

Caoimhe and Eoin's First Eucharist

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We had always assumed our oldest child would participate fully in the life of the Church. Our daughter, Caoimhe, was baptised before we knew she was disabled and it was only over the course of the next year or two the implications of her disability unfolded.

We found our Canberra parish home at St John the Apostle at Kippax, where we have attended regularly since 2001. We were heartened, when early in our involvement, the Parish Priest made it clear that when she was ready, Caoimhe could and would receive her first Eucharist there.

Life went on and we didn't give it much more thought until our second child, Eoin, began preparations for his first Reconciliation. We knew first Eucharist would be the next step and we decided to investigate the possibility of Caoimhe receiving her first Eucharist at the same time.

Our parish catechists were a step ahead of us, asking us and later suggesting Trish Mowbray would be able to assist us in preparing Caoimhe. At first we were a little unsure; when Trish telephoned, she offered some written resources. We explained that Caoimhe was not able to read or write, or even use pictures very well.

Trish made a time to come and meet with our family and it wasn't long before we were at ease. The first meeting was more introductory and following sessions were beautifully prepared special liturgies to familiarise Caoimhe with the process. Trish recognised that much of Caoimhe's preparation had already been accomplished with regular attendance at Mass.

We were touched that Trish involved our whole family in Caoimhe's Eucharistic preparation sessions. Eoin was included in a special way, as he was also preparing for his first Eucharist at our parish Catholic school (he and two other boys from our parish were also preparing by participating in a home group). We were also given some unconsecrated hosts for ongoing practise with Caoimhe at home.

We set the date for Caoimhe and Eoin's first Eucharist, on November 16 last year. As Caoimhe attends a special school, Eoin prepared certain things for her at his school, as well as preparing for himself (for example, the signs for the pews).

The day arrived, and those receiving their first Eucharist processed in during the entrance hymn, and we felt so proud to see Eoin pushing Caoimhe in her wheelchair.

When the most important moment came, it didn't go quite according to plan and practice, but fortunately no one seemed to notice. We had been a little apprehensive that some people in our parish community might have reservations about Caoimhe receiving her first Eucharist, given her limited understanding, but as Trish said to us, 'Who among us fully comprehends the mystery of the Eucharist?'

We need not have worried. A number of regulars at the parish told us how wonderful it was to see Caoimhe, as well as Eoin, receive the Eucharist. We experienced nothing but acceptance, support and love.

It was wonderful to have Trish and her family present to celebrate with us, and join us for a celebratory barbecue at home afterwards.

We are very grateful to Trish for the encouragement and support she provided, and pleased that someone like Trish is working in the diocese, so that people with disabilities are included in the life of the Church.

