

Unpacking the Creed with Young Children

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has asked us, in this Year of Faith, to pay particular attention to the words we say when we profess the Creed. Every time we gather at Mass, when we pray our rosary, at Baptisms and Confirmations, and other times too, we recite our Creed. Here we profess our belief in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in the work of God in creating, saving and sustaining us.

In this Year of Faith, the Pastoral Offices of the Diocese of Hamilton created a booklet, *The Faith We Believe: Unpacking the Creed*, to help people remember the fullness and beauty of what we profess every time we say the Creed. We certainly hope that people across the diocese find the reflections helpful.

Here, we offer a few suggestions of how parents, grandparents, teachers, priests, parish ministers, and others who work with and care for children can bring young children into the great mysteries and joys expressed in our Creed.

The suggestions have been organized under the five chapters used in the *Unpacking the Creed* booklet. The booklet is not written for young children but the themes of the Creed should be accessible to people of all ages.

Creation – Chapter 1

Children usually enjoy being outside, interacting with nature, and playing with or learning about animals. They find it easy to understand that God is the Creator of all that we find in nature.

Reading Genesis 1-2:4, the first story of Creation, reminds us that God took care to create everything – to separate dry land from the sea, to create birds and fish, and plants and animals. As you share this story, spend time with the final verses that tell us how we are all created in the image of God. Let them know, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.”(Gen. 1:31)

A wonderful way to honour God’s Creation is to spend time thinking about the care of Creation.

Is there one thing that each person can do to care for Creation?

- weed a garden
- recycle
- get a compost bin
- turn off the light when you're finished in a room

Is there one way that you can recognize the image of God in the people you meet?

- be helpful to someone at home or in your community
- brighten someone's day by smiling at them
- take time to find out how others are feeling and what they might need; don't be quick to judge

The older the child, the more responsibility he or she can take for such initiatives. Making these practices part of everyday life means we are really trying to make our belief visible in the way we live. This is how we become disciples!

It's very important to find time in your day to pray about these acts of caring. This may be at the beginning or end of the day, or at supper. This way, children will be reminded that these are not just **good** works you do but **God's** work. Pray in your own words or the use prayer suggested here:

+ Almighty God,

We are amazed by all you have created. We know you want us to care for your Creation. Help us to notice when we are showing good care and when we are not. Help us to care for Creation and for one another created in your image so that we may honour your great gift. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Incarnation – Chapter 2

The Gospel of John begins with a beautiful expression of the mystery of the Incarnation:

“The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

He became flesh and lived among us! Children can be helped to consider this mystery by thinking how Jesus' life is like theirs. Think together about what it means that Jesus was once a little boy. He was 8 years old once, he was 10, he was 17! Let each child think about what Jesus would have been like when he was the same age as they are now.

In a classroom or parish setting, have children wrap their arms around themselves and hug themselves. It feels good to be hugged! In a family, hug each other! Remember, Jesus' family held hands, hugged, and kissed one another. Mary would have cuddled Jesus when he was a little baby and Mary and Joseph probably held Jesus' hands as he learned to walk. Remind children that God became flesh, in part, so we would know that's how close he is to us!

There are many Bible stories of Jesus touching people to heal them or bless them. Imagine what it would be to be touched by Jesus. How would his hands feel on your cheek or your shoulder? How would his face look when he smiled at you?

For children preparing for First Communion, this is a wonderful opportunity to consider how Jesus really does touch us in the Eucharist. He comes to us and we welcome him "under our roof" as we say at Mass.

You may choose a prayer of your own or pray this prayer together:

+God our Father,

We thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you for loving us so much that you sent Jesus to touch us, listen to us, be among us, and teach us how to live. We thank you for Jesus who knows what it is to have a life like ours, who loves us, and who chooses to be close to us still. Help us to learn more about your Son through scripture and by receiving him in the Eucharist.
Amen.

Paschal Mystery – Chapter 3

Dying and rising may be difficult ideas for children. But disappointment, hurt and sadness are real and well understood even by young children. Remind your children that Jesus knows what it is like to be hurt, but he trusted God would raise him up. We can practice trusting God more.

Tell one another stories where trusting God has helped you to overcome something that was difficult. Help children to realize that God does not magically take away hardships. God promises to be with us through tough times. God promises to bring us to new life.

Think of how trusting God would look in real life. People who try to put their trust in God would probably:

- Pray for guidance if they needed to make a big decision.
- Pray for others who are hurt, sick, or sad.
- Try to help people when they can. For example, they might visit someone in a hospital or bring food to a food drive.
- Tell others how God has been good to them.
- Remember that God does not delight in our sadness. God does not take away every pain but he promises to be with us always.
- Remember that one day, we look forward to being with God and all the communion of saints in heaven.

Say a prayer together and tell God about your hurts. Ask God for the things you need to help you with those hurts like comfort, patience, mercy and strength. Your prayer might be helped by thinking about what St. Paul said about God's love:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

The End Things (The Ascension) – Chapter 4

Hmmm. Jesus ascended to heaven. That might seem like a sad time. It might seem like Jesus went away. Some of the disciples felt like that. They just stood there looking up into the sky. They were reminded that he came from God and had returned to God. He took his place at the right hand of his Father. Jesus' Ascension into heaven reminds us all that, at the end of our earthly life, we too look forward to being with God. This is why the chapter on The Ascension was also called “The End Things”.

Of course, Jesus' Ascension does not mean we have been left alone. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to be with us so we would never feel alone or be alone.

If you know a young person preparing for Confirmation, this is a wonderful reminder to them. Think of everything Jesus promises about the Holy Spirit ... that the Spirit will comfort us, be an advocate for us, and guide us in truth. (See John 14:15-17)

St. Paul spoke of the fruits of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5: 22-23) If we saw apples on a tree, we would know it was an apple tree. When we see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, we know the Spirit is at work there.

Thank God that his Spirit remains with us.

The Church and the Holy Spirit – Chapter 5

Everyone needs a place where they belong and are cared for. For Christians, beyond our own family, we have the church. In the Catholic Church, we belong through Baptism.

It's good to pray as a family. But when we go to church, we support our whole faith family. They are happy to see us. It's important for us to see each other. No family likes to be apart for long. The next time we're at church, let's think about how good it is to worship together. Imagine that over the whole world, thousands and thousands and millions of Catholics are praying the same prayers as us.

St. Paul tells us we are part of Christ's body; he also says that the body needs all its parts! Spend time remembering as a family how good it is to be part of the Body of Christ. Try to find some new way of connecting with your faith family.

- Go to the coffee social after Mass if your parish has one.
- Say hi to new people in the pew behind you.
- Stop to say hello to Father after Mass.
- Find out if your parish has a website and visit it to see if you can learn something about your parish you never knew.

The theme for the Year of Faith in our diocese is **REDISCOVER THE JOY!**
Help a child to see your joy and to find joy in their own faith!