

First Intentional Communion was developed in response to the responsibility given me as the newly ordained Associate Rector of St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Sayville, New York to prepare second grade age children for First Communion. I pointed out to my rector, a wonderful and loving priest named Father Bob Schwarz, that the children of the parish were already receiving communion. Father Bob also gave me the opportunity to prepare the sixth graders for Confirmation. From these two challenges in 1990, First Intentional Communion became a reality.

Since the children were already receiving communion, Admission to Communion was as unrealistic a name as First Communion. I remember sitting in the parish office on a Saturday morning and getting very quiet in prayer. As I awoke, okay, maybe I fell asleep, I discerned the word "intentional" as the key to preparing anyone to become more deeply committed to the Christian faith and life. Placing the word "intentional" between the words "first" and "communion" not only gave the liturgical rite of passage a name but made clear to me the emphasis needed in the teaching program for the children.

Christian Educators such as John Westerhoff affirm second grade age as the time in a child's life when he or she begins to dissemble when asked a question about behavior rather than offer a simple and direct answer. Most parents I know, and as a parent myself, would agree that their wonderful children begin to show signs of being sneaky and less than truthful at this age.

Accepting this premise and a desire to give a child a special experience of God's grace as given in Holy Communion, serve as the foundation to the four unit First Intentional teaching program.

While preparing children for First Intentional Communion should not necessarily be the responsibility of the priest, I think there is great value in the children having a direct relationship with the ordained sacramental minister they see praying over the bread and wine in church. Furthermore, by being with their priest while doing the First Intentional Communion exercises, the children develop a relationship with their priest that allows them to see their priest as a spiritual guide and not just as another authority figure.

The four teaching sessions are about an hour. Sessions One, Two, and Three are repeated with focus on an age group. However, a child may attend either session should a conflict arise. Session Four combines all ages. The teaching flows as follows:

### **SESSION ONE—Following 10:00 am worship** **February 26, 2017 in Room 118**

The main project in this lesson is to make a video about the difference between Heaven and Hell. The story the children and their priest enact is the story of visiting first Hell and then Heaven. In both places are tables groaning with the most delicious food. In our video a plate of chewy brownies serves as our example of food. The elbows of the people are

locked and, as a consequence, people cannot get food into their mouths. The children make angry faces to express the emotion of Hell. When asked why the people in Heaven are happy and well fed even though their elbows are also locked, the children make the connection that the people in Heaven are feeding each other. They then proceed to feed brownies to each

other while their elbows remain locked. The teaching moment reflects on the grace that motivates us to serve others freely offered when we share in holy communion.

### **SESSION TWO—Following 10:00 am worship** **March 5, 2017 in Room 118**

The exercise involves drawing in two boxes. The first box calls for drawing "pictures of things you bring on vacation when you go to the beach." The idea is to engage the word "intentional" as being prepared. The participants are encouraged to bring to class the things they might bring to the beach. Flip-flops, beach balls, and towels are great fun in the middle of the winter! The second box calls for drawing a "picture of a brother or sister saying, 'I'm sorry' to his or her brother or sister." This box sets up the teaching moment that connects the General Confession of Sin, said in church before receiving communion, with intentional preparation. It can also prepare a child to make a first "private" confession with his or her priest.

## **A Look At First Intentional Communion**

**By The Rev. Dr.  
William Carl Thomas**

**SESSION THREE—Following 10:00 am worship**  
**March 12, 2017 in Room 118**

As with Session Two, the exercise begins with drawing in two boxes. The first box is for drawing pictures that the child spends his or her money on. The second box is for pictures that the child's parents spend money on behalf of the child. The teaching moment comes in the take home project about stewardship. Using three Glad plastic containers (two small containers and one larger container) the children are given stickers to place on the containers.

The larger container receives a sticker that says, "80% Spending." The two smaller containers receive a sticker that says on one, "10% Giving" and on the other, "10% Savings." Now that the containers are ready, the children are given ten dimes (the original approach used pennies).

With a little work, the children come to understand that one dime equals 10% and eight dimes equal 80%. The children are recognized as being mature enough to begin to manage their own money. The goal is to give them an emotional commitment to saving and giving that matches the desire to spend. After all, when you don't have to pay for heat, light, food, housing, etcetera as your parents do, 80% for spending is a pretty good deal! The 2010 expansion of the teaching included giving each child one paper one dollar bill. The teaching moment is reinforced when the child realizes he or she could take two dimes out of spending in order to keep the 80/10/10 ratios. The lesson ends with \$1.80 to spend rather than the original eight cents.

I'm grateful to past mentors The Rt. Rev. Bill Stough and The Dr. Rev. Bill Yon, the originators of the Alabama Stewardship Plan for this teaching they used with their own children. One interesting outcome of this teaching is that it introduces the "tithe" to a family or reinforces the commitment to the "tithe" already present in a family.

**SESSION FOUR—Following 10:00 am worship**  
**March 19, 2017 in Room 118**

This time gives me a chance to reinforce all that has been taught. The participating children now have the information to ask me questions as only children can! We will go on a "field trip" to the parts of the church such as the sacristy that children rarely see. If there is time, we will spend time around the

baptismal font with each child "baptizing" a doll while wearing my clerical collar and a stole of appropriate size. Again, as is the case in the earlier teaching, this time is recorded as a video and then watched in order to reinforce the lesson.

**CONCLUSION**

I see First Intentional Communion as a part of the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Whenever possible, as will be the case at Christ Church, my hope is to invite teenage confirmands to serve as assistants during the teaching sessions. This gives the confirmands a mature experience of being Christians mentors.

**THE LITURGY OF**  
**FIRST INTENTIONAL COMMUNION**  
**Sunday, March 26, 2017 at 10:00 am**

The children sit together in church and after the confession of sin and before the peace, they come before the priest according to the words below:

*Each person is presented by name to the Celebrant who then presents a cross and prayerbook while saying the following*

**Wear this cross to proclaim that Jesus Christ died for all.**

**Use this prayerbook and a bible to study and proclaim the reconciling love of the risen Christ.**

**Remember the grace you receive in the Body and Blood of Christ during Holy Communion. May this grace inspire and strengthen your intention, with God's help, to honor the promises made at Holy Baptism.**

*After all have been presented and charged, the Celebrant addresses the congregation saying*

**Will you who witness this presentation and charge do all in your power to support *these persons* in *their* life in Christ?**

***People* We will, with God's help.**

*The Celebrant prays over those presented and charged, saying*

**Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Continue, we pray, to sustain them O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage and will to persevere, and a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen.***

*The participants come forward as a group to receive Holy Communion after the Prayer of Consecration.*