It is through his body that Jesus calls us to discover how deeply we are loved and how vital is the mission to which we are called.

Do I realise how deeply loved I am by Christ and his Church?

In what ways have I yearned to grow closer to Christ and his people?

Each Eucharistic celebration is an opportunity to rediscover our vitality and vocation as the people of the New Covenant, a pilgrim people moving through history with an awareness that God is with us.

By responding to Jesus' invitation to 'Take this and eat it', the Church is led by the Holy Spirit to a deeper unity. This is what we ask the Father in the Eucharistic Prayer (II) of the Mass:

May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.

Think of someone who has drawn you into a deeper relationship with the people of the Church. How did this person express this invitation?

The unity of the body, however does not mean uniformity of its members. True love makes the loved one more uniquely himself or herself. Likewise, when the Spirit of the risen Christ embraces us in the Eucharist, each member is opened to the discovery of his/her unique gifts. Thus the one bread gives life to the different ministries and charisms in the Church.

What are some of the unique gifts and qualities apparent to me in the church present here in this room?

You may wish to pause here to read Ephesians 4:1-16.

The Church is one and holy because of the Spirit that pervades her, but sadly she is divided by the many splits in the Christian community which have occurred over the course of history. 'Although they have received the same baptism, Christians cannot participate at the same table because of the awareness that unity in love requires unity in truth.' (BNL,10)

Is there someone with whom I long to share Eucharist?

In the face of such divisions, the Eucharistic celebration is a plea to all the baptised to come together. It is a sign of our common commitment to seeking full communion and the fulfilment of Christ's prayer: *Father, may they all be one* (Jn 17:21).

What can couples in interfaith ('mixed') marriages teach us about unity through their struggles, growth and insights?

Living the gift

Going to Mass without my husband can be lonely. Nick is not a Catholic, you see, and usually chooses not to come to Mass. Although we share everything else in our lives, I long to be able to share with him all the treasures of my Catholic faith, especially the Eucharist.

One thing I have found helpful is to 'take Nick with me' at each Eucharist; not in body but in spirit. At each part of the Mass I mentally preface my prayers by bringing Nick to mind. It helps to take away the isolation and, I believe, is a way of deepening our union in Christ. (Paula)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- Describe one of the most powerful experiences of unity you have ever had. How did this unity come about?

- Given the diversity of gifts, cultures and personalities in the Church, unity is not easy! Name some of the challenges your local faith community faces as it seeks to live as 'one body' in Christ?
- How can we make:
 - i) our homes
 - ii) the Sunday liturgy in our parishes a more visible and obvious sign of unity?
- What ecumenical initiatives am I aware of in my local area?

Into the week ahead

When we receive communion, said St Augustine, there is a twofold dimension to our 'Amen':

Amen: Yes! I believe this is not just a piece of bread but the body of Christ.

Amen: Yes! I believe this is not just a bunch of people but the body of Christ. When you next receive the Eucharist, do so with St Augustine's 'double Amen' in mind.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, unite your people; make us one.*

For a deeper awareness of the struggles of our people. R.

For a willingness to forgive past hurts. R.

For the grace to be less critical and more encouraging of God's people.

For the unity of all Christians. R.

For our special intentions... R.

Loving God, just as your Spirit permeated the humanity of Mary, may your grace pervade all humanity, making us one in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Finish by praying together Jesus' great prayer for the unity of his Church: *Jn 17:20-23.*



If, then, you wish to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle as he says to the faithful: 'You are the body of Christ, and his members' (1 Cor 12:27). If, therefore, you are the body of Christ and his members, your mystery has been placed on the Lord's table, you receive your mystery. You reply 'Amen' to that which you are, and by replying you consent. For you hear 'The Body of Christ' and you reply 'Amen'. Be a member of the body of Christ so that your 'Amen' may be true.

St Augustine



The home is the 'domestic church'.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Make Sundays special

For Christians, Sunday - the Lord's Day - is the 'soul' of our week. It is our 'weekly Easter' when we refresh our inner spirit with prayer, rest and the rediscovery of God's gifts.

As a family or household, make Sunday a special, holy day:

For example: Take a walk in the sunshine. Enjoy a simple treat such as an ice-cream with your children. Take more time over Mass - get there a little earlier to pray, spend time with parishioners afterwards. Revisit a sacred site such as the grave of a loved one. Visit a person who is ill or in jail.

Music and song

Traditional: *Where there is Charity and Love*

Contemporary: *One Bread One Body* (John Foley SJ)

Instrumental: *Canon* (Pachelbel)

Secular: *Because You Loved Me* (Celine Dion)



Jesus' words, 'Take and eat it', are connected with the invocation of the human heart that needs to satiate the many kinds of hunger that mark the earthly pilgrimage: hunger for food and the essential things for life, hunger for justice and freedom, hunger for love and hope. In the bread and wine, God gives people not only the food that nourishes them but also the sacrament that renews them so that they will never be lacking in this sustenance for the body and the soul.

Bread for New Life, 11

Session 4

Gift of new life

the bread of life

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharist fills the deepest hunger of the human heart and leads to new life.

Symbol. A crucifix.

Sharing question

Who first awakened you to the gift of the Eucharist? What do you remember of that person?

Opening prayer

Lord, you not only make us your table companions but you give us spiritual food so that we will live with you forever. Guide us by your Holy Spirit, so that we may not be distracted by the world's empty promises but seek real food that lasts. Amen.

Reading

The prayer that we direct to our heavenly Father, 'Give us this day our daily bread', finds its full response in the divine Word and in the Eucharist. To us today - just like the people who asked Jesus, 'Sir, give us that bread always' - he answers,

'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never be hungry; he who believes in me shall never thirst' (Jn 6:34-35).

Bread for New Life, 11

Reflection

The Eucharist is the Bread that sustains us on our journey through life.

We forget sometimes that the faith we received at Baptism needs to be constantly nourished, just as our bodies need to be regularly fed.

Our faith tells us that Jesus in the Eucharist fulfils our deepest hunger and leads us to life's true meaning.

What are some of the 'hungers' in our community (e.g. the hunger for love, hope, rest, understanding, physical/mental wholeness)?

St Augustine said, '*Christ is the food looking for hunger.*'

It is said that an alcoholic cannot be helped until he/she asks for help. Similarly, Christ cannot satisfy our hunger until we recognise we are hungry. Pause to reflect on this.

What would you name as your deepest hunger at this stage of your life?

We all know how difficult life can be. The very nature of the Eucharist speaks of suffering. It is the living memorial of Christ's passion and death, the love that loved to the very end. The elements of the bread and wine used for the Eucharist are made of ground wheat and crushed grapes. Each Eucharist invites us to join our sufferings to those of Christ. And each Eucharist compels us to go out to those who are suffering.

The Eucharist offers strength to all who shoulder life's burdens. It is the strength of the weak, support to the sick, the balm that heals wounds, and the viaticum (literally: 'food for the journey') for those leaving this world. It is the strength of those who witness to Jesus in environments hostile to the gospel message.

What is the climate of your weekly work or social environment? Is it difficult to witness to your faith in this context?

Reflect on a time you felt strengthened by being present at Mass.

The Eucharist is indeed 'food for the journey', but it is not like a roadside restaurant where one stops to 'fill up' before heading down the highway. Such an image is far too passive and individualistic to suit the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist is more like a beautiful family meal. It nourishes in the context of loving relationships. Each Eucharist is a call to active participation in a communal way of life, to *be* the body of Christ - loving as

Jesus loved, caring for one another and reaching out to touch the hungers of those beyond our community. In feeding one another we are fed.

Read the miracle of the loaves and fishes (Lk 9:10-17) reflecting on Jesus' words 'Give them something to eat yourselves.'

What resources, however meagre, can I offer the mission of Jesus? (e.g. a talent, a smile, an act of faith, a gift of time or money, a gesture of care.)

Living the gift

I was at Mass and I was alone. My husband was in hospital and I had one thing foremost on my mind: his pending pathology results which would tell us the prognosis of his liver disease. I tried to pray but the liturgy seemed so irrelevant. I felt distant from God and everyone in church.

I looked up at the tail end of the communion line and noticed Carlos, a fellow parishioner. He was of Spanish descent, not a well man and often quite depressed. He would routinely come up to me after Mass and tell me about his problems and I would try to sound interested and supportive. But this time I thought, 'Not today. I'll leave as quickly as I can after Mass.'

As Carlos walked back to his seat, he stopped at my pew, clasped my hands and said (in a fairly loud voice in Spanish) 'Signora, I'm so sorry to hear the news of your husband's illness. I'm really sorry.' I was amazed by the impact this simple, direct gesture had on me - and the fact that it had come from Carlos. The alienation I had been feeling seemed to evaporate and my eyes stung with tears.

I felt the presence of Jesus through Carlos more than through any other thing that happened in the whole liturgy. (Raelene)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- Discuss practical ways we can 'feed the hungry' (with love, food, faith):
 - in our families
 - in our parish or neighbourhood
 - in our nation and overseas
- Describe a time when *you* were 'fed' in a very important way.
- How does your parish respond to the sick, the suffering and the house-bound? Are you part of that response?
- What other ways have you been involved in helping people in need and challenging injustice?

Into the week ahead

Be conscious of the 'hungers' in your own life and those around you. Bring these to prayer at your next Eucharistic celebration.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, heal our hunger.*

That Christians will lead by example in showing humanity how to share its resources. R

That our hearts and homes will be a source of hope to the broken-hearted. R.

That we will put people before things. R.

That Christians will lead simplified lifestyles and resist materialistic pressures. R.

For our special intentions... R.

Loving God, hear our prayers. Heal our brokenness so that we may bear your healing light to others. With Mary, may we not be afraid to stand at the foot of your cross. Amen.

Close by praying together the words from the Mass: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*



We begin our day by trying to see Christ through the Bread, and during the day we continue to see him hidden beneath the torn bodies of the poor.

Mother Teresa



Our experience of being a eucharistic people starts in the home.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Ways to give life

Two simple, powerful ways to give life as a family:

1. Affirmation. Release one another from the burden of your criticism. Focus on noticing all the good in your family. e.g. Write affirmation notes in birthday cards; cut out all negative jokes; smile more often; thank one another 'just because'.

2. Simplified lifestyle. Pool your ideas and come up with ways to lead a less materialistic lifestyle. e.g. Cut back your shopping list, give non-material gifts, take inexpensive holidays. Give the money saved to a relief fund for those in serious need.

Music and song

Traditional: *All You People Praise the Lord*

Contemporary: *Eat This Bread* (Taizé)

Classical: *St Matthew Passion* (JS Bach)

Secular: *Hands* (Jewel)



Listening to the Word which the Lord himself utters for us in the liturgical assembly arouses the response of faith which prepares us to take part in the banquet of Life.

Bread for New Life, 18

Session 5

Gift of presence

The church gathers

Theme

Prayerful contemplation of the Eucharist leads to prayerful contemplation of the presence of Christ in everyday life.

Symbol

A candle; preferably one with some significance - such as a baptismal candle or a candle used as part of family prayer-time.

Sharing question

What part of the day or week am I most likely to pray and reflect? Who or what helps me to do this?

Opening prayer

Lord, you long to be truly present to us in every facet of our lives. Help us to place all our hopes and struggles in your hands, and not to hide anything from you. Amen.

Reading

The Bread of life gives life to those who receive it with faith. Jesus taught this to his listeners in Capernaum and in every other place:

‘Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father...has set his seal’.

Then they said to him, ‘What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants? Jesus gave them this answer, ‘This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent’ (Jn 6:27-29).

Bread for New Life, 17

Reflection

Without God’s revelation, the Eucharist is incomprehensible. Like the apostles at the Last Supper and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, something must shift in our hearts in order for us to grasp the reality of the Lord’s presence

faith leads to adoration

in the breaking of the bread.

You may wish to pause here to read the Emmaus story in Lk 24:13-35.

What word or phrase speaks to you in this story?

In the Mass the breaking of the bread is preceded by the ‘breaking open of the Word’. Listening and responding to the Scripture readings arouses our faith in Christ, the living Word, and prepares us to receive him in the Bread of life. Thus we speak of the Mass as being made up of a twofold table or two liturgical parts: the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy.

Do you read or listen to Scripture outside of Mass? In what way do you experience the Word of God as spiritual nourishment?

As Catholics we believe that we find Jesus truly present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. We refer to this as a ‘real’ presence - not to suggest that other kinds of presence are not ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense; it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and human, is wholly and entirely present in the Eucharistic species which is consumed by the assembly gathered at the Eucharistic table.

Pause to reflect on the gift of ‘presence’.

Awareness of the greatness of the gift of the Eucharist, which is kept day and night in our churches, has led to a number of prayerful expressions of Eucharistic faith: exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction, hours of adoration, Eucharistic processions and congresses, and the celebration of the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*). All these focus our attention on the One who is the Bread of life, life itself. They remind and give witness to all that we do not live by bread alone.

Are you familiar with these devotional practices? What has been your experience of such occasions?

Eucharistic exposition and adoration have sometimes been described as 'sitting with the Lord' and 'exposing' our true selves to the Lord's presence. Thought of this way, such prayer rituals become a very intimate encounter with God. Furthermore, contemplating Jesus' presence in this way leads us to contemplate his presence in many other life experiences. Sitting patiently with a sick person, cradling a feverish child, holding a loved one, even waiting for the bus - Eucharistic adoration can help us to turn all such moments into precious opportunities to 'sit with the Lord' and treasure God's presence.

Living the gift

Some of my deepest insights into the Eucharist have come through breast-feeding. Many times, while nursing a baby at my breast, I have recalled that phrase: 'This is my body, given for you.' (Natalie)

I've always prided myself on being a 'man of action' - in business, in sport. Yet when Steven died I felt a complete failure. There was nothing I could 'do' to bring my little son back to life. Carmel's response was to simply wrap her arms around me. We sat together silently for a long time. In the pain of that moment I experienced a deep intimacy, the touch of grace. (Gary)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- Share a time when someone was truly present and attentive to you. How did that feel?

- Talk about the value of 'wasting time with God' and just 'being there' for one another. How can we be more *present* to God, to loved ones, to life itself?
- Describe someone you know who has an obvious love for the Eucharist. What have you learnt from this person's witness?
- *A ritual dubbed 'old-fashioned' is a ritual awaiting enlivened faith and contemporary expression.* Do you agree with this statement? How might Eucharistic adoration find fresh expression among today's Catholics?

Into the week ahead

This week, spend some time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, live within us.*

That we will allow God to fill the lonely spaces in our hearts. R.

That each day we will make time to 'taste and see the goodness of the Lord'. R.

That we will be attentive to the gift of creation - especially in young children and in nature. R.

That we will care for the earth, treat all God's creation respectfully and be prolific in every way. R.

For our special intentions... R.

God of our hope, hear our prayers. Like Mary who 'pondered all these things in her heart' (Lk 2:51), may we grow in understanding of your mysterious ways. Amen.

Close by praying (or singing) together a prayer which has great significance for your local faith community.



In the Virgin's example of silent and fruitful listening, contemplation helps grasp the presence of the Living One in the Eucharist and aids in transfiguring the deaths that mark the earthly city into a commitment for life and hope in the resurrection.

Bread for New Life, 20



God is with us always.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Moments of contemplation

Contemplation is not just something for monks in monasteries. We can become 'contemplatives in everyday life' by allowing ourselves to be fully present to God's gifts each day.

Make a conscious effort to 'tune in' each day to the gift and wonder of God's creation. This might be gazing upon a newborn baby, savouring the taste of nourishing food, admiring a scene of beauty, watering the garden, enjoying the gift of clean running water while taking a shower, stretching after vigorous exercise, pausing to notice the freshness of the morning air.

Music and song

'Traditional': *Sweet Sacrament Divine*

Contemporary: *How Rich are the Depths of God* (Christopher Willcock)

Instrumental: *Thais, 'Meditation'* (Massenet)

Secular: *When You Say Nothing At All* (Ronan Keating)



The Eucharist calls for a response of renewed life that is open to sincere love. St John Chrysostom reminds us about this: 'You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognise your brother... You dishonour this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.' (St John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in primam ad Corinthios*, 27, 4).

Bread for New Life, 15

Session 6

Gift & responsibility

'Lord, I am not worthy...'

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharist is a gift that comes with a responsibility.

Symbol

A bowl of water: a sign of cleansing.

Sharing question

With whom do I usually share the Eucharistic celebration?

Opening prayer

Lord, thank you for loving us, especially when we are undeserving of your love. Whatever our brokenness and failings, may we never hesitate to seek your mercy and reconcile with your people. Amen.

Reading

'Everyone is to recollect himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognising the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation' (1 Cor 11:28-29).

Therefore, anyone who has violated God's commandments in a serious way should be purified from sin through the sacrament of Reconciliation before taking the Eucharist.

On the one hand, the Eucharist is the source of reconciliation and calls believers to be effective promoters of forgiveness. On the other, so that everyone can receive worthily the Body of Christ, they must be reconciled not only with God but also with their brothers and sisters and the community.

Bread for New Life, 15

Reflection

Given all we have said about the Eucharist thus far, it is clear that we are dealing with a very great mystery of faith at the centre of the Church's self-understanding. For this reason, the Church asks us to approach the Eucharist responsibly.

When we gather at the Eucharistic table and receive the Body and Blood of Christ we are publicly declaring, through word and action, our commitment to Christ and our faithfulness to the Church's way of life. In other words, our reception of the Eucharist on Sundays is to reflect our lifestyle as a Eucharistic people Monday to Saturday.

If our unity as one body of Christ is ruptured by our words, attitudes and actions during the week, how can we truthfully enter into a Eucharistic expression of our unity on Sunday?

Matthew's Gospel tells us to go reconcile with our brother or sister before presenting our offering at the altar. You may like to pause to reflect here on Mt 5:23-24.

With the Eucharist comes a responsibility to be well prepared in a spirit of humility, repentance and gratitude before God's gift.

This is why we have the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass and why we exchange the sign of peace before communion. It is an indication of our need and willingness to be reconciled. Likewise, before the Bread of life broken for us, we say with humble faith, 'Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.' In cases of serious sin, the Church asks that we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before taking the Eucharist.

How attentive am I to the penitential prayers and gestures within Mass?

In what way does my lifestyle need to be more closely aligned to my faith?

The act of receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist is a public statement; it acknowledges our communion with the Church. Where this communion has in some way been broken, it can be a more truthful statement to abstain from the Eucharistic act rather than to enter

into it untruthfully. This is why, as a general rule, the Church does not permit interfaith communion. The division among the churches is a contradiction to Christian unity and needs healing before the churches can authentically enter into the Eucharistic rite which declares 'one body in Christ'. The process of healing this division is the path of ecumenism.

There are other situations, too, where the Church believes it best to refrain from receiving communion. In such cases, the intention of the Church is not to *punish* anyone or to suggest that one person is a greater sinner than another. Rather, it seeks to preserve the integrity and consistency of the community's beliefs as expressed by its public statements and sacramental signs and symbols.

Indeed, a person's decision *not* to receive, out of respect for the Eucharist and all it stands, can be a powerful gospel witness to the community and a way of identifying with the faith of the community. As St Thomas Aquinas pointed out, some people receive the Eucharist in faith without eating, and others eat without receiving in faith.

[Have I ever hungered for the Eucharist but been unable or chosen not to receive? What did that feel like?](#)

The important thing to emphasise here is that *all* Catholics, whatever their life situation, are called to act *responsibly* in their relationship with their faith community and in their approach to the sacrament of unity. The delicate interplay of fidelity to one's personal conscience and respect for the public signs of the Church are always the mark of a faithful Christian.

[Some sensitive issues are raised here. Although they cannot be dealt with adequately in the space of this program;](#)

[you may wish to explore them in your own time. Suggested starting points are offered at the end of this program.](#)

Living the gift

I usually go to the 6 pm Mass because I love the choir and its music. Last week, however, the choir was away. With no singing at communion time, the church was unusually hushed. Few people fidgeted or spoke. In that near-silence the only sound was the repetition of the words 'the Body of Christ' and the gentle shuffle of people as they came and went. It was like a prayer in itself. A beautiful mantra. (MR)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- When is it hardest to forgive? Who and what helps you to forgive?
- What public signs of forgiveness and reconciliation are currently part of
 - i) your local church?
 - ii) the wider society?

Into the week ahead

Read the 'Signs of peace' box below. With whom do you need to make peace? Take this step as your preparation for Mass this week.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, grant us your peace.*

That the peace of Christ will reign in our homes. R.

That we will never be so proud as to overlook our need for repentance. R.

For those who hunger for Jesus. R.

For our special intentions... R.

God of mercy, like Mary, may we always seek to be faithful to you, even when we don't fully comprehend.

Amen.

Close by offering a sign of peace.



What use is it that Christ's table glitters with golden cups, if he himself is dying of hunger? First of all relieve his need, then, with what you have over, deck out his table as you will. No! You offer him a golden cup and refuse him a glass of cold water? Be consistent! Adorn the house of God, but do not despise your needy brother. For this brother is a temple more precious than that you have built.

St John Chrysostom



'Let us offer one another a sign of peace.'

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Signs of peace in the home

Our 'big' Church will only ever be as loving and forgiving as our 'little' churches, our homes.

In my own family, with whom am I experiencing tension? What 'sign of peace' can I offer this person?

Some suggestions: Use those powerful words: 'I'm sorry.' Be the first to forgive - let go of a long-standing grudge. Pray for a forgiving heart. Offer a practical gesture of compassion. Be willing to talk things through - 'no talkies' is the death knoll for a relationship. Don't let the sun go down on your anger.

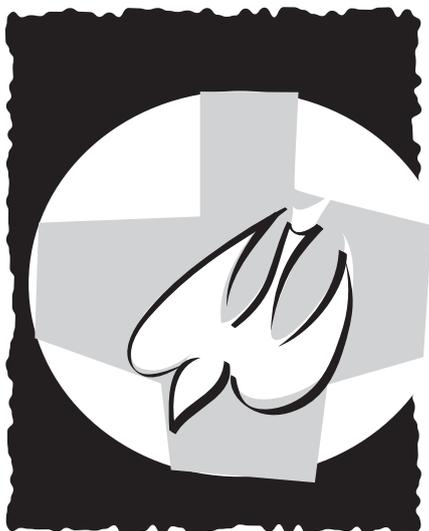
Music and song

Traditional: *Breathe On Me, O Breath of God.*

Contemporary: *O Lord, Hear My Prayer* (Taize)

Instrumental: *Nocturne in F Minor*, Opus 55, No.1 (Chopin)

Secular: *One Blood* (Yothu Yindi)



The Church, following the Apostles, teaches that Christ died for all people without exception: 'There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 605).

Bread for New Life, 14

Session 7

Gift with a mission

bread for the world

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharist commissions us to take the Good News to the whole world.

Symbol

A cross placed amidst newspaper cuttings depicting a troubled world.

Sharing question

What aspect of our troubled world weighs on your heart?

Opening prayer

Lord, you are bread for the world. Your grace rains down on all the earth. We praise you and ask you to fill us with an outreaching spirit that is true and vibrant. Amen.

Reading

True love involves self-giving without any conditions. Outside of this horizon it becomes possession, risks turning into blackmail and is confused with illusion. True love, on the contrary, is a full offering for the sake of another and it forgets self.

Christ's example is like this and is consumed in freedom and gratuitousness:

'The good shepherd is the one who lays down his life for his sheep. The Father loves me, because I lay down my life...No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will' (Jn 10:11,17-18).

Bread for New Life, 13

Reflection

When we remember Christ's sacrifice at the Eucharist, we remember that he died for *all* people; in offering this gift of salvation no one is excluded.

Spend a moment in silence, thanking God for the gift of redemption.

The Eucharist is an extraordinary gift of new life. But it is not a gift to be kept to ourselves. Personally and communally, our reception of the Bread of

life is a call to give life to others.

The most powerful way we do this is through the witness of our Christian way of life. The way we choose to live and work, spend our time and money, conduct our relationships, teach our children... all these daily realities are to be shaped by the fact that we are followers of Christ. We are meant to be 'different' to the society around us, and in this way cause people to ask questions of us and think more deeply about their own values and lifestyles.

Do you think that we Catholics appear to be 'different' or are we just like everybody else?

We also share our gift of faith by openly speaking about it with those who do not know Christ and with those who have drifted away from him. This is all part of the Good News proclamation. It would be a strange contradiction if we were to consider ourselves Catholics and yet never mention such matters to others.

*Don't hide your light under a bushell!
Pause to reflect on Mt 5:14-16.*

Our self-giving as followers of Christ includes actively reaching out to people in our society who are most in need, especially the poor and the marginalised. Whether it be checking on an elderly neighbour, taking part in rallies for East Timor, defending the dignity of human life or contributing financially to an overseas aid fund, each Christian is called to play a part in the 'Good News' transformation of the world.

*In your view, does the Church reach out to the poor and the marginalised?
Is the Church's concern for the poor obvious in your local faith community?
Is it obvious in your own personal life?*

The missionary commitment of the Church is powerfully summed up in the Eucharist. Every Mass concludes with the missionary command, 'Go',

to bring everyone the announcement of the risen Lord and his peace.

All the missionary works we do flow from and are sustained by our awareness that we are a Eucharistic people who feed from the Bread of life.

The Eucharist has been called the source and culmination of evangelisation. In fact, the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is the most effective missionary action of all because it renews people's lives at the very core.

Do I regard the dismissal at Mass 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' as directed at me personally, or do I leave church without another thought?

Living the gift

One lovely, lazy Sunday morning, I stopped at a coffee shop after Mass and read the newspaper. No sooner was I perched happily over a steaming cappuccino, relishing the inspiring feelings I had enjoyed at Mass, when God threw me a whammy. Through the window of the cafe I could see the humped shape of a man crouched in a doorway - homeless and clutching a wine bottle.

Would you believe I sat there for 20 minutes trying to pluck up the courage to respond? All I wanted to do was buy the man a cup of coffee as a simple gesture of caring, but for 20 minutes I agonised over the decision. Was it token charity? Would he reject me? Was I being patronising? What would people think? With my heart in my mouth I made my move.

'Excuse me sir...'

'What?!' he barked.

'You look like a man who could use a strong cup of coffee. Can I buy you one?' He stared at me before saying, 'Yeah'. I went back inside the cafe and returned with a coffee and a sandwich. 'Got any sugars?' he muttered. I

dutifully retrieved the sugar satchels, mumbled some well wishes and fled! My heart was pumping. I was shocked to realise the extent of my own unease. Why is it so hard to be a little bit neighbourly to a fellow human being? (Margy)

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- How does the practice of your faith influence your life; e.g. as a family member, friend, neighbour, worker?
- Describe two of the most missionary people you know, the witness they offer and the challenge they pose.
- Have you ever yearned for or invited someone to become a Catholic? If so, tell us something of that experience.

Into the week ahead

Read the 'Hospitality' box below. Consider an area of your daily life where you could be more missionary. Take this to prayer at Mass. Plan some simple steps.

Praying as one

Response: *Lord, you are bread for the world.*

That Christians will treasure the gift of redemption and be moved to make this gift known to others. R.

For the courage to be 'different' by the way we witness to our faith. R.

For Spirit-led initiative; may we be active in the mission of Jesus. R.

For our special intentions... R.

Almighty God, hear our prayers. May our Christian love know no bounds. Amen.

Close by praying Mary's prayer of praise and liberation: the *Magnificat* (See Lk 1:46-55).



May the Virgin Mary, who in a missionary action presented the Saviour to the shepherds of Bethlehem and to the Magi who came from the East to Jerusalem, teach every Christian community how to give thanks to the Lord who fills the hungry with goods, and to express in life the mystery that is celebrated in faith.

Bread for New Life, 22



The Eucharist sends us forth to be bread for the world.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Hospitality

In the Middle Ages, whole towns grew up in order to satisfy the needs of pilgrims on their way to the great shrines.

Our earthly lives as Christians are a 'pilgrimage to the Father'.

How can our own homes be an oasis of support and encouragement to others on their faith journey through life?

Some suggestions: Invite a new parishioner to your next family meal. Greet visitors with warmth. Take time to listen and be truly present to those who visit your home.

Music and song

Traditional: *We Stand for God*

Contemporary: *City of God* (Dan Schutte)

Instrumental: *Theme from Rocky*

Secular: *Love Can Move Mountains* (Celine Dion)



St Ignatius of Antioch recalls that the Eucharist is 'the only bread that is a medicine for immortality, an antidote against death, food for eternal life in Jesus Christ'. (Epistula ad Ephesios, 20, 2).

Bread for New Life, 21

Session 8

Gift of promise

bread of eternal life

The church gathers

Theme

The Eucharist is the eternal banquet - the sign of promise that one day we will live with Christ forever.

Symbol

Each person in the group brings to this session a photo or symbol of a loved one with whom he/she looks forward to being reunited in heaven.

Sharing question

Share something about the person in your photo - perhaps a fond memory or his/her best quality.

Opening prayer

Lord, your love is eternal. Thank you for all those who have loved us and taught us about you. May your Spirit continue to guide us as your people and bring us home to you. Amen.

Reading

In celebrating the Lord's death and resurrection, the Church finds her vitality again...moving toward communion with God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

There 'he will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past is gone' (Rv 21:3-4).

For men and women today who wish to live a life that is not ephemeral and to survive beyond the limitations of time and space, Jesus has promised the possibility of...aspiring to an everlasting existence:

'Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day' (Jn 6:54).

Bread for New Life, 6, 21

Reflection

We began this program by talking about the Eucharist as a gift of love, an expression of God's desire to be close to us, within us, completely one with us. This desire for union knows no bounds. In fact, God wants to be with us *forever*, and promises to all who receive Christ the gift of eternal life.

How often do I think of the gift of eternal life? Is it part of my day-to-day awareness?

By filling us with every spiritual blessing and transforming us in the present, the Eucharist is also an anticipation of God's kingdom that is to come.

Whenever we gather as a Church at the Eucharistic table to remember the Lord's Passover, we turn our gaze to 'the heavenly banquet'. In prayer we call upon the Spirit of the risen Jesus to come again in glory, to fulfil and complete all creation in his love: '*Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!*'

What are some of the positive movements of renewal in the world which I long to see completed?

The Christian life is often described as a journey. We are a pilgrim people, moving through history amidst great trials towards our heavenly home. As we make our way, the Eucharist is our spiritual food, sustaining and renewing us as we live the Paschal mystery. The way we experience this mystery in the many deaths and resurrections of our earthly lives is but preparation for that day when we will pass from this world to the next and meet Christ face to face. For Christians, then, death is not something to be feared but to be embraced as the gateway to eternal life.

Is death a frightening prospect to me? How have my attitudes to death changed over time?

During the Mass, we pray with the communion of saints in heaven and we remember those who have gone before us 'marked with the sign of faith'. We believe that the saints of heaven are alive in Christ, rejoicing in God's glory, and bonded to us in love. The saints lift our sights and broaden our horizons, showing us the possibilities on earth because of the reality of heaven.

Which saints - famous or little known - are important to you?

Why are these particular people special to you? How do they influence your vision of life and faith?

When we celebrate the Eucharist we are aware of a twofold reality:

We are aware of the presence of the risen Jesus in our midst right now; in a very real way, the kingdom of God is 'here and now'.

On the other hand, the kingdom is 'not yet'; its fullness is in the future and we yearn and work for that day when Christ will come again in glory.

The Eucharist is the greatest sign of Christian hope: Jesus Christ, the Bread of life, has brought us new life. One day we will live with him forever.

Living the gift

*During the final stages of my grandfather's illness, I was sometimes present when he received holy communion from the communion minister. This experience gave me a fresh perspective on the Eucharist. Knowing that Grandpa was soon to die, the promise of eternal life expressed through the prayers of our faith tradition filled me with hope: Yes, Grandpa, you **will** live forever! Never had the phrase 'bread of life' been so alive to me. (KF)*

Sharing and discussion

- Share a thought or question arising from your reflections.
- As Christians what does it mean to 'live with the end in mind'?
- People who take communion to the sick often speak of the vitality of faith they see in those who are preparing for death. Have you ever spent precious moments with a dying person? What was that like for you?
- The environmental movement is one tangible sign of the 'renewal of creation' in our world today. What other signs are obvious to you?
- In what movements of renewal have you had a role? How have you been 'renewed' through this group?

Into the week ahead

People who have recently lost a loved one through death are a vivid reminder of the bond between heaven and earth, and of the fact that this world, as we know it, is passing away.

At the Eucharist this week, treasure their witness; pray for them in their loss.

Praying as one

Response: *Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!*

That we will live each day with hope. R.

That we will commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the renewal of the world in Christ. R.

For the dying, that the final stage of their journey will be experienced as a time of grace. R.

For our special intentions... R.

Eternal God. Mary has gone before us into your glory. May we take the same path of faithful discipleship. Amen.

Close by praying the *Glory Be*.



Moreover, while the Eucharist attests to the renewal of the world brought about by the Saviour, it also commits believers to be responsible for nature, the earth and the air which are entrusted by the Lord of the universe to people's care. In believing that the bread and wine, fruits of the earth and human toil, become the Body and Blood of Christ, we get a glimpse now of the transformation of creation which, at the end of time, the one Saviour of the world will give back, definitively redeemed, into the Father's hands.

Bread for New Life, 21

Music and song

Traditional: *Be Thou My Vision*

Contemporary: *I Am the Bread of Life* (Suzanne Toolan)

Instrumental: *The Four Seasons: Spring* (Vivaldi)

Secular: *One Sweet Day* (Mariah Carey)



God's love is eternal.

A eucharistic spirit in the home

Our special saints

As part of our Christian understanding of the communion of saints, we know that, through Christ, we are bonded to our loved ones even across the grave. In the Mass we pray for 'those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith...' In your own way, continue this prayer in your home. e.g.

Reminisce as a family: open a photo album, read a special letter. At mealtime, pray for your departed loved ones - may they embrace eternal life to the full! Release any unresolved hurts and regrets into the hands of Jesus.



Postscript

now that the program is over

FOLLOW UP SUGGESTIONS

At the conclusion of this program, the people in your group may like to consider:

A night of further discussion

- What came out of our group?
- In what ways have we grown together in faith?
- How will we go forward 'differently' because of this shared experience?

A written submission

What insights would you like to share with your parish or diocese?

Appoint a member of your group to write this up in a succinct written submission. This might be:

An insight of faith: In your experience, what is the Spirit saying to the Church? How have you sensed the Lord's voice in your midst?

A good pastoral idea. One that could be shared with the wider community.

An affirmation of something good about your local Church. It would be a joy for the Bishop or Parish Priest or Pastoral Council to hear some good news from their people!

A challenge: how can we be better as a local Church? Be responsible in your critique - be sure to suggest constructive steps to which you yourselves are willing to contribute.

A celebratory Eucharist

Arrange to gather and celebrate with your group at a parish Eucharist.

A missionary action

From your meetings, there may emerge an obvious way to contribute to the Church's mission. Take action!

A renewal of your commitment

Time to renew or deepen your commitment to your local parish? As a starting point, make contact with somebody who is familiar with the workings of the parish, or turn up on Sunday and speak to the priest or pastoral worker after Mass.

Wise counsel

Is there an area of your life in which you feel a certain distance from the Eucharistic assembly? You may like to talk this over with someone. Your local parish will be able to help you or put you in touch with someone who can. The Church has many networks offering assistance in areas such as:

Family support

Prayer support

Counselling

Questions about marriage, divorce and annulments

Receiving the sacraments

Becoming a Catholic

Further reading

To explore issues of contemporary eucharistic theology, try:

Frank Anderson. *Eucharist: Participating in the Mystery* (John Garratt, 1998).

Frank O'Loughlin. *Doing What Jesus Did* (St Pauls, 1997).

Monika Hellwig. *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (Sheed & Ward, 1992).

Margaret Press (ed.) *The Eucharist: Faith and Worship* (St Pauls, 2001).

Gerard Moore. *Why the Mass Matters. A Guide to Praying the Mass.* (St Pauls, 2004).

for further consideration

Divorce, remarriage and Eucharistic reception

A discussion about the Eucharist can be painful for a Catholic whose marriage has ended in divorce. Misunderstandings about church teaching and the stigma attached to divorce have led to an unfortunate clouding of essential issues concerning the place of divorced Catholics in the Church. Tragically, many have felt 'second class'.

As the Australian Catholic Bishops pointed out in their pastoral statement *When Dreams Die* (1985), if we all play our part in living the truth and compassion of the gospel, Catholics who are separated and divorced should be able to find a deep sense of belonging in the Church. They should be encouraged to participate in and contribute to the sacramental life of the Catholic community.

Divorce in itself is not a barrier to reception of the Eucharist.

Where a divorced Catholic has **remarried** without an annulment the issue of receiving communion is more complex and requires delicate and prayerful handling. Care must be taken to uphold the beliefs of the Catholic community regarding the indissolubility of marriage and the meaning of the Eucharist, while respecting the conscience of the individual and his or her relationship with God.

Catholics who are divorced and remarried are urged to seek wise counsel in examining their particular circumstances and, if so advised, seek the help of the marriage tribunal in their diocese.

As we have seen in this program, the Eucharist is more than a ritual act, it refers to a way of life. Like every Catholic, divorced and remarried Catholics are encouraged to seek an ever-deepening relationship with

God within the life of the Eucharistic community. Their presence is always welcome at Mass where they join with their faith community in prayer.

A decision to refrain from Eucharistic reception should never be viewed as 'punishment' but rather as an act of respect (and therefore a sign of faithfulness) for the Church's sacramental signs and all that they represent.

Indeed, the decision *not* to receive communion can be a firm witness to Catholic belief and a way of identifying with the faith of the community. It can stand as a challenge to others to review their own readiness to receive the Eucharist and to not take this sacrament for granted.

Further reading

Australian Catholic Bishops. *When Dreams Die* (1985). Statement concerning the pastoral care of separated and divorced Catholics.

Geoffrey Robinson. *Divorce, Remarriage and Nullity* (Collins Dove, 1984).



About The Story Source

The Story Source began in 1991 as a ministry devoted to the spread of the gospel through parish and diocesan publications. The name 'The Story Source' reflects an emphasis on storytelling. By harvesting the insights of people living their faith in everyday situations, and using these in the development of publications, **The Story Source** draws attention to the simple fact that the presence of Christ is close to us, within us, around us, every day. For a list of publications, a catalogue is available from **The Story Source** Ph/Fax 02 9314 0867 or Email: storysource@ozemail.com.au



the Story Source

A publication of
The Story Source