



NOURISH

Leader Guide



Faith and Family Life
Catholic Ministries

AN INVITATION

You have been invited to accompany families as they discover the love and power of Jesus in the Eucharist. The *Nourish* experience invites families to connect the beauty of the liturgy with their lived family experiences. This is encouraged through simple faith conversations, shared activities, and prayer. Preparation to receive the sacrament of first Communion is a special time in the life of a family and provides great opportunity to grow in faith together.

A FEW TIPS

- By reading and experiencing the content yourself, you will be best equipped to accompany this resource. We recommend first becoming familiar with the material before implementing it, both the at-home and at-church content.
- Families can be placed in small groups of 4-6 families to share this journey with. Parents can learn from each other as they recount their Family Meeting experiences. Companions and catechists can weave together these individual families into a small church community.
- The At-Home Content includes 10 Family Meetings and the At-Church Content includes 3 Sessions and 1 Mini-Retreat. The sequence of how these work together can be found in the at-church intro.
- Check in with families regularly using our Family Follow Through system available on Martha or as a PDF. This helps with accountability.
- Share photos from the Family Follow Throughs in your bulletin, newsletter, emails, or bulletin boards.

AT-HOME CONTENT

Nourish is a family based curriculum facilitated by parents in 10 at-home Family Meetings. These Family Meetings focus on different parts of the liturgy, tying them into concrete ways families encounter these same themes in their day to day living. The catechesis is presented in the form of family meetings. Each Family Meeting includes: an opening prayer, gathering ritual, check-in question, experiential activity, teaching, and closing prayer. Each Family Meeting will begin with a gathering ritual, which includes setting up a sacred space, sharing a family handshake, and having the first communicant read the opening prayer. This becomes a ritual as it is shared together each time. Rituals are meaningful moments that, when continually shared, help to unite a family. This

blessing ritual will help provide a regular rhythm to begin Family Meetings. The check-in is meant to get the conversation started between family members. The question is loosely based on the session's theme, and is one that is easy to answer. The activity provided is meant to teach the children through a fun and interactive experience. A teaching is also provided that coincides with the activity. Parents are given the language to teach an essential part of the catechesis related to the theme. Children remember what they “do” and parents remember what they “teach.” To end each family meeting, a prayer is included for families to pray together.

AT-CHURCH CONTENT

It is important to have families gather periodically throughout the *Nourish* process. The goal of gathering is to:

- Find out what is going well and what parents are struggling with in the *Nourish* Box Family Meetings.
- To encourage, deepen, and support their experience of the Family Meetings with any tips, inspiration, or information.
- To meet and hear from other parents on a similar journey. There is wisdom in any room of adults, especially parents!
- To give children a positive and meaningful experience at-church.
- To pray together - for each other and for their families.

This resource has been provided to support you in facilitating Sessions held at-church throughout the *Nourish* experience that are designed to complement and support the at-home content. The Sessions have been written for parents and the child preparing to receive the sacrament. You may consider having another space or experience prepared for other siblings, or they can serve as helpers and mentors to their younger siblings. The Sessions include separate content for parents and middle childhood (6-10). Parents and their children will be separated for the first part of each Session. Each Session ends with a closing prayer for the parents and children together.

There is plenty of content to fill a 1-1.5 hour time frame in the Sessions and a 3 hour time frame for the Mini-Retreat. Session 1 is designed to be used before Family Meeting 1, where you can also pass out the boxes. Session 2 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 2 and 3. Session 3 is designed to be used between Family Meeting 5 and 6. You can conclude with the Mini-Retreat or it can be offered at another time in the process.

The modules from the Mini-Retreat can also be broken up into additional sessions.

There are supplies that need to be pulled together to help bring these Sessions to life. We have given you supply lists. We have also suggested ways to set a mood in the room; candles, music, dimming the lights, etc. We feel it is critical to set holy spaces to lead families into deeper intimacy with Christ and themselves. The children's Sessions always begin with gathering around a prayer table covered with different items for each lesson to help draw them into the experience. Depending on the size of the group, you may decide to break the group up into classrooms led by catechists and helpers. We have included a Saint for each of the Sessions. There is a short explanation tying them to the lesson. Children love to hear about the lives of these incredible examples. A Saint coloring sheet PDF is provided as well. You may choose to have the children color these during the Session, or they could be sent home depending on timing. It is good to tell the stories of our holy heroes as they connect to different parts of our faith story. Feel free to scale the material up or down. Use all of the material or pick and choose the sections that best fit your time. We cannot over emphasize the impact of simple but beautiful decor, great hospitality, and intimate prayerful spaces. Your attention to detail tells everyone this is important, we prepared for you!

We realize parents are in different places and stages in their own faith journeys. We have written Sessions we feel best take into account today's parents. The majority of the parents we encounter have very little theological background, but have the wisdom of their own lives to reflect on. We have found that when we give them helpful prompts and time to process, they do very well in sharing with each other. It is our hope that these Sessions meet them where they are at and slowly lead them into something more. Feel free to scale the material up or down. It is most important that families leave with a positive experience of Church and community, feeling like they have a place in it.

ACCOMPANIMENT TEAM NEEDS

We realize each of our directors have different gifts; some are wonderful teachers, some are storytellers, others are better facilitating small groups, some are gifted in finding volunteers to present material. Use your strengths to lead your family Sessions, and look for others who can take the pieces you are not as confident in. It takes a team! Invest in time with your accompaniment team. Having a strong team of people committed to the same mission helps everyone. Offer time to get to know one another, provide skills training, and spend time in prayer together. We want our parents to feel like they are being invited into a group that has been preparing for them and enjoys each other. Our *Beside* resources can be helpful in forming and growing your accompaniment team.

Facilitator:

- Choosing a facilitator to lead your Sessions as an MC from the front is an important decision. This person will introduce and weave together the content for each Session. This person should be warm, engaging, confident, and it helps if they have a good sense of humor. This person needs to be open and non-judgmental. It will be their voice that will help the group grow together.

Companions:

- We recommend placing a companion in each small group if possible. Make sure companions feel comfortable with the flow of each Session. It is very helpful to have them walk through a sample Session together. Leave time at the end of each Session with the companions to evaluate the experience. To make this a great experience for all we must be checking in regularly, making any needed changes as soon as possible. The companions should be made aware of the following:
 - Make sure each group member has the chance to participate.
 - Do not allow any group member to control the sharing.
 - Do not make anyone feel forced to share. Parents can decide to “pass.”
 - Make sure all parents feel respected and listened to. Having cell phones put away will help with this.
 - Companions will set the tone for the sharing. If they want a deeper, more thoughtful response from parents, they will need to model that in their own sharing. The group will usually follow their lead.
 - Do not monopolize the sharing. It works well if companions begin the sharing and then pass it on to the other members.
 - Companions should be listening to all parent responses, and be ready to ask follow up questions that help expand parent’s answers. It is important that they remember information discussed and check in with parents in future Sessions: “How is your sick mother doing?”, “How was your vacation time with your family that you were looking forward to?”.
 - Each group sharing time is preempted by a journaling and reflection time for processing. This should help the parents be prepared to share. No one likes to be put on the spot.
 - If anything is ever discussed in small group time that is inappropriate or alarming it should be brought to the attention of the Faith Formation Director.

Catechist:

- Catechists will be leading and guiding the children in their Sessions. This will include playing games, leading crafts, having conversations with a small group, managing group dynamics, and providing a safe trusted space for the children to feel a part of. The catechists should be made aware of the following:

- How you lead, your encouragement and your undivided presence, will be your greatest gift.
- You may have other helpers joining you, including older children. Make sure they understand the Sessions ahead of time and what you expect from them. This will ensure a better experience for all.
- You will be assigned a group of children to journey with. You will be the glue that holds the small group together. Your leadership will be important as you are called to help facilitate conversations, share the passion you have for your faith, and witness through your own life experiences with the children.
- Each of the activities you have been given to lead is meant to be enjoyed with the children and then tied to a teaching. We remember more when we can tie words to an image, a craft we made, or an experience.
- The gathering around the table as the Session begins is meant to encourage wonder. Wondering encourages awe, curiosity, and pondering. Draw children into this special time by the way you display the items, the tone of your voice, the questions you ask. Wondering is a key element of faith.

Hospitality:

- Hospitality is about much more than setting out cookies and water bottles. Great hospitality is the root for the growing that will take place. Having a team that interacts well together, and welcomes you into their community, will help the families get comfortable almost immediately. This will produce greater engagement in the Sessions. This type of hospitality requires that facilitator and companions become friendly with the families from the moment they arrive. It includes asking good questions, being vulnerable, and helping everyone feel seen.
- How the room “feels” is also an important part of the hospitality recipe. Covered tables, simple centerpieces, and the glow of a few candles will encourage the parents to lean into the conversation, like a great dinner party. Take the time to set the room in advance, so that families walk into a space that feels prepared for them. A prayer table up front with changing images each Session can also be a small voice speaking into the room. Find creative people in your community who have a heart for families and let them loose to work their magic.

Intercessors:

- Having intentional intercessors who are praying for your families and your ministry is an important step to staying on mission. Prayer always needs to be integral to the work we do. People in your parish community who take the time to talk with Jesus often and who understand the struggles and difficulties facing families are

perfect to help in this role. These prayer warriors can be organized as a group, or can individually come before God for the needs of the parish families each day. Prayer can be specially centered around this time of preparing for Eucharist. Intercessors can be invited to pray specifically for the following needs:

- For our first communicants, that they would feel the support of family members at this special time.
- For the parents of our first communicants who may not feel like they are enough, may they come to know how beautifully God sees them. May their faith grow through this time of ministering to their children.
- For our parish families engaging in faith conversations together, that God would draw them closer to himself and to each other. May this time of preparation lead them to the Eucharistic table often where they will continue to be fed.
- For our parish families who need healing, may God lead them to forgiveness, mercy and peace.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Family Meeting	Theme	Activity	Values Taught
1	Learn the importance of gathering as a family in your home and as a community at Church. Your family is unique, special and holy, and set apart for a purpose.	-Set up your family gathering space -Create a family handshake -Draw a picture of your family -Find something around your home that reminds you of Jesus	-Community -Uniqueness -Family Bonding
2	Learn about the importance of your daily actions and the opportunity to seek forgiveness when you make mistakes.	-Forgiveness analogy using a tube of lotion	-Forgiveness -Mercy -Reconciliation
3	Learn how reading, listening, pondering, and re-telling Scripture stories helps you to know and share your faith.	-Lectio Divina using a set of Story Tokens	-Contemplation -Reflection -Find Deeper Meaning
4	Learn how to follow Jesus by making good choices.	-Play a game of Pick up Sticks -Fill out a postcard for your priest	-Good Decision Making -Free Will



5	Learn the connection between preparing for a meal in your home and preparing the altar to celebrate Jesus' sacrifice.	-Set your table in a special way -Share a snack together	-Care -Preparation -Participation
6	Learn how bread and wine transform into the Body and Blood of Jesus.	-Bake a loaf of bread together	-Love -Sacrifice -Tran- substantiation
7	Learn how the world God created to beautifully fit together was broken apart by sin. We each are called to help put it back together by being peacemakers.	-Color and put together a puzzle	-Peace -Care for Creation
8	Learn how receiving Jesus is a gift given to you each time you receive Communion.	-Decorate a door hanger for the first communicant	-Giving and Receiving
9	Learn how you are called to take your faith outside of church, by loving and serving others.	-Family foot washing experience	-Service -Kindness
10	Learn how to celebrate faith milestones with those you love.	-An intentional activity for your first Communion celebration	-Evangelization -Affirmation and Encouragement



NOURISH

FAMILY FOLLOW THROUGHS

Time with family is precious. Following through with this family experience tells your child this is important. With your child, please complete the following tasks after each meeting to turn in.



Family Meeting 1: Email a picture of your gathering space.

Family Meeting 2: Email a list of the qualities that were brought up as you affirmed each other as a family. Try to commit to noticing these and calling out these characteristics in each other more.

Family Meeting 3: Now that you have completed the first three family meetings, how has this experience been for your family? Email a short response.

Family Meeting 4: Send or drop off the postcard for your priest to the church office.

Family Meeting 5: Email a picture of your family table as it is set for this week's family meeting.

Family Meeting 6: Email a picture of your freshly baked bread after you have removed it from the oven.

Family Meeting 7: Email a picture of the puzzle your family made together.

Family Meeting 8: Email a picture of the door hanger after it is decorated and hanging on your first communicant's door.

Family Meeting 9: How was the experience of washing and blessing each other's feet for your family? Email a short response.