



Faith Formation Session on the Sacraments: LEADER'S GUIDE

2 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!

Faith Formation Leaders: Please review all materials and select those most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.

Introduction:

As Catholics, we value the sacraments as the foundation of our faith. Most respondents highlighted "sacraments" while others specified "the seven sacraments." Interestingly, more than several noted the "Sacrament of Reconciliation," "confession," and "Christ's forgiveness in the sacraments." Many of the faithful have experienced the strength and power of sacramental grace. Some noted our "sacramental worldview" and others submitted "sacramental nature." Catholics believe God's love continues to be present in our world, especially through the sacraments.

Catholics treasure the sacraments as God's way of touching and strengthening us for the journey. So, what do we believe about sacraments?

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.
Guide us to a deeper conversion.
Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty and truth of our Catholic faith.
Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.
May your Church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.
Be with us now as we explore the Sacraments.
Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture:

Mark 8:22-26

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

When they arrived at Bethsaida, they brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, "Do you see anything? Looking up he replied, "I see people looking like trees and walking." Then he laid hands on his eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly.

The Gospel of the Lord:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Song: (or select your own song)

Open My Eyes by Jesse Manibusan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbihOyKlvi8>

Or

Open My Eyes by Hillsong: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uku6V5oyWSc>

Section I: What is a sacrament?

Video # 1: Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/qLye-oMUEks>

A sacrament is a privileged encounter with the risen Christ. Sacraments are visible signs of the invisible God. They open our eyes to God's presence through a touch, a "kiss of grace." Jesus Christ, the visible image of God is the first sacrament. The Church, as primary sacrament, mediates Christ's presence through the seven sacraments, which confer grace. We, the body of Christ, continue this sacramental presence in the world through our grace-filled, gracious living.

These sacred encounters with mystery must be experienced to be understood, and embraced to be effective. When we bring our lived experience to the sacraments, we begin to grasp their power to transform and heal us. Participating in the sacramental life is being moved by, and in tune with, the sacred symphony of God's saving touch. Very simply, the **power** behind and before, within and beyond, our lives is God. We meet God in and through the **SACRAMENTS**—the sacramental life.

Each sacrament is rooted in the paschal mystery—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sacraments increase our faith, hope, and love. Each sacrament deepens our faith in the Incarnation, the living Christ, so that all of creation, each human person and the universe itself, can be changed and charged—transformed—through these seven gifts. Each sacrament fills us with hope by granting us the grace to start over, to go deeper, to live more boldly, to hold on and to have no fear. Each sacrament is an encounter with Love, bringing us further into union with the living God and the entire body of Christ. Through the sacraments, we begin to experience the paschal mystery: faith over doubt, hope over despair, love over fear, and resurrection over death.

Sacraments are ALWAYS relational and communal—through and within the body of Christ. No one gets to heaven alone. No one becomes holy without others. We need the body—the Church—to experience the fullness of God's grace. Together, we become vehicles of grace by taking Christ's loving presence into every nook and cranny of the world. As Catholics, we are sacramental people, "finding God in all things."

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- Were you surprised to hear Dr. Pitt refer to the sacraments as the "kiss of God?" How would you describe a sacrament to a friend?
- Dave Cushing said: "Sacraments must be experienced to be understood." In what way does your experience reflect the truth of this statement?
- Many respondents spoke of sacraments and sacramentals. What experiences of this sacred reality has touched your life or changed your life?

Section II: Witness to the Sacraments of Initiation

**Please refer to the #1 Reason to be Catholic on the Eucharist for more information on this third Sacrament of Initiation.*

Video #2: Witness of the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/iu5shPXuqlw>

Our Seven Sacraments are grouped into three interconnected realities: Sacraments of Initiation, Sacraments of Healing, and Sacraments of Service (Orders). Through the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—Christians grow into their call to discipleship.

What a joy to witness water poured over a wide-eyed baby! What a thrill when an adult plunges into the waters of Baptism and emerges as a new creation in Christ! The New Testament describes Baptism's immersion as water, fire, blood, and sacrifice—even a baptism of tears. Baptism is the gift of salvation, the gift of new life!

Pope Francis has encouraged us to “reawaken the memory of our Baptism.” “It is by the power of Baptism, in fact, that, freed of original sin, we are inserted into Jesus' relation to God the Father; that we are bearers of a new hope, for Baptism gives us this new hope: the hope of going on the path of salvation our whole life long. ... Thanks to Baptism, we are capable of forgiving and of loving even those who offend us and do evil to us. By our Baptism, we recognize in the least and in the poor the face of the Lord who visits us and makes himself close. Baptism helps us to recognize in the face of the needy, the suffering, and also of our neighbor, the face of Jesus. All this is possible thanks to the power of Baptism!”

www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140108_udienza-generale_en.html

Baptism is completed through the Sacrament of Confirmation when the sacred chrism is poured and the Bishop invokes the Holy Spirit, “Be sealed with the Holy Spirit.” In John 3: 1-8, Nicodemus questioned Jesus about this reality after Jesus said: “Unless you are born anew you cannot enter into the kingdom.” Nicodemus asked how this could be. “Do people return to their mother’s womb?” Jesus replied: “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom.”

Pope Francis reminds us that Confirmation is to “mould us in the image of his Son, to make us capable of loving like him. He does it by infusing in us his Holy Spirit, whose action pervades the whole person and his entire life, as reflected in the seven gifts that Tradition, in light of the Sacred Scripture, has always highlighted.” We are given the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding to face life situations with patience and peace; we exercise counsel and fortitude as challenges confront us; we know a profound piety and awe, that all things are in God’s hands, held with mercy and compassion, and by God’s grace, all will be well. These sacraments weave meaning into our life circumstances and we are changed. We become the “new creation” about whom St. Paul so often speaks.

www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140129_udienza-generale_en.html

Pope Francis concluded his teaching: “These two Sacraments, together with the Eucharist, form a single saving event — called ‘Christian initiation’ — in which we are inserted into Jesus Christ, who died and rose, and become new creatures and members of the Church. This is why these three Sacraments were originally celebrated on one occasion, at the end of the catechumenal journey, normally at the Easter Vigil.” (Read about the Eucharist at our #1 Top Ten Faith Formation Session.)

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Have you ever participated in or attended an adult Baptism? What emotions did it evoke in you or the newly Baptized?
- b. What do you remember from your Confirmation? How have you experienced one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, awe and wonder?
- c. Who is one person who seems to be led by the Holy Spirit?
- d. How has your life experience deepened your awareness of Baptism’s reality that we are baptized in water, fire, blood, and tears?

Section III: Witness to the Sacraments of Healing

Video #3: Witness of the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/raEibS40X4M>

As human persons aware of our shadows and sins and the many ways we move away from God's abundance, we Catholics are particularly grateful for the Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing. These sacraments strengthen our unity and our bond of peace. Of its essence, all true loving includes forgiving. At their center, the Sacraments of Healing mend our wounds, free our spirits, liberate our hearts, reduce our selfishness, and return us to unity with God and the entire Christian community.

As we gaze upon the cross, we realize the cost and importance of forgiveness—Jesus stretched out his hands to reconcile us with the Father. He extends this gift to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are forgiven of our sins when we approach this sacrament with humility, honesty, and contrition. We are freed from shame, guilt, and sadness as we hear the words: "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

One woman spoke of her inability to be released from the guilt—the heavy burden she had carried for years—of having had an abortion. "Only when I finally confessed it, felt the priest extend his hands, and say the words of forgiveness could I finally forgive myself and be at peace." There is a deep need in the human heart to speak our sins and then to hear Christ's healing words. Christ offers this great gift, but the choice is ours.

Pope Francis encourages us to accept this gift of reconciliation. "Everyone say to himself: 'When was the last time I went to confession?' And if it has been a long time, don't lose another day! Go, the priest will be good. And Jesus, (will be) there, and Jesus is better than the priests - Jesus receives you. He will receive you with so much love! Be courageous, and go to confession," urged the Pope.

Acknowledging a popular objection to the sacrament, Pope Francis noted, "someone can say, 'I confess my sins only to God.' Yes, you can say to God, 'forgive me,' and say your sins. But our sins are also against our brothers, against the Church. This is why it is necessary to ask forgiveness of the Church and of our brothers, in the person of the priest."

Forgiveness, the hallmark of the Christian, teaches us to let go, to live peaceably, to surrender—to follow the way of the cross. One friend recalled going to reconciliation and sharing with the minister that the TV blaring in her home all evening long was driving her crazy. The wise young priest suggested that for her penance she was to go home and choose to watch one-hour of something together. "Make it a sacramental moment," he counseled. She did that, and discovered a hidden joy in that hour—the way of peace, the power of "letting go."

Stories of healing touch everyone's life, bringing a rich reality to the power of grace to heal— body, mind, and soul. Aging has its diminishment as our vitality ebbs, while illness and impairments limit us—no matter our age. While the Sacrament of Anointing sometimes brings physical healing, it always brings us the grace of inner strength and courage to unite our cross with the saving cross of Jesus. Not only for the sick, but for their care-givers whose lives are radically changed in providing care, this sacrament strengthens their resolve and brings a deep peace that God is present within the mystery of suffering.

Finally, the power of healing in the Sacrament of Anointing is known to all who come to that moment with a loved one, when the physical world has no more healing to offer and all healing must come through spiritual realities alone. In a very real way, we surrender to God's infinite care, finding an acceptance within God's presence that gently guides us through death's door with our beloved. We are given to one another for a time, and in the end, we return one another to God's keeping.

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- How could you relate to Trina's experience of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation? What are your feelings when approaching this sacrament?
- How have you felt a burden lifted from you through the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- What has been your experience of the Sacrament of Anointing, whether as a recipient or an observer? How does the Sacrament of Anointing make you feel "good to go?"
- When have you been present to a dying person? How did the experience affect you/your loved ones?

Section IV: Witness to Sacraments of Vocation (Ministry and Service)

Video #4: Witness of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/Gjr5elixSTA>

The sacraments of service and ministry complete the seven sacraments. Marriage and Holy Orders are adult sacraments of commitment and relationship, each bringing God's grace to us through our love and service. The church refines the priest and forms him into a servant of the community—a commitment to the people of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the priest is made "another Christ." He acts in the person of Jesus Christ (*in persona Christi*). When exercising his priestly ministry, he IS the Word of God, the face of God, the healing of God, the forgiveness of God, the nourishment of God for us. (The Sacrament of Orders will be considered at greater length under Apostolic Tradition.)

The Sacrament of Matrimony draws husband and wife out of their singular worlds into a lifelong, fruitful union—a commitment to one another, to their children, and to the world. The calling, the purpose, will be to live for the other, united in Christ. Making a commitment isn't difficult; keeping it is. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to a newly married couple: "Today you are young and very much in love, and you think that your love will sustain your marriage. It won't. But your marriage can sustain your love!"

The hard work of "living out that marriage covenant" is nowhere more visible than in the dynamic of two people striving to build a sacramental life together. A metaphor often used to image marriage is the dance, a dance that has many rhythms over the years. In the dance, there's a union and a yielding. We all love the "union" side of love, the joyful ecstasy of blissful moments. We all struggle with the "yielding," the cross moments. Without learning "the yielding," we can never live the love (John Paul II).

Several stories amplify the power of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Msgr. Bleich has told a story of inviting all couples married over fifty years to a celebration on the feast of the Holy Family. He spoke of the miracle that marriage is and the gift of fidelity and loyalty for so many years as a very real grace – to each other and the church. He noted that many marriages today end, sadly, in divorce. This one elderly lady came up to Father after the talk and said, "Sonny, I've been married over 50 years and I've never once thought about divorce. Murder, yes." Although joking, this statement represents the resolve of her commitment: "til death do us part." (We realize this is often not possible in our day and age, and the church welcomes and works with those who have experienced divorce.)

In a remote village in Medjugorja, hundreds of pilgrims listened intently to a devout and faith-filled priest who offered a compelling homily on the mystery and miracle of this sacrament. Holding up a small crucifix, Father asserted that as a couple witness their wedding vows, they need to wrap their hands together around this saving cross for it is with the grace of this alone that they will be able to live their vows - "for richer for poorer, for better for worse, in sickness and in health, until death." Adamantly, he acknowledged, "You CANNOT do it without understanding and embracing this cross." Further, he claimed, "Your spouse is your ticket, your way to heaven. Through

their faults, limitations, annoying irritations, and shortcomings, YOU will be purified and made holy. LEARN to love them – the limitations. You see, when we marry, we fall in love with love. Only years later can we really say we “love” because love is only demonstrated through the cross.” “Greater love has no one than to lay down their life!” As we journey down this road, we discover that our complimentary yet very different gifts unite us in ways we never could have anticipated. Married couples who do make it to the end can celebrate, rightfully, Shakespeare’s words: “It is a far better thing I do than I have ever done.” And “I’ve known the best and the worst of times—mostly the best. Additionally, many men and women lead sacramental lives by answering the call to committed discipleship through the vocations of consecrated vowed religious or single life.

As Pope Francis has remarked, “What would happen if there were no nuns? No nuns in hospitals, in missions, in charitable institutions, in schools... Can you even imagine a Church without nuns...? No it is unthinkable!” He continued that the “women religious are a gift, the leaven that carries the message of Christ.” Religious men and women find strength from their communities to serve the world in often-heroic ways. Whether their mission is active or contemplative, all religious give witness by their living commitment to “lay down their life” for God’s people. “They live the truth that only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings in a person’s heart, and witness that this union provides a deeper joy than the secular world can give. In effect they are previewing the way we will relate to Christ in heaven.”

Though not a sacrament, we view the vocation of the single life as an important way of answering God’s call to discipleship—of living fully and freely for God in the world. The single life frees men and women to concentrate on serving God when others may be too busy with obligations of spouses or children.

One woman expressed that her vocation to the single life is a great blessing while she cares for her aging mother. A middle-aged man said, “I find single life a great gift as I have the freedom to go and serve where God needs me.” One woman however voiced, “I sometimes feel the single life is the least recognized and respected vocation. I often feel like an outsider in the church.” Not only should single persons feel an essential part of the body of Christ, they should know they are greatly valued by the Church.

The vocation and call to serve God’s people, as dedicated single, married, consecrated or ordained is the common call of all baptized persons as we strive for holiness. Sacramental graces touch all life as those blessings reveal God’s presence within our ordinary experiences. Sacramental faith is never stagnant but rather expands us in mysterious and miraculous ways as it is lived, explored, and developed. The letter to the Ephesians expresses this truth: “...that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3: 18-19).

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. How have you been called to “lay down your life” through your specific vocation? What do all the vocations have in common?
- b. What is attractive about the community of religious life?
- c. If you are a married person, how has your love changed? What difference does it make for a marriage to be a sacrament? How does it change the purpose of the marriage?
- d. How does the single life free one for service in the world? How can we make single persons feel more included and respected in the church?

Conclusion:

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion: The Seven Sacraments are pivotal to embracing the fullness of our Catholic faith, for both the individual person and the Christian community.

Concluding Questions:

- a. What did you learn about the sacraments?
- b. What did you like best about the session?
- c. What is one thing you will share with someone at home or in your sphere of influence?
- d. What difference does it make to believe in and celebrate the sacraments?

Closing Song:

Your Grace is Enough by Matt Maher: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wN-fspKg1Q>

Or

You Are My God by Tony Melendez: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOmix_4M6SI

Finish the session by saying the following prayer together:

Prayer in Thanksgiving for the Gift of the Sacraments:

Loving God, you have called each of us to be holy.

Thank you for the sacraments, which deepen our relationship with you.

Grant us a deep desire to experience your grace through the sacraments.

Help us to be a sacramental people by bringing God's love to each person we meet.

May we cleanse, reconcile, heal, feed, and love others in your name.

Mary, and all the saints in heaven, intercede for us.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Additional Resources:

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on the Sacraments, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580, ext. 214, or dbqcm1@dbqarch.org.