

A PLAN TO BEGIN GUIDED EUCHARISTIC HOLY HOURS FOR CHILDREN



VISITING JESUS!

Step 1 - How the plan began

Only through **JESUS**



"Only through the Eucharist is it possible to live the heroic virtues of Christianity: charity, to the point of forgiving one's enemies; love for those who make us suffer; chastity in every age and situation of life; patience in suffering and when one is shocked by the silence of God in the tragedies of history or of one's own personal existence. You must always be Eucharistic souls in order to be authentic Christians."

Pope St. John Paul II

STEP ONE

How the plan began

"Behold, I make all things new."

Revelation 21:5

As a Director of Religious Education for Elementary Age students for many years in a thriving Twin Cities parish, the wounds that I have seen in the children I have met can be overwhelming at times. Many carry the wounds of divorce or fatherlessness. Some are dealing with close family members with addictions to alcohol or serious mental illness. I've been told by heartbroken parents that their children were accidentally exposed to internet pornography. Many are at risk from the negative aspects of the media that attempts to form their thoughts and values in direct opposition to the teachings of the Church. I remember the child who brought a Wicca (witchcraft) book to Religious Ed class and couldn't understand why that was a problem. Then there are the nearly universal sufferings that children experience from the pressures of school, their peers and some form of bullying. During my early days of ministry, I would often ask myself: Is there anything I can do in the short amount of time I see these children each week that could really make a difference in their lives?



VISITING JESUS

from the plan began

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28

When dealing with personal challenges, trials and sufferings, I know the answer. I know where to go. I know Who to go to. I go to our Lord Jesus in prayer, making a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament. I ask Him to help me, to guide me, to strengthen, to heal my heart and He does! Jesus did not leave me orphaned. He is so good, so able, that He made a way to always be available for me. He is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Holy Eucharist, in every single Catholic Church tabernacle and Adoration Chapel. He made this way to be present for me to come to Him and bring Him my burdens. He made a way to give me rest. Two thousand years since His Ascension into Heaven is no obstacle to Him. My God, my Savior, my amazing Brother and dearest Best Friend figured out a very real way for me to be able to come visit Him. So how could this truth be bridged over to the children? How could this become a reality for each of them too?



"Let the children come to Me; do not prevent them,
for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these."

Mark 10:14

I knew what had to be done. We needed to figure out a way to bring the children to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament on a regular basis. I knew I could guide and help them understand that Jesus is truly present by talking out loud to Him. I needed to talk to Him and not about Him, just like I do in my personal prayer. Once they were there, once they were before Jesus and had their hearts open, He would give each one of them the graces that they needed. He would speak to their hearts and touch their lives in ways that only He can. And they would be a great consolation to Him too. Yes, there was a way to do this! I wasn't sure of all the details yet but I knew we had to try. Most importantly, I believed Our Lord wanted this.

VISITING JESUS

How the plan began

"I give praise to You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth,
for although You have hidden these things from the wise and the
learned You have revealed them to the childlike."

Matthew 11:25



I went to my Pastor and told him everything that was on my heart and he, like the good spiritual Father that he is, said, "Yes, let's try it." He said we could begin it in the Fall (2001) with the opening of the Wednesday night religious education classes for grades 1-8. We would extend our time to 90 minutes: 30 minutes for our visits with Jesus, 60 minutes of class time. "I'll go ahead and expose the Blessed Sacrament and you guide the time of prayer," confirmed Father. "We will take it one step at a time and see how it goes."

When I first started leading guided Eucharistic Adoration with the children in the early days, I would think, "Jesus is right here! What would we (the children and I) like to talk with Him about today?" Then I'd write an outline and script out what I was going to say. That way the children would be able to understand that prayer is simply "conversation with Christ" like St. Teresa of Avila so famously said.

I never got tired reminding the children, "If something is important to you, it's important to Jesus because you are so important to Him!" I realized I had to speak this truth often after having a conversation with a child the first year I was an Elementary DRE. He and I were talking about his karate class. He was so excited to tell me about it and at one point I asked him, "Do you ever talk with Jesus in prayer about what you are telling me?" He was just stumped. He asked, "Do you really think Jesus would care about my karate class? I didn't think He would be interested in that." It was the very first time I ever said, "If it's important to you then it's important to Jesus because you are so important to Him!" I will never forget the look in his eyes when the truth of what I said started to register. It was like a whole new world opening up for him and that is what I wanted all the children to understand.

VISITING JESUS

from the plan began

It took the first-year session (October through May) for the children in our Wednesday evening religious education program (most of them attended public schools) to really start to understand and embrace what was happening. Looking back now, the growing pains, the nuts-and-bolts of what worked and what didn't work, were smoothed out after that first year. Our visits with Jesus became the center and the highlight of our time together! The children were visiting Jesus first, having an encounter with Him, then going into the classroom to learn about Him. Classes over the next dozen years consistently had very high attendance each week (90% plus) and very little volunteer teacher turnover.

It was also very important for the children to see the priest on a regular basis in this way. They began to identify with him as their spiritual Father. They knew they must be important for Father to take the time to come and expose the Blessed Sacrament for them. They in turn would pray regularly for him.

As the years ticked by, guided times of Eucharistic Adoration were added for toddlers, First Confession Retreats, First Holy Communion Retreats, Advent and Lent Retreats for elementary age children and Catholic Vacation Bible School summer programs. I would say that the ever-growing, full-of-life parish programs for children began to take on a life of their own and the main thing we were doing that was fueling this: making our visits with Jesus!

Let me briefly share with you just a few of the many happy moments I remember connected with our visits: there was the six-year-old who had been preparing for her First Holy Communion who told me one Wednesday evening not only what the word "transubstantiation" means but then, to my astonishment, proceeded to spell the word perfectly for me too! (Tran-sub-stan-ti-a-tion is the miracle of the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus by a Catholic priest.) Then there was the child who unabashedly announced to a group of eighty children getting ready to make their visit with Jesus that they had to pray for his friend at school who had cancer because Jesus was going to make his friend well again. They did and He did. The boy who excitedly explained to me one snowy December Wednesday that "Christmas" really means "Christ's Mass!" The group of little ones who spontaneously waved to Jesus, blew Him kisses and told Him they loved Him, as we walked by the Church because they knew He was there in the tabernacle.

VISITING JESUS

from the plan began

I recall one particular time when our Pastor invited the Archbishop, of happy memory, to join us during our time of guided Eucharistic Adoration. It took place on a Saturday during a children's retreat. When the Archbishop arrived, he looked tired and burdened. His coloring was pale and he was not his famous "Irish" self. After our time of guided Eucharistic Adoration, I went into the sacristy and what a transformation! The Archbishop's cheeks were pink and he was smiling. He greeted me warmly and said he felt his burdens lift during our time before the Blessed Sacrament. He said the prayers of children were very powerful! He stressed that he wanted the children to continue praying for him. He also wanted to be invited back again the next time we had a large group of children in Eucharistic Adoration. He was invited back and he did indeed come again, so touched was he by the experience.



STEP ONE

How the plan began

"Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."
Isaiah 43:19

Fast forward, I now live in a very beautiful little town dedicated to our Blessed Mother called "Ave Maria" in the state of Florida.

One sunny day (I know, the days are nearly all sunny here!) I was sitting in the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel that is located in the center of our town. I was thinking about the data from a poll that found just one-third of U.S. Catholics believed in the True Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. At one point during my Holy Hour I remember asking Jesus, "Lord, is there anything I can do to help You remedy this?" It was during my time with Him that day in the Adoration Chapel that He inspired me with a thought. The thought was simply this: "Catholic Kids 101 – kids telling kids about Jesus."

It took a little time to figure out what "Catholic Kids 101" might look like. I started praying. I asked others to pray. I had lively discussions with friends and letters back and forth from "my Carmelite nuns" and soon Catholic Kids 101 began to take shape.

Catholic Kids 101 began as a Catholic website for children that helps them understand that Jesus is truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist primarily through original stories. It is presented in the format of "kids telling kids about Jesus" and it was ready to be launched right when Covid hit. I call that God-timing! Who knew that kids would be sitting in front of their computers for hours each day? Our Lord most certainly did.

As time has gone on, in part because of Catholic Kids 101, I was given the opportunity by our Pastor in Ave Maria (another good spiritual Father) to begin leading weekly Guided Holy Hours for children in the parish Church. "Step Two" of this plan will tell step-by-step how to begin guided Holy Hours for children in your parish based on how it has been successfully implemented here. I am grateful for our Pastor, our wonderful DRE and the families of Ave Maria Parish.

STEP ONE

How the plan began

"Out of the mouths of children and infants
You have perfected praise."
Matthew 21:16

Switching gears, I now want to share a brief Church history lesson that will connect some dots regarding the importance of bringing children to Jesus and the relevance for us today.

In 1910, Pope Saint Pius X decreed that children who have reached the "age of reason" (around age seven) be permitted to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. The usual age prior to that had been twelve years old. The Pope explained why he lowered the age:

"The pages of the Gospel show clearly how special was that love for children which Christ showed while He was on earth. It was His delight to be in their midst ... He embraced them; and He blessed them. At the same time, He was not pleased when they would be driven away by the disciples, whom He rebuked gravely with these words: 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God.' It is clearly seen how highly He held their innocence and open simplicity of their souls on that occasion when He called a little child to Him and said to the disciples: "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven ... And whoever receives one such little child for My sake, receives Me."



Pope St. Pius X

STEP ONE

from the plan began

Before his death in 1914, Pope Pius X saw the threat of World War I become a terrible reality. His urgent calls for peace had been ignored. The continued calls for peace by his successor, Pope Benedict XV, were ignored in the same way. His July 1st, 1915 memorandum for peace was unanimously rejected by the nations at war.

A year later, Pope Benedict XV called to the bishops of the nations at war that on Sunday, July 30, 1916, all the children of their dioceses were to receive Holy Communion in the most solemn manner for the intentions of the Pope. On that day, these nations witnessed thousands of children, older children and now little children, receiving Holy Communion and uniting their prayers and sacrifices to the Sacrifice of Our Lord for the conversion of the world and the end of World War I.

This is part of the Holy Father's homily for that day:

"...We look for solace in the thought that the innocence of children will be more pleasing to God than the penance of adults...see the power of your prayers! A power that comes directly from your innocence. Because in God's presence, the supplication of a pure heart is much more efficacious than the one of a penitent heart. A power generated by your lack of human strength because it is the custom of the Almighty to confound the deluding strength of this world by accepting what the world considers weakness.

...We have exhorted and we have prayed; all in vain...

Maybe God... will be appeased by the innocent lament of the children, because it is a lament of the just. A lament according to the heart of His Son, the Redeemer of the world. One child only, by the splendor of his grace, moves the heart of God. Would not it be true then, that thousands and thousands of children will move the Sacred Heart of Jesus?"



STEP ONE

How the plan began

During this same period of time, Jesuit Father Albert Bessieres proposed a crusade to twenty-eight children in Bordeaux, France. Under his direction, "Treasure Sheets" were created for the children. They began to write down their daily prayers and sacrifices offered for the end of the war and the salvation of the soldiers. The Croisade des Enfants (Children's Crusade), renamed Croisade Eucharistique (Eucharistic Crusade), was approved by the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Within months, it spread to over sixty-five French dioceses and then to other countries. It would be by millions of prayers and sacrifices on the part of the children that this effort would continue for the end of the war.

Also during this same time period, in the year 1916, the Angel of Peace was sent from Heaven to interrupt the games of three little shepherds: Lucia, age 10, Francisco, age 9, and Jacinta, age 7, in Fatima, Portugal. At the first visit the Angel commanded, "Pray with me!" Then the Angel taught the children the prayer, "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You. I beg pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You." Repeating this prayer, the Angel bowed to the ground. He told the children, "Pray like this. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplication."

In the Fall of 1916, during his final visit, the Angel of Peace appeared holding a chalice with the sacred Host above from which drops of Precious Blood were falling into the sacred vessel. Leaving the chalice and the Host suspended in the air, the Angel bowed his head to the ground in adoration to the Most Blessed Sacrament and taught the children to do the same along with another prayer in honor of the Most Holy Trinity. Could this, perhaps, be called a guided time of Eucharistic Adoration for children?

In the following year, in a letter dated May 5, 1917, Pope Benedict XV made another appeal for peace. In his letter, he ordered that the invocation: "Queen of Peace, pray for us!" be inserted into the Litany of Loreto. Eight days later, our beautiful Blessed Mother, the Queen of Peace, was sent from Heaven to the three little shepherds in Fatima. This was the beginning of a series of unprecedented visits. "This war will end," Our Lady told the children in July. The Queen of Peace had been sent by God to offer His supernatural plan for peace, the call to conversion, done with and through children!

STEP ONE

How the plan began



The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind;
so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion.

Isaiah 24:20

Does it often seem to you like our world today is spinning out of control? I know your answer but we need not despair! Heaven has given us the solutions! It is through us - you, me and the children all around us - that the solutions can be put into action. I invite you to go to "step 2" to continue reading the three step plan to implement "Visiting Jesus!" in your parish.

United with you in His Eucharistic Heart,

Jean Prather
Catholic Kids 101



This work is dedicated to the children of this generation.
May the earth resound with their voices:
"Praise to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus!
To Him be glory and honor forever!"



Catholic Kids 101

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