



First Communion: Ritual, Church and Popular Religious Identity (Liturgy, Worship and Society Series)

Peter McGrail

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One of the most carefully prepared liturgies of any Roman Catholic parish's year is the celebration of 'First Communion'. This is the ritual by which seven- or eight -year-old children are admitted to the Eucharist for the first time. It attracts the largest congregations of any parish liturgy, and yet is frequently marked by tension and dissent within the parish community. The same ritual holds very different meanings for the various parties involved - clergy, parish schools, regularly communicating parishioners, and the first communicants and their families. The tensions arise from dissonance between the parties on such key issues as expected patterns of Church attendance, Catholic identity, dress and expenditure, and family formation. The relationships and discontinuities between popular and 'official' religion is at the heart of these tensions. They touch upon deep-seated anxieties concerning the future viability of the very structures and patterns of parish life during the current period of falling Church attendance and parish closures. For those within the Church who are concerned to understand and address the issues in its structural decline, this book will make sometimes uncomfortable but always stimulating reading. Peter McGrail examines the relationship between Church structures and popular religious identity, viewed through the lens of the first communion event. Drawing out hitherto unrecognised connections and significances for the future of the Catholic Church at local level, the insights into the decline of the parish as an institution present challenges to all with an interest in and concern for the future of the Church in the English-speaking world. Bringing to the fore the relationship and tensions between liturgy and Church structures, both historically and at the present time, this book offers academics and students alike extensive material for reflection and future development..

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