Conversation:
► What is the single best slice of bread you’ve ever eaten?
► Why do you think bread, pita, tortilla or other forms of daily staple are so important?

Study!

Bread and Wine
► Bread, food for our bodies, and wine, drink of refreshment, celebration and merriment—they are the stuff of life. These symbols assume a new reality in the Eucharist.
► They are not only reminders of physical nourishment but they become food for the soul.
► We bring our gifts of bread and wine, made by human hands, and we ask God to bless them and make them holy.
► We ask that the Holy Spirit change these elements into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
► We believe it happens every time the Church gathers to tell the story and pray the blessing prayers of thanks and praise.
► Bread is a sign of God’s providence and protection throughout Scripture. It is a sign of nourishment, freedom from hunger, and satisfaction for the soul’s longing for God.
► Bread is a sign of our very sustenance, our need for food—everyday food and spiritual food.
► Bread, broken and shared, is a sign that we place our lives completely in God’s care.
► Wine, as symbol (symbol that expresses reality) of Jesus’ blood, is a sign of his life force poured out for humanity in atonement for sin.
► We become the bread we receive. We allow ourselves to be poured out as a libation. Christ’s broken body was given up; his blood was poured out for the entire world.
► Christ’s sacrifice is made manifest to us; it takes place upon the altar every time we take the bread, bless it, break it, and share it. Thus, we too become broken, blessed, and shared.
Bread in the Old Testament

► Melchizedek extended the gift of bread to Abraham, and Abraham gave it to strangers as a sign of hospitality.
► Parties who shared bread were assumed to be in covenant relationship. To betray someone with whom bread had been broken was a serious infraction. David used this principle cleverly to deceive the enemies of his son Absalom. Once bread was broken between them, it would be a most serious grievance to plot against Absalom.
► Rather than putting pen to paper or quill to scroll, contracts were forged and entered into through the ritual of breaking bread.
► The people of Israel expressed their covenant relationship with God that was forged at Mount Sinai with the annual Passover supper in which bread and wine both had significant roles in the supper.
► Passover recalled the Exodus event. In one vignette of the Exodus story, God shows his providential care for the people by providing manna in the desert.
► The bread of Exodus was unleavened bread. The people had to be ready to move at a moment’s notice. There was no time for the bread to rise, thus they used unleavened bread. One of the reasons for unleavened bread was to express a theology of constant and immediate readiness and openness to God’s call and initiative.

Conversation:
► God invites us to be ready to meet him when he comes, to be ready and willing to follow his initiative no matter where that might take us, to be ready in a moment’s notice to do what he asks of us. Are you ready to respond to God in such a way? If not, why not? What would it take to become willing?

Resume reading the faith statements:
► Unleavened bread was used in Israel’s ritual worship. Unleavened bread was used as a remembrance of the Exodus. It denoted the reality of a pilgrim people constantly on the move, journeying toward their destination, the Promised Land. All other forms of bread were considered ritually impure.
► The bread used in the celebration of Eucharist is also unleavened. Bread, therefore, was a sign of God’s providential care for Israel and the people’s trust in God. Bread was a sign of the manna God provided in the desert—and of the reciprocal covenant relationship with the people of Israel.
► That covenant was renewed on every Sabbath as 12 flour cakes were placed on a table in the holy of holies.
► The Prophet Isaiah used the image of banquet (always a subliminal reference to bread) to refer to the coming of the day of the Lord, the end times.
► Wine was an essential part of every meal in the Old Testament. A cup of wine was reserved for the prophet Elijah at the annual Passover meal. It was believed
his return would precede the coming of the messiah.
► The belief in blood as expiation for sin is associated with the sacrifice of the cup.
► There is an ancient symbol of Eucharist that speaks of the mystery we just celebrated. A mother pelican is pictured with droplets of blood dripping from her breast. It was believed that in time of famine, the mother pelican would scratch her breast until droplets of blood dripped into her starving babies’ anxiously waiting beaks. Her babies fed off of her freely offered blood. When we receive Eucharist in the form of bread and wine, we go forth willing and strengthened to offer our droplets of love in service of God’s people.

Conversation:
► Who in your life right now needs you to be the body and blood of Christ for them?
► What is going on in your local world right now that cries out for you to go forth and be bread, to go forth and shed your blood (joblessness, homelessness, health issues, and so forth)?

Resume reading the faith statements:
► Wine/blood is a sign that Christ shed his blood for the sins of the world.
► Wine/blood is equated with the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20) and the conferral of eternal life.
► The blood of Christ in the gospels is understood as a sign that Jesus shed his blood for the sins of the world.
► This is why the Eucharist is considered a primary sacrament of reconciliation.
► Bread and wine were not just arbitrarily chosen by Jesus to be a sign of his presence. Both bread and wine were already laden with a depth of meaning in the Scripture that Jesus knew.

Exercise:
Small group leader divides easel paper in half. On one half write: BREAD IN EVERYDAY LIFE. On the other half write: WINE in EVERYDAY LIFE. Write the group’s responses in the appropriate place on the sheet. Possible responses include:
✓ Bread is the staff of life.
✓ Bread offers nourishment.
✓ With bread, we are nourished; without bread, we go hungry.
✓ Bread gives us strength for living.
✓ Bread is filled with the necessary nutrients for life.
✓ Bread is a complement to every meal.
✓ Bread and water is all that is needed for life.
✓ Bread, symbol of food, is necessary for life.
✓ Wine is a symbol of fun, festivity, and merriment.
✓ Wine loosens the spirit.
✓ Too much wine can be devastating.
✓ Wine stresses the importance of celebration.
✓ Good wine enhances a meal.
Resume reading the faith statements:
► The same thing we said about bread could be said about God.
► God is the staff of life.
► God offers all the nourishment we need.
► With God, we are spiritually nourished; without God, we are spiritually starved.
► God gives us strength for living.
► God gives us all the spiritual nutrients we need to be in relationship with him.
► God is necessary for life.

Small group leader invites participants to respond to the following.
► Are there any stories in the Bible in which bread and wine play a significant role?

Small group leader creates another easel paper and places the following words at the top of the sheet: STORIES OF BREAD AND WINE IN THE BIBLE. Small group leader invites participants to list various stories in which bread and wine had a significant role, such as
✓ Passover
✓ Manna in the desert
✓ Elijah in the desert under the broom tree
✓ Jesus and the Last Supper

Small group leader poses this question to the group:
► What spiritual meaning was associated with bread and wine in the Bible?

A Story:
A man had great devotion for the Eucharist. Each day he knelt for an hour in adoration before the tabernacle. A woman observed the man and was so touched by his great sacrifice of praise that she decided to follow him, sure that she would be equally touched by the life of discipleship he must lead.

What she discovered scandalized her. A homeless person approached the man and asked for a dollar to buy a hamburger. He scowled at the homeless person, told him to get a job, and told him never to bother anyone again. He pushed in front of a line of people in order to be first in line for the bus ride home. Once home, he chastised his son for leaving his bicycle on the front lawn and for constantly being so irresponsible. He yelled at his wife for not having dinner on the table in a timely manner. He got up from the table and, without a word of thanks, plopped himself in front of the television, and asked his wife to wait on him hand and foot for the rest of the evening.

The woman was shaken by what she saw. The next day she approached the man and asked him, “What, kind sir, do you see in that gold tabernacle that you do not see in the homeless man on the street, the people waiting for the bus, your son who desperately needs your love, or your loving wife who waits on you hand and foot?”
Eucharist calls us to take Christ to the world, to extend Christ’s love—to allow others to feed off of the love we have received.

- What is the challenge of the Church’s teaching regarding the Eucharistic symbols of bread and wine?
- In what way does this teaching invite you to live more fully the paschal mystery?
- Is there an attitude or behavior in need of transformation? If so, what is it and what are you willing to do about it?
- Is there someone in your life whom you should nourish with Christ’s life but whom you choose instead to ignore or, worse, treat badly?
- In what way does this teaching concretely invite you to live the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection that is present in the celebration of the Eucharist?