



A Sense of Sacrament

A Discussion Paper for Parish Sacramental Teams

Teresa Pirola



A *Sense of Sacrament*

Acknowledgments:

I gratefully acknowledge the parishioners, priests and parish team of Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Parish Chatswood (Diocese of Broken Bay) with whom I was immersed in the sacramental life of the parish over five years as a pastoral associate, 2004-2009. In particular, I acknowledge with gratitude the pastoral leadership of Fr Vincent Casey, parish priest during that time.
-Teresa Pirola

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Authored by Teresa Pirola.

Illustrations by Sarann Ryan.

Design by Francine Pirola, Sarann Ryan.

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PO Box 1106 Maroubra NSW 2035 Australia



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Sacraments are “powers that come forth”
(cf. Lk 5:17; 6:19; 8:46) **from the Body of Christ,**
which is ever-living and life-giving.

They are “the masterworks of God” in the
new and everlasting covenant.

Cathecism of the Catholic Church, 1117



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Introduction

A Sense of Sacrament

How does a Catholic parish establish healthy sacramental ministries?

Certainly, every diocese has its sacramental policies and programs, but *how* is a policy or program implemented within a parish; with what kind of care, thought, imagination, prayerfulness, apostolic zeal and pastoral sensitivity? What principles should we be working from, and what practical examples illustrate those principles at work?

This booklet offers thoughts on this topic for discussion

among personnel who lead sacramental formation processes. The points for discussion all arise from the 'trenches' of Australian parish life and reflect the experiences of a local setting in a particular time period (2004-2009).

In brief, this setting can be described as urban, middle class and multi-cultural. On a typical Sunday we celebrated five Masses with some 1800 parishioners. Over the course of each year we celebrated 1500 liturgies and baptized/received 100 new Catholics (typically 60 babies, 25 children/teens, 15

adults). Over the page I outline some of the programs and practices that supported our sacramental processes.

"Resource Ideas" refers to a sampling of notes, brochures, bulletin pages and reflection sheets that I developed and incorporated into our sacramental processes. They can be downloaded (free) at www.teresapirola.net.

The booklet is deliberately brief and 'chatty.' Imagine it as one pastoral associate chatting over coffee with another. It is meant to be used in this way: as a

conversation starter for parish and diocesan personnel.

Add your own examples. Indeed, add your own principles! The list here is far from exhaustive. Enjoy the discussion, the sharing, the questions (and the coffee).

Teresa Pirola

Pastoral Associate, 2004-2009
Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Parish
Chatswood NSW

Overview

This booklet emerges from a parish sacramental experience that looks like this:



Infant Baptism program

A monthly schedule:

- First Saturday: preparation session for parents of babies.
- Second Sunday: presentation of babies in Mass.
- Third Sunday: baptism of babies at 12.30pm (outside Mass).
- Fourth Sunday: baptism of babies within Sunday Mass.
- Parents choose from a list of scheduled baptism dates. Baptisms at other Masses by arrangement.

Kids' Baptism program

- A ten week program for 5-11 year olds and their families, shaped around the 9am Sunday Family Mass:
- Three sessions of catechesis.
- Participation in Sunday Masses, including Kids' Liturgy of Word.
- Presentation at a Family Mass.
- Baptism at a Family Mass.
- One follow-up session.
- The program was appropriately adjusted for baptized children seeking reception into the Catholic Church. When ready, families moved into the Children's Sacramental Program to prepare for further sacraments.

Children's Sacramental Program

Over the course of a year, three programs (5-7 weeks each) prepare a child for Confirmation, Reconciliation, Eucharist. Caters for 7-11 year olds and their families. Older children (12-13) included with modified resources. Parents teach their children, working with them through a child-friendly workbook. The following steps are repeated for each sacrament:

- Enrolment Sunday after all Masses.
- Presentation at Sunday Masses.
- Two Input Nights for parents.
- 10-15 min "Interview" with

child and parent.

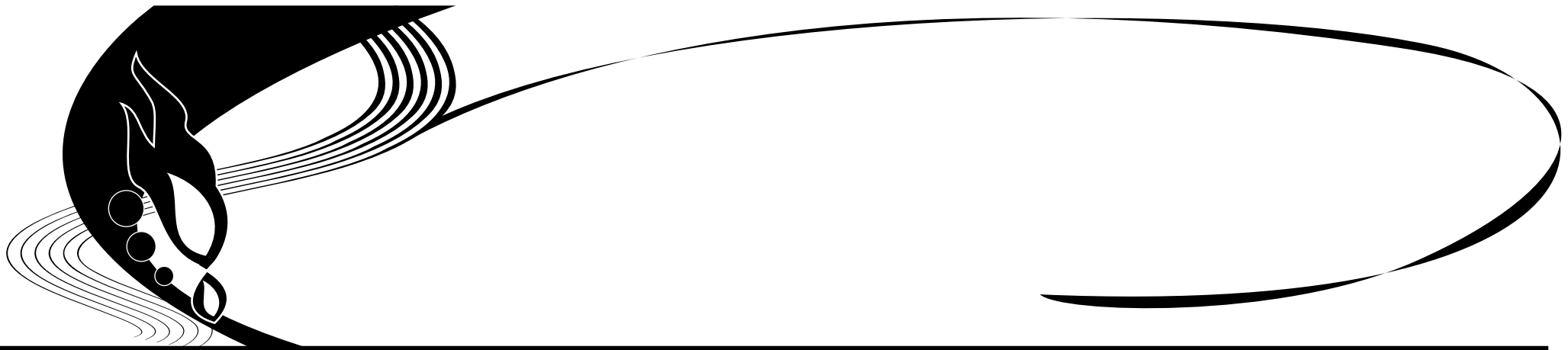
- (Retreat Day for First Communion candidates.)
- Practice for ceremony.
- Celebration of sacrament.

Sacraments for teenagers

We adjusted our child and adult sacramental processes to accommodate teenagers. We invited the collaboration of our youth worker, school and young adult parishioners. Initiation occurred either at a youth Mass, at a Family Mass or with adult candidates depending on various pastoral factors.

Adult Initiation (RCIA)

A fairly typical RCIA schedule, included all steps except the dismissal. Formal catechesis held on Sunday afternoons, just prior to the 5.30pm Mass which many of our candidates attended. We tried to be creative with our ritual steps, and our attempts ranged from okay to fabulous! Our Lenten scrutinies were a major feature. A Palm Sunday retreat was held each year. We were blessed with a steady trickle of enquirers throughout each year, and a stream of enquiries post-Easter. Having an open church in the midst of a major shopping centre and business district was an evangelizing presence in itself.



Adult Confirmation

Each year we encouraged Catholics who had 'missed out' on this sacrament (in their childhood) to approach us. Preparation consisted of three formal meetings, an expectation that they make a 'good' Lent by participating in our Parish Lenten Journey (see p.24), a self-directed catechetical program, and the support of a sponsor. The sacrament was usually celebrated at a diocesan adult Confirmation ceremony. One year we had 16 adult candidates, so the Bishop came to us in a parish-based ceremony.

Eucharist

In addition to regular Mass schedules and initiation processes:

- A monthly Korean Mass.
- A monthly Philippino Mass.
- Saturday exposition, adoration and benediction.
- A two-day 'mini-eucharistic congress for the Year of the Eucharist (2005).
- A strong roster of lay ministers taking communion to the sick and house-bound.

Reconciliation

First Rite: held every Saturday, and in abundance during Advent and Lent, and on other occasions (e.g., Divine Mercy celebrations). We added small touches, like a Reconciliation 'How to' card near the confessional; educational material in the bulletin, foyer, website.

Second Rite: held twice in Advent, twice in Lent, and twice in November for children's First Reconciliation. We made creative use of symbols, gestures, music and lighting.

Anointing of the Sick

Held every third Friday during 12.15pm Mass and at other times by arrangement. Once a year this sacrament was celebrated in Mass on the Sunday closest to World Day of the Sick. We prepared the congregation with educational material and spiritual exercises.

Marriage

Celebrate Love (marriage enrichment) seminars and marriage education material offered periodically. We promoted all church-sponsored marriage preparation programs, but especially encouraged *Embrace* and *Engaged Encounter*. Blessings for engaged couples and wedding

anniversaries encouraged and held in Sunday Mass.

Holy Orders

We utilized most of the usual 'Vocations awareness' tools offered by our diocese. In addition:

- A prayer network (31 Club).
- Guest speakers/celebrants: priests whose vocations started in our parish were invited back.
- Educational and testimonial material.
- A well planned Silver Jubilee celebration for our parish priest highlighted the sacrament of Holy Orders at every Sunday Mass.

1 Impart a sense of sacrament

- Life is sacramental.
- Do more than run programs; exude a sacramental spirit.
- Relate the 'big' sacramental symbols of the church to the 'little' symbols found in daily life.



Develop a 'sacramental consciousness' in parish life

In other words, don't just run programs; impart a *sense* of sacrament. We are familiar with the idea of 'a sense of sin' (and mourn its loss). We can be just as concerned for 'a sense of sacrament.'

Sacraments are not just 'things we do,' they are the people we mix with, the air we breathe. Life is sacramental. Parish life is sacramental. Wherever we meet the divine through what is visible, material, tangible, we are participating in a sacramental life. Our seven

sacraments are intense, unique, ecclesial expressions of this life.

I love to swim in the ocean. I love that feeling of being immersed in waters that are not chlorinated, that flow from a natural source, are teeming with life, have a power beyond my own, and stretch for as far as the eye can see. When I swim I often think of baptism. I can't help it; water is so potent a symbol. It reminds me that I am immersed, boyant, and at times challenged, in the sea of God's love.

I draw upon that experience when I talk to people preparing for baptism. I invite them

to think of their own water images. E.g., when they bathe their baby who is soon to be baptized, or anoint their baby with oil, with moisturizer...these are physical actions that are loving, nurturing, lifegiving. So, too, are our seven sacraments. They are not religious actions isolated from the rest of our lives. They pulse with the sacramentality of life itself. Creation and redemption are mysteriously linked.

So, how does a parish impart a 'sense of sacrament'? How do we impart a sense of *anything*? Much of it has to do with our attitudes and speech patterns. It is the way we enthuse about

a baptism enquiry, warmly congratulate an engaged couple; call the community to pray. It is the way we use big, beautiful symbols in sacramental ritual. A flask of sacred oil, tastefully presented and visually highlighted 'speaks' to the senses. A sense of sacrament is an osmotic process; but it is also imparted through deliberate education and experiences of prayer and conversion.

It is worth pondering who and what have shaped our sacramental mindset. For myself I would name the influence of those who introduced me to the RCIA and

the theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet. I would mention my love of nature fostered by both outdoor fitness and the contemplative writings of Thomas Merton. I would think of my ongoing fascination with the Hebrew understanding of 'remembrance' and the Pauline idea of 'mystery.'

For discussion:

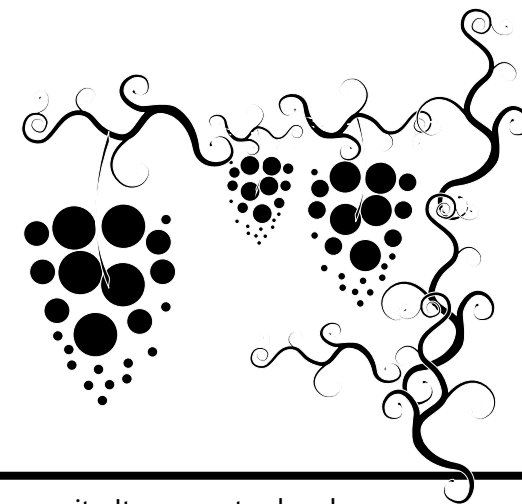
Who and what have shaped your 'sense' of sacrament?

Resource ideas

- What is a sacrament? Notes from an information night
- Ten Ways to Prepare for your Baby's Baptism

2 Highlight 'hidden' sacraments

- Highlight all seven sacraments in parish life.
- Don't 'hide' sacraments behind other ministry labels.
- Name sacramental teams appropriately.



There are seven sacraments, not three (or four)

How often do we hear of a parish group with a name like 'THE Sacramental Team.' What do you think is the task of THE Sacramental Team? Usually it is to prepare Catholic children for the sacraments of Confirmation, Reconciliation and Eucharist. Rarely does it have a mandate to attend to all seven sacraments.

I don't have a problem with a specific team, but I think we should call it for what it is; e.g., *Children's Sacramental Team*. This naturally makes room for other kinds of sacramental

teams; e.g., a team dealing with 'commitment' sacraments or 'healing' sacraments.

Sometimes sacraments are camouflaged by headings that take the focus away from the sacrament itself. E.g., 'Family' usually suggests parenting rather than the relationship between spouses in the sacrament of Marriage. 'Vocation' is not the same thing as talking about Holy Orders. 'Single Life' is not the same as unmarried adults living out their Baptism. 'Seniors Ministry' does not equate with Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. There is nothing wrong with these categories, or with

using them to organize our ministries, however we must ensure that the *sacramental* aspects of those ministries are named and developed for what they are.

A sacramental step we introduced into our parish was an annual anointing of the sick during Sunday Masses. This sacrament was already celebrated at a monthly weekday Mass, however its inclusion in a Sunday Mass was new for us. This was held on the weekend closest to Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes which is also the Church's annual celebration of World Day of the Sick. It had a terrific

impact on the community. It allowed parishioners to 'see' and experience a sacrament of which most have no knowledge. It highlighted the giftedness of our parishioners coping with old age and illness. And it emphasized our healing vocation as a parish community.

There are practical and educational considerations when planning such a liturgy. We included:

- An educational lead-up & follow-up: bulletin items, pulpit statements, etc.
- Testimonies by parishioners.
- Appeals for assistance in bringing housebound people

to church.

- Reserved seating and clear ushering instructions.
- Gentle music; attractive symbols.
- A blessing for medical personnel and carers.

For discussion:

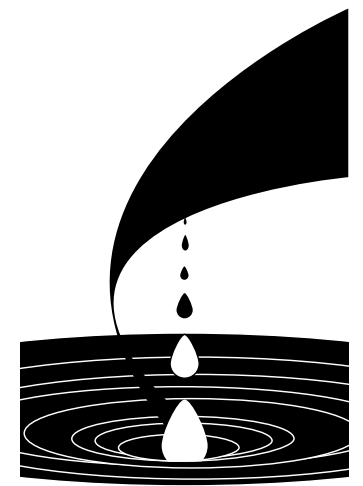
What sacraments have a 'hidden' presence in your parish? How might they be highlighted, made visible for the benefit of all?

Resource ideas

- World Day of the Sick (WDS). Bulletin page re Anointing of Sick in Mass
- Healing Prayer. Resources to accompany WDS celebrations. Page #1, #2, #3
- Blessings for engagements, wedding anniversaries & convalidation

3 Welcome the brief encounter

- Sacramental processes offer significant contact with the 'unchurched' and spiritual 'seekers.'
- Don't underestimate 'soft' evangelization. Do the sums!
- Make the most of 'brief' encounters and remember that they form part of a bigger picture of evangelization.



Every parish has golden opportunities for evangelization

By this I mean those moments when a person 'outside' parish life approaches us seeking information, contact and involvement. Even if seeking these on a temporary basis—'just' to get married or 'just' to get their child baptized—it is an evangelizing moment.

In our parish team we had a name for this: 'soft evangelization.' 'Soft' because it's easy: they come to us! We don't have to go out and find these 'distanced' parishioners and convince them to take an interest in the church. They

come looking! The temptation is to be cynical about such contacts (and yes, there is a place for caution) but these are moments for loving witness, worthy of our best attention.

Think about it: If someone told you that 80 Catholics who are 'distant' from the Church were about to come to you, voluntarily, to receive six hours of catechesis, would you not be delighted, and a little daunted? *Gosh, how can we make the most of those six hours?! Well, that's what happens when parents enrol in our Children's Sacramental Program. Over the course of a year, 80 or so 'unchurched' parents sit in front of us for six hours of input. And that's just the Input Nights. It*

doesn't include all the other steps like enrolment, liturgical presentations, practices, and of course the celebration of the sacrament itself. In fact, over the course of one year, we have at least 23 face to face encounters with parents whom we would otherwise never see!

For anyone involved in pastoral leadership, these kinds of sums are significant. If nothing else, they remind us of the potential for good in the 'brief encounter.' Our response in any given moment may seem small: responding to a phone enquiry, listening to a person's story, welcoming a parent to an Input Night. Yet, like small pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, over time we are building a substantial picture.

Being consistently 'good' in those apparently mundane moments can be extremely taxing, and we don't always respond perfectly. Yet if we can understand the *value* of the 'brief encounter'—and its larger context—we will be encouraged in our efforts.

As I write this I am thinking of one lovely young family (by no means an isolated case) who returned to the practice of their faith and became key leaders in our children's ministries. It all began with a phone call: "I am thinking of enrolling my child in your Confirmation program, but I am not sure. You see, I haven't been to church for 15 years".

For discussion:

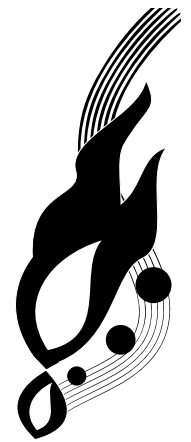
Do the sums. How many points of meaningful contact do you have with people 'distant' from the Church? How do you make those moments count?

Resource ideas

- Letters to State School Catholic Families
 - » Invitation to those eligible for current sacraments program
 - » Invitation to those who may have missed out in previous years

4 Make memories

- **Sacramental celebrations are memorable moments in a person's life.**
- **Memory-making is as essential to parish life as it is to family life.**
- **In planning, ask: Will this result in treasured memories for our people?**



Sacraments are memory-makers

Family ministry experts stress the importance of memory-making in family life. The same goes for parish life. As people come in contact with parish we want them to be loading their memory-banks with positive memories. Even if they remain 'Christmas and Easter Catholics,' they are storing positive experiences, and the accumulative effect may have a decisive impact at a later date.

Sacraments, because they are communal celebrations and represent milestones in a person's life, hold special power

to form memories that will influence that person's whole life. How often do we hear an adult Catholic reminisce about his/her First Communion Day (or relate a terrifying memory of First Confession!)?

In planning sacramental processes, especially the celebration itself, we ask, "Will this be a special day that the family will remember with joy?" Such questions lead us to take that little extra care with organizational details: church decorations, the welcome at the door, the well-marked seating plan, the effort to accommodate the needs of an elderly

grandma, sensitivity to visitors of other faiths, the provision of baby-change facilities in the room next door, and so on. Even something as mundane as car park arrangements can make the difference as to whether a parent or guest enters the church happily and open to prayer, or late, flustered and ready to kill someone!

Positive memory-making is much about doing ordinary things well and in a loving spirit. Along with good catechesis, organisation and prayer, this means plenty of warmth, joy, affirmation, gratitude, good humour!

Some small touches that we have incorporated in our celebrations:

- A Parish Letter to a Child (given to family at their baby's baptism).
- Gift bags of lollies after First Reconciliation ceremony (from the prodigal son's feast table of course!)
- Marriage anniversary blessings attractively copied on 'parchment.'
- Attractive symbols and decorations for the sacramental occasion. We know they are appreciated by the numbers taking photos afterwards!

- Rewarding refreshments for parishioner-organizers/helpers and visiting priests after the 'work' is done.

For discussion:

**Share a sacramental memory that endures in your life.
How can our sacramental planning foster treasured memories for our parishioners?**

Resource ideas

- Parish Letter to a Child (on the occasion of Baptism)
- Pre-baptism Baby Blessing: for use in church and as a take-home gift for family

5 Do the basics well

- Remedial education is a large part of sacramental formation.
- Reinforce foundational messages; e.g., in brochures, bulletins, websites.
- Precede sacramental programs with a general information night.



Attend to the basics

"I desperately want my child to make her First Communion, and by the way, what is a sacrament?"

Comments like these point to the fact that remedial education is a large part of preparing people for sacraments. Yet we can be so busy attending to the particulars of a sacrament that the underlying questions go unnoticed.

An effective solution in our Children's Sacramental Program was to run a general Information Night, at the start of the school year, several weeks prior to the official start of the program.

At this session we did three things.

1. We explained, at some length, the meaning of 'sacrament.'
2. We outlined the sacramental process and timetable of events.
3. We clarified expectations of parish, school and home.

This 'grounding' meant that parents enrolled in the program with confidence and clarity. They had a handle on 'the basics,' they could mark their diaries before the year 'filled up,' and they had some idea of who and what to expect.

This approach also allows for evangelization to take place, as parents go away from the

Information Night and speak to other parents who were absent. Come time for enrolment in the first sacrament, the groundwork has been laid and we 'hit the ground running' so to speak.

Other ways to attend to basics include clear, attractively presented information brochures that are consistently accessible in the church foyer and parish website. E.g., with every timetable handed to a parent, we always included a basic information sheet which began: 'What is a sacrament?'

We expanded upon the catechism definition with points such as:

Sacraments:

- are essential rituals; 'highpoints' in Catholic worship;
- are an intense encounter with Christ;
- express divine love and impart grace through created realities;
- express beliefs central to the mystery of faith;
- involve the voice of the whole Church community;
- are an official action of the Church;
- have a context.
- We also described sacraments in terms of celebration, belonging, family, 'milestones' and growth points in a person's life.

For discussion:

In what ways do you attend to basic sacramental education? What is one strategy that would consolidate your efforts?

How do you explain 'sacrament' to your parishioners?

Resource ideas

- What is a sacrament? Notes from a parish information night
- Brochures for parents enquiring about Children's sacraments:
 - » Program schedule
 - » Accompanying information

6 Gossip: look on the bright side!

- **What you say and do 'gets around.'**
- **Your positive words and witness will reach people who are beyond your immediate influence.**

People talk

What you do and say in your sacramental processes 'gets around.' The down-side of that is gossip. But the up-side is that people will also spread good news. When people talk to each other they can evangelize by what they are saying about the parish behind our backs! Our messages have a reach far beyond the group under our immediate influence.

One startling example of this was the year that we decided to put great effort into convincing the parents of First Reconciliation candidates to come to the sacrament

themselves. "It's so important that you witness to your child," we said. "They need to see that this is not just a 'kiddies' sacrament." Then we invited them, at a Parent Input Night, to table all their objections to the sacrament. And they did: *Why do I need to go to a priest? It's embarrassing. Confession was awful when I was a child. It's been so long I don't know how to do it any more. I really don't think I am sinful.* And so on...

One by one, we took each obstacle and did our best to answer their objections, allay their fears. And we didn't stop there. We invited our parish

priest to share what it was like for him to hear confessions. No, he wasn't mentally sizing up their sinfulness, he reassured them. No one is going to belittle or embarrass you. It is a time when a priest sees you at your best. He spoke of the seal of confession.

But we didn't stop there. As the day for our Reconciliation ceremony drew closer, we continued to remind, encourage, challenge, cajole, plead... we were shameless in pulling out all stops! But when it came to the crunch, would they really come to the sacrament? I had my doubts...

But they did. By golly they did! It brought tears to our eyes. In great numbers they came forward; some a little sheepishly, but happily enough. A gentle spirit of joy, peace (relief!) lingered in the church afterwards. There were smiles. People walked lightly and made comments like, "I never thought confession could be a nice experience!"

But here's the surprise. The following year we decided to try the same tactic with a new group of parents. "Okay, let's get all the obstacles out on the table." No response. "Come on, don't be shy." Nothing. "You mean, you

have no objections to coming to Reconciliation?" we asked, disbelieving.

"It's OK," they replied. *"We already know what's expected. We've heard that it's not such a bad experience. It's alright, we'll come."* And they did!

Word gets around.

**For discussion:
Share an experience
of positive 'talk' that
has enhanced your
sacramental processes.**

Resource ideas

- "Prayers I Pray," by M. Commins (Homebush: Paulist Publications)
An excellent prayer book for children. We gave a paperback copy to every Catholic family in our state schools and in our parish school when we invited them to enrol their children in sacraments. It was a talking point, and contributed strongly to our evangelizing efforts.

7 Create synergy

- Look for points of collaboration between ministries.
- Collaborative ministry reaps fruits greater than the sum of individual ministries.
- A well-celebrated Family Mass makes a great centerpiece for children's sacramental processes.



Create synergy between sacramental (and other) ministries.

When our parish began to develop a child-friendly 9am Family Mass on Sundays, we could not have foreseen the impact it would have on so many other ministries. It became the centerpiece of our sacramental processes for children.

Children loved it and took real ownership. This was 'their' Mass and they were involved in every aspect: reading, singing, playing instruments, writing prayers of the faithful, helping Father with his homily,

offertory processions, gospel processions... They were highly visible, gathering on the sanctuary at designated times during the Mass. A spirit of joyful participation pervaded, and many families were attracted.

Around this power cell, we shaped a Kids Baptism Program for 5-11 year olds. A big part of the catechesis was simply being at Mass. We shaped our preparation sessions around what they saw and did at Mass. We presented them at this Mass. We baptized them at this Mass. We put their families in touch with other families at this Mass. We invited them

to be involved in ministries associated with this Mass.

Further, the success of our Family Mass gave us a burst of confidence in our Infant Baptism Program and our Children's Sacramental Program. We were able to boldly invite (urge, cajole) families to 'come back to church!' It was a message that resonated happily because there were always smiles and delightful 'Mass' stories to tell. It wasn't just about duty, it was a case of 'Hey, don't miss out on something special for your kids!'

We held a monthly 'Look & Learn' session immediately

after our Family Mass. With so many children happily present, we offered them a 10 minute lesson which ranged from topics like genuflection classes to 'What is the Advent wreath?' to a guided tour of the sacristy. It was enjoyable, educational and the parents said they learned along with their children!

It was at the 9am Family Mass that we also blessed expectant parents, commissioned catechists, incorporated special CCD activities, promoted Children's Liturgy of the Word. In summary, the synergy between ministries reaped fruits far greater than the sum

of individual ministries.

Special mention can be made of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (COGS). For those parishes blessed to have this ministry, COGS has enormous potential to assist children's sacramental preparations.

For discussion:

Describe one strong point of collaboration in your parish.

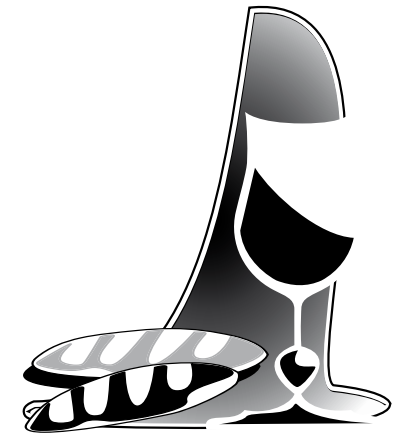
And one untapped opportunity?

Resource ideas

- A Child-friendly Parish: describes parish efforts to welcome children
- Our Family Mass. Ways for children to participate in the Mass (brochure by Angela Hague)
- Follow-up letter after Infant Baptism

8 Respect the mystery

- Step back and marvel at God's work.
- The divine mystery is Love. Bring this awareness into the prayer and work of your teams.
- Communicate this awareness to those receiving the sacraments.
- Stand in awe. Allow others to witness your stance of awe.



Something bigger than us is at work in a sacrament.

"Did the children seem adequately prepared," I asked the diocesan MC after our Confirmation ceremony, curious to hear an outsider's impression.

"Did they what! When the bishop laid hands, they all closed their eyes and prayed! I've never seen that before!"

We can 'do' a lot to enhance our sacramental processes, but at the end of the day the sacrament is out of our control. Something is at work which is beyond us. How important to acknowledge this. A mysterious relationship exists between God and this person, this child,

this couple, who prepares for the sacrament.

In our adult sacramental processes we would say this to our people: *Respect the fact that there is a great mystery at work. We can't predict the impact of this sacramental moment, but we can be open and ready to receive whatever the Lord offers. The same Spirit who overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation will overshadow you (or your child) in the sacrament.*

In our children's sacramental processes we would say to parents: *We can't predict how this sacrament will affect your child, but we do know that he/she is absolutely unique in God's loving eyes. Parents understand*

this. Parents know intimately their child's uniqueness, gifts and struggles. When we speak in these terms, we see the 'yes' in their eyes. They know. They and God share this secret knowledge.

Similarly, engaged couples know this. They may not always display knowledge about church teachings, but he knows that he is in love with this woman who means the world to him. She knows she wants to spend the rest of her life with this man. They are already caught up in the divine mystery. When we speak in these terms there is understanding, resonance.

Similarly with the sacrament of reconciliation. We would enthuse about this sacrament as a treat of healing grace, a cleansing, a freedom, a liberation, a joy. *You know the places in your heart where you feel stuck, bound, guilty, sad, broken, unwhole... There is a story, a very personal story, within you waiting to be touched by the mystery of redemption... Bring this to the Lord and let us celebrate that freedom with you as your parish.*

We don't have to 'tell' people everything. Rather, we can acknowledge their own capacity to be in touch with the mystery of divine love. Stand in awe, and see what happens.

For discussion:

Describe a moment when you 'stood in awe' of sacramental presence.

In what ways do you communicate this sense of awe to your people?

Resource ideas

- Confirmation Symbols: parent handout
- Holy Spirit Prayers
- Gift of Eucharist: reflection sheet
- Mary, Woman of the Eucharist: reflection

9 Treat home as a holy place

- **The most enduring faith formation takes place in the home.**
- **What are the best practical tools you know of that help people to express spirituality and sacramentality in their homes? Make them available to your people.**

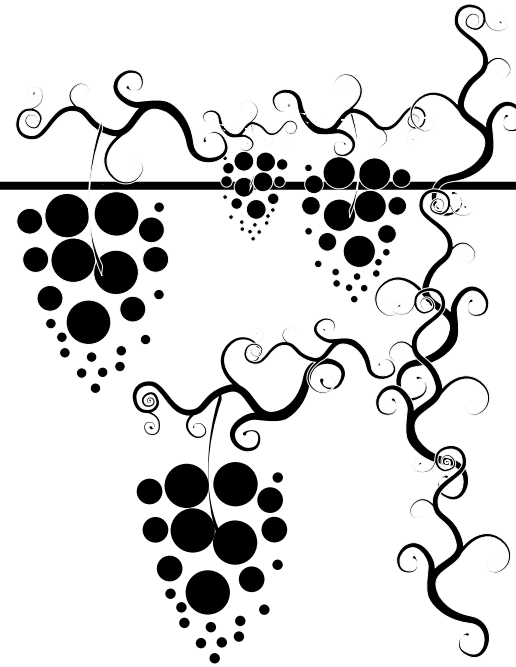
The home is a place of sacramental formation

The home is a holy place, a sacramental place. Parents are the prime educators in the faith. Such principles are presumed these days by enlightened Catholics. How far we have come!

But there is still the challenge of how best to encourage spirituality, sacramentality, in the home. There was a time in recent history when in-home pieties were part of our tribal religiosity: family rosary, grace before meals, no meat on Fridays, pictures of the Sacred Heart. Today most Catholics

homes are stripped of religious evidence, and this is reason for grave concern. No matter how prayerfully satisfying our Sunday Masses, eucharistic faith must find its way into the heartland of the home.

People need help in this. What does it mean to 'pray more' or 'love more' at home? Most people's relational and spiritual repertoires are limited. They need to be shown, repeatedly, and to have concrete tools placed in their hands. At right are practical tips that we have given parents as part of infant baptism preparation.



For discussion:

What sacramental tools for the home do you offer your people?

What works best?

What other tools could be tried?

Prayerful ways to prepare for your baby's baptism at home

1. Gaze upon your child

Gaze upon your child often. Reflect on the miracle of creation.

2. Pray with water

Invite the family to gather around as the baby is being bathed. Say a simple prayer together and talk about how water is a symbol of cleansing and new life.

3. Pray with oil

When you are rubbing moisturiser or ointment on your baby during the course of a normal day, take a moment to reflect on the symbol of oil to be used during the baptismal ceremony.

4. Pray with light

Your baby's baptismal candle, symbolising the light of Christ, will be an important feature on the big day. But even now, light a candle each night and reflect on ways this family can 'light the way' for its newest member.

5. Write words of love

At baptism the Church community proclaims the Word of God. The authors of scripture wrote out of love for their people. What words express your love for our child? Write a baptismal 'love letter' to your child to be opened on his/her Confirmation day.

Resource ideas

- Ten Ways to Prepare your Child's
 - » Confirmation | Reconciliation | Eucharist
- Tips for Teaching your Child about:
 - » Confirmation | Reconciliation | Eucharist

- See also:
 - » cathfamily.org | homeisaholyplace.org.uk

10 Strike a balance

- **Be firm, hold to set standards.**
- **And be ready to relax those standards for good pastoral reason.**
- **Know yourself. Do I tend to be too 'tough' or too 'soft' in my expectations of others?**
A team that includes both will strike a balance. Welcome these differences! Keep a sense of humour.



How much can we demand of our parishioners?

How much can we expect of our people who are preparing for the sacraments? E.g., how insistent should we be that families preparing for their child's First Communion attend Mass every Sunday? And how do we respond when they don't meet our expectations? Such questions are often accompanied by angst and controversy. Some parish solutions involve an accountability system: a sticker for every Sunday you are at church and a minimum number of stickers or your child won't make First Communion! Such

strategies work well in some communities and wreak havoc in others.

One creative solution I hear of is a parish that holds all its children's sacramental preparation during the Mass. The children move into a meeting room next door for the Liturgy of the Word where they also receive sacramental preparation, then return to their parents who wait for them in church...at Mass! A parishioner puts it this way: "Coming to Mass is in-built to our program, it's not an 'extra.' And since we have sacramental preparation most of the year it means that our Sunday morning Masses are

full of young families for most of the year!"

Our own approach has been to strongly encourage rather than 'police' Sunday Mass attendance (see p.13). In matters generally, we are up front about asking for commitment, but we are ready to relax our own rules for good pastoral reasons. 'Trust the parent,' our parish priest will often say at those moments when the next step is unclear.

As part of our children's sacraments we seek out parents who 'disappeared' after enrolling their children and hold 'catch up' information nights for them. Occasionally we suggest

that a family withdraw if it can't commit adequate time. Then again, there have been exceptional cases where we waived every rule in the book.

We are best when we are working as a team where both tendencies (firm insistence and gentle flexibility) are emphasized. I had this experience working alongside the coordinator of our Children's Sacramental Program. She tended to be very matter-of-fact whereas I wanted to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. We balanced each other well, and we were seen to bring balance to the program.

We were able to display our differences with good humour. ('I'm the softy, she's the tough one!') People would chuckle, but they understood that our collective approach was well balanced, and they knew that they couldn't play off one against the other. We were a team.

For discussion:

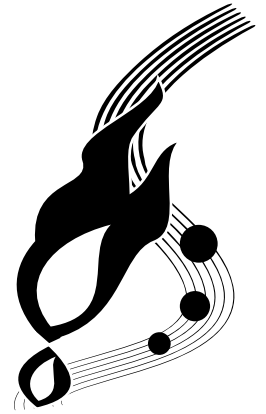
How does your parish handle delicate issues?

Resource ideas

- Church Etiquette: Tips for being in God's House. A friendly guide for young families
- The Responsibilities of a Catholic. RCIA handout

11 Attend to detail

- Details are important because we are concerned for people, and people's lives are full of details!
- Attention to detail is essential to pastoral care.



Detail. Detail. Detail

Sacraments are about life, and life is about detail. If you want to eat a healthy breakfast each morning, the milk and cereal don't magically appear. Somebody has had to go out and buy them, and to have made choices between low fat and full cream milk, between Weetbix and Coco Pops. (A frivolous example? Not if you have a heart condition!)

Likewise in a parish, somebody has to be immersed in the detail. And detail is not just organizational. It's knowing people's stories. It's knowing that the sacraments workbook is not going to help a Korean

family who doesn't speak English. It's about making five phone calls to find that parishioner who can speak Korean and who is available to act as interpreter. It's about briefing the interpreter who may not be familiar with your sacramental processes and following up afterwards to check that the contact was successful.

When you are not about detail, the bare minimum gets done but the pastoral care is limited. If you didn't return the call of an enquirer it may mean one less family enrolled in your Children's Sacramental Program. On the macro level, it

doesn't matter; after all, it's not a numbers game! On the micro level, it matters a great deal if it is *your* son or daughter. Details are important because people's lives are full of them. It's in the detail that lives are truly engaged.

Detail is also a good 'test' to see whether sacramental coordinators are worth their salt. Ask about their work. Do their eyes light up as they recall this family or that moment? Do they wince with pain when they recall the mistake that had pastoral consequences? Can they explain their decision for choosing Weetbix over Coco Pops (back to the breakfast

analogy)? Can you see that they have thought things through, wrestled with real challenges, know their people? Do they really care, or are they just going through the motions?

Some examples of details that have a direct impact on people:

- A phone answered by a live voice;
- An enquiry followed up promptly;
- A personal story that is heard;
- A brochure stand that is always filled; a website that is updated;
- A presentation well prepared;
- A pastoral leader who smiles;
- Personnel who are well briefed;

- Gathering spaces that are clear, uncluttered and welcoming;
... to name a few.
- What details are on your list?

For discussion:

In your sacramental processes, what details are well covered?

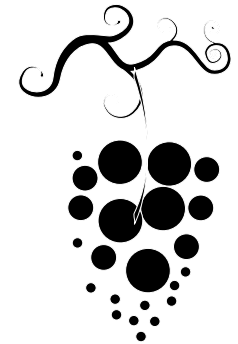
What details tend to escape you?

Resource ideas

- Team Manual: Children's Sacramental Program
- What goes into running a Parent Input Night?

12 Work hard

- **Sacramental ministry is demanding work because:**
 - i) it is complex, operating on multiple fronts,
 - ii) it is about human lives, and
 - iii) the needs and opportunities always exceed our resources.
- **Hard work is part of a loving parish. Need we say more?**



There is no substitute for hard work

I wish there was! I wish I could wave the magic wand that guarantees the perfect parish with minimum effort. But the fact is: hard work is essential to pastoral care and mission. And sacramental processes are very demanding tasks.

They are demanding because they are processes operating on multiple fronts (spiritual, educational, personal, communal, liturgical, organizational, cultural). They are demanding because we are dealing with people's lives and we are, to some degree, 'carrying' their precious stories. They are demanding because

the needs and opportunities are always greater than any parish can meet with its limited resources.

So we do what we can, and we work as hard as we can. There is no substitute. It will cost. We must expect this and not look for short-cuts. Nor must we settle for leaders who are not prepared to put in the hard yards.

I mention this latter point because it seems to me that our expectations of parish and parish personnel are often quite low. There is the perception that 'anyone' can be a pastoral associate, and that a diocesan priest without a specialist role is

'just' as parish priest.

Every now and then retirees would contact our parish asking about employment opportunities. On occasions it was clear that someone was looking for a gentle and pleasant distraction after retiring from 'real' work. The first thing that went through our minds? *Forget it! If you come here in retirement mode you are in for a rude shock!*

And yet many parishes do give that impression: a quiet little parish, nothing much happening, just Father and a part-time secretary who does the bulletin on Fridays. Situations like these are understandable, but they

should never be acceptable let alone set the benchmark for our pastoral expectations. Even a tiny parish is brimming with needs and gifts and opportunities for realizing the kingdom of God should anyone wish to jump in the deep end.

I suspect that many parish leaders are in 'shut-down' mode. The pastoral challenges are overwhelming and the resources so thin that the only way to cope is through practiced absence. I do empathize with this. I have had moments when the only way to 'survive' in the job was to 'pull back' from the job. Not answering the phone on occasions in order to preserve

one's sanity is understandable. It's when it becomes a way of life that the church has a real problem.

For discussion:

Who and what helps to sustain you in your mission and ministry?

Are your expectations of parish appropriate?

Resource ideas

- Two retreat centres that have been a source of spiritual sustenance for our tired pastoral personnel:
 - » St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre, Douglas Park, NSW
 - » Mount Carmel Retreat Centre, Varroville, NSW

What options for retreats and spiritual sustenance are available to you?

13 Create flexible processes based on RCIA principles

- Have a deep understanding of the underlying ecclesiology and spirit of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- With that knowledge, use sacramental programs flexibly for pastoral effectiveness.



Begin with the RCIA

Today, a deep knowledge of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is surely fundamental to parish sacramental processes. By this I mean to have read and reflected upon foundational RCIA documents and to have first hand experience of being involved in parish implementation of the RCIA. Once we have this knowledge and experience we can develop programmatic steps (for all sacraments) based on RCIA principles and practice.

I say 'based on' because, as much as I believe in the gift and power of the RCIA, I don't

believe we need to be slavish about its implementation. What is important is the ecclesiology and spirit of community, conversion, mission that underpin the Rite. In a perfect parish setting, yes we could do everything 'by the book.' But parish circumstances vary enormously and it is not always possible to model every practical aspect of the RCIA

However, if we are thoroughly soaked in the spirit of conversion, community and mission that permeates the RCIA, if we have felt the transforming power of word and ritual, if we have a heart for the personal story of the

seeker, then we will be asking questions that lead to good sacramental formation. E.g., *What is God doing in the life of this man/woman/child/family? Have they heard the Good News? How can we nurture their spiritual journey already begun? What's the next step to draw them into the community? Do they have Catholic family or friendships to help them to live a gospel way of life? What support will they have after the sacrament/s is celebrated? What do they 'know' about Christ and Church; what do they need to know now, and what can we reasonably expect of them in terms of catechesis? What particular life challenges does this person face? What are his/*

her gifts and how can we call upon them?

With questions like these we adapted our existing programs to the person at hand, with sensitivity to whole-family dynamics as well as individuals. For instance, although we held weekly catechetical sessions for adults as part of the RCIA, sometimes we discerned that the best formation for a particular adult candidate was simply to travel the year long Children's Sacramental Program, learning with their child as they went, with the help of other families in the program who already formed their natural community base.

Then we would supplement that journey as needed.

Rather than apply programs uniformly, a deep understanding of the underlying logic and spirit of the RCIA, allows us to use our programs flexibly, with pastoral sense.

For discussion:

In what ways is the RCIA vision reflected in your sacramental processes?

Resource ideas

- Adult Initiation (RCIA) brochure
- Enquiry Invitation
- Discernment questions for adult catechumens as the Rite of Election approaches

14 Tell the story

- Proclamation of God's Word, and response to that Word, is at the heart of our sacramental rites.
- Consider carefully how Scripture is part of your parish's sacramental processes.



Sacrament is inseparable from God's Word

Proclamation of the Word of God, and our response to that Word, are the basis of our sacramental rites. Yet in the rough and tumble of parish life, how easily God's Word can become just another 'component' in an already full agenda. We have so many messages to impart to people. We want them to understand the teachings of the church, the prayers of the church, how to behave in church and how to negotiate the practicalities of parish life. We have people to introduce them to, pastoral problems to solve, paperwork

to complete and logistics to sort through... and somewhere in all that we have to proclaim the Word of God in such a way that it will stir their hearts and transform their lives. Phew!

Thankfully, though, we are not starting from scratch. A gracious mystery is already at work; they have already heard the Word. They wouldn't be here asking for baptism or seeking further sacramental experiences if there wasn't some 'Good News' theme resonating—even if subconsciously—in their lives. So we have a starting point.

I think if I had my time over

again as a pastoral associate this is the area I would want to improve and develop the most. I think I would spend less time trying to create catechetical sessions that bring all the pieces together, and more time helping parishioners to fall in love with scripture. Although much of our catechesis was biblically-based, I think that too often I used scripture as a jump-off point into an explanation of a church teaching rather than helping them to savour the story itself.

We are storytelling beings. We love stories. We feed on story. And when a good

story captures our hearts and imaginations it has great power over our lives. Essentially, catechesis is about listening to the story of God and God's people, and discovering how one's own life has a place within that great unfolding drama recorded in both Testaments.

Praying with scripture is a special way for God's Word to be massaged into our lives, and I have always liked to offer people scripture-based prayers: Aaron's blessing, the psalms, the Lord's prayer, the Magnificat, doxologies in St Paul's letters, to name a few. Lectio divina is a wonderful tool for praying with scripture.

For discussion:

Share something of your own experience of Scripture.

Where/how does Scripture feature as part of your sacramental processes?

Is the Word a transforming experience for your people?

Resource ideas

- The Magnificat: a prayer of praise to start a meeting
- Aaron's Blessing. A reflection
- Sample RCIA session. Breaking Open the Word (21st Sunday Year A)
- Books of the Old Testament: teaching resource

15 Remember our roots

Our Christian story originates in the story of the Jewish people.

- **How can our sacramental processes reflect this awareness?**
- **Sacraments immerse us in a community. We need the Jewish people to help us to understand what it means to live as a people chosen by God.**



Our Christian practices originate in Judaism.

A profound awakening is happening in our Church. Ever so gradually, Christians are learning about their Jewish spiritual ancestry. Jesus was a Jew, and the Church grew out of the faith experience of the people of Israel. Our faith has roots reaching deeply into the rich soil of Judaism.

Numerous aspects of Christian life and worship that we take for granted grew out of Judaism; e.g., the use of word and gesture in sacraments, the daily rhythms of prayer, the reading of scriptures followed by an explanation of the text, the sacred meal, anointing,

laying on of hands, the calendar of feasts, charismatic prophecy, ethical enquiry, fasting, burial practices, the centrality of Jerusalem, and the list goes on.... And of course we remember that the bible of the earliest Christians was that of Israel.

If so much of our faith has been shaped by the Jewish people, how can our sacramental processes reflect this? And do we dare to add to the plate of sacramental coordinators who are already over-stretched? An experimental response of mine has been to develop some simple prayer-exercises that can be incorporated into a sacramental program. An

excerpt from one is included at right.

Reconciliation reflection

When we think of repenting, of 'returning' to God, it can all seem like hard work! At times the journey 'home' to God seems so far that we hesitate to even start. Yet we are not the only one covering the distance: God sets out to meet us.

A poignant story comes to us through the storytelling traditions of the Jewish people, (traditions that Jesus drew upon in the telling of his own parables):

"A king had a son who had gone astray from his father a journey of 100 days. His friends said to him, 'Return to your father'; he said: 'I cannot.' Then his father sent word to say, 'Return as far as you can, and I will come to you the rest of the way.' So God says, 'Return to me, and I will return to you' (Mal.3:7)" [Pesikta Raba].

What a wonderful story to bear in mind as we ponder the gospel image of the father running to meet the prodigal son.

Let's think about that, as we prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

For discussion:

How might these ideas be relevant to our parish?

Further reading:

www.lightoftorah.net
www.etz-hayim.com
www.batkol.info

Resource ideas

- Teshuva: a reconciliation reflection
- Lost Sheep: a reconciliation reflection
- A Lenten Reconciliation Ceremony, drawing on Jewish penitential influences
 - » 1. ceremony | 2. order of service
- Tu B'Shevat: a prayer reflection on trees, fruits and spiritual growth

www.teresapirola.net/sacraments

16 Know your parish

- Every parish is unique. Our sacramental practices reflect that uniqueness.
- New to a parish? Listen and learn why things are done a certain way. Never change or dismantle a system without understanding it from the 'inside.'



Every parish is unique

We need parish/diocesan systems and policies. We also need flexibility that allows parish communities to *be who they are*. If you are new to a parish, don't change or dismantle a system without understanding it from the 'inside.' Listen, learn and work with it until you know *why* things are being done this way. Then review and make decisions with local personnel.

When I first became involved in our parish's Children's Sacramental Program I was horrified to learn that every child had to undergo an 'interview' to ensure his/

her readiness to receive the sacrament. "How intimidating!" I thought. "Surely there are better ways of relating to children as young as seven." Besides, it wasn't part of the diocesan requirement. It seemed like an unnecessary local rule.

But after experiencing the interview process, I was sold. It was nothing like what I had imagined. In a hall filled with 'interview stations,' an experienced parishioner met with each child and his/her parent, for 10-15 minutes. Yes, the 'interviewer' led the child through a list of basic questions, but so much more happened. It was conducted

in a warm, friendly manner and every child was personally praised and encouraged. In a program with over 100 families enrolled it gave us (the team) one-to-one contact with *every* family. It was a chance to reinforce key points, to ensure that the child knew how to receive the sacrament on the day. It was a chance to detect a problem and deal with it appropriately *before* the ceremony. Yes, there were some nerves, but 'good' nerves that suggested a healthy sense of accountability.

But do you know what really convinced me? It was the look of intimacy that passed

between parent and child as they walked away from that 'interview' room, all smiles, hand-in-hand. Was it a shared pride, a sense of achievement, an excitement as 'the big day' approached? That 'look,' which I saw again and again, told me that parents were drawing close to their children, and surely this is vital to a child's sacramental experience of divine love. From being an 'outside' skeptic, I was won over by the 'inside' reality.

We inherited other practices, too, which would not have been our natural choice, but which were part of the history of this particular parish and which 'worked' for this local

community.

A parish is like a family: its uniqueness needs to be heard and respected.

For discussion:

Share an experience of moving from one parish to another.

What worked (or didn't work) in different pastoral settings?

What is unique about your current parish sacramental experience?

Resource ideas

- My Confirmation Journey: a handout for child
- Walking with my child on the Confirmation Journey: a handout for parents

17 Remember: One size never fits all

- If your sacramental team has a way of responding to people who have specific needs/gifts which put them outside the mainstream process, then it is a graced parish indeed.
- Consider forming a 'SWOT Team' (special operations team) that works alongside the core organizing team.



Parish is like family

Some family members have highly specific needs and gifts. Like a family, a parish must develop a system for organizing itself, while recognizing that the system doesn't 'work' for everybody.

Examples, all of which we experienced in our parish, relate to factors such as cultural diversity, physical and mental disabilities, family breakdown and custody arrangements, inter-religious marriage tensions, families that travel, 'slow' kids and 'bright' kids, families with strong faith and religious involvement, and those with little or no experience of church.

One dream of mine (unfortunately unfulfilled, but I still think it's a good idea!) is to have a SWOT team. Now, don't be put off by the law enforcement imagery. The SWOT team I have in mind is a special operations team made up of individual parishioners with specific skills who can undertake 'special' assignments that fall outside the mainstream mechanics of running a sacramental process for 100 or so families.

A family that speaks little English? Send in Jon, he speaks Mandarin. A non-Catholic parent who is anxious because he is confused by all the Catholic terms? Send in Patrick, he can explain things well. A

family that missed key sessions because of a bereavement? Send in Karen, she has a special sensitivity and she knows the program intimately having been through it twice with her own children.

These are the pastoral situations that, when addressed, turn a good sacramental process into something really special, graced. Often these situations are left to the core team to resolve and, submerged with the task of organizing the overall program, they are not always able to give the time or attention that is pastorally required.

Although our SWOT team did not eventuate in a formal

way, the desire for it did have an impact and we were able to respond in limited ways. This included special sessions with particular children, a Mass tailored for families with members with disabilities, parishioners acting as interpreters, and personal home visits to families who didn't respond to the usual channels of communication.

We can't always respond perfectly, but I am a great believer that even one's 'trying' bears fruit.

For discussion:

What special needs/gifts emerge in your sacramental processes?

What have you tried? What would you like to try?

Resource ideas

At preparation sessions we often provided tables with a range of additional resources that could be borrowed to supplement the set program. We encouraged people to be proactive in making the program 'work' for them (e.g., see: 'Additional resources'). We urged them to speak

to us (the team) if they found themselves struggling with the program in any way. While we couldn't solve every difficulty, people appreciated the fact that we cared and we did our best to respond to specific pastoral needs.

18 Be pastorally ambitious, strategically savvy

- Be ambitious for the kingdom of God.
- If we care for our people, we will 'stretch' ourselves.
- It's like cooking on a tight budget. Use whatever meagre ingredients are in the larder to create a tasty dinner!



Have holy ambitions!

'Ambition' can be heard as a dirty word in church circles, but we use it here in the sense of the Pauline image of an athlete straining for the finish line. If we care for our parishioners, and if we yearn for the fullness of the gospel, we will 'stretch' ourselves as parish leaders. But how do we reach for 'big' things when most parishes have limited resources and are barely coping with day to day maintenance?

It's a bit like cooking on a tight budget. You go to the larder and say, "Okay, all I have is an onion, a piece of wilting pumpkin, a can of tuna and—oh look!—there is still a bit of sauce

left in the bottle... Now what can I do with that?" (I am not sure, but Margaret Fulton assures me that it is enough to produce a tasty meal!)

Parish is like this. Even on an ordinary day, there are significant 'pieces' (a person, a ministry, a venue, a resource) which, with a little bit of imagination, can be brought together to create a parish strategy with flair!

An example: During Lent we unveiled to the community our Parish Lenten Journey—a cohesive six week program of multiple opportunities for spiritual growth during Lent. It was attractively presented as an eight page booklet and

looked rather impressive. *Wow! All those things happening in our parish. What a feast!*

But if you examined the booklet closely, you would see that most of the items were to be found in every parish: Sunday Mass, Lenten groups, Project Compassion, Reconciliation times. We incorporated our existing RCIA plans and made a special feature of the scrutinies, involving the whole parish in prayers for healing and conversion. We enquired among our parish groups as to what they were planning for Lent and a 'Soup and Movie Night' was added to the booklet courtesy of the social justice committee.

We added Sunday Gospel references, graphics, a few motivational comments about Lent, and—*ta da!*—a six week program of parish renewal! Further, we now had a neat little program to hand to adults preparing for sacraments, and a letterbox filler for neighbourhood evangelization!

Using similar tactics ('What's in the larder?') we were also able to organise a Mini-Eucharistic Congress for the Year of the Eucharist, a substantial adult education program to follow-up World Youth Day, and a four week 'Advent Journey' leading to Christmas.

None of these involved rocket science or huge outlays of time,

money and personnel. We used existing resources wisely and imaginatively.

For discussion:

What's in your parish larder?

Now what could you do with that?

Resource ideas

- Our Lenten Journey
- Our Advent Journey
- Our mini-Eucharistic Congress
- Post-WYD adult education series

19 Pray. Pray now!

- Pray.
- Pray now. In fact, why not put this booklet aside for a moment, and take a prayer-break?



Pray

To suggest prayer as part of sacramental processes may seem to be stating the obvious. After all, aren't sacraments, in themselves, acts of worship? Certainly! But I am thinking of prayer amidst all the planning and activity that goes into preparing for those acts of worship. At times sacramental preparation can feel more like a well-orchestrated military campaign than a religious process! Before a childrens' Confirmation ceremony, for example, all enrolment information has to be processed, seating plans drawn up, items printed, names

checked and re-checked, medals ordered, certificates printed, choirs practised, people in liturgical roles briefed, parish bulletin notices published, carpark signage erected, diocesan instructions heeded, last-minute crises dealt with and a hundred small details covered.

And all this organization is part of the realization of God's kingdom! Or is it? I think that's where a robust prayer-life keeps our priorities in focus, maintaining a spiritual and ecclesial perspective for all the activity. Yes, there are times when we will have organized prayers such as in a team

meeting or a Parent Input Night or an RCIA session. But beyond that? Like caresses between lovers (a peck on the cheek, a squeeze of the hand) we can stay in touch with the Lord during a busy day, simply by surrendering to spontaneous prayer moments: a silent prayer before making that delicate phone call to a family who are insisting on being seated in the front pew; a pause in front of the tabernacle before we embark on preparing the church for the ceremony; a deep breath inhaling the Spirit's energies as the celebrations begin; a heartfelt plea to the Lord for a particular candidate as he/she steps up to receive

the sacrament.

In fact, one of the best rules of thumb for prayer amidst busy ministry is simply this: *pray now!*

Arranging 'prayer partners' for candidates is a wonderful parish strategy. We drew heavily on our Sunday Mass congregations for this. Another possibility (which we planned, but unfortunately did not succeed in implementing) is to arrange 'prayer families' from within the Children's Sacramental Program itself. The idea here is that the previous year's intake of families pray for the families in the current program (see resource below).

For discussion:

How prayerful are your sacramental processes?

Share your best prayer-ideas.

Resource ideas

- Prayer-Family strategy
- Prayers for parish use:
 - >> Remembrance | Magnificat | Planting seeds | Novena for the sick

20 Over to you: share a pastoral insight

⋮



Now it's your turn

What has worked well in your parish sacramental processes? What insights and key lessons have you learned along the way? What stories can you share? Pool your wisdom...

For discussion:

Resource ideas

- What resources did you use/develop that could be shared?

teresa pirola | faith initiatives

Light of Torah • A Sense of Sacrament • The Story Source • Walking Together in Faith

www.teresapirola.net