

## THE JOURNEY OF INITIATION

*This year you are on a journey, a special journey which will lead you to confirmation. When you celebrate confirmation it will mean that you have finished your journey of initiation into the church, you will be a full member of the church.*

### BACKGROUND

After Jesus' death and resurrection there were a lot of people who believed in him and who wanted to continue to live as he had lived and to do what he had done. They began to gather together, to tell stories about Jesus, to share all that they had with each other and to do what he had done at the last supper. These people became a community, a group of people who believed the same things and wanted to live their lives in a particular way. They were called the early Christians. After a while the early Christians needed to find ways to welcome other people into their community. They developed a Rite of Initiation, although they didn't call it this. This helped people to understand what it meant to belong to the church of the early Christians. It was also a way of celebrating how people became new members of the church. The early Christians looked at what Jesus had said and done:

- He was baptised by John the Baptist and encouraged others to be baptised
- At the Last Supper, he told them to break, bless and share bread and to bless and share the cup in his memory
- He sent the Holy Spirit to help his followers 40 days after his death and resurrection.

The early Christians believed that to truly follow Jesus meant that they must completely change, that they must turn away from one way of life and begin to live in a totally new way. In the New Testament the early Christian writers use the word 'baptizein', which is a Greek word that means 'to take the plunge' or be dipped into'. This is where we get the word 'baptise'. They wanted to show that becoming a friend or disciple of Jesus was more than just joining a club, it was a choice for life. Once this choice was made there was no going back even when times got tough and they got very tough for the early Christians, many of them were killed because they chose to follow Jesus.

The members of the early church decided that to become a follower of Jesus that people must be

- Baptised with water to show that they were washing away their old way of life

- Anointed with holy oil to confirm this baptism and be clothed with the Spirit
- Invited to share the sacred bread and cup of life with the rest of the community.

It took a long time for these early rites of initiation to become what we know as the sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. For four centuries the three sacraments were always celebrated together at the Easter Vigil. The local bishop was the celebrant at these celebrations. Then over a number of centuries changes began to happen. It became the custom for priests to baptise and for the bishop to confirm. The bishop was not always available every time there was a baptism and so the two sacraments were separated. Eucharist was still linked to baptism and even babies were given the Bread of Life or in later years a taste from the chalice. This was stopped in the twelfth century and so First Communion was no longer given at the time of Baptism but instead much later at fourteen or fifteen years of age. By this time the Bishop had usually visited the parish and confirmed the children and so the original order of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist remained unchanged.

Almost a hundred years ago, in 1910, Pope Pius X changed the order in which we celebrate these sacraments. He wanted children to begin receiving the Bread of Life at seven years of age and so we do what we do today. We begin with baptism, then we celebrate Eucharist and finally we are confirmed. In some countries they have changed the order of celebration of the sacraments back to the original order of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, but so far we have not made any change.



### *Initiation*

1. There are \_\_\_\_\_ sacraments of initiation.
2. The sacraments of initiation are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The word 'baptism' comes from a Greek word \_\_\_\_\_, which means to take the \_\_\_\_\_.