

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



FIRST EUCHARIST RETREAT

Leader's Guide

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! The goal of this leader's guide is to provide a comprehensive list of retreat ideas and provide a sample retreat outline for parish catechetical leaders in the Archdiocese of Chicago who are in the process of planning a retreat for their first Eucharist students and/or families. This guide has been created as a resource for parishes given the challenges of the pandemic and is meant to be flexible enough to plan a retreat that aligns with your current parish programming.

Throughout the leader's guide you will find numerous resources as well as possible layouts for designing a personalized and meaningful retreat experience. Parish leaders are encouraged to select the options that are best suited for your faith formation families. If you have already developed an idea of your own that is not listed within this guide, do not hesitate to include that in your retreat.

As you work through the leader's guide and use it to organize your retreat, please know that you, your team, your parish community, and all your first Eucharist families remain in our prayers during this important time of preparation. If you run into any problems, have any questions about the leader's guide, or would like to talk to someone about your retreat ideas, please reach out to your Lifelong Formation Coordinator or Deborah Breakey, Sr. Coordinator for Children and Family Ministry at dbreakey@archchicago.org.

Additionally, the Office of Lifelong Formation will be offering three optional collaboration/retreat planning meetings to help you walk through this guide and create your own retreat with feedback from other attendees. These meetings will show you how to adapt the templates shared in this guide to your specific program as well as answer any questions you may have about how to plan your retreat or use the tools provided in this guide. These optional meetings will be offered on:

Monday, March 15th at 2 p.m. (English – [Register here](#))

Wednesday, March 17th at 10 a.m. (English – [Register here](#))

Monday, March 22nd at 4 p.m. (Spanish – [Register here](#))

RETREAT FORMAT

Your retreat can take place as one session or you can have multiple “mini-retreat” sessions depending on the structure and capabilities of your parish faith formation program. This year, you may want to consider including retreat sessions, prayer, or activities that may take place in a combination of virtual, in-person or at-home settings.

General Preparation Tips for ALL Retreat Formats

- Be creative in your planning – you do not want the retreat to simply feel like a longer class for your students. The more engaging, interactive, and prayerful the retreat is, the more it will set this experience apart from a typical faith formation class.
- Remember to include prayer throughout every phase of your planning and your retreat. Be open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and direction for your retreat. Some aspects of your retreat may not turn out exactly the way you had envisioned them, but you can be assured that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit everything will work according to God’s plan.
- Determine how many catechists/volunteers are needed on your retreat team (e.g., for disinfecting spaces, assembling retreat kits, technology assistance, etc.).
- List materials needed and prepare the materials and craft supplies needed well ahead of time.
- Create retreat packets (if needed) which would be distributed before the retreat and could include craft supplies, a prayer card, a retreat journal, activity hand-outs, a snack or anything else that is within your budget.
- Determine and schedule the time(s) and place(s) for the retreat.
- Design a flyer or write an email to inform parents of the details of the retreat (including clearly outlined safety protocols if applicable).
- Create a retreat presentation that will be used by catechists and/or parents with a tool such as PowerPoint (**template**).

Tips for Virtual Programs (Catechist Led)

- When planning a completely virtual retreat, remember to:
 - Limit the timeframe of the retreat to avoid screen fatigue
 - Require parent participation to help children fully participate in activities
 - Provide retreat packets to be picked up ahead of time or email printable pdf activity hand-outs
- See the end of this document for additional tips for virtual retreats

Tips for In-Person Programs (Catechist Led)

- When planning a completely in-person retreat (only for programs certified for modified in-person programming), remember to:
 - Follow all current health & safety guidelines and protocols
 - Schedule the retreat during your regular class sessions
 - Include at-home activities to engage parents in their child’s faith formation

Tips for At-Home Programs (Parent Led)

- When planning a completely at-home retreat, remember to:
 - Host a parent meeting to provide clear retreat details and directions for parents
 - Provide a list of materials needed or retreat packets to be picked up ahead of time
 - Create presentation materials for parents with Google Docs or PowerPoint

Tips for Hybrid Programs (Catechist and/or Parent Led)

- When planning a hybrid retreat, remember to:
 - Incorporate multiple-session options and clearly communicate the details of each
 - Clearly define roles and expectations of catechists, parents, and students
 - Give clear directions for at-home activities

PARENT PARTICIPATION

No matter what retreat format you choose to use, parent participation and partnership will greatly improve your retreat experience and impact. Retreat preparation must include making sure parents are prepared for the multiple roles they may have throughout the retreat. The goal of this preparation is to help parents grow in their knowledge and understanding of the faith, feel comfortable with their role in the retreat, and feel equipped to engage in faith conversations with their child.

Pre-Retreat Information for Parents

- Share a letter or email with parents explaining what a retreat is and what the goals and purpose are of your first Eucharist retreat
- Host a virtual parent meeting(s) or retreat session(s) to equip parents to either partner with you during the retreat or to lead the retreat at-home. Consider offering multiple parent meeting times to accommodate busy schedules. Topics to address may include (but are not limited to):
 - A review of why it is necessary to partner in children's faith formation
 - Your specific faith formation program retreat details
 - Education for parents on the history of the Eucharist and the parts of the Mass
 - Reinforcing the importance of Sunday mass attendance as a family
 - Clear directions related to the parent's role during the retreat
 - Clear directions for each activity included in the retreat
 - What to expect during the retreat (or clear instructions for at-home retreats)
 - The proper way to receive the Eucharist
 - What will happen on the day of First Eucharist (including parish guidelines)

Parent Formation Resources

- **What Happens to the Bread & Wine** (video)
- **Making of the Communion Wafers** (video)
- **An Overview of the Mass | Loyola Press** (article)
- **Zoo in a Pew: Tips for Managing Behavior at Mass** (article)
- **Guided Mass Participation Questions for Parents of Young Children** (guide)
- **The Eucharist: Source & Summit of the Christian Life** – US Catholic Catechism for Adults (p.241 – 260)

Parent Collaboration

The Directory for Catechesis reminds us that, “the Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of their educational mission’ to become above all the first catechists of their own children.” (124) Therefore, we encourage

you to engage parents and trust them with the pieces of your first Eucharist retreat that you are asking them to play a role in this year. If you're looking to include some specific tasks for parent collaboration for at-home retreat activities, you may want to invite families to do some of the following:

- Complete an activity packet or a journal and return it to the Faith Formation Office
- Take a photo of a completed craft activity and email it to the student's catechist
- Fill out a Microsoft or Google Form for feedback
- Schedule a virtual group discussion following assigned at-home retreat activities

Note: Please keep in mind that parents may struggle to engage given the many challenges of the current year. These suggestions are offered for you as a way to invite parents to engage, but they are not encouraged to be viewed as a retreat requirement.

PLANNING TOOLS AND SAMPLE RETREAT FORMATS

Each of these sample retreats are adaptable for any program format (in-person, at-home, virtual, hybrid). You may also decide to cover certain aspects of your retreat in a variety of those formats. For example, you may have a 1-session retreat that is held virtually, and then you may instruct students/families to complete the final activity of the retreat (e.g., a craft in the 1-session sample below) at-home after your virtual session.

The following sample retreats may be used as they are for your retreat. However, to plan your own retreat, we recommend using one of the templates of the following tables which can be found [here](#). You are encouraged to add specific details to one of the templates as you plan your retreat.

Sample 1 – Session Retreat

Includes: prayer, 1 Scripture story, 1 main lesson, 3 activities

FIRST HOLY EUCHARIST RETREAT	APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF TIME	DETAILS	NOTES/RESOURCE LINKS
(approx. 90 mins)			Add links to resources
Introduction and Prayer	10 minutes	Welcome children/families and review the retreat agenda Family Prayer	Create a welcome video and PowerPoint presentation Family Prayer for Celebrating First Eucharist Loyola Press
Scripture	20 minutes	Read Scripture story – Feeding the Five Thousand (John 6:1-13) Short Video of Scripture story Brief comments on Scripture story	Feeding the Five Thousand video
Activity	15 minutes	Draw/write and memory verse activity sheets	FREE Bible Unit: Jesus Feeds the 5,000 Activity Sheets

FIRST HOLY EUCHARIST RETREAT (approx. 90 mins)	APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF TIME	DETAILS	NOTES/RESOURCE LINKS Add links to resources
Main Lesson	10 minutes	Church Tour and overview of sacred objects used during mass	Record a video (sample), create a PPT, Google Slides (sample) or handouts (adult , child) or lead a church tour. Include signs indicating and with explanations of the following: 2021 Adult Church Search, 2021 Childs Church Search
Activity	15 minutes	Holy Eucharist Bingo	Holy Eucharist Bingo
Break/Snack	10 minutes	(optional)	
Closing Prayer	5 minutes	Blessing “May you always know the peace of Jesus, the light of His love, and the joy of His life within you”	Record parish priest offering a final prayer and blessing over the children First Communion Prayer.pdf
Craft Activity	20 minutes	Keepsake Banner (can be completed as an extension of the retreat either during class, while online as a group, or at-home)	First Communion Banner Kits (catholicsupply.com)

Sample 2 – Session Retreat

Includes: prayer, 2 Scripture stories, 2 main lessons, 6 activities

FIRST HOLY EUCHARIST RETREAT (approx. 90 mins)	APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF TIME	SESSION 1 THE MASS	SESSION 2 THE EUCHARIST
Introduction and Prayer	10 minutes	Welcome children/families and review the retreat agenda Prayer = The Glory Be	Welcome children/families and review the retreat agenda Prayer = Act of Faith, Hope, and Love
Scripture	20 minutes	Read Scripture story of the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26-30) Videos on YouTube Last Supper Cartoon video The Story of Easter (The Last Supper) Brief comments on Scripture story	Read Scripture story of the Multiplication of the Loaves (John 6:1-13) Video on Catholic Kids Media Miracle of the Eucharist Brief comments on Scripture story
Activity 1	15 minutes	Last Supper Skit and Discussion The Last Supper Skit Script	Draw/write and memory verse activity sheets FREE Bible Unit: Jesus Feeds the 5,000
Main Lesson	10 minutes	Church Tour and overview of sacred objects used during mass Record a video (sample), create a PPT, Google Slides (sample) or handouts (adult, child) or lead a church tour. Include signs indicating and with explanations of the following: 2021 Adult Church Search, 2021 Childs Church Search	If you have FORMED (subscription through your parish) watch the following: Brother Francis – The Bread of Life Or you can watch: Blessed First Communion: The True Presence

FIRST HOLY EUCHARIST RETREAT (approx. 90 mins)	APPROXIMATE AMOUNT OF TIME	SESSION 1 THE MASS	SESSION 2 THE EUCHARIST
Activity 2	15 minutes	Teach children how to properly receive the Eucharist	Start first Eucharist journals which will be completed at home First Holy Communion Journal
Video	5 minutes	Sacraments 101: Eucharist (how we receive)	n/a
Activity 3	15 minutes	First Communion Banner First Communion Banner Kits (catholicsupply.com)	Monstrance Craft Gold Monstrance Craft
Closing Prayer	3 minutes	The Lord's Prayer Our Father – Lord's Prayer video	Spiritual Communion Guided Prayer – Act of Spiritual Communion
Notes			

Sample 3 – Session Retreat

Includes: prayer, 3 Scripture stories, 3 main lessons, 6 activities

FIRST HOLY EUCHARIST RETREAT	SESSION 1 THE BREAD OF LIFE (approx. 30 mins)	SESSION 2 THE LAST SUPPER (approx. 30 mins)	SESSION 3 JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH US (approx. 30 mins)
Prayer	The Lord's Prayer Our Father – Lord's Prayer video	Invite your parish priest to join you (or make a recording) to offer a prayer and blessing over the children First Communion Prayer (PDF)	Spiritual Communion Guided Prayer – Act of Spiritual Communion
Scripture	Feeding the Five Thousand (John 6:1-13) Video on Catholic Kids Media Miracle of the Eucharist Brief comments on Scripture story	The Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26-30) Videos on YouTube: Last Supper Cartoon video The Story of Easter (The Last Supper) Brief comments on Scripture story	Commissioning of the Disciples (Mt 28:16-20) Brief comments on Scripture story
Main Lesson	Sophia SketchPad: The Eucharist	Jesus Gives us the Eucharist	Blessed First Communion Session 4, Episode 4 Blessed First Communion Session 4, Episode 6
2 Activities (Discussion, game, or activity sheet handout)	Draw/write and memory verse activity sheets FREE Bible Unit: Jesus Feeds the 5,000 First Communion Countdown Calendar	Host and Chalice Craft The E-U-C-H-A-R-I-S-T Song	Jesus, Thank You prayer web (example) Encountering God at Mass Cards
Closing Prayer	The Glory Be	First Holy Communion Novena – Day 1	Guided Meditation (sample)

Notes

Retreat Topics and Resources

When selecting retreat topics and activities, discern what is feasible for your program and families (e.g., what can most easily be done at-home, in-person or through virtual gatherings, etc.).

RETREAT TOPICS	TOPIC PURPOSE	SUGGESTED RESOURCES
Welcome Message from the Parish	To offer support and encouragement to first Eucharist families and thank families for commitment to their lifelong faith formation.	Ask your pastor, catechetical leader, or catechist(s) to share a recorded message of support and offer a prayer for (or blessing over) the children as they start their retreat
Prayer	To gather students and families together in the Lord and remind participants of God's presence among them while setting a reflective tone for the retreat.	<p>Sacred Space at Home (PDF)</p> <p>Pray traditional prayers (Sign of the Cross, Glory Be, Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary)</p> <p>Let's Pray the Our Father! (guided prayer)</p> <p>Act of Spiritual Communion (guided prayer)</p> <p>Family Prayer for Celebrating First Eucharist</p> <p>First Holy Communion Novena</p> <p>Guided Meditation (sample)</p>
Scripture	To help children and parents grow closer to Jesus through Sacred Scripture and ground the retreat in Scripture related to the Eucharist.	<p>Books of the Bible USCCB</p> <p>Last Supper Cartoon video</p> <p>Easter Song – Remember Me!</p> <p>Feeding the Five Thousand</p> <p>Jesus Feeds the 5,000</p> <p>Jesus Gives us the Eucharist</p> <p>Miracle of the Eucharist</p> <p>Catholic Kids Media – YouTube</p>

RETREAT TOPICS

TOPIC PURPOSE

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Main Lesson

To teach about Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist and help children become familiar with the Church, the sanctuary, and the Mass.

Talk about the importance of going to Church each Sunday and how giving praise and worship to God is the most important thing that we can do. By showing God this act of love, He meets us in the Eucharist, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of His Son Jesus Christ and gives us the grace of communion with God by entering our body. With Jesus within us, we can go out and be like Jesus in how we love and help others.

Have a teaching mass for students and parents (recorded or in-person).

Discuss the 4 ways Jesus is present in the mass.

[Sophia SketchPad: The Eucharist](#)

[Last Supper, First Eucharist](#)

[What is the Eucharist](#)

[Encountering God at Mass Cards](#)

[Tour of a Church video](#)

[Sample Church Tour on Google Slides](#)

[Catholic Kids Media](#)

[Blessed – Session 4 videos](#)

[Eucharist Review Chapters 1_10 \(PDF\)](#)

[The E-U-C-H-A-R-I-S-T Song](#)

[Making of the Communion Wafers](#)

Activities and Crafts

To help reinforce Scripture stories, core teachings of the Catholic faith and provide opportunities for engaging, fun, and meaningful faith-sharing.

[Guided Meditation before the Blessed Sacrament](#)

[First Holy Communion Journal](#)

[Gold Monstrance Craft](#)

[Host and Chalice Craft](#)

[First Eucharist Coloring Page](#)

[FREE Bible Unit: Jesus Feeds the 5,000](#)

["How to Draw" Video](#)

[First Communion Countdown Calendar](#)

[Holy Eucharist Bingo](#)

[Jesus in the Eucharist Art Project](#)

[First Communion Banner Kits](#)

RETREAT TOPICS**TOPIC PURPOSE****SUGGESTED RESOURCES**

**Activities and Crafts
(continued)**

Make a Plate Kit

**Jesus, Thank You – Prayer
Web, (example)**

Church Search Activity (**adult, child**)
2021 Adult Church Search,
2021 Childs Church Search

Tour of the Church worksheet

**OSV – Sacraments
Activity Downloads**

**How to Receive the
Eucharist Properly**

To teach students that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist and that we are to receive him with reverence.

**Sacraments 101: Eucharist
(how we receive)**

Additional Resources

**Sample First Eucharist
At-Home Retreat**

**Pop-Up Catechesis: First Eucharist
Retreat at Home Resources**

**Retreats at Home – Diocese
of Kalamazoo**
