

Child-Centred Eucharist

Being an inclusive church sometimes brings its challenges one of which is how to celebrate the Eucharist in a way that children can participate in fully and understand why we do what we do. This was one such Eucharistic liturgy that was written specifically to enable the children to not only receive the elements but to participate fully in telling the story, breaking and sharing and serving the bread and wine.

We began by watching a film, "The March of the Penguins" which tells the story of the Emperor penguins where the female penguins after laying their eggs carefully pass the eggs to the male penguin and head off to walk huge distances to find food leaving the male penguins to huddle together and survive the harshest months of the winter. They only survive by working together and waiting for the females to return just as the chicks are hatching and in need of food. After watching part of the film and having a discussion about the importance of working together we then cut out penguin shapes and wrote on to them the things we found difficult and needed help with.

We then shared in the following liturgy together, with an adult leading and the various children reading different parts of the liturgy and telling both the penguins story and interweaving this with the story of the last supper. Here I have left on the children's names rather than using "Child 1, 2 etc". We read out the things we found difficult from the penguins as part of our intercessions and commitment to work together. You may want to adapt this to suit the children of your own congregation..

**Here's a table
here's a table
let us share
let us share
bread and wine
bread and wine
with Jesus here
with Jesus here.** [tune Frère Jacques]

Leader: In the Jewish tradition it is the smallest child who asks the questions as to why the Passover is celebrated. It is the smallest child who asks the questions and allows the story to be told.

Imogen: Why are we here?

Leader: We gather together
around this table
to tell the stories
that inspire our faith
that help us
become a community

Beth: Tell me a story.

Sam: The emperor penguins
walk 70 miles
across the frozen landscape
hungry
cold
battered by storms
huddled together

in order to survive
no, not to survive
but to protect
what is weakest
an egg
the hope of new life
cocooned against the harsh winter
passed precariously
from one penguin to another
until one day
the egg hatches
a tiny, helpless
baby penguin.

Imogen: Why do you tell this story?

Leader: Because it is here
gathered together
around this table
that we bring the things
we find difficult
the things we cannot do alone.

Joel: On the penguins we wrote things we find difficult
to remind us all to help each other.

[Read penguins and place on table]

Beth: Tell me the story about Jesus.

Rachel: Jesus shared lots of meals
with his friends
and with the ordinary people
he met
he told them stories
of inviting people from the streets
to great banquets
of a run away son
saying sorry and having a party
of tiny seeds
growing into huge trees
he showed that by sharing a picnic lunch
a crowd could be fed
he sat a child on his knee
to show that the smallest
is the most important
of all

Imogen: But why do we share bread?

Leader: The night before Jesus
was killed

he shared a last meal
with his friends
he took bread
and broke it
and said:
Imogen: this is my body
broken for you

[Joel to break bread]

Leader: to show how he was broken
on the cross
to show that our world is broken
by the things we do wrong
when we share the bread
Imogen: we say sorry
and ask God to forgive us

[Share bread - Imogen]

Beth: Why do we share wine?

Leader: The night before Jesus
was killed
he shared a last meal
with his friends
he took wine
and gave thanks
and said

Beth: this is my blood
poured out for you

[Joel to hold up cup]

Leader: to show that we are forgiven
to show that we are loved by God
to remind us to love one another
to remind us that the small things
are the most important
Beth: to celebrate the hope
of new life

[Share wine - Beth]

Joel: Let us pray:
God who loves us very much,
we have told new stories
and listened to old stories
we have said sorry
and been forgiven
we have become friends
and learned that together

we can do the things
we find difficult
but most of all
we have celebrated
that with your love
like the baby penguins
there is hope of new life.

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