

Households of Faith

A retreat for parents

who have children preparing for First Reconciliation or First Eucharist
to help them love more deeply the faith which they pass on
to their own children.

Scheduling Format:
Saturday from 9 AM until noon

Note: Permission is granted to reproduce the talk outlines and other features of this retreat for use in your own parish. © PastoralPlanning.com, 2008. WHRT107

Overview

This retreat is designed to be used at the local parish level for parents who have children preparing for First Reconciliation or First Eucharist. It is designed to accompany Growing Up Catholic, but will serve beautifully with any preparation process. It is organized by leaders in the parish faith formation community and carried out entirely by them. Outlines are provided here for all the talks, prayer service, and handouts.

A note about the use of the 50-50 Covenant in the closing rites

As you prepare to host the retreat, pay special attention to the 50-50 Covenant process used in the closing talks and exercises. This covenant is one completed by all who make the retreat, whether for the first time or repeated times. It is used in the closing prayer service as a means to sending home and extending the retreat experience. A worksheet for retreatants is part of these notes, but the parish half of the Covenant must be worked out ahead of time by the pastor and parish leaders. See the material regarding this at the end of these notes.

Room set up

- A private conference room is needed with round tables, seating for 6 retreatants plus one leader per table. There will also be a podium, and a small table on which the Sacred Scriptures will be placed, along with a candle. If the lights in the room are bright overhead lights that cannot be dimmed, then bring in lamps to light the room with a more intimate lighting scheme.
- You will need a table for refreshments: coffee, tea, juice, a breakfast roll, or other snacks.

- You will also need a special table organized by the parish book store or other volunteers, on which you can display items which help households live their faith well: bibles, crucifixes, prayer resources, bottles of holy water, children's bibles and bible story books, information about parish activities and programs, and other ways in which you can help parents create households of faith.

Staff

- A **Retreat Leader** is needed for this experience who will provide the reflections (a half hour each) and lead the sharing. It is good to rotate the leadership role, to prevent any one person from making this his or her personal ministry.
- **Table Leaders** who will lead all activities at the table level; one leader is needed for each small group.
- A **Host Team** of two to three people, which will provide for hospitality, and general set up and clean up.
 - Note: One member of this Host Team, or more than one, will be ready to prepare the 50-50 Covenants for the retreatants between the closing session and the closing Liturgy. See the notes on this in that section.
 - This host team also prepares and staffs the exhibit table with the resources on it which parents will need to create households of faith.
- A **Retreat Prayer Coordinator:** who will coordinate inviting prayers and good works from the community to support the work of the retreat.

Materials needed

- A common Bible to place centrally in the room
- A Christ candle to place next to the Scriptures
- Pads for note taking
- Pens
- Decorations for the meeting room to make it welcoming and appealing
- Tent style name plates for each table
- Name tags for all, including all the leaders
- Journey of Faith inventory sheets - reproducible handout included in this set of notes
- Items for the resource tables where parents will be able to obtain what they need to create a stronger household of faith.

Schedule

- 9:00 Gather for Introductions
- 9:35 Enthronement of Sacred Scripture

- 9:45 Journey of Faith presentation, sharing, & discussion

- 10:45 Break

- 11:00 50-50 Covenant presentation, sharing, & discussion
- 11:45 Closing prayer service and commitment

- 12:15 Lunch (optional)

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Guide to the First Session: 9:00 AM

This should take a total of not more than 30 minutes.

“Introductions”

Folks arrive and are greeted by the team. They get a name tag. Invite each couple or single parent to take his or her place at one of the small group tables. A table leader should be there, ready to welcome them personally and make them feel at home. Before beginning, take a moment to go around the tables to each person one by one and invite them each to just take a deep breath and share their name and one significant thing that happened to them that day. Keep this light and quick, if possible. It has to move fast to keep us on time.

It's probably best to pre-assign table seating so that there is a good mix of gender, age, and backgrounds on each table. If the pastor or other parish staff are making this retreat, they simply take their place at a table like anyone else. Once everyone is settled, we are ready to begin.

The Retreat Leader welcomes all.

- Tells a little about him or herself, background in the parish, desire to grow in Christ, love for the church, family details, hopes for this retreat. Not too pious at this point or some people might be put off.
- Explains the schedule a little, but only sketchily. Do not give the details or announce beforehand about the topics of the reflections. Let the retreat unfold for the participants a little at a time to keep them focused on the present moment.
- Gives the “community guidelines” for this retreat
 - Be kind to each other at all times.
 - Be honest - everything we hear here is confidential.
 - Work hard at this process of growing closer to Christ.
 - Listen closely to each other.
 - Speak clearly, charitably and briefly when it's your turn.
 - Be open to the Spirit in our midst.
 - Don't keep the group waiting - be on time.
- Asks each group to quickly (in three minutes, timed by the Retreat Leader) choose a group name and write it on a name plate for the table.
- Then, invites each participant to introduce him or herself: name, family details, life in the parish, hopes for the retreat. This expands what we just did at supper.
 - Note: the process for this sharing will be the same one used throughout the retreat.

1. Each group begins by sharing at the table, following the directions of the Retreat Leader.
 2. Then, when all are finished, the Retreat Leader calls the whole group to order and invites each group to come to the front together, standing (or sitting if they are not able to stand) in a line, across the room in front of the podium.
 3. Then, one at a time they do their sharing. When all are finished, the large group applauds and the small group goes back to its table.
- For this first sharing, the small group should first announce its table name and why it was chosen. Then each person should make that slightly longer introduction of him or herself.

Households of Faith
Guide to
Enthronement of Sacred Scriptures
With Candle, and Holy Water
10 minutes

The Retreat Leader now holds a brief ceremony during which we honor the Word of God. At the ready should be a small table, covered with a decorative cloth. On it, a Bible stand, a candle, matches, and a container of Holy Water.

1. Process with the Bible to the center of the room, holding the Bible reverently above your head and place it on the table.
2. Light the candle.
3. Proclaim a short reading of your choice.
4. Then say that the Bible is the light for our lives and the life of the whole Church. It will also be the center of what we do here in the next three days.
5. Give a very short explanation of why this is so. Then say that baptism is the beginning of our journeys of faith. At Baptism we receive Christ, we are empowered by grace to live in Christ. The water of baptism is a sign of this new life.
6. Then sprinkle all with this water as an opening blessing.
7. This entire opening ceremony should take 10 minutes or less.

Households of Faith Retreat

Guide to the 1st Presentation: 9:45 AM

Talk outline for "The Journey of Faith"

This talk is a fifteen minute reflection given by either the retreat leader or someone else chosen for this presentation. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the Journey of Faith. Keep the introduction short.

Purpose: to help the participants become aware that growing in faith is a lifelong journey begun at baptism and continuing down through the years. The faith we pass on to our children is something we ourselves must cherish. Our children will know if we do or if we do not. They learn from watching and listening to us. It is intentional and basic. And it is something we share in the parish community. Here are your main points:

- Thank everyone for being at the retreat this week.
- Our spiritual journey, I suppose you could say, started at baptism for us.
- But many came before us, parents, grandparents, neighbors, all the way back to the time of Christ and beyond.
- Down through history, a parade of faithful people have come to know Christ, to turn their hearts to Christ, and to live according to the teachings of Christ as presented by the Church.
- So with us. Pause for a moment, think back over your own journey:
 - Remember religious ed?
 - What religion did you practice as a child?
 - What do you remember about those years in your faith life?
 - What was happening in your family then, or in the world that affected your faith journey?
 - What were some turning points in your life?
 - What brought you here tonight?
- Taking the time to think about our journey helps us steer a clear path toward Christ. We're all so busy all the time. We run from this to that. We come running into Church on Sundays, and then run out and keep the race going. Pausing to savor Christ's love, to become more aware of Christ around us, and to share that with each other is what this retreat is about.

- Here share a brief story from your own life about your own journey of faith and how it has unfolded. Don't be afraid to share about the rough times, but do not engage in inappropriate self disclosure, the sort of thing which belongs in therapy or the sacrament of reconciliation.
- Your child or children learn about faith mainly from you. You're 90% of the teaching your children will have. They learn by watching. If you love your faith, they will too. If you find your parish and faith experience to be a dreaded duty, they will too. (Expand on this if needed.)
- After you finish:
- Distribute a Journey of Faith inventory (the handout is on the last pages of these notes) and ask people to take a few minutes to think through it. Then the Retreat Leader thanks the speaker and invites each small group to share, giving each person about 3 minutes (20 minutes overall).
- Then lead a large group discussion as above, each small group member is invited to share (briefly) with the whole group about one major turning point in his or her spiritual journey.

--- Break for 15 minutes ---

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Guide to the 2nd Presentation: 11:00 AM

Talk outline for A Plan for Daily Life with Christ: 50-50 Covenants

This is a fifteen minute reflection from the leader or someone else designated for this job. Do not be tempted to talk longer than the allotted time. As the group moves its attention to this moment, the Retreat Leader stands at the podium and calls everyone to attention, using humor and gentleness. He or she then introduces this speaker, giving a personal statement about his or her competency to share about the Living with Christ in daily life. Keep the introduction short.

Purpose: To assist participants to make a concrete plan with which to leave the retreat, which will help them continue to live with Christ as they return home and prepare to teach their own children about faith. The speaker will introduce the 50-50 Covenant, and each retreatant and staff person will complete one and share portions of it with the group.

Here are the speaker's main points:

- All the good intentions in the world don't help when you are back in the routine of your daily life. What we need then is a plan.
- If we don't have a plan for how we will continue the journey, we will soon find we're off the path.
- Give an example of this from your own life.
- Stress the importance of a daily life style that supports the Christian journey:
 - household meals
 - regular prayer
 - being part of a community
 - being in the Sunday Assembly
 - sharing faith with others
- Introduce them to the 50-50 Covenant concept:
 - Each person agrees to various commitments, based on the 50-50 materials at the end of these notes, but modified for your local community as noted on the materials themselves.
 - The local parish also commits itself to various ways of assisting the person, again based on the 50-50 materials at the end of these notes, but modified once again to the local parish situation.
 - Distribute the 50-50 worksheet to everyone, including all staff of the retreat. Invite about 5-8 minutes for folks to read through it and

select those things which are significant to them or add their own ideas.

- As they finish, the Retreat Leader invites folks to browse through the various resources for prayer, learning, and service which the Host Team has prepared.
- As they do this, each participant hands their 50-50 worksheet to the Retreat Leader. Once all are collected, they are quickly handed to the member of the Host Team designated to generate each one's personal 50-50 Covenant. These will be signed as part of the closing liturgy and sent home with the participants.
- After about 10-12 minutes of browsing, gather everyone back to prepare for the Eucharist.

Households of Faith Retreat

guide to the

Closing Liturgy of Word (& Eucharist, if possible) and the 50-50 Covenant ritual

Introduction. This Liturgy should be a more intimate than weekend Sunday liturgies because it is being celebrated in a much smaller group. When possible, we recommend you use a smaller space than the parish church, such as a small chapel, or a room prepared as a chapel for this occasion.

Music. Music should be kept simple and singable. If possible, use the parish hymnal. Our goal is ultimately to help everyone take a more active role in the Sunday Mass. Invite the retreatants to take appropriate roles in the Liturgy or Mass as readers, communion distributors, and so forth.

The Liturgy. Normally, this special retreat liturgy is not the weekend liturgical celebration. It is meant to provide a special ending for retreatants, and you should not invite others to join in. Select readings and ordinary parts of the Mass to augment the retreat experience. If this is not a Mass, then we will celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, and end with a blessing.

Blessing and sending forth. After the communion rite if this is a Mass, or after the blessing if it is not, the Presider might consider giving a special blessing to all to send them on their way. This would be an appropriate time for the Presider and Retreat Leader to present each retreatant, including the retreat staff and themselves, with each one's 50-50 Covenant. The Host Team will prepare these between the closing session and this Liturgy or Mass. It would be appropriate to use a brief rite of presentation for this purpose.

50-50 Covenant

Worksheet for Households of Faith retreat

I. As you come to the end of your Households of Faith retreat, we invite you to take a few minutes to consider how you will take this home with you and continue to live in the Spirit of Christ. Please review the items below and choose those elements of the Christian life to which you are willing to commit yourself. You may also add your own ideas. Be specific about your commitment.

Check √	How I commit myself to live in the Sprit	Getting specific: add your notes here.
A. Loving those within my household...		
	I will tell those nearest to me that I love them.	Who?
	I will show my love with notes and little gifts more often.	What?
	I will pay more attention to the needs and wants of those near to me, either in my home or community.	How?
	I will share a meal with others once or twice per week. If at home, I will try to add a little romance: no TV, candles, and good dishes.	When?
	I will work hard to forgive others when they have hurt me. I will use the words, "I am sorry." and "I forgive you."	Specifically:
	I will care for _____ who is ill or in capacitated.	Specifically:
	Add	Specifically:
	Add	Specifically:

B. Loving our neighbors and world...

	I will become aware of people in my family, neighborhood, parish, or wider society whom I dislike or hate.	How will you do this?
	I will admit to any grudges or prejudices that I hold toward other groups - and try to see beyond them.	Specifically:
	I will try to find ways to be more tolerant of people I don't like.	Specifically:
	I will gossip less and affirm more.	About whom?
	I will contribute time or money to support community needs, such as public radio, the arts, the humane society, and others.	How much? For whom?
	I will become more aware of those who are sick, imprisoned, on death row, or refugees. I will seek ways to help them.	How will you help?
	I will give more time, food, or money to help ease the burdens of others, such as the food shelf, works of justice, the homeless and poor, and others	Specifically:
	I will do at least one thing each week to improve the care of the earth on which we live. This might include recycling, picking up trash, demanding better laws from government, or caring for a garden.	Specifically:
	Add:	Specifically:
	Add:	Specifically:

C. Living our faith and being in our parish:

	I will be present and active for Sunday Mass each week, or as often as possible for me.	Specifically:
	After Mass, I will continue to observe Sunday as a "day off" from regular life. I will postpone shopping and work as much as possible.	Specifically:
	I will decide how much money to give to my parish each week.	How much?
	I will assist others (children, friends) to come to know Christ better and to pray often.	Who?
	I myself will pause each day to pray, using whatever prayer form suits me best.	When? What prayer form?
	I will make sure I have sacred items within my home such as prayer books, sacred spaces, occasional quiet times, and signs of my faith.	What?
	Every evening before bed I pause to think back over the day and find ways in which God has touched my life.	When?
	I will take part in the parish life long learning process.	Specifically:
	I will invite someone I know to make this retreat here in the parish or wherever they live.	Who?
	I will volunteer time for parish programs.	Specifically:
	Add:	Specifically:
	Add:	Specifically:

II. This section addressed what the parish itself promises to the household. It is very important to those making this commitment that, as a parish, you are prepared to offer them a spiritual home. More than ever, they will need the support and affirmation of the community. Please review the suggestions below, and add or change them as suits your parish situation. Be ready to offer this to the members of your parish as the “your half” of the 50-50 Covenant.

Item	Realistic Why?	Unrealistic Why?	Revisions
A. On the part of the parish catechesis process...			
<p>We promise as a parish to provide you with chances to gather with other adults and young adults in order to grow your faith.</p> <p>These will take the form of [here insert your parish plan for adult faith gatherings to help people sustain and grow their faith]</p>			
<p>We promise to make available to each household the materials to help you grow and be connected to the parish: including sacramentals, booklets, music, and web sites.</p>			
<p>We promise as a parish that anyone leading faith formation for any age will be well prepared for this ministry and will use materials approved by the church.</p>			
<p>We promise to help you find ways to serve the poor, the rejected, and the suffering.</p> <p>If you wish, we'll train you to visit the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely, and the refugee.</p>			
<p>Add:</p>			
<p>Add:</p>			

B. On the part of the rest of the parish...

<p>We promise to make the Sunday Assembly the single most important focal point of parish life.</p> <p>We will prepare for it carefully and help you as a household to be well disposed for it, ready to participate, and actively engaged in the rites.</p>			
<p>We'll welcome you to our Sunday Assembly regardless your situation in life. [Here you may wish to list particular groups who do not now feel welcome.]</p> <p>We'll maintain an open door and an open heart to you, and we'll offer you a share in the grace of Christ which fills this church.</p>			
<p>If you call us for help, we'll do everything possible to provide it to you.</p> <p>If you call with a question, we'll answer promptly.</p> <p>If you ask for prayer, we'll offer it immediately.</p>			
<p>Add:</p>			
<p>Add:</p>			
<p>Add:</p>			

Households of Faith

worksheet

the journey of faith

The purpose of this brief reflection tool is to help you focus on your own journey of faith in your life so far. Please pause quietly for a few minutes to respond to the questions. Then prepare to share whatever part of this with others you are comfortable.

Event in my life	Notes I recall about it
Your baptism When and where? Who decided you should be baptized?	
The household in which you were raised Who lived in your home? How much religion was practiced there? Describe the spirituality of your home: prayerful? justice centered? non-existent? pious? progressive or conservative? more than one faith?	
Your early parish experiences What was the name of your family parish? Where was it? How were you involved? Thinking back, what is your primary memory of the parish?	

<p>How you responded to religion during young adulthood</p> <p>As you entered college or the work force, what role did religion play in your life?</p> <p>Who were your most influential friends, teachers, or ideas?</p>	
<p>Turning points in your adult life regarding your faith: who were the influential people?</p> <p>Influential people?</p> <p>Influential ideas?</p> <p>Influential life events?</p>	
<p>Your current connection to religion and a parish</p> <p>How are you or aren't you involved?</p> <p>What attracts or repels you in parish life?</p>	
<p>Your current connection to Christ and the spiritual life</p> <p>Describe your own current prayer life</p> <p>Where do you find your inspiration and guidance for life?</p>	