

# BECOMING CATHOLIC

A parent's guide  
to Baptism,  
Confirmation,  
Eucharist &  
Reconciliation



KATHY HORAN



# Becoming Catholic



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## About the Author



Kathy Horan has worked extensively in a range of leadership roles within Catholic Education in South Australia. These roles include RE coordinator in parish schools, Deputy Principal and RE consultant in the

Adelaide Archdiocese and Diocese of Port Pirie. Kathy holds Master Degrees in Theology and Educational Leadership. A focus of her work is family-based catechesis, particularly in the role of sacramental preparation.

Kathy is currently working in the Adelaide Archdiocese as Coordinator of the RCIA, supporting parish Baptism teams and adult Confirmation groups. She is also working with the Ministry Formation program to support students seeking pathways into pastoral ministry within the Archdiocese.



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## About this book

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation are important moments in your child's unfolding journey of faith within the Catholic community.

I have written this book to assist you with the wonderful and, at times, daunting task of being involved in your child's preparation to celebrate these sacraments.

This can be an exciting time. The anticipation of celebrating an important religious ritual may re-awaken memories associated with your own preparation. There may be moments of excitement and wonder, but there may also be moments of

uncertainty or confusion as you take an active role in preparing your child to take another step along the way in the life of the Christian community.

For some of you, it may be the hopeful prompting or spoken expectations of grandparents that move you to find out more about what you can do to help your child prepare. In this case, along with non-Catholic parents, or parents who no longer feel very much at home in the Church, you may feel inadequate and unsure about how to support your child at this important time.

My hope is that this book will enable you to refresh your memories about the sacraments, and also learn something about the way the Church talks about these important religious rituals today. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has made many changes in the way it does things, so that people can more clearly see and understand the meaning of what is happening. Some of the language that is used in describing the various sacramental experiences is different from the way it used to be. This book explains both the new terms and why they have changed, so that parents can appreciate what their children are learning about their faith.

This book also offers suggestions designed to help you support and learn with your child at home, and



to make use of family gatherings for simple prayer rituals.

A simple glossary of terms is included to assist you in bridging the gap between earlier understandings of the sacraments and the contemporary approach.

Think back to a time when you, or someone close to you, prepared to celebrate one of the sacraments, e.g. Reconciliation, First Eucharist or Confirmation (or, as you might have called them then, Confession, First Communion and Confirmation).

- What are some of the memories you have about this time?
- How did you learn about the sacraments and their place in the life of the Church?
- What were some of the practical preparations that took place leading up to the sacramental celebration?
- How did you and your family celebrate this important event?
- What memories do you have of the actual celebration in the Church, and who was present with your family?

You may also like to ask your own parents what it was like for them growing up Catholic. How was their experience different from what your children are going through?

Some people think that change is a good thing, while others may remember with fondness the way things used to be. But whether you fall into the first group, or the second, or somewhere in-between, the reality is that the Church has made changes



in all areas of its life as a community. This includes some changes in the way sacraments are celebrated, when they are celebrated and who needs to be involved. There have also been changes in language and focus.

While all of this change may be exciting for some, it can also bring about a sense of unease in others. By discussing why and how these changes came about, this book will address some of these concerns and offer support to you as you journey with your child.

# Why is everything different now?

## TIMES HAVE CHANGED

We live in times that are marked by rapid change—not all of it good. Everyone these days seems to live life in the fast lane: we work longer hours, often both parents work and we have access to a multitude of opportunities for sport, recreation, entertainment and socializing. We also live in times that often do not support family life and do not value as highly the things our parents and grandparents valued.

Today, many grandparents provide a lot of parenting of children as a support to the parents. In some families, children may spend part of the week living with one parent, and the other part living with the other parent.

There are also things that happen in society that affect the happiness and wellbeing of families and the Church.

We are well aware of issues such as child abuse, violence, bullying in many shapes and forms, including cyber bullying, and the effect of poor life choices on our relationships.

There was a time in the Church when it was said that the family that prayed together stayed together. When was the last time you heard that?

Nowadays, we experience many split layers in family life: different meal times, meals on the run in front of TV, odd working schedules, extra-curricular activities several nights a week and shopping and sporting activities all days and nights of the week. When we arrive at Sunday, more of the same happens, and people often have little energy or inclination to make their way to church, or fail to see the relevance of the Christian community gathering on a Sunday.

## WE HAVE CHANGED

In addition, some people who have been away from church-going for a period of time find it difficult to find a place in the community where they know and understand what is going on, because there have been significant changes since they last participated in a Sunday Mass.

For many parents this all becomes relevant when one of their children begins preparing to celebrate a sacrament, such as Reconciliation, Eucharist or Confirmation.

Nowadays, we experience many split layers in family life: different meal times, meals on the run in front of TV, odd working schedules, extra-curricular activities several nights a week and shopping and sporting activities all days and nights of the week.



Even hearing words like Eucharist and Reconciliation can be daunting. These new names for the sacraments reflect just a couple of the changes people face as they try to understand new ways of reflecting on the sacraments and being part of the Christian community today.

A significant and additional change for parents of children preparing for sacraments is that, now they are not only invited to be part of their child's preparation in a way that may be foreign to them, they are also often expected to take a quite active role. This invitation in itself can often stir feelings of unease or inadequacy.

Added to this is the indifference, or even disillusionment, some people feel towards the Church due to past negative experiences. As a result of these feelings, many people do not feel the need to attend Mass on Sunday, and so the cycle of estrangement continues until that moment when it becomes important, often for the sake of their child and the hopes of grandparents, that they re-evaluate or re-think what they believe and what they hope for their children.

## **THE CHURCH HAS CHANGED**

Sometimes, in our Church, people feel that they are listening to a foreign language, because so many things, including the sacraments, have different names from the ones we used in our childhood. Sometimes it's hard to be sure that we are even

talking about the same things! For example, we used to talk about Confession; now we talk more about Reconciliation. The Mass was the name we gave to what we did when we went to church on Sundays; now we refer to this as the Eucharist, and the people who gather to celebrate it as the community. In the past the priest used to 'say Mass'; now the priest 'presides over the liturgy' and many people, both men and women, can be involved in ministries within the Mass. And these are just a few of the obvious changes!

The important thing to understand, though, is that language changes are not made lightly, or just to be trendy, but because the Church feels that the new words are a better reflection of our current understanding of the sacraments.

Many of the changes relating to the sacraments, the way they are celebrated and the shape and forms of preparation for them, came about as a result of what is known as the Second Vatican Council.

This Church Council, in the early sixties, was a major event in the life of the Catholic Church. The main purpose of this Council gathering of all the bishops with the Pope was to take a good look at the life and ministry of the Church to ensure that the Church was in touch with the hopes, the dreams, the challenges and anxieties of Christians in the modern world.

There was a deep recognition in the Church of a need for renewal so that the religious life and ritual celebrations of the Church would touch and affect people's lives. The Church faced up to the need to be relevant, to be in touch with the lives and challenges of ordinary people and to read the signs of the times so that the mission of Jesus could continue to touch people's lives and provide hope for the future. This is an on-going challenge for the leaders of the Church today in the light of the abuse and suffering of many within the Church, and for seeking pastoral responses that promote the healing process.

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### LIFE BEFORE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

For many years before the Second Vatican Council, the Mass was said by the priest, in Latin, with the priest quite remote from the people and with his back to them. People who knew some Latin could recite the responses during Mass, but many remained silent spectators, unable to join in. In those days, parents were almost silent partners in the formal preparation of their children for any of the sacraments. Their role consisted mainly in providing the appropriate garments and perhaps providing a party after First Communion. Before the Vatican Council, the responsibility for the formal religious formation and preparation of children was left to the religious brothers and sisters who staffed Catholic schools or worked in parishes. Nowadays, there are very

few religious brothers and sisters in schools, and this has made a big difference to local arrangements for sacrament preparation.

### THE WAY THINGS ARE NOW

In the post-Vatican II Church, the celebration of the sacraments is seen less as a time for children to 'learn about religion' and more as an opportunity for parents to share their faith journey with their children and to initiate their children into both a Christian way of life and a supportive Christian community.

In the Christian way of life, the community is important. Children need to learn to pray, to be with the community when it celebrates on the Lord's day and to take part in the worship of the community. By coming to church on Sunday and participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, children learn about the Christian story, and come to understand what the Christian community is all about and how they can be part of it.

The sacraments are opportunities to acknowledge the various moments along the journey when the children, with their parents, become more involved in the life and work of the Christian community. Becoming more involved includes developing a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, learning about and getting involved in the good works of the community and being with the community for special celebrations.

