

All in the family: One bread, one body

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [May 6, 2008](#) issue

On the third Sunday of Easter I was in La Jolla, California, for the baptism of a granddaughter. If there is anything better than witnessing and participating in the baptism of a grandchild, I don't know what it is.

I'm told there are never unpleasant days in this part of the world. April in Chicago testifies that T. S. Eliot was right when he called April "the cruelest month." Perhaps Eliot had watched a baseball game at Wrigley Field with the temperature at 37 degrees and a 30-knot wind blowing off the lake. There are no days like that in La Jolla.

Baptism Sunday arrived sunny, warm and clear as a bell. The sanctuary buzzed with greetings, conversations, laughter. The church followed a traditional liturgy—somewhat unusual these days in Southern California. The organist chose Sowerby for a prelude, J. S. Bach for the postlude, and Sowerby's "Behold, God Is My Salvation" as the anthem by the choir. During the prelude, the three-year-old big sister of the one to be baptized walked down the aisle to light the candles. It was a bit of a stretch, even with the long candlelighter. The young woman accompanying her resolved the matter by lifting each brass candle holder from the altar and holding it down for Fiona, who took her responsibility utterly seriously. As she accomplished her mission a broad smile appeared on her face.

This baptism was logistically complex, since both grandfathers are clergypersons. (Both grandmothers are named Sue, which made the choice of a middle name quite clear.)

The intercessory prayer was my responsibility. I asked God's nurture, grace and protection for Eliza Sue, who had suddenly ceased her mild protestations and squirming and had settled into her mother's arms. Her other grandfather assured her and the rest of us that Jesus Christ came into the world for her, lived and demonstrated God's love for her, died and rose for her. And then, breaking a rule or

at least a protocol, we each dipped a hand into the water and placed it on her head. I was reminded again that it is the church's sacrament, not the minister's. Then the presiding minister carried her up the aisle and reminded us all that Eliza was connected now not only to the faithful who were present that sunny California morning, but to the holy catholic church and the faithful of all times and places.

It was a communion Sunday, and again the connection between what we were doing in that small sanctuary and the life of the whole church of Jesus Christ was clear. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we partake of the same loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the Body of Christ," the minister said, and it surely was.

When I worry, as I often do, about the future of mainline churches, I will remember that Third Sunday of Easter and a small congregation of faithful men, women and children—and the thousands upon thousands of others like them—keeping the faith, holding on to one another, baptizing infants, being the church.