

The NDC states that the liturgical life of the Church revolves around the sacraments, with the Eucharist as central (p.113). Sacraments are gifts and one of the tasks of sacramental catechesis is to create in our students and parents the disposition to understand the value of these gifts. What an awesome responsibility. Sacramental catechesis needs to present Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit. This catechesis should focus primarily on the symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each sacrament. (p.114) With this in mind and being true to the diocesan guideline for this sacrament, many DREs spent time sharing their sacramental preparation and celebration practices.

Best practices from the field concerning Eucharist:**Immediate preparation:**

- Hands on experience around the altar, priests' sacristy, aware of gifts that are regularly carried up, holy water font at entrances, location of baptismal font so that candidates understand that this is their parish and they should know it well.
- Teaching Mass and shared supper with parents and candidates. This requires a step by step walk through the Mass with explanations starting with the priest's clothing and right through to the end of Mass. Some parishes include a potluck supper before or after the teaching Mass.
- Renewal of baptismal promises in the classroom periodically, at paraliturgies, at parent meetings to heighten awareness that this is a sacrament of initiation, closely linked with Baptism.
- Use learning stations during immediate preparation: themes for some learning stations can include: the Last Supper, objects used for Mass, the Apostles Creed, Loaves and Fishes, I am the Vine, Baptism, how to prepare to receive for the first time. Pertinent articles/symbols and handouts should be at each station.
- Plan a prayerful day of reflection, for both parents and candidates where both can recall the candidate's baptism; create an experience of ongoing initiation, use themes from learning stations to create interest and understanding.
- Challenge candidates to write letters to Jesus showing their desire and excitement to now be able to fully participate in the banquet.

Celebration of the sacrament:

- Give several choices to families for the First Eucharist Celebration: Sunday masses during the Easter season e.g .
- Promote simple dress code
- Schedule during regular Sunday liturgy, adult lectors etc.(allows candidate to pay attention to what's going on around the altar instead of worrying about reading etc.)

After the celebration of the sacrament:

- Create a mystagogy after the sacrament is received to review what has taken place. Perhaps a class or two to share their experience of the gift received. (NDC p.114)
- Map a eucharist lesson for each grade level from Gr.3 on building on the year before.

Resources:

- *Together* from Loyola Press, *Welcome Children* from Pflaum, *Embracing the Vision* by Linda Gaupin from 23rd Publications, *The Blessing Cup* from Autumn, *A Walk through the Mass* from St. Anthony Press, *This Sacred Meal* from 23rd Publications, *Learning Centers for Whole Community Catechesis* by Doris Murphy from 23rd Publications, *National Directory for Catechesis* from the USCCB pp.123-131, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The challenge is to try to change one thing in our preparation for this sacrament so the experience of receiving the sacrament is always new. Sacraments celebrated well and experienced profoundly (at one's particular age/grade level) have the power to enlighten and to teach, to witness to what the church professes and believes as we celebrate Christ and the power of his saving Death and Resurrection in our lives.

Feel free to share your ideas. Additions welcome. E-mail edankowski@buffalodiocese.org.