

HEART SPEAKS TO HEART THE GIFT OF HOLY COMMUNION

INTRODUCTION FOR CATECHISTS

What does it mean to be a Catechist?

A catechist is someone who delivers *catechesis*. The word catechesis derives from a Greek verb meaning 'echo'. In the catechesis of the Church we 'echo' the teaching of Christ Jesus.

Two important aspects of Church Catechesis:

1. The instruction passed on in Catechesis is not the personal opinion of the catechist about God. Rather, a catechist passes on knowledge of the faith which she or he has received from the Church and ultimately from Jesus Christ Himself.
2. In instruction provided in the early Church and later, teaching took place in a dialogue of question and answer between the **catechist** (teacher) and **catechumen** (student). Such dialogue presumes a serious engagement on the part of the catechumen. Catechesis stands between the very first announcement of Christ's gospel (which we now call "**Initial Evangelisation**") and the advanced instruction of mature Christians (which we call "**Ongoing Formation**"). Usually, catechesis refers to the particular preparation of candidates to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist).

What sort of instruction should the Catechist aim to pass on?

It is very important to note that Catechesis does not merely aim to communicate factual information about Christ's message or the Church's teaching. As St John Paul II suggested, "**The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ**" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5) and so also with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. This communion is achieved by a personal transformation on the part of catechumens as they draw closer to Christ, becoming a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) in His image.

The information which Catechesis aims to pass on is not the same as the intricate and sometimes dry explanations of doctrine given by academic theologians. Catechesis should always engage a catechumen at a personal level, seeking to present **relationship with Christ** as an attractive and important choice for the catechumen to make.

An engaging understanding of God's revelation may well be passed on more readily by stories and shared experiences than by the rote learning of religious truths. The central narrative or proclamation (the *kerygma*) about Christ (that He suffered for our sins, died and rose to offer us new life with Him) should therefore form the core narrative on which all catechesis is based and which a catechist always seeks to illuminate.

How can I prepare to be a Catechist?

Since Catechesis is principally about passing on the knowledge of Christ which can facilitate an intimate relationship of love with Him, it is most important that the catechist herself or himself renews her/his own **relationship with God**. As Pope Francis writes:

"The heart of a catechist always beats with this movement: union with Christ – encounter with others. Both of these: I am one with Jesus and I go forth to encounter others. If one of these movements is missing, the heart no longer beats, it can no longer live" (Address to the International Congress on Catechesis, 27th September 2013).

This union with Christ can be facilitated in many ways:

- **by encountering Jesus in the Bible**
- **by spending time in personal prayer**
- **by responding to Christ's call to repentance through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and by receiving Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist**

As a catechist, it is important to remember that God's Word is addressed to you as well as to catechumens and that responding to it may mean accepting its challenge to follow God more faithfully. **Enthusiasm for relationship with Christ is contagious** and is the best way to lead others to faith. A famous prayer of St John Henry Newman asks for God's help to share our faith in this way:

*"Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Jesus will be all from You;
none of it will be mine;
It will be you shining on others through me."*

It is very important, of course, for you to prepare to teach the particular preparation classes by reading over each session in advance to know the session content and structure. In addition to this essential preparation, it may be useful to read over the relevant topic each week in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, so that you understand the material which you are covering and can answer any questions which arise. If you do not understand all of the material yourself, it may be helpful to ask your parish priest or another catechist or Gregory Stacey, the diocesan Co-ordinator for Adult Formation and Research (Gregory.stacey@dioceseofleeds.org.uk or 0113 261 8043). Further useful information about how to prepare spiritually and practically for work as a catechist may be found in Hannah Vaughan-Spruce's *A Handbook for Catechists* (CTS, 2018).

Ultimately, however, a catechist can only do his or her best to put catechumens in a position to be united to Christ in faith and to receive the grace offered in the Sacraments. **Faith itself and transformation in Christ are gifts from God.** That is why St Paul ascribes the fruits of preaching to God, who works through and alongside our efforts:

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God provided the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but rather God who provides the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).



HEART SPEAKS To HEART **A Resource to Assist in the Preparation for First Holy Communion**

PREPARATION (before the sessions begin)

Gather a team

It is good practice to have a team of catechists and helpers who will meet before the course begins to pray together, plan the sessions and share out the various tasks. Ask parishioners to pray for the children, their families and the catechists and helpers.

Roles for Catechists and Helpers (when it is possible to hold sessions physically) include:

- Setting up the room for the sessions
- Preparing any technical equipment
- Arranging a focal point (especially for prayer)
- Organising refreshments (when this is possible)
- Welcoming families
- Leading prayer and music
- Working with individuals and small groups – especially for any participants with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL)
- Acting as the Lead Catechist for the session (a variety of lead catechists over the course would be the ideal to aim for)

Online Resources

Become familiar with the resources which are available on the website of the Diocese of Leeds (<https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk>). Scroll down the Home Page until you come to a series of tiles and click on the **First Sacraments** tile. This will take you to a further four tiles: the tiles **First Holy Communion** and **Catechists' Resources** will provide you with resources to help with the preparation for First Holy Communion. You can access this section of the website by searching for: dioceseofleeds/first-sacraments.

Note that to access the Catechists' Resources tile you will require a password: **Godsgifts20**

Home Learning

When it is not possible to meet physically, you may be able to meet remotely with children and their parents or carers. **Home Learning Guidance** is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website. Also available there is **Feedback Advice Using Online Platforms** and **Feedback Sheets** (for those families who cannot access online platforms).

Safeguarding Advice

Guidance for Safeguarding is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website (under **Safeguarding Advice**). Please read and carefully follow the guidance given there. Please also ensure that all involved with catechesis are familiar with this guidance.

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Please read the advice given in **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Advice** (in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website). In the **First Holy Communion** area there are suggestions for **Creative Ways to Engage Children** which may help some children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to engage more easily with the First Holy Communion programme.

Access the MATERIAL you will need for the sessions:

1. Acquire (from the Diocese) sufficient copies of *Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Holy Communion* (the First Holy Communion book for the children). The book should be given out to parents and carers at their pre-session meeting. To order copies, please contact the diocesan Vicariate for Education (education.admin@dioceseofleeds.org.uk) at least a month before you require the books.
2. You may also like to acquire 'backpacks' (string bags) which are also available from the Vicariate for Education. These could be given to parents and carers during the pre-session meeting or could be given directly to children during Session 1. You may like to include a pack of post-its in each bag. Please see page 14 for advice about how the children may use their 'backpacks'.
3. Download the **Book of Holy Communion Prayers** (available in the **First Holy Communion** area). Give these prayer books out to parents and carers at the pre-session meeting for them to give to their child before the sessions begin. This 'Book' contains the prayers which are recommended in the children's *Heart Speaks to Heart* book; the 'Book' could be placed in the child's Prayer Place and used by the child for prayer.
Also available is a **How to Receive Holy Communion** card which could be downloaded now and stored ready to give out to families during Session 6.

Other material is available in the **First Holy Communion** area of the website. You may wish to download some of the following to distribute to families:

(a) **Glossary**

This document explains difficult words in the resource. You may like to distribute the Glossary to adults and carers and/or to the children as you think appropriate.

(b) **Feelings Chart**

A **Feelings Chart** is available which helps the children identify their feelings when asked, 'How are you feeling?'

(c) **Stickers**

Links to a **Sticker Chart** and **Stickers Sheet** are available (under **First Holy Communion – Stickers**). These can be printed off and made available to the children so that they can attach a sticker to the Chart when they have completed a session.

(d) **Creative Ways to Engage Children**

Many interactive and multi-sensory ways to engage the children who are preparing for First Holy Communion are available here.

4. Acquire a few notebooks (ideally with lined pages facing blank pages so that the children can both write and draw their reflections; otherwise, notebooks with blank pages would be better than lined note books). These books would be your store of spare reflection books for the children who have not been given a Reflection Book at home.
5. Download the detailed Catechist Notes for each session. These notes include the words catechists may use for each session: **they are designed for those who are new to the role of catechist but experienced catechists may find them of use too**. Experienced catechists may like to read through them and extract what they find helpful (particularly suggestions for timings for each section of the session and the teaching given at the end of the Notes).
6. For those who do not have easy access to the internet, you may like to print copies of **Communion Help and Guidance Introduction** (available as a link in **Help and Guidance Sessions 1-7**) and give them out during the parents and carers meeting. Alternatively, you may ask parents and carers to watch the **Communion Introduction** video available as a link in **Videos Sessions 1-7**).

7. Decide on whether you will make **Communion Help and Guidance** notes available for each session or whether you will ask parents and carers to watch the videos in advance of the sessions. If you are going to use the **Help and Guidance** notes, will you give copies to parents and carers in advance of the appropriate session, at the beginning of the session or have the notes available to give out to families who are struggling during the session? If you are going to give the guidance out to parents and carers in advance, you will need enough copies of **Communion Help and Guidance Session 1** to be given out to parents and carers during the parents and carers pre-session meeting.
8. If you are doing the Treasure Hunts at the end of each session, you will need to download or design Treasure Hunt sheets and have them available for Session 1.
9. Prepare a box to store equipment required for the course and for each session. This box may include:
 - **Help and Guidance** notes for each session (to be given out EITHER a session in advance OR at the beginning of the session OR during the session for those who would benefit from seeing the guidance)
 - Pens, pencils, coloured pencils for each group of participants
 - Items for a prayer focal point (this should be large enough/flexible enough to incorporate the 'backpack' items of the children when physical meetings are possible):
 - Coloured cloths
 - Candle (possibly LED candle – and lighter/matches if not LED)
 - Crucifix or Cross
 - Children's Bible (or equivalent)
 - Pictures and prayer cards
 - A statue and/or an icon
 - Symbols to reflect the themes of the sessions
 - First Holy Communion Certificates
10. Down-load extra activities and pictures you may want to use. The pictures could be put out on tables before participants arrive.
11. Have display boards available (particularly for any work you have asked the children to do and, if you do the evaluation, to display the participants' evaluation post-its).

Timetable:

- Two to three months before the programme begins, have a letter available in the parishes alerting families to the preparation and informing them of the enrolment process. The letter may also be sent out through schools to families of children in Year 4. A **Specimen Letter to Parents and Carers** (which you may use or adapt) is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website.
- Invite parents and carers to a meeting and/or arrange individual appointments to enrol the children. A model **Enrolment Form** is available in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website. Ideally the children will already have been enrolled for the three sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation when they were enrolled for First Reconciliation in Year 3.
- Arrange a meeting with parents and carers to outline the course and let them know of expectations of them and the children.



HEART SPEAKS TO HEART: THE HOLY COMMUNION RESOURCE

NOTE: the resource has been designed to be used in a variety of contexts and in a variety of ways.

- The timings, number of sessions and venue are arranged locally by the parish (with support from the local primary school where appropriate).
- The resource has been designed with the ***Family Catechesis*** method of delivery in mind i.e. with extended family involvement supported by a team of catechists and helpers with a variety of roles (see above for a description of these roles).
- However, the resource may also be delivered by the more traditional catechist-led method of sacramental preparation.

Resource Contents

There are **seven sessions** which follow a similar format:

1. An illustration of a biblical scene (from a story mentioned in the session) and an **opening prayer** (2 pages).
2. Reflection inspired by a **family story** (2 pages). Prompted by a story of a grandfather and his twin grandchildren (Grandpa, Jess and Ryan), participants share what they have been doing since last time and discuss any thoughts and questions they may have. The children could have been invited to record their answers to these questions in advance in their Reflection Books, so that they have something to say in the sessions and something to look back on in future sessions.
3. Reflection on **the virtues** (2 pages). Practise of the virtues helps the children grow in friendship with Jesus and become like Him. A particular virtue (e.g. faith, hope, love) has been chosen for each session for the children to learn about and apply in their own lives.
4. **Bible Journaling** (2 pages). A story from the Bible (reflecting the theme and virtue of the session) is read and participants are encouraged to write, draw and colour-in words and thoughts which struck them as the story was read.
5. **Elaboration** on the biblical story, **discussion and activity** (2 pages). Usually at this point, the biblical story explored by Bible Journaling is set in the context of the biblical and salvation story as a whole and its significance for Holy Mass considered. Participants are invited to talk together about what they have read and complete an activity together (in sessions 3-5 this will be in the form of a comprehension task on the parts of the Mass).

6. Further **opportunities to reflect** (1 page) on the faith journey of the children or on our Catholic churches (where Holy Mass is celebrated) or on the various parts and meaning of the Mass.
7. Introduction to a **Treasure Hunt** (1 page). Each week a few church treasures (e.g. font, altar, etc.) will be named on this page in the book. Discovery sheets with pictures of the named church treasure are available on-line which can be used during the hunts (**Treasure Hunt Sheets Sessions 1-7**).

The blue-print Treasure Hunts, which are available online, are divided into three sections. The first section is the name of the object being hunted (using the colourful fonts from the book); the second is a simple illustration of the object; the third section is blank for the children to write something about the object, or to draw or to stick a photograph of the object there.

Note: catechists may like to adapt the sheets or make up their own sheets to suit local circumstances. Catechists may also want to change the fonts to more dyslexia-friendly fonts (Calibri or Arial). Catechists may also like to create their own questions to put under each object's name, to give the children something specific to look for; e.g. under Paschal Candle, catechists could ask: "What signs and numbers do you see on the Paschal Candle? Try to find out what they mean." The children could write their responses in the blank section; etc.

There are six hunts in total (for sessions 1-5 and Session 7: in Session 6 the Treasure Hunt is replaced by an activity about receiving Holy Communion). When churches are open under normal circumstances, the Treasure Hunts may be done separately or combined in one or two sessions. Catechists will need to arrange access to some of the 'treasures' with the Parish Priest.

The Treasure Hunt for each session may be done in a variety of ways. These include:

- (a) At the end of the session (if the local parish church is accessible). This will probably mean allowing for 15-20 minutes extra at the end of each session
- (b) On one or two visits to the local parish church (when this is possible, and to be arranged with the Parish Priest)
- (c) After Holy Mass on Saturday evening or on Sunday
- (d) As part of a retreat preparing for First Holy Communion
- (e) Through online research, when it is not possible to visit churches for activities like these Treasure Hunts

Note:

For the sixth session, catechists may wish the children to practise receiving Holy Communion during the session or just after it. There may be opportunity to repeat the practice of receiving Holy Communion during or after the seventh session and/or to arrange a specific time and date for a rehearsal (to include the practice of receiving Holy Communion).

In this session, there are 2 pages (pp.90-91) indicating how the children should receive Holy Communion under normal circumstances. A card which gives more detailed information (**How to Receive Holy Communion**) is available to download and to give out during this session. Catechists may wish the children to practise receiving Holy Communion during this session or at another convenient time. You may need to give separate guidance if the guidelines for receiving Holy Communion are different (e.g. as under the guidelines for receiving Holy Communion during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The card provides guidance for the children to receive, under normal circumstances, Holy Communion under both kinds from a priest. You may need to point out at the appropriate time that it is often usual for Holy Communion to be distributed by deacons and/or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion as well as the priest.

8. **Things to do at home or in church** (1 page). The catechists should read through this section and elaborate on the suggested home activities suggested there.
9. **Evaluation**. This is not in the book – and is not obligatory! It may be useful, however, to spend 5 minutes asking children and families these two questions towards the end of each session:
 - (a) **What did you enjoy in the session?**
 - (b) **If we were to do the session again, what could make it even better?**

Ask participants to consider these two questions and write down one answer for each question on post-its (which may have been provided in session 1 in the 'backpacks' or are available on the participants' tables) and then stick the post-its on boards. It would be good practice for catechists and helpers to gather for 5 minutes after the session (when participants have departed) to reflect together on the session and what participants have written on the post-its.

10. **Concluding prayers** (2 pages). There will always be an opportunity in this section for Catholic Meditation (called Quiet Prayer in the resource).

What material in the resource is it essential to cover?

Ideally each session would be quite short, lasting no longer than an hour (with an additional 15-20 minutes if the Treasure Hunt is done immediately after the session). There is a lot of material in the resource and it may not be possible to do it all in such a short period of time. To make sure that what is essential is covered within the session, we suggest the following sections be definitely included:

1. The opening prayer
2. Sharing of what the children (and families) have done since last time
3. The introduction of the session's virtue
4. A biblical story (either the story explored by Bible Journaling or another story which is described or narrated on the following page)
5. An opportunity to *Talk Together* about the virtue and/or biblical story
6. In sessions 3-5 the information about the structure of the Mass and the comprehension activities following; in Session 6 the information about receiving Holy Communion; in Session 7 some opportunity for the children to reflect on what they may do next
7. The concluding prayers (especially the opportunity for Quiet Prayer/Meditation)

You may wish to omit some of the material in the resource and add your own material and activities which have worked for you in your past experience as a catechist for First Holy Communion.

You may like to add songs to sing at the end of each session. You may then need to find time within the session to teach the children the songs.

Drawing and Colouring

On the 'Bible Journaling' pages the children are encouraged to write and draw their thoughts in the blank margins.

You may also like to suggest that the children use other blank parts of pages for colouring, writing or highlighting e.g. on pages 6-7 children could highlight key words in different colours (e.g. "journey", "Holy Communion", "prayer", "virtue") and/or write a chosen virtue from the list and draw a design round it in the space at the top of page 7; in the space in the bottom right hand of page 13, children could write other questions they have; etc.

PARENTS & CARERS MEETING

Arrange a meeting with parents and carers before the first session with the children. During this meeting catechists should distribute the First Holy Communion book (*Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Holy Communion*) and explain to parents and carers that they will need to read through some of the introductory material in the book at home with their child before the first session.

During the meeting catechists should make sure that they include the following:

1. An introductory time of prayer (perhaps using the prayer used at the beginning of each session in the book: it first occurs on page 11).
2. May like to read the following powerful quotation from *YOUCAT for Kids* as an introduction to the meeting:
 "[T]he transmission of faith cannot be delegated to books or media. Faith can only be awakened by the oldest method in the world: from heart to heart, from person to person. The greatest books, the coolest movies cannot replace parents or grandparents saying: 'I believe in Jesus. Can I show you how wonderful that is?' Or: 'Come on, let's find out more about our good Lord'" (*YOUCAT for Kids*, Preface).
3. Give out at the beginning of the meeting:
 - (a) The timetable of the preparation sessions and the date of First Holy Communion (and information about at least one opportunity for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the period of preparation for First Holy Communion).
 - (b) Any other information parents and carers need to know e.g. that parents and carers journey with their children as they prepare for First Holy Communion (and, in the case of Family Catechesis, that at least one adult should accompany the child during preparation sessions).
 - (c) Enrolment forms (if this has not already be done). A specimen **Enrolment Form** is available online. This form may also be used for children with **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**. Be clear about when you want the forms returned.
 - (d) A book for each child (the resource *Heart Speaks to Heart: the Gift of Holy Communion*)
4. Explore some pages of the book with parents and carers (especially pp.1-9) and ask the parents and carers to do the same with their children before the first session.

- (a) **Page 3.** Ask parents and carers to turn to page 3. They should make sure that the children fill in this page with their name and the day they begin their preparation for First Holy Communion (which could be either the day they receive the book from their parents or carers at home or the date of the first session).
- (b) **Page 6.** Read this page with parents and carers. As you read about the 'Backpack' and 'Reflection Book' add this information for parents and carers:

1. **'Backpacks'**

These may simply be string bags. They may be provided by the Parish (and bespoke string bags can be acquired from the Diocese) or catechists may ask parents and carers to acquire them for the children. If they are provided by the Parish, the 'backpacks' will be given out at Session 1. Inform parents and carers if you have decided to include a pack of post-its which will be used for evaluation in each session.

When it is possible to meet in person, the children will be asked to find one object each week to put in their 'backpack' to bring to the next session. The children would take their object back home at the end of the session to keep safe and may place it in their special Prayer Place at home (see below about a Prayer Place). For the last session the children could be asked to bring all their objects back for a final display.

2. **Reflection Books**

These are notebooks which should be obtained by parents and carers for each child and given to the child before the sessions begin.

The children should be assured that what they enter into their Reflection Book will be private and confidential (though they may ask an adult to help them fill in the Reflection Book if they need support).

The children should record at least one thing that has stood out for them in the session or something they have learnt (something about the virtue or the Bible or what we find in church or about Holy Mass). Parents and Carers could encourage the children to decorate the front cover of their 'Reflection Book'.

Note:

Catechists may decide that the Parish should obtain the Reflection Books. In which case, catechists will need to distribute them at this meeting. **Reflection Book Advice** is available (under **Extra Information and Advice** in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website).

- (c) **Page 7.** Read this page with parents and carers. As you read through page 7 add this information:

1. **Prayer Place**

Ask parents and carers to help their child establish a Prayer Place at home or (if this is difficult) establish a place where they can pray together as a family. For the Prayer Place ask parents and carers to encourage each child to make it special by placing on a small, cloth-covered table various objects which remind the child of their friendship with Jesus: a crucifix or cross; an LED candle; a children's Bible; holy pictures and/or statues and prayer cards; cards the children will receive as part of their preparation e.g. a *Book of Holy Communion Prayers* and the *How to Receive Holy Communion* card, etc. This may be the time to distribute the *Book of Holy Communion Prayers* to parents & carers.

One way of praying we will recommend during First Holy Communion preparation is **Quiet Prayer**. In Quiet Prayer we sit still, close our eyes, listen to our breathing and quietly repeat to ourselves a few words of prayer. Tell parents and carers that the meeting will end with an example of Quiet Prayer so that they can pass on the details of how to pray in this way to their children and pray with them too.

1. **The Virtues**

Living the virtues (like Faith and Love and Courage) help us to live like Jesus and become the best person we can be. Encourage parents and carers to help their children to understand the different virtues and ways of living out the virtues in daily life, e.g. how do we show faith or love or courage in what we say or do? Parents and carers can set a good example of virtuous living!

Note: *eight virtues have been selected in the resource for the children to reflect on and to try to practise in their lives. The first three (Faith, Hope and Love) are known as the 'theological virtues' and we learn about them in the New Testament. The other five (Stillness, Generosity and Gratitude, Courage and Reflection) are aspects of the four 'cardinal virtues' of classical and Church tradition: Temperance, Justice, Fortitude and Prudence.*

- (d) **Pages 8-9.** Inform parents and carers that each session will begin with a story about a grandfather and his grandchildren. Read pages 8-9 with parents and carers to introduce them to the 3 characters (Grandpa, Jess and Ryan). Parents and carers should then introduce the characters to their children.

Each session will begin with a conversation between Grandpa and the twins (Jess and Ryan) to stimulate sharing of thoughts at the beginning of the session. The children will be asked to read these pages in advance to prepare for this.

Ask parents and carers to **turn to pages 12-13** and read through the conversation found there between Grandpa and the twins and (in particular) draw their attention to the questions at the bottom of page 13. Ask parents and carers to ask their children to read these pages and think about the questions on page 13 and then to record their answers in their Reflection Books.

- (e) **Pages 16-17.** Ask parents and carers to turn to page 16. On pages 16-17 there is an example of 'Bible Journaling':
- During the session a story from the Bible will be read.
 - Each child will be asked to underline words on page 17 that stood out for them during the reading of the story.
 - Following a little discussion together (as families or groups of children) each child should write down and/or draw their thoughts about the story and the words that struck them in the large margin to the side of the text of the story.
 - The child will be able to finish this off and decorate it later at home.

Page 16 has already been illustrated as an example of what Bible Journaling looks like – but it still needs colouring in!

Audios of the **Bible Passages** are available which may be used. They ensure that the Bible stories are read slowly and meditatively.

- (f) **Page 21.** Ask parents and carers to turn to page 21, where they will find names of objects to be identified in church (as part of a Treasure Hunt). Explain to parents and carers how the Treasure Hunts will be done in your parish (see point 7 on page 10 for some ideas of when you may do these hunts). You may like to have an example of a Treasure Hunt that you have prepared to show parents and carers. You may download or adapt one of the hunts available on the website.

5. If you decide to ask parents and carers to read the **Help and Guidance** material or watch the **Videos** in advance of sessions, inform them of how they should access the material or print it out. Familiarity with the material will help parents and carers with the children during the sessions (particularly if conversation comes to a halt or answers are not known). If you are giving out the **Help and Guidance** in advance, give out the **Communion Help and Guidance Session 1** now and ask parents and carers to look through it before the first session.
6. In short, below is **a list of what parents and carers should do at home with their children before the first session**. You may like to read this list out or print this out for parents and carers as a summary of the points made above. Before the first session, parents and carers should:
 - (a) **Give the child their First Holy Communion book (*Heart Speaks to Heart: The Gift of Holy Communion*)**
 - (b) **Invite the child to fill in page 3**
 - (c) **Explore pages 6-9 with the child**
 - (d) **Ask the child to read pages 12-13 in preparation for Session 1**
 - (e) **Give the child the *Book of Holy Communion Prayers***
 - (f) **Provide the child with a Reflection Book**
 - (g) **Ensure that the child establishes a Prayer Place**
7. At the end of the meeting with parents and carers, catechists should give out **Communion Help and Guidance Introduction** and **Session 1** to those who cannot access the videos. You may also like to consider issuing a commitment to be signed by parents and carers to support their children as they prepare for First Holy Communion. This commitment should be returned before they leave the meeting. The terms of this commitment should be determined by the Parish Priest
8. Inform parents and carers that they will need to provide certain information about their child before the date of First Holy Communion (date and place of the child's Baptism; date and place of the child's First Reconciliation). Let them know when and how you will require this information.

9. Concluding Prayer for the meeting. Take this opportunity to introduce 'Quiet Prayer' (Meditation) to parents and carers:
- Provide introductory information: invite parents and carers to sit quietly (they may close their eyes, have their feet firmly on the floor with straight backs and hands on knees). Tell them that you will soon say a short phrase (e.g. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"; "Come, Lord Jesus"; "Come, Holy Spirit", etc.); you will repeat this phrase a few times (with short periods of silence between each repetition); parents and carers should repeat the phrase silently to themselves until a signal is given to end the time of meditation (perhaps a bell is rung)
 - After this introductory information, ask parents and carers to sit in stillness. Quietly and slowly, ask them to be aware of
 - Any tension (especially in backs and shoulders) and try to relax
 - Sounds outside the room
 - Sounds within the room
 - Their breathing
 - Say the phrase (perhaps two or three times) and then allow 2-3 minutes of silence
 - Give the agreed signal to end the Meditation
 - Lead parents and carers in a concluding prayer e.g. the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross



PREPARATION BY CATECHISTS FOR THE SESSIONS

1. **Timings:** try to keep catechesis to **one hour**. However, when it is possible to meet in person, you may want to allow for about 1 hour 30 minutes of your time in total contact with participants (15-20 minutes before the catechesis begins for arrivals and refreshments and 5-10 minutes at the end for anyone wishing to ask individual questions and more socialising).

Some timings to deliver each section of the resource are given in the Catechist Notes for individual sessions. These timings are simply suggestions and actual timings may depend on how a particular group is responding to a session. It is important, however, to be clear about start and finish times: always try and finish at the time you have set, even if you haven't covered everything in the session.

2. **Setting up the room:** make sure that there are sufficient tables to meet any social distancing requirements (when these regulations have been removed, you may like to encourage participants to sit in groups of up to 8-10). Think about the lighting you will use and the background music as families arrive: some quiet, prayerful music may help establish the right atmosphere as participants are settling, ready to begin.
3. **Light Refreshments** (when possible).
4. **Have equipment ready** (see ideas for a Catechists' Box on page 7).
5. **After each session:** meet as a team of catechists for 5 minutes evaluation to discuss these 2 questions:
 - What went well in the session?
 - What could have been done better?
6. **Display boards:** consider displaying some of the children's work either in the place where Catechesis happens or at the back of your local church.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Retreat:** you may like to organise a retreat for First Holy Communion candidates. When it is possible to organise a retreat in person, this may be an opportunity to do some (or all) of the treasure hunting! The retreat may include an opportunity for the children to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

2. **Rehearsal**: it is good practice to arrange a rehearsal for the First Holy Communion Mass. This will be an opportunity for the children to practise (or practise again) for their First Holy Communion by receiving un-consecrated hosts - and wine (when Communion under both kinds is possible).
3. **Continuing the Journey**: as a follow-up to First Holy Communion you may like to suggest that parents engage (or re-engage) with *The Wednesday Word* as a way of continuing reflection on the scriptures and how to put the message of Christ into action (and particularly if *The Wednesday Word* is distributed through the local primary school).

You may also like to recommend *YOUCAT for Kids* to parents and carers to look at with their children: the book is designed for parents and carers to help children to explore the Catholic faith in detail (see page 9 of *YOUCAT for Kids* to see how parents and carers can do this).

See the links under **Continuing the Journey - After First Holy Communion** in the **Catechists' Resources** area of the website for more suggestions about how families can continue their journey in faith after First Holy Communion. There is a **Recommended Books** link for information about books which parents and carers may find useful to help them to educate their children in the practice of the faith (e.g. children's guides to Holy Mass, Bibles and Bible story books, prayer books, etc.).

EXTRA ONLINE MATERIAL

Elsewhere in the **Catechists' Resources** area, you'll find links for:

Certificates to mark the children's enrolment for Holy Communion; for the participation of parents & carers in the preparation sessions; and for the children to mark their completion of preparation.

Extra Liturgy and Prayer Resources including two Rites of Enrolment which you may like to use for enrolment of the children during Holy Mass (when this is possible).

Feedback Surveys which provide advice and models for obtaining feedback about the preparation from **Parents and Children**. There are also links to a **Holy Communion** Feedback Survey for **Catechists** to complete. We'd be very grateful if you would complete the survey and send it to the Vicariate for Education to help us modify and develop our resources.

FINALLY: we hope you enjoy the resources and your time of preparation with the children and their families. Let us keep each other in prayer.