

Home baked bread has been part of my life ever since I can remember. On Sundays my mother would take out the *Joy of Cooking*, turn to page 603, and begin gathering the ingredients. By evening our family was gathered around the kitchen table for warm bread topped with melting butter. I use that same recipe today: the *Joy of Cooking*, turned to page 603.

Jesus taught through everyday activities such as baking (remember the parable of the yeast?) One Sunday while baking bread and thinking about planning Confirmation classes (what I like to call a period of inquiry), I wondered, "What might baking bread say about supporting the spiritual growth of youth?" The fact that the dough rises without apparent work on my part suggested a connection.

So, I noted the steps of my bread baking as I went along.

Step 1: Read and gather the list of ingredients.

Step 2: Re-read the recipe and dig in. Literally, dig into the dough with your hands.

Step 3: Let the dough rise for one hour, then gently knead again.

Step 4: Let the dough rise a second time.

Step 5: Gently knead again, shape into loaves, and let rise a third time.

Step 6: Place into a 375° oven until the crust is browned.

Step 7: Out of the oven it comes, a loaf with a shape of its own. A delightful surprise every time.

The beautifully rounded loaf reminded me of this verse in Luke:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. (Luke 2:49-52)

After reading the preceding two chapters, I noticed that this verse is a bookend for Luke's recipe for spiritual growth. It is a recipe much like the recipe for bread: collect essential ingredients, knead, let go, knead, wait, notice, and expect to be surprised.

You can read the complete recipe in Luke 1-2. Here's an abridged version:

Step 1. Listen to God.

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. (Luke 1:30-31)

Step 2. Name and proclaim God's call.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. When the time came for

their purification according to the law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (Luke 2:21-22)

Step 3. Give thanks and proclaim the call to ministry.

Simeon took [Jesus] in his arms and praised God. (Luke 2:28)

At that moment [the prophet Anna] she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38)

Step 4. Provide plenty of mentors within the faith community.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. (Luke 2:39)

Step 5. Let God do God's work and watch them grow.

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)

Step 6. Let them choose the journey.

When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. (Luke 2:43)

Step 7. Look in unexpected places and be ready to be surprised.

When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Luke 2:45-47)

Luke's narrative is a recipe for an intentional period of inquiry and spiritual growth in preparation for Confirmation. It is also a recipe for all Christians who seek to grow into the full stature of Christ; those who bake and break bread together every week. Gather the ingredients: discernment, community, proclamation, thanksgiving, waiting, and exploration. And be ready to be surprised by God and the *Joy of Inquiry*.

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