

Leader's Guide for
UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENTS
A Catholic Update Video

Please note: This leader's guide was originally written for those using this video program in its VHS format. Those now using this program on DVD may find some references that do not apply to their use (i.e., directions for locating segments, time notations, etc.). We trust that both VHS- and DVD-users will find this guide a valuable resource.

The Use of Video in Faith Formation

Jesus used the "media" of his day to teach. He was a master storyteller. His preaching is full of imagery. His parables are calculated to engage his audience. Through the ages, Christian teachers and preachers have followed Jesus in the creative proclamation of his message.

From the culture of Jesus' time, heavily dependent on *oral communication*—to the advent of *print communication*—to our own time and its dependence on *electronic media*—Christian teachers have adapted their proclamation to each new medium and its particular demands.

Media scholars like Marshall McLuhan remind us of the impact of the medium on the message it carries. *How* we communicate affects *what* we communicate. Electronic media offer us new ways to tell the story of our faith. Father Pierre Babin points out (see *The New Era in Religious Communications*, Pierre Babin with Mercedes Iannone, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991) that the message, as well as the sender and receiver, will be re-shaped in the telling.

Catechesis, as a part of the total evangelization process, must touch the learners' hearts and shine the light of faith on their lives. It must connect to the learners' experience or risk being discarded as irrelevant. To be effective, catechists must learn how to make the best use of the electronic media available in our culture, aware of the particular medium's strengths and weaknesses.

Video is a very popular, familiar and accessible part of our electronic culture. It draws us in, captures our imaginations and touches us on a deep, emotional level. As it speaks to our experience and utilizes several of our senses, its message is more likely to be heard and remembered. By integrating quality video programs into the catechetical process, catechists can share the message more effectively.

At the same time, as television becomes a more pervasive part of our lives, we can be lulled into thinking that it can do everything for us—inform, entertain, shop, even worship. The reality is that it can't and shouldn't do everything. As Pierre Babin emphasizes, electronic media function differently than print media. They appeal first to the *emotional* content of our faith rather than the *intellectual* content. Video cannot begin to convey the amount of information print can. It cannot replace the live presence and personal witness of the catechist. But in a catechetical setting, it can be a powerful part of the "mix of

media” used in proclaiming the message.

How effectively video—or any electronic media—is used in the catechetical setting depends primarily on how prepared the catechist is to use it:

- A preview of the video is essential to determine the best use of the program with a particular group.
- The catechist should select a video program (or section of a video) based on the audience, the purpose, and the availability of competent teachers and other resources and activities to support the theme.
- Sufficient time should be available to introduce the video and to process the viewing experience.

Catechists must realize that *they* control the use of video in their sessions. They might approach a video program in one of two ways: as a skeleton on which to build a presentation or as a way to “enflesh” an existing skeleton.

A video program well-tailored to the needs of a group might be used in its entirety. At other times, catechists may creatively manipulate the video to fit their needs:

- An excerpt may be taken from a longer piece to illustrate a point.
- A video may be shown with the *sound off* to highlight an aspect of the program.
- The “pause” button can be used freely to interject explanations and examples or to elicit reactions.
- The program or excerpt may be repeated to emphasize a point.

The producers of this video program have attempted to craft both medium and message with an awareness of the power of the medium as well as its limitations. They encourage those who use it to study this guide and become familiar with ways to allow this program to supplement their own sharing of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Introduction to the Series

Catholic Update Videos are dynamic new media designed for use with today’s adult learners. Use them in RCIA, faith formation, liturgical and pastoral ministry, faith-sharing groups and sacramental preparation. *Catholic Update Video* offers catechists and pastoral ministers multimedia resources to enhance teaching, presentation and training efforts.

Catholic Update Video’s four segments—story, witness, teaching and musical reflection—are short and can stand alone or be used with others in the program. The format is flexible, making it useful in a variety of group settings as well as for individual viewing. The emphasis is on what video can do best, namely touch us through story (story segment), testimony (witness segment) and song (musical reflection segment) with images and the emotions they carry. But a more “didactic” approach (teaching segment) respects the need to convey a concise core of information.

The general model for catechetical process (life experience, message or doctrine, response) is respected by the order of the four segments, although at times a catechist may choose to use them alone or out of sequence:

- Each program begins with a **story segment** designed to draw viewers in and help them connect their life-experience to the faith-topic.
- The testimony of real-life Catholics in the **witness segment** helps viewers reflect on their own life experience and prepare for group sharing.
- Our teacher briefly highlights some aspects of the topic in the **teaching segment**. Relevant images help to illustrate the points being made. *(This segment is not intended to treat a topic exhaustively nor substitute for a more thorough presentation on the message or doctrine.)*
- Viewers are invited to respond in prayer using the *musical reflection segment*.

The program's host provides a context for each segment. This is designed to help viewers who will see the program from beginning to end. Catechists who use segments individually or out of sequence may wish to prepare their own lead-in. On-screen graphics provide viewers with a question for reflection or sharing between segments.

This leader's guide is an important tool for making the best use of this video program.

It includes the following features:

- **Summary and Suggestions for Use** for each segment.
- **Questions for Sharing** for the story, witness and teaching segments; facilitators can choose from them or use them as models for developing their own questions.
- **Suggestions for Use** for the musical reflection segment provide a model for using this segment in a prayer setting.
- **Resources for Further Study** are listed at the end of this guide.
- **Approximate times** are noted for where each segment begins. *(If the VCR is equipped with an "elapsed time" counter, reset the counter to 0:00:00 at the beginning of the tape and fast-forward to the time listed for the beginning of the desired segment. If the VCR does not have an "elapsed time" counter, the facilitator can fast-forward in the "review" mode [while the VCR is in "play"] to find the gray screen and Catholic Update Video logo that indicate the start of a segment.)*

UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENTS

Overview of the program

Remember the “good news/bad news” routine? The first chapter of the Gospel of John has a line that could be the start of one: “The bad news is: ‘No one has ever seen God,’” And the “good news” comeback is in the same verse: “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made God known” (John 1:18).

That verse from John’s Gospel captures the Good News of our faith: the fact that the invisible God has become visible in Jesus Christ. The “incarnation,” God becoming human in Jesus, is the foundation for our understanding of “sacrament.”

As Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., teacher for this *Catholic Update Video*, points out, sacraments are not so much objects as events. They are not simply something “we receive,” but something “we are.” As Catholics, we believe we meet God by encountering Jesus Christ in our sacramental celebrations and, in turn, by the way we live, we enable others to meet Christ.

In this *Catholic Update Video* we’ve asked some ordinary Catholics to tell their stories, stories of real people living out their lives in everyday circumstances. Why? We believe this kind of faith sharing is one of the best ways to help others understand the sacraments. Along with the testimonies heard in our witness segment, viewers will also meet Nancy and Conrad Kolis in our opening story segment. From their wedding liturgy, which they used to express the presence of Christ in their marriage, to the funeral liturgy of their child, this faith-filled couple discovers an ever-deepening expression of what “sacrament” means in real, human terms. Finally, the music video, “Be Light for Our Eyes,” uses music and dance to express the themes of incarnation, prayer and sacrament.

Separately and together, all four of this program’s segments assist viewers to understand better how the sacraments, celebrated in the liturgy, express the Church as the visible Body of Christ to the world.

Audience

This program is intended for an adult or teen-age audience, which may encompass several groups:

- RCIA participants preparing to be baptized or received into the Catholic Church;
- Lifelong Catholics who wish to deepen their understanding of the sacraments;
- Parents who want to know more about the sacraments before their children receive Baptism, First Communion or Confirmation;
- High-school students studying about the sacraments as part of a religious education curriculum.

Teachers, group leaders and parish sacramental coordinators should explore how individual segments of this video program might be used fruitfully in programs for the RCIA, or for Baptism and First

Communion programs for parents.

STORY SEGMENT

“Living Beatitudes”

(Begins approximately 2:30 into program.)

Summary

In this true-life “video” story, viewers are introduced to Nancy and Conrad Kolis, a faith-filled Catholic couple who are parents of five children. They explain in an honest, simple way that they discovered what “sacrament” means through both the happy and sad events, which have transpired during their marriage. While preparing for their wedding liturgy, the Sacrament of Matrimony, they searched for just the right biblical passage to describe the outward sign of their union, words that would proclaim to the world that they were entering into a sacramental—not just a civil—marriage uniting them with a third party, namely, God.

The couple eventually chose the Beatitudes, the nine blessings proclaimed by Christ at the beginning of his famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12). Both Nancy and Conrad assert that this passage expresses the “ideas and hopes” that they have for their marriage as Christian partners.

Nancy next recalls her pregnancy, and the joy that this reality brought to the immediate family, as well as to strangers. She even took the opportunity to write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, commenting on the issue of when life begins. For her and her husband, their child was a real person, already a part of their new family.

Finally the long-anticipated labor began. But what should have been a day of joy turned into a day of mourning. Tragically, the baby died shortly after birth. A prolapsed cord had cut off the life-sustaining oxygen supply during the delivery. Amidst the turmoil a compassionate nurse suggested administering the Sacrament of Baptism, an idea the parents embraced. And so the infant was baptized in the delivery room as a child of God named “Elaine.”

Although she lived only moments after birth, Elaine let God’s irrepressible love and joy be expressed through her in-utero existence. And the Beatitudes took on a much deeper meaning for her parents.

Today, Nancy and Conrad are raising five active young sons. However, the story—the life—of Elaine is still very much a part of this small “Body of Christ” Christian community. Just look at any number of official family snapshots, the proud couple points out. One member of the Kolis family always holds Elaine’s pink baptismal candle—a symbol of a life remembered and loved.

“Sacrament is not static,” explains the couple, pointing out that their marriage, a living sacrament, “continues every day. In everyday-ness...is where holiness is.” Sums up Nancy: “Sacrament

is the sacred, bubbling up through the ordinary.”

Suggestions for use

In connection with viewing the story segment, ask participants to explore how the images and ideas expressed relate to their own lives. Talk about how sacraments are lived out every day in ordinary ways by individuals and families. (See “Questions for sharing” below.)

Note that the segment uses a number of *symbols* (e.g., cross, cup, etc.) as transitions in the story. Ask viewers to identify and comment on these symbols.

Nancy and Conrad Kolis stress how biblical wisdom, as expressed in the Beatitudes, continues to guide them through their marriage and its unknown peaks and valleys. Invite participants to search for Bible passages which can help express their own faith commitment, or thoughts or feelings they have about a sacrament they may have received or are preparing to receive. Encourage them to write these verses down and possibly share them with others who have helped them on their faith journey. Parents who are helping their children prepare to receive a sacrament likewise may want to find a Bible story to share with their children. If possible, suggest making a poster that incorporates the story.

Children and parents could also make a “sacramental history” book, marking the reception of the sacraments and other milestones on the children’s faith-journey.

Nancy and Conrad relate the importance of two sacraments (Matrimony and Baptism) in their lives. Leaders should be prepared to answer basic questions about both sacraments for participants who are beginning their journey as Christians. (See the “Resources” section in this guide for assistance in choosing materials addressing specifics about these and other sacraments.)

Questions for sharing

1. The couple in the video chose the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) as guidelines to follow for their Christian marriage. Besides marriage, how can one—or all—of the Beatitudes enhance the experience, comprehension or appreciation of other sacraments? Of our Christian life in general?
2. The life of the deceased baby girl, Elaine, is represented in family photos by a baptismal candle. Why do you think this symbol is used?
3. What “outward signs” relating to the various sacraments have special meaning for you? What symbols can you use at home to remind you of the sacraments and of the liturgy?
4. If you’re married, reflect on the idea of your marriage being a living sacrament. In what ways, or at what times, do you feel the presence of God, your other partner?
5. If you’re a parent, what sacramental faith experience will you share with your child?

6. How does the statement, “Sacrament is the sacred, bubbling up through the ordinary,” relate to your everyday life? What stories does it recall which you might want to share with others?

WITNESS SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 13:00 into program.)

Summary

Sacraments have to do with real people, in community, celebrating Christ’s presence. That’s why in the witness segment of this *Catholic Update Video*, real people (not actors) are encouraged to tell how they experience God through prayer, signs and communal worship. What follows are some of the many ideas they express which participants may want to explore further in discussion:

1. For some individuals, the sacraments present a problem because the reality they point to is not tangible, yet that reality is stronger and in some ways more real than many things which can be seen or felt. We have to “see more” than the external appearances.
2. “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1131). (Several of the witnesses refer to or develop this definition in their own words.)
3. The sacraments “fit together” and build upon each other, especially in relation to the process of Christian initiation.
4. The sacraments offer a “connection to Christ” that enables us to know who God is, to experience oneness with God.
5. At the center of our sacramental life is the Eucharist, where each of us becomes part of the Body of Christ, charged to proclaim God’s love to the world.
6. In Mass we deepen our relationship with God and each other, and open ourselves more to sharing God’s love and power with others.

Suggestions for use

The witness segment should be introduced as the experience of real-life Catholics: people chosen precisely because they are ordinary people of faith. Stress with participants that those interviewed shared their own thoughts and experiences, not ideas scripted by the producers of this video.

Personal witness is important in most, if not all, groups where faith topics are being discussed. As participants share their stories, they can begin to shape a small faith community among themselves. By supporting the personal journey of others, they can better reflect on their own journey and understand questions raised.

This collage of interview excerpts models what can emerge from a sharing of faith stories in a small group or classroom setting. The group leader should pick a time when group sharing seems appropriate. It is important to present sharing in a non-threatening way by respecting others' privacy, and recognizing the possibility that not all participants may be comfortable talking in a group.

Encourage the participants to identify key quotes that speak to their own faith experience, using the questions below as discussion-starters. An alternative for those who feel uncomfortable sharing would be to write a personal journal for private use.

Questions for sharing

In inviting participants to share their faith stories, some general question areas can be developed, based on the comments of the witnesses on the video:

1. How is the reality behind the sacraments, that which can't be seen or felt, somehow more real than things we can see and touch? How do you experience God through prayer, signs and communal worship?
2. How has your understanding or appreciation of the sacraments changed since you were a child? Which sacrament has the most meaning for your life? Your family?
3. In what ways do you think the sacraments "fit together" and build upon each other?
4. What does the idea that "the sacraments all involved community" mean for you?
5. How do the sacraments—especially the Eucharist—express and celebrate who we are as the Body of Christ? "We give people Eucharist"—what does this quote from one of the witnesses mean to you?
6. The "outward signs" used in the sacramental system include water, bread, wine, oil and human speech. How are these elements used for each of the seven sacraments?
7. *For parents:* How have you been helping your children understand the meaning of Eucharist or the other sacraments?
8. *For catechumens:* What aspects of the sacraments would you like to know more about?

TEACHING SEGMENT

(Begins approximately 18:45 into program.)

Summary

Ever try to picture God? Father Tom Richstatter, O.F.M., begins his teaching with that effort—and from there leads us into a discussion of how we really discover what God is like, in and through our celebration of the sacraments. Here is an outline of his presentation:

- A. What is God really like? The word *God* doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. For some people the word *God* has very little meaning. For other people God embraces the central meaning of

their lives. But even when the word *God* is rich and full of meaning, those meanings may vary widely. Some people believe in a God who is stern and just. Some people believe in a very loving and tender God. Some people believe in a God that many of us would find it very hard to believe in.

B. Where do we find the God we seek?

1. As Christians, we believe the God we seek and want to believe in is the God of Jesus Christ: the God revealed in Jesus, the God become visible in the Jesus of history. As we reading the Gospel of John: “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (John 1:18).
2. That’s why we should want to know all that we can about Jesus, and not only the Jesus of history but also the Jesus as he is visible today—in the Body of Christ, the Church. We find this Jesus in word and in sacrament. We find this Jesus in the liturgy.

C. Sacraments and liturgy are the expression of the Body of Christ.

D. As the Second Vatican Council said, the liturgy is “the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #2).

E. Sacraments are not so much objects as events. The sacraments are not simply something “we receive,” but something “we are.” We, as Church, are baptized into the Body of Christ and as that Body we make Christ visible to our world.

F. To be “good,” a liturgy has to be “accurate.” It has to be a good picture of Christ. When people see Christians at worship they should see something of the reality of Jesus, who healed, reconciled, nourished, served those he met.

G. Jesus is at the very heart of our rituals. As Jesus revealed the invisible God, so our celebrations of the sacraments reveal Christ to the world today: the Christ who reconciles us at the one table, who washes away our sins in the waters of Baptism, and who continues to heal us in the Sacrament of Anointing.

The Scriptures play a central role in the celebration of the sacraments: We get out the book of our ancestors and read those inspired stories of our origins. And then we celebrate the presence of Christ among us.

Suggestions for use

This teaching segment is not meant to be an exhaustive study on the sacraments. Preview the tape before using it with a group, noting points in the outline that require fleshing out for your group’s particular needs.

There are many excellent “overview” resources about the sacraments you may want to use to supplement the video teaching offered here. (See our print catalogs or our online catalog at www.AmericanCatholic.org.)

Questions for sharing

1. Describe who God is to you. How does that description differ from the God you learned about as a child?
2. How do the sacraments and the liturgy help you to “picture” Christ?
3. Which sacramental “event” has the most meaning for you? Why?
4. How do the sacraments challenge you to work for peace and justice?
5. How does liturgy help you celebrate/express your membership in the Body of Christ?
6. Talk about a story from the Bible—the history of our spiritual ancestors—which helps you appreciate some aspect of the sacraments.

MUSICAL REFLECTION SEGMENT

“Be Light For Our Eyes”

(Begins approximately 25:05 into program.)

Summary

The musical reflection, “Be Light For Our Eyes,” by David Haas (found on the recording *To Be Your Bread*, available from GIA Publications, 1-800-442-1358), is a celebration of music, gesture and dance. It expresses how our sacramental encounter with God, drawing on the very stuff of human life, reveals Christ to the world today—the Christ who heals, forgives, teaches and leads us to justice, in response to our prayer that he truly be our light.

This fluid liturgical dance performance was recorded in three different areas of a church setting: an altar, a platform and a courtyard. These changes in venue, as well as day/night changes in lighting, represent the various changes and stages of growth in a Christian’s faith journey. They also represent the need for Jesus, the “light” of the world, to chase away the darkness each of us experiences on a daily basis.

Through fluid, continual leaps skyward and hands reaching upwards, the primary dancer communicates that the sacraments lift her—and us, the community—into the mystery of God.

Images of the Paschal Candle and flickering white candles carried by the chorus dancers (representing the community, the Body of Christ) reflect the “light” theme in the song’s invitation-refrain that Christ be light for us, that he be as indispensable as the air that fills our lungs, or the voice we use in

words or song to praise God; that he be the way we follow. The dancers' joyful, tandem movements elicit thoughts of how the community works and prays together toward a common goal: union with Christ.

Also note that the song's lyrics loosely refer to Christ's action in the sacraments, as the verses address how Christ is involved in human life and history:

1. as *food* (Eucharist);
2. as the one who *brought life out of death* (Anointing of the Sick);
3. as the one who *gives us the name of Christian* (Baptism);
4. as the one whose *vision of service* we share (Holy Orders);
5. as the one who *heals and forgives us* (Reconciliation);
6. as *present in his Spirit, enabling to confess Jesus as Lord* (Confirmation);
7. as the one who *helps us discover shared dreams* (Marriage).

Suggestions for use

This musical reflection can be used to either open or close a session about the sacraments. Groups may wish to watch this segment several times to allow the richness of the words and the liturgical dance performance to be fully appreciated. It could be shown alone, or in conjunction with a prayer service. A suggestion for such a service follows:

1. Begin with a time of silence.
2. Light the paschal candle in the midst of the group, and call the community to prayer:
Leader: Christ is our light.
All: The true light that enlighten all people.
3. Read John 1:1-12.
4. View the music video.
5. Invite participants to share spontaneous prayer and praise, concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Scripture references:

Sacraments are "'powers that come forth' from the Body of Christ" (*Catechism*): Luke 5:17, 6:19, 8:46

Receiving the Spirit: John 20:21-23; Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:18-20

Church's relationship to sacraments: Matthew 13:52; Luke 22:15; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 11:26, 15:28, 16:22; Titus 2:13; Revelation 22:17, 20

Transformation of those who partake of sacraments: 2 Peter 1:4

2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* references:

In the *Catechism*, general and specific aspects of the sacraments are talked about in Part Two (“The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”) in both Section One (“The Sacramental Economy”) and Section Two (“The Sacraments of the Church”).

3. Available from St. Anthony Messenger Press

Please see our catalog at <http://Catalog.AmericanCatholic.org> for additional print (magazine, newsletter, book and pamphlet), audio (book and presentation) and video (DVD and VHS) resources to support your efforts in faith formation and personal spiritual growth.

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NOTE: This guide can be printed and cut down in size to be stored with the DVD version of this video program. Simply cut ¾ inch from each side of the page for a guide that, when folded, can be placed inside of the DVD case or attached to the DVD or VHS case.

For use with:

Understanding the Sacraments on VHS (V2000) and DVD (D2000)

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