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## **General Introduction**

The sacraments celebrated in the Catholic community are a treasure of the Catholic faith. These guidelines are designed to help the parish community celebrate sacraments fully and with the proper understanding while providing guidance to those responsible for sacrament preparation.

Whenever there are children in multi-parish programs (school or religious education), the role of the home parish for the celebration of the sacraments must be respected. It is the parents' responsibility to check with their local pastor regarding their parish policies for the preparation and celebration of the sacraments.

These guidelines present the community's story and theology for each of the following sacraments: Infant Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Reconciliation. Ideas are offered for sacrament preparation and sacramental celebration. Each section contains a theological reflection, answers to frequently asked questions, and further resources.

Sacraments are described not so much as something we "receive." Rather, they are presented as a way to express God's loving and compassionate presence in the life of each person. Sacraments are "celebrated" when candidates are able to freely respond to the action of God in their lives.

In the case of infant baptism, parents, with the support of the faith community, freely choose to place their child in the loving arms of God and promise to raise their child in a manner that will support the promise made. The celebration of sacraments enables the community to be touched by God in a way that sustains and nurtures it throughout life.

## Sacrament Overview

Sacraments in the Catholic Church are ceremonies or symbolic actions through which the mysteries of God are discovered, expressed, and celebrated.

Jesus can be regarded as a sacrament because his humanity revealed the mystery of God in human form and through him God is encountered even today. Likewise, the Church has been called a sacrament because it is through the Church that God is revealed and through the Church that believers experience spiritual realities. The Church expresses the mysteries of God through its presence and action in the world, and it celebrates those mysteries in word and ritual.

The Church's liturgical sacraments are seven in number but this document will address four: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Reconciliation (Penance) for children. Like the other three sacraments of Holy Orders, Marriage, and Anointing, these sacraments are rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus—celebrating his life and continuing his ministry in the world.

Baptism celebrates each person's entry into the life of Christ as it is lived in and by the community of his disciples, the Church. Just as Jesus called people to announce the good news of God's love and do God's work in the world, Catholic Christians are called through Baptism to be disciples of the Lord, to bring good news to others, and to do God's work in the world. In Baptism, past sins are forgiven and a life of grace begins.

Confirmation celebrates the spiritual life begun in Baptism and strengthened through service. Those who are baptized as infants are confirmed when they are old enough to understand the meaning of discipleship and make a personal commitment to Christ and the Church. For those who are baptized later in life, Confirmation follows immediately after Baptism and celebrates their commitment to a life of discipleship and service.

Eucharist is the liturgical celebration of many mysteries of God, but especially the mystery of Christ's real presence in word and communion and the mystery of Christ's life as it is lived by the assembled community. Eucharist recalls Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, his redemptive sacrifice on the cross, and his glorious resurrection, as a reminder of the paschal mystery experienced as we die to ourselves and minister to the needs of others.

Reconciliation celebrates God's forgiving love at moments when reconciliation with God and others is needed. Through confessing sins, we confront our shortcomings and open ourselves to the grace of knowing that God loves us despite our sinfulness. By performing works of penance, we cooperate with the grace of conversion to become the persons we are called by God to be.

Dr. Joseph Martos

## **Today's Catholic Parents**

Today's parents juggle activities around family life, work, church, extra-curricular activities for their children, social lives, and whatever else needs to be worked into their 24-hour day. This packed lifestyle presents many challenges for sacramental preparation.

In addition, family structure is much more diverse than in the past. It is estimated that close to half of all children live in single parent families, and many other children come from blended families. Families come with many different backgrounds and faith experiences. Many children have parents of different religions. Statistics indicate that the second largest Christian denomination may be made up of non-practicing Catholics. Often inactive Catholics still desire and seek sacraments for their children. This is a tremendous opportunity for the Church to welcome these parents back to the Church as the parents participate in sacramental preparation programs for their children.

Pastoral experience reveals that parents who present their children for sacramental preparation experience faith in a variety of ways. Some are active and practicing members. Still others feel inadequate and express a desire to learn more about their faith so that they can share it with their children. Some desire to deepen or rekindle relationships with the Catholic community. Relationships are built on mutual listening and respect. Those preparing families for sacrament preparation need to consider these realities to effectively address the needs and concerns of diverse families and their children.

The catechetical consequence of such dialogue engages the parish leadership to be more creative and aware of families' needs. When a pastoral response is made on their behalf, parents become enriched and are strengthened in their own spiritual lives as they try to pass the faith to their children.

When working with parents, the attitude of the parish leadership needs to be one of welcome, concern, support, and encouragement to the parents who bring children to celebrate sacraments. Some parents have very different views than previous generations about what it means to be Catholic. Sacramental preparation is an opportune time to invite families and the parish community to grow in their understanding and experience of the sacraments.

It is important to set expectations and schedule meetings with sensitivity to the needs and circumstances of families. Creative ways to reach those parents who cannot or will not come to meetings include email, mailings, personal visits, etc. When parents are spiritually enriched, they want to share that faith with their children.

## **The Role of the Adult Faith Community**

The Bishops' plan for adult faith formation in the United States, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, calls for parishioners to join with one another in their daily concerns and walk side by side on the pathway of life. Adults listen to one another's questions, concerns, hopes, and anxieties and find meaning in their existence through the living word of God. Prayer and sacramental celebrations are opportunities to experience the presence and love of Christ. As people of faith, adults are called to be contributors to the life and work of the Church and to grow as disciples throughout life. Adults are called to build vibrant parish communities of faith and service.

Such communities only exist when adults are willing and eager to renew their commitment to continued faith formation. Supporting adult formation in no way diminishes support of other essential educational ministries. Quite the contrary, since adult faith formation renews the faith and strengthens the dynamics of the Church, it naturally strengthens all other catechetical efforts, leading to new ways of thinking and acting.

Adult faith formation lays the foundation for the role all age groups play in bringing the faith of the parish to life. Adults carry a serious responsibility to witness and share the Gospel. "*To teach as Jesus did*" means calling and equipping Christians of every age and state of life to fulfill their baptismal call to holiness in family, Church, and society and to live out their mission to evangelize and transform the world into a more caring and just society. Ongoing faith formation is essential to accomplish this mission; it does not end at Confirmation or graduation but continues until death.

The Parish is the place where children are able to gather and experience weekly worship, celebrate their most joyous occasions, and mourn their deepest losses. As children become initiated into the Church, they should be able to experience the embrace and welcome of adult members formed soundly in their faith. By the witnessing of the adult members, the children should be able to experience the life-giving power of faith. When a parish truly lives the Christian message, the children will be challenged to holiness and strengthened for self-giving love and Christian service.

The parish is called to be "a visible place of faith-witness" and the living and permanent environment for growth in the faith." In attempting to achieve this, catechesis should be seen as an apprenticeship that lasts a lifetime with the primary catechists being the adult faith community of the parish. (Adapted from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.)

## Persons with Disabilities

“Catholics with disabilities have the right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community. All forms of the liturgy should be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together...The Church must recognize and appreciate the contributions that persons with disabilities can make to the Church’s spiritual life and encourage them to do the Lord’s work in the world according to their God-given talents and capacity” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 130-131).

## Challenges in the Ministry of Catechesis

The cultural context in today’s American church has many dimensions. The *National Directory for Catechesis* identifies cultural challenges in the ministry of catechesis:

- For many Catholics, there is a gap between their faith and their everyday life and an inadequate connection between their religious beliefs and their moral choices.... Catechesis needs to present the Christian life as a response to Christ’s invitation to follow him – personally, in the family, in the parish, and in the wider human community.
- The widening gap between the rich and the poor presents a difficult problem for catechesis....Both the disadvantaged and the affluent must come to know through catechesis that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is communion with God, not power, riches, and influence.
- The frantic pace of life caused by economic and social expectations leads to serious time constraints for participation in catechetical programs and in the life of the Church. The way many Catholics choose to live their lives today simply does not allow them the same free time that they once had. Family and other social commitments are often arranged so that attendance at Mass or participation in catechetical programs becomes very difficult.
- Children are currently raised to be independent thinkers, are more critically minded than generations in the past, and reject some of what they learn. Therefore, they must be taught in ways that make sense to them emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually.
- Young people are voracious consumers in a popular culture that emphasizes materialism and permissiveness. Catechesis must make it clear that the person of Jesus Christ offers a realistic alternative to immediate gratification and the satisfaction of personal needs.
- The information revolution, including the Internet, presents major challenges for catechesis. Catechesis must investigate new possibilities and imagine new models and systems so that the Gospel message penetrates the culture and makes sense to the next generation (15-16).

## **Principles of Catechesis for Sacrament Preparation**

Some fundamental principles apply to catechesis for the sacraments of initiation and Reconciliation. Dioceses and parishes should present sacramental catechesis that:

- (1) Is a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith; one that integrates knowledge of the faith with living the faith.
- (2) Is fundamentally Trinitarian and centers on initiation into the life of the Triune God.
- (3) Presents Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit.
- (4) Is appropriate to the age level, maturity, and circumstances of those being catechized.
- (5) Is intended for all members of the Christian community, takes place within the community, and involves the whole community of faith.
- (6) Involves parents in the preparation of their children for the sacraments.
- (7) Is integrated into a comprehensive catechetical program.
- (8) Focuses primarily on the symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each sacrament.
- (9) Enables the believer to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament received by implementing a thorough experience of *mystagogia* following the celebration (*National Directory for Catechesis* 114).

There are many resources to select from when planning for sacramental preparation. Programs will look different from parish to parish depending on the needs of the people in a particular parish. The catechumenal model is the basis to be used when designing any program.

## The Catechumenal Model

The catechumenal model provides an excellent model for catechesis. Rites, symbols, and biblical and liturgical signs are incorporated into the catechesis, which deepen the community's formation of faith. These are the principles of a model for catechesis inspired by the catechumenate:

- (1) Catechesis respects and supports an individual's faith journey, incorporates the principles appropriate for each level, and welcomes the individual.  
(General Directory for Catechesis-*GDC* #89-90)
- (2) Catechesis focuses on conversion as a lifelong process.  
(*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults-RCIA, Study Edition* #1 and #4) (*GDC* #89-90)
- (3) Catechesis is grounded in the Word of God, presents an appreciation of the mysteries of faith and an acquaintance with the dogmas of faith.  
(*RCIA Study Edition* #75) (*GDC* #90)
- (4) Catechesis involves and is nurtured within and by the community of faith.  
(*RCIA Study Edition* #9 and #75) (*GDC* #90)
- (5) Catechesis leads to liturgical and sacramental life and is supported by prayer and appropriate liturgical celebrations.  
(*RCIA Study Edition* #6 and #75) (*GDC* #88 and #90)
- (6) Catechesis is directed toward personal apostolic witness and an active appreciation of and commitment to the mission of the Church in the world.  
(*RCIA Study Edition* #7 and #375) (*GDC* #88 and #90)

(Adapted from Diana Raiche, "Focus on Children," in *The Baptismal Catechumenate: An Inspiration for All Catechesis*.)

## Whole Community Catechesis

Whole community catechesis, as the term implies, involves every Christian of every age in the parish. The Sunday liturgy is the source from which all living faith flows back to the Christian home and out to the wider community.

Christian households of faith are those that exemplify lived faith. Sacraments begin in the home. Eucharist is manifested in the home, reconciliation is practiced at home, and even initiation becomes part of home life. Marriage is lived out there and prayer and healing become increasingly more home-based. Households of all sorts, made up of grandparents, parents, children, youth, and single adults, provide the home where faith is lived and shared.



Whole community catechesis provides a method in which faith sharing, parish retreats, conversion to Christ, a connection to the Sunday assembly, and gatherings are used to welcome, comfort, and educate the whole parish (*A Pastor's Guide to Whole Community Catechesis* 7). In his book, *Handbook For Success*, Bill Huebsch describes the following seven principles that help parishes move from what is often called the schoolhouse model to whole community catechesis.

“Principle # 1: Catechesis has several tasks. In articles 85 & 86, the *General Directory for Catechesis* tells us that the fundamental tasks of catechesis include:

- (1) Promoting the knowledge of faith,  
which is what we call religious instruction.
- (2) Liturgical education,  
leading to a true liturgical life.
- (3) Moral formation, i.e.  
learning to follow the Way  
based on conversion to Jesus Christ.
- (4) Teaching to pray,  
which requires apprenticeship.
- (5) Education for community life,  
including the ecumenical dimension.
- (6) Development of households of faith.
- (7) Preparation to work in the vineyard  
as an active minister in an interfaith setting.
- (8) Over and above all this, according to the GDC,  
Catechesis also must be grounded first in  
conversion to Jesus Christ and his Way, and  
it must be something we live within our household, in everyday life!

Principle #2: Catechesis is constitutive of the Christian life.

Principle #3: Conversion precedes catechesis.

Principle #4: All catechesis is tightly connected to the Sunday assembly.

Principle #5: The goal of all catechesis is to develop households of faith.

Principle #6: Catechesis must look and feel more like Church and less like school.

Principle #7: All catechesis builds on grace, which is offered to everyone” (10-31).

## **The Sacrament of Baptism**

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door, which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism, candidates are freed from sin and reborn as children of God, become members of Christ, and are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1213).

“Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God’s people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children, a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God” (*Rite of Christian Initiation: General Introduction* # 2).

“The Christian faithful are those who, in as much as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one” (*Code of Canon Law* c. 204.1).

## **Community’s Story**

The early disciples continued trying to help new Christians experience the love of Jesus they had through being in his presence. The memories of his presence and his words faded as the second and third generations of Christians entered the community. The bits of history gleaned from the first and second centuries indicate that a form of Christian initiation emerged that primarily focused on adults. Since community witness was the main avenue for spreading the Gospel, candidates were brought to the community teacher for approval. Sponsors would then testify on behalf of the candidate. Once they were accepted, they entered the catechumenate. They would leave the Eucharistic celebration before the prayers of the faithful. On Holy Saturday night, they would be baptized, confirmed, and share Eucharist in one welcoming event.

For 40 days before Easter, candidates would be asked to fast and pray. The community would join them—this process formed the origins of Lent. Baptism would then be celebrated by immersion or the pouring of water after the three-fold profession of faith in

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It wasn't until the eighth century that today's formula was used... "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

It was during the fourth century that the newly baptized received the white garment and a lighted candle. Following the baptismal ceremony, the newly baptized were anointed with oil on the five senses by the bishop. This anointing by the bishop gradually developed into the sacrament of Confirmation.

Early Christian history indicates that some children were baptized and by the fourth century, infant baptism became the norm. Christianity was no longer outlawed by the Romans but became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This dramatic change in the legal standing of Christianity caused a dramatic increase in converts and greatly expanded the need for baptisms to be held on many days of the year and in various places. Because the bishop could not be present at all of these ceremonies, the anointing and laying of hands began to be conducted at a later time in a separate ceremony. By the ninth century other prayers and rituals were added, and the rite became known as Confirmation. Baptism and Confirmation became separated and over time persons began receiving the sacrament of Confirmation at an older age.

St. Augustine taught that every child was born in sin. In order to be saved from the effects of original sin, Augustine taught that every child had to be baptized immediately after birth lest they die and go to hell. Parents became concerned about what would happen if their baby died before it was baptized? The Church taught that unbaptized babies went to a place of "purely natural happiness" which came to be called Limbo. The Second Vatican Council dispelled this inadequate teaching and returned to the original understanding that unbaptized infants are safe in God's eternal presence.

Vatican II has given new meaning to actions of the early church initiation rites, such as the period of instruction, the sponsor's role, and the community prayers and support. "The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults," recently reinstated, is patterned almost exclusively on the early church's form of baptism-confirmation. Both of these rites, which are celebrated with youths and adults, challenge people to make a personal commitment to the Lord and allow them to experience the power of God's Spirit flowing from the commitment" (Feider 22-29).

## **Theology**

Baptism is the Church's way of celebrating the embrace of God who loves all persons from the beginning of time. It marks the beginning of a life commitment to the Christian way of life and to a community that strives for the same ideals of discipleship. Baptism is a sacrament that is future-oriented; it is merely the beginning of living out the meaning that was celebrated in the rite. In the case of Infant Baptism, it is the parents or guardians who request Baptism for the child and assume the responsibility, along with the parish, to develop and nurture the faith development of the child.

The willingness to assume responsibility for Christian parenting is given a stronger focus today than the past emphasis on simply pouring of water to wash away original sin. “You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith” (*The Rites: Rite of Baptism for Several Children #39*). *Practice* is the key word because it calls the parents to model the Christian way of life.

In regards to original sin, theologians today tend to de-emphasize the notion of personal sin in infants. In its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (#16), Vatican II affirmed that God loves every single person prior to baptism. Perhaps William Bausch sums it up best when he says:

*“The doctrine of original sin as we have inherited it developed only gradually. No one will deny the truth about the reality of evil that it affirms. We are certainly born into an ambiguous world where the force of sin impinges on us as quickly as the force of love. And we are certainly born with inner tendencies which, once they become conscious, show a propensity for selfishness as much as for self-giving. But in addition to this dimension of life, which the doctrine of original sin has rightly recognized, we also need to be attentive to what it has left unsaid. God loves us from the first moment of our conception”*(71).

“As Vatican II expresses it: Baptism itself is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus oriented toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself wills it to be, and finally toward a complete participation in Eucharistic communion” (Bausch 72).

Whether Baptism occurs in infancy or later, Catholic Christians believe that everything is charged with God’s presence. The world offers more than the secular world recognizes. God’s presence is the heart of faith, just as it was in the teachings of Christ. Baptism takes away original sin and offers the entrance point into the church. But first and foremost, in Baptism believers make a public commitment to live in God’s love. Through Baptism, the community of believers witnesses the promise to allow the Spirit that moved in the life of Jesus to move in the lives of those being baptized. Baptism calls us to live the sacrament of Baptism and all sacraments in an abiding, consistent, and sustaining relationship with God. Through example, believers challenge one another to live the baptismal commitment throughout their lives.

# Preparation for Baptism

## Catechesis for Baptism

All those preparing for Baptism, including parents and godparents, need the prayerful support and apostolic witness of the people of the local community of faith – the parish. This preparation is an especially important opportunity for the Church to encourage the parents and godparents of infants to reexamine the meaning of the Christian message in their own lives.... For pastoral reasons, Baptism may be deferred if there is no assurance that the child’s faith will be nurtured. The parish should give attention to the families of these children through pastoral outreach and evangelization.

Dioceses and parishes should present baptismal catechesis that teaches that Baptism:

1. Is the foundation of the Christian life because it is the journey into Christ’s death and resurrection, which is the foundation of our hope.
2. Gives sanctifying grace, that is, God’s life.
3. Gives them a new birth in which they become children of God, members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit.
4. Cleanses people from original sin and from all personal sins.
5. Incorporates them into the life, practices, and mission of the Church.
6. Imprints on their souls an indelible character that consecrates them for Christian worship and is necessary for salvation in the case of all those who have heard the Gospel and have been able to ask for this sacrament” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 120-121).

“Before the celebration of the sacrament, it is of great importance that parents, moved by their own faith or with the help of friends or other members of the community, should prepare to take part in the rite with understanding” (*The Rites: Rite of Baptism*, #5-1).

Catechesis should include an explanation of the elements and symbols of the rite, such as

- Reception of the children.
- Celebration of the sacrament:
  - Blessing and invocation of God over baptismal water.*
  - Renunciation of sin and Profession of Faith.*
  - Baptism – “Baptism is conferred either by immersion or by pouring” (Code of Canon Law c. 854). Trinitarian formula.*
- Anointing with chrism.
- Clothing with the white garment.
- Lighted candle.

## **Family Preparation/Involvement**

Parent(s) have a right to look to parish leadership for support in sacramental preparation and celebration. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 843.) In infant Baptism preparation, parents need the opportunity to deepen their understanding and experience of their child's baptism. The following factors of a preparation program are important in helping parents see and exercise their role.

**Parish Contact** - Parents(s) are to be encouraged to contact the parish, preferably during early pregnancy, to request the sacrament of Baptism for their child. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 867.)

**Interview** - A private interview with all parents is suggested.

**Group Sessions** - Parents are to participate in group sessions. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 851.) It is recommended that there be two to four of such sessions, with the possibility of one being held after the celebration. This meeting could serve as a bridge for many parents into active participation within the community.

In small parishes if only one child is being baptized or in cases of extreme pastoral concern, an individual parent preparation program with more experienced parents could be designed and presented in collaboration with the parish staff.

**Attendance Requirements** – Parents are to participate in all group sessions when it is their first child that is being baptized or if they have not been through a full preparation program. All parents, even if they have attended previous preparation programs, are expected to attend the final session before the celebration, which includes the rehearsal.

**Godparent Selection** - Godparents are to be supportive faith models who will cooperate with the parents in nurturing the child's faith. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 774.) Godparents are invited to the sessions and are encouraged to attend the final preparation session before the celebration, which includes the rehearsal.

**Follow-up** - A form of follow-up is to be provided. Parents are to have ongoing opportunities for community help and support.

## **Pastoral Considerations**

Catechesis should enable faith to “become living, explicit, and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living” (*Code of Canon Law* c. 773). Effective Infant Baptism catechesis needs to incorporate the life situation and concerns of parents.

**Outreach to Parents** - Pastoral staffs have a responsibility to provide outreach to young parents – inviting them to enter the preparation program and to begin or deepen actual participation in the life of the parish.

**Place of Baptism** – As a rule adults are to be baptized in their own parish church and infants in the parish church proper to their parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 857.)

**Content for Pastoral Interview** - During the private interview, the pastoral staff member would discuss with the parents:

- Their understanding of baptism and why they are bringing their child to baptism.
- Their questions regarding the need for preparation.
- Their expectations for ongoing religious formation for their children.
- Their own level of commitment to and participation in the community faith life (i.e. active participation in Eucharist and other sacraments, regular prayer life, etc.)

**Rationale for Delay of Baptism** - In discussion with parents it may become apparent that there is no founded hope of Christian formation for the child or little or no knowledge or practice of the Catholic faith by the parents and a refusal by them of any formation or catechesis. In such cases, at the discretion of the pastor (*Code of Canon Law* c. 868) and in consultation with the staff, Baptism is to be delayed. However, if a grandparent or someone else from the family unit is willing to support the child as catholic, Baptism may be considered.

**Rationale for a Parent-To-Parent Program** - The U.S. Bishops have recognized and encouraged the peer ministry of parent-to-parent, particularly in regard to new parents. Experienced parents will exercise their rightful ministry to the new parent through their involvement in planning and presenting parish group sessions. They can discuss, pray, and grow together with other parents.

**Special Considerations** - There is to be sensitivity to the unique needs and situations of each family. Recognition and support is to be given within the program to parents who are not Catholic. Their faith life needs to be incorporated into early sessions. Concern and support needs to be given to single parents, parents of handicapped or sick children, divorced parents, or others with special situations.

**Follow-up** - It is essential that the parish staff provides help in Christian parenting and faith formation to young parents and fosters parents' involvement in the parish.

**Materials** – Copies of Baptism preparation materials from main line publishers are available from the consultant for sacrament preparation from the Office of Lifelong Formation and Education, OFLE.

Also available is a copy of the “Dining Out” Series. This is a baptismal preparation program that was drawn-up by consultants in the OLFE office.

## **Celebration of Baptism**

### **1) When to Celebrate Baptism**

Baptism should be celebrated when the physical health of the child and mother permit and the parents have completed a preparation program. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 867.)

“To bring out the paschal character of baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, when the Church commemorates the Lord’s resurrection” (*The Rites: Rite of Baptism* # 9).

“It is recommended that Baptism be celebrated at Sunday Eucharist with sensitivity to community needs and ecumenical considerations. (See *Code of Canon Law* c. 856.) The people of God, that is the Church, made present in the local community, has an important part to play in the baptism of both children and adults. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community. During the rite, in addition to the ways of congregational participation, the community exercises its duty when it expresses its assent together with the celebrant after the profession of faith by the parents and godparents. In this way it is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but is the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ” (*The Rites: Rite of Baptism* #4).

### **2) Readings**

When Baptism is celebrated during Sunday Mass, the readings and prayers are taken from the Mass of the Sunday.

### **3) Creed**

The Creed is omitted since the profession of faith is included in the Rite of Baptism. (See *The Rites: Rite of Baptism* # 29.)

### **4) Liturgical Music**

The music during the Rite of Baptism is selected by the parish music minister and/or pastor respecting the liturgical season and the specific acclamations within the sacrament of Baptism.



## **5) Processions**

When Baptism is celebrated within the Sunday liturgy, candidates, their parents, and godparents may be included in the entrance procession.

## **6) Prayer of the Faithful**

The general intercessions are taken from the Rite of Baptism. Before the brief litany of saints, petitions are added to the intercessions for the universal Church and the needs of the world. (See *The Rites: Rite of Baptism* #29.) Within the litany of saints, the names of other saints may be added, especially patrons of the children to be baptized and of the local church.

## **7) Photography**

Care should be taken so that photography does not distract from the sacredness of the sacramental celebration.

Designated photographers or videographers may be given a specific location where the liturgy may be recorded and pictures may be taken that prevents distractions during the liturgy.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What are the qualifications for a baptismal sponsor?**

To be admitted to the role of sponsor, persons must:

- Have completed their sixteenth year unless the pastor makes an exception for a just cause.
- Be fully initiated Catholics who lead lives in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.
- Not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
- Not be the father or mother of the child being baptized.

(Adapted from *Code of Canon Law* c. 874.)

### **May a non-Catholic serve as sponsor for Baptism?**

A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only as a witness to baptism and together with a Catholic sponsor.

(Adapted from *Code of Canon Law* c. 874.)

### **Is it necessary to use a saint's name for Baptism?**

The only regulation concerning a name at Baptism is that it not be foreign to a Christian mentality.

### **What kind of preparation is expected for the parents and godparents of an infant presented for baptism?**

The parents and sponsors of an infant who is to be baptized are to be properly instructed in the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. Personally or through others, the pastor must ensure that the parents are properly formed by pastoral directions and by common prayer, gathering several families together and where possible visiting them (*Code of Canon Law* c. 851.2).

### **What preparation is necessary for children of catechetical age (generally age 7) who have never been baptized?**

Unbaptized children of catechetical age should participate in a suitably adapted form of the catechumenate. After the necessary period of formation, the child should celebrate the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

## **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

“When the day of Pentecost came it found them gathered in one place. Suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong, driving wind which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4).

“Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ Jesus our Lord” (*The Rites of the Catholic Church* #25).

“By Confirmation, Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off the ‘the aroma of Christ’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1294).

## **Community’s Story**

In the Old Testament the spirit of God descended upon certain people destined for a special mission. John the Baptist announced the Messiah’s coming as one who would baptize with “the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). At his baptism in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and at the conclusion of his life, Jesus promised to send his Spirit to his disciples to comfort and guide them (John 14:16). At Pentecost, the birth of the Church, the first disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out and preach the Good News (Acts 2:1-13). The first Christians understood that receiving the Holy Spirit was a necessary part of being a follower of Jesus, and the gift of the Spirit was closely associated with the new birth of Baptism.

In the first centuries of the Church, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were linked together in one sacramental ritual of initiation. The three became separated when it was no longer possible for the bishop to perform all the baptisms. Priests then became the ordinary ministers for Baptism. The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches handled this in different ways. In the Roman Rite the baptism of a child includes anointing with the sacred chrism (oil). Later as the child grows older the Bishop confers the sacrament of Confirmation. In the Eastern Rites the three have remained unified. The priest who performs baptism also confirms the child and administers Holy Communion in the same ritual. These different practices emphasize different aspects of the Confirmation ritual. The Roman Rite clearly expresses the communion of fully initiated Christians through the bishop with the whole universal Church. In the East the emphasis is placed upon the traditional unity between Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, emphasizing that the Holy Spirit is given in all three sacramental moments.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) bishops called for a reform of the sacraments of initiation and requested that the links between Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist be strengthened. A unified process was developed for receiving adults into the Catholic Church that came to be called “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” (RCIA). The common practice in Catholic churches in the West is to baptize infants and confirm later in life, usually during adolescence. In this way Confirmation strengthens the candidates’ bonds with the Church and enriches their lives with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, completing the initiation process begun at Baptism. Confirmation provides adolescents with a boost for their spiritual lives offering the gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgement, courage, knowledge, reverence, and wonder and awe.

## **Theology**

Confirmation is about becoming a fully initiated Catholic, empowered to live a holy life, in the service of the Gospel and God’s people. For persons on the journey of faith Confirmation is not the end of Christian formation, but rather the beginning of living the Christian life fully. Confirmation candidates, therefore, are expected to enter a formal process of catechesis in which they identify and renew the faith they hold and believe. In addition to formal catechesis, candidates also are expected to be fully involved in the life and worship of a parish faith community where they are welcomed, encouraged, and challenged to deepen their commitment to Christ and Gospel living. As a public recognition of Christ’s command to care for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40), candidates are expected to engage in the parish’s outreach ministries of service and care for the poor.

“All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
By water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin  
and gave them new life.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide” (*The Rites of the Catholic Church* #25).

## **Preparation for Confirmation**

The Confirmation process completes the entry into a lifelong journey of discipleship. It represents a defining spiritual moment in the lives of young people, their families, and the faith community. This spiritual process of initiation can take a variety of shapes and forms that expresses the diverse needs and context of each community. Since this is primarily a spiritual process, it is vital that candidates’ families and the parish community are prayerfully connected throughout the time of preparation.

The themes that are woven into Confirmation preparation should recognize the developmental stages of the young people involved and focus on:

- Spiritual living.
- Initiation into discipleship.
- Serving God by caring for God’s people, especially the most vulnerable.

## **Catechesis for Confirmation/Chrismation**

“The revised *Rite of Confirmation* indicates that episcopal conferences may designate the appropriate age for Confirmation. In the United States the age of Confirmation in the Latin Church for children and young people varies widely from diocese to diocese; it can be designated between the age of discretion (the age of seven) through around sixteen years. Since the sacramental practice for Confirmation in the United States is so diverse, a single catechesis cannot be prescribed for Confirmation. However, some general guidelines can be articulated.

Confirmation for adults preparing for Confirmation follows the pattern recommended in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation that:

- Teaches that Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character on the soul.
- Teaches that Confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ, strengthen their bond with the Church, associate them more closely with the Church’s mission, increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds.
- Teaches about the role of the Holy Spirit, his gifts and his fruits.
- Is developmentally appropriate and includes retreat experiences.
- Includes instruction on the Rite of Confirmation and its basic symbols: the imposition of hands, the anointing with Sacred Chrism, and the words of the sacramental formula.
- Ensures that parents and sponsors are involved in the catechetical preparation of the children for Confirmation.
- Teaches that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation” (*National Directory for Catechesis* 122-123).

## **Shared Responsibilities and Resources**

### **Responsibilities**

The Confirmation process is a journey that the whole community embarks upon. The entire parish shares in the responsibility of welcoming, affirming, and preparing young people for Confirmation. The key leaders in this ministry are the pastor, the parish staff and catechists, the parents, sponsors and family members of the confirmands, and of course the young people themselves. Throughout the process pastoral leaders, catechists, and teachers should find creative opportunities to invite the entire parish into the Confirmation journey.

### **Resources**

The first and most important resource in the ministry of Confirmation preparation is to be found in the faith-life, gifts, and experience of those catechists, teachers, parents, and sponsors who will walk the journey with the Confirmands. The Office of Lifelong Formation and Education (OLFE) offers support services, training and guidance for Confirmation catechists, parents, and sponsors.

There are many diverse resources (publications, program materials, and audio visual aids) to assist with planning. Those responsible for planning the preparation and celebration of Confirmation are encouraged to seek guidance from the staff at OLFE. They can help discern how to select and implement Confirmation resources and generate a process that is appropriate to the needs of the Confirmands and the specific character of the local parish.

## **Key Steps on the Confirmation Journey**

### **Invitation**

The Confirmation process begins when candidates are invited to participate in a formal ritual enrollment, ideally during a Sunday Eucharist. On this occasion candidates are invited to step forward and, in a prayerful way, make public their commitment to the Confirmation journey before the parish assembly. Creativity and prayerfulness are encouraged when formulating the enrollment ceremony. This is an opportunity to affirm the young candidates and their families and to invite the whole parish to prayerfully support and enter into the process.

### **Investigation**

The next phase is a period of intensive catechesis, study, and investigation of the faith. Confirmands explore the life and message of Jesus, the teachings and the story of the Catholic Church, and what it means for them to live as young disciples of Jesus. This

formal period of catechesis can take place in a variety of settings: at home with parents and sponsors, during catechetical sessions at church, and as part of the religious education curriculum at a Catholic grade school or high school.

Confirmation offers the entire parish community the opportunity to reflect upon and recommit to a life of discipleship. This takes place in a variety of ways:

- The young candidates are remembered in prayer at Sunday Eucharist.
- Parishioners make prayerful connections with individual Confirmands.
- Parents and sponsors gather to pray, discuss, and learn about the demands of faithful living.

Other opportunities to enhance the spiritual preparation of Confirmation include retreats pilgrimages, and prayer services. OLFE staff members can provide assistance to catechists and parents seeking creative ways to deepen their spirituality as they journey with Confirmation candidates.

## **Interviews**

Interviews shall include:

1. Personal contact and rapport with the candidate. It is an opportunity to show care and concern for the young person .
2. The opportunity to help the young person discern readiness for the sacrament. The interview will be conducted during the preparation process. The entire parish staff may be responsible for conducting these interviews.

**Suggestion:** Consideration can be given to having youth schedule their own interviews with a staff member of their choice. This approach allows candidates some flexibility and some ownership of the interview process. Candidates can be offered the option of scheduling an interview at their convenience and over a certain time period (i.e., two weeks).

## **Catechetical Sessions**

Catechetical sessions should give the candidates an opportunity to explore and understand the basic themes of Confirmation and how those themes relate to their faith and life experiences.

## **Service**

Young people should be exposed to the concept of stewardship and its relationship to discipleship. A specific number of hours or projects for candidates to complete can give a false impression of having accomplished service. However, there is an expectation that some form of service is a part of the preparation process. Each parish should determine realistic service experiences that are to be completed.

## **Letters to the Archbishop**

Confirmands are strongly encouraged to write letters to the Archbishop sharing their thoughts on their preparation, how they have engaged in their preparation, especially their service outreach and in what ways they will stay involved in their parish. These letters should be mailed as a group at least two weeks before the reception of the sacrament.

## **Celebration of Confirmation**

### **1) Liturgical Celebration**

“Ordinarily confirmation takes place within Mass in order to express more clearly the fundamental connection of this sacrament with the entirety of Christian initiation. The latter reaches its culmination in the communion of the body and blood of Christ. The newly confirmation should therefore participate in the Eucharist, which completes their Christian initiation” (*The Rites: Rite of Confirmation* #13).

Catechesis for the Rite of Confirmation should include an explanation of symbols and some elements of the rite, such as:

- Presentation of the candidates.
- Renewal of baptismal promises.
- Imposition of hands.
- Anointing with chrism.
- Candidate’s response during the ritual.

### **2) Planning Sheet**

The Office of the Archbishop provides a “Confirmation Liturgy Planning Sheet” that assists in the preparation process. The completed form should be returned to the Archbishop’s office at least ten days before the celebration.

### **3) Prayer texts**

Ordinarily the prayer texts are taken from the Ritual Mass for Confirmation. This is found in the *Roman Missal*, Ritual Masses: Christian Initiation, No. 4 – Confirmation. Several optional texts are given. Ordinarily the Preface on pages 54 or 55 is used. However, on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Ash Wednesday, and the weekdays of Holy Week, the Mass of the day takes precedence.

The Scripture readings are taken from the Mass of the day or from the selections for Confirmation in the *Lectionary for Mass*, Volume IV (Nos. 764-768). If Confirmation is celebrated on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Ash



Wednesday, and the weekdays of Holy Week, the scripture readings from these days are used.

The Creed is omitted since the profession of faith is included in the Rite of Confirmation.

#### **4) Music**

The music chosen should respect the liturgical season and the selections recommended in the rite for the celebration of Confirmation. Selecting music for the celebration of the Rite of Confirmation is the responsibility of the parish music minister and/or pastor. Involvement of the candidates in the selection process can enhance their participation in the rites. It is important to keep in mind the participation of the entire assembly when making these selections.

#### **5) Processions**

Candidates may be part of the entrance procession and may assist in bringing the gifts to the altar (*The Rites: Rite of Confirmation #31-b*).

#### **6) Liturgy of the Word**

Lectors are chosen on the basis of their ability to proclaim the word. A parish cantor leads the dialogical prayer of the responsorial psalm. A deacon, the pastor, or another priest reads the Gospel.

#### **7) Prayer of the Faithful**

The Prayer of the Faithful may be taken from the Rite of Confirmation or may be composed by parish ministers (*The Rites: Rite of Confirmation #30*). It is desirable that the intentions be announced or sung by the deacon, cantor, or other minister.

#### **8) Environment for Worship**

The liturgical space reflects the festive nature of the celebration with respect to the liturgical season. The art and environment committee in the parish has the responsibility for the preparation of the worship space.

#### **9) Photography**

Care should be taken so that photography does not distract from the sacredness of the sacramental celebration.

Designated photographers or videographers may be given a specific location where the liturgy may be recorded and pictures may be taken that prevents distractions during the liturgy.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **At what age should children already baptized be confirmed?**

In 2001, the U.S. Catholic Bishops reaffirmed canon 891 of the *Code of Canon Law* stating that the sacrament of Confirmation is normally conferred on young people between the ages of seven and about sixteen years. In the Archdiocese of Louisville, the normative practice is that Confirmation is conferred from middle school age to senior high.

### **Why are those preparing for Confirmation expected to do service?**

Through Baptism, Catholic Christians are called to serve and bring about the Kingdom of God to create a world that is just, peace-filled, and unified. This was Jesus' mission. In becoming full members of the Catholic Christian church, candidates must be encouraged to take responsibility for serving others. It is recommended that leadership not set a specific number of hours or projects for candidates to complete. Such a practice can give a false impression of having accomplished service. A young person might be asked to keep a log of service activities for later reflection and discussion.

### **What are the qualifications for a Confirmation Sponsor?**

Qualifications are the same as those for a sponsor of Baptism. According to Canon 874, parents cannot be Confirmation sponsors for their child.

Since it would clearly show the connection between Baptism and Confirmation, and strengthens an already existing relationship, it is desirable that the Baptism sponsor be the sponsor for confirmation (*Code of Canon Law* c. 893).

### **Is it necessary to take a new name for confirmation?**

In order to express the intimate relationship of Confirmation to Baptism, it is encouraged that candidates keep their baptismal name. If a new name is taken:

- The confirmand can name a holy person/saint whom they admire and see as a role model that carried or carries that name.
- They must have a significant reason for choosing a name.
- They should research a saint with the same name as they have chosen and determine a virtue or quality of that person's life that can be incorporated into the confirmand's life.

## **How is readiness determined for Confirmation?**

Readiness for Confirmation is determined by:

- Understanding of initiation with implications for truly being a part of the community and being accepted by the community.
- Understanding of Spirit with implications of God's power, strength, and life being with them always and calling them to live and relate to people in a certain way.
- Ability to define what it means to be an active or practicing Catholic.
- Desire and willingness to participate in Eucharist.
- Willingness to pray, serve, and be a part of the community.

## **The Sacrament of Eucharist**

“Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, ‘Take this and divide it among - yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:17-20).

The Eucharist is “the source and summit of Christian life.” “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1324).

“...For the Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself. He is our Passover and living bread; through his flesh made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he is bringing life to people and in this way inviting and leading them to offer themselves together with him, as well as their labors and all created things” (*The Rites. “Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass”* #1).

## **Community’s Story**

Shades of the very early roots of Eucharist can be seen in the story of the Passover in the book of Exodus. Each household selected a year-old male lamb and when it was slaughtered, some blood was placed on the doorposts. The blood was a sign as to where they lived and with this sign, they were promised that the Lord would pass over their homes, and they would not be destroyed. This was a day of remembrance and they celebrated it as a festival to the Lord.

In the New Testament Luke, along with the other Gospel writers, gave the account of the Last Supper and how the early Christians came to understand the Eucharist. The meal that the Jewish people celebrated on the feast of the Passover became the meal whereby Jesus offered his body and blood as the blood of the covenant, which was offered for the forgiveness of sin.

The early church’s experience of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus helped them to connect the sacrifice of the paschal lamb in the Old Testament with the words and actions of Jesus in the New Testament. In doing so, they envisioned Jesus as the new paschal lamb who was able to overcome sin and restore our relationship with God. Members of the early Church continued to break bread and to praise God at home. In repeating the ritual of the Last Supper, they came to recognize the presence of God in this spiritual and physical reality.

“Our celebration of the Eucharist is more than a remembrance; it is a memorial of Christ, of his life, death and his resurrection. With each Eucharistic liturgy, we proclaim the Paschal mystery “until he comes.” We celebrate as the pilgrim people of God on our way to the table of the kingdom (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1341 and #1344).

The Christian assembly is strengthened when it acknowledges itself as a community, when people freely enter into the singing, prayers, responses, when they use silence to recognize their needs as well as those of others, and when members of the community really understand gestures used and enter into the rites in a meaningful participative manner. When the community comes to really believe Matthew 18-20, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” then Christ will become a real presence in the gathered assembly. It is then that the Christian assembly recognizes the need and begins taking that presence of Jesus out to love and serve the world.

At the liturgy today, Christ is present to us in the following ways:

**Assembly:** The community comes together to give praise and thanks to the Living God. As a community gathered in prayer, members recognize not only the need for God in their lives, but also the need they have for one another. Christ is intimately present with the community as members of the Body of Christ. The Word is shared with in the community as members proclaim “Jesus is God.”

**Word:** Christ speaks to the assembly through Scripture. Christ’s love from the beginning of time is revealed, and Christ continues to teach his people.

**Presider:** Christ speaks through the presider as he leads prayer and united all prayers as one. Members of the assembly respond to the invitation to pray with the presider and recognize that through the priest Christ is giving verbal expression to the needs and concerns of the community and giving voice to the community’s praise at this moment.

**Sacrament:** The reality of God’s unconditional love is offered in the Eucharist. Christ’s body and blood nourishes members of the assembly through the form of bread and wine but what really “happens in the Eucharist can be known properly only by the ‘uncreated mind of God’ and by us only through faith (Mitchell 96).

## Theology

The Eucharist is the central act of worship in the Catholic Church. Theologically it has been interpreted as a meal and as a sacrifice, and both of these understandings are important.

The Eucharistic liturgy is historically rooted in the Last Supper, Jesus’ departing meal with his closest friends, shortly before he was arrested. It was at this meal that Jesus blessed bread and wine and gave it to those at table with him, indicating that this food

was his body and blood. After Jesus' resurrection, his disciples met regularly to share a special meal in which they remembered Jesus' life and death given for them and in which they experienced his risen presence.

Meals are richly symbolic rituals. In Old Testament times Jews had special religious meals in which they felt God's presence among them. The Passover supper was one such meal. Temple sacrifices also were meals in which part of the food was offered to God, symbolizing the people's desire to please God and do God's will. Because the early Christian Eucharist recalled Jesus' self-giving in obedience to the Father's will, and because in this meal Christians united themselves with their risen Lord in offering themselves to God, the Eucharistic liturgy came to be understood as a sacrificial meal.

The Eucharist is a ritual meal in which Christians recall the sacrifice of Jesus and enter into it for the salvation of the world. Eucharist means "thanksgiving," and so Christians give thanks for the life-giving death and resurrection of Jesus. They also thank God for revealing through Jesus that the way to new life is often through dying to self and giving to others.

The Lord calls all persons, regardless of race, gender, age, or social status, to come together at the Eucharistic table. The Eucharist is therefore both a sign and a cause of unity among God's people. It calls us to greater love for one another and the Lord, it calls us to reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, and it calls us to participate in the redemptive work of Christ in the world.

### **Preparation for Eucharist**

The most important aspect of the parish's annual First Communion Celebration is the parish acceptance and welcoming of its young children to the table of the Lord. The whole community celebrates the children's continued participation in the Church's sacramental life. Practices that segregate the children or make them wholly distinct from the rest of the worshipping community takes away from the unitive nature of the celebration.

In the "Rite of Christian Initiation," the term "candidate" is used to refer to those coming into the Church through the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Since Eucharist is a step in the initiation process, referring to the children as candidates will help to reinforce the understanding of Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation.

### **Catechesis for Children's First Reception of the Eucharist**

Preparation for first reception of the Eucharist begins in the home. The family has the most important role in communicating the Christian and human values that form the foundation for a child's understanding of the Eucharist. Children who participate with

their family in the Mass experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer.

Parents have the right and the duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion. The catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.

Catechesis on the Mass provided in systematic parish catechetical programs is an indispensable part of the preparation of children for their first reception of the Eucharist. Suited to the children's age and abilities, catechesis should help children participate actively and consciously in the Mass. During planning, it is essential to remember that children around the age of reason ordinarily think concretely. Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis in preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist that:

- Teaches that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.
- Teaches not only 'the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on...they can as full members of Christ's Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters.'
- Ensures that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion..
- Develops in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Teaches that 'the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ' and that "what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living body.'
- Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
- Teaches the meaning of the reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine.
- Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass.
- Helps children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner" (*National Directory for Catechesis* 126-128).

In addition to the traditional classroom model of catechetical instruction, models include:

The Family Model - Parents or guardians prepare their children at home.

Multiple Family Model - Several families work together to share teaching responsibilities and arrange for activities and events that they would like to provide for their children.

The Intergenerational Model - Parents are not the only ones who can prepare their children for First Communion at home. Grandparents and teenage siblings may also find the experience rewarding.

The Weekend Afternoon Model - Children meet at the parish on several weekend afternoons to prepare for First Communion. Parents and catechists share responsibilities for preparing the children by combining lessons with social service, prayer, and shared meals.

Often parents who have recently moved into the parish have older children who prepared for the Sacraments using a different model and found it to be meaningful for them as a family. It is helpful to ask parents who have already participated in one of the above or still different models to share their experience of these models at a parent gathering.



## **Celebration of Eucharist**

### **Preparing the Liturgy**

Those responsible for the preparation of the Liturgy for First Communion should keep in mind that this sacramental celebration is one of the sacraments of initiation. The celebration should clearly reflect this initiatory focus by the various choices made and the tone of the over-all celebration.

### **Texts to be used for the Mass**

There is no specific ritual Mass or set of readings from the lectionary provided by the Church for this event. This is because First Communion is very much linked to what the candidates will participate in every Sunday for the rest of their lives. The regular Sunday liturgy should always be the starting point for this celebration.

The liturgical season, or the solemnity on which the celebration is scheduled, should not be seen as an obstacle to the celebration of this or any sacramental liturgy. Allow the season to lend its color, texture, and tone to the celebration.

### **A Parish Celebration**

Although a variety of times is appropriate for the celebration of First Communion in the parish, serious consideration should be given to the scheduling of this sacrament within the context of a regularly scheduled parish Sunday Mass. This can help to foster --both in the parish community as well as in the candidates for the sacrament -- an appreciation of this sacrament as related to the weekly Sunday celebration. This sacramental celebration is one of unity with the rest of the community around the Table of the Lord. If there is a parish grade school, distinctions between candidates from the school and those from religious education classes take away from the unitive dimension of the sacrament as do any practices that segregate the candidates or make them somehow distinct from the rest of the community

### **When to Celebrate First Communion**

Because of the nature of the celebration as one of the sacraments of initiation, the Sundays of the Easter Season are ideal times to celebrate First Communion. On these days the Sunday scripture readings and the Easter focus of the liturgy are most appropriate for the celebration of sacraments of initiation. If the number of candidates

prevents the scheduling of all the candidates for the sacrament at one liturgy, the candidates could be divided among the scheduled Masses on a Sunday or Sundays during the Easter season.

## **Liturgical Music**

The music chosen for the celebration should follow the guidelines given in *Music in Catholic Worship and Liturgical Music Today*. With this in mind it is important to work with the parish music director. The music should be selected for the whole assembly, not just the candidates for the sacrament.

Along with the Mass parts that are normally sung (the acclamations and responsorial psalm) the hymns and other music should be carefully selected. If, as has been suggested, the celebration takes place during the Easter season, then the parish's normal repertoire of Easter music would be most appropriate. Some time should be spent in preparing the children to participate in the sung and spoken parts of the Mass. As mentioned above, practices that segregate the children or make them wholly distinct from the rest of the worshipping community take away from the unitive nature of the celebration. Therefore, performance pieces by children are discouraged.

## **Celebrating the Eucharist**

Those who are being welcomed to the celebration of the Eucharist have a unique role within the sacramental celebration in that they will be receiving Holy Communion for the first time. They should be encouraged to participate fully in this (and every other) Eucharist by taking part in the singing and the spoken prayer and by listening to the scriptures and other liturgical texts spoken in their names by the presider.

Candidates should not serve in specific liturgical ministries such as lector, cantor, server, etc. Celebrating First Communion at a regularly scheduled Sunday liturgy allows the parish community to minister to those who are candidates for the sacrament. Those who normally fulfill the liturgical roles of lector, cantor, etc., within the parish would be the best choices for the persons to serve in this capacity for the First Communion liturgy.

### **1) Processions**

Candidates for First Communion are sometimes included in the entrance procession. The purpose of the Introductory Rite of the Mass is to help unify the assembly and to draw those already in place into the action of gathering for the celebration. If the candidates (and their families) are in the entrance procession they should have the necessary hymnal or worship aid that will allow them to participate in the singing of the entrance hymn. There is no liturgical requirement that the candidates be in the entrance procession. This decision whether or not to include the candidates and their families in the procession is left up to the parish.

Some of the candidates for First Communion could participate in the gift procession. Along with the bread and wine, gifts of food for the poor and the monetary collection may be included in the procession.

The function of the procession at the end of the celebration is to get the ministers in the sanctuary out with some sense of order and dignity. It is not necessary to have everyone who was in the entrance procession included in the exit procession.

## **2) Creed**

The Apostle's Creed may be used instead of the Nicene Creed if desired.

## **3) Prayers of the Faithful**

Just as the candidates for First Communion should not be chosen as lectors, so too it is best to allow the deacon, the cantor, the lector, or one of the lay faithful to announce the intentions in the Prayer of the Faithful (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* #71).

## **4) Using the Lectionary**

The readings to be taken from the Sunday lectionary, and they are to be proclaimed from the lectionary in the normal way. It is always preferred to proclaim the scripture readings from the lectionary rather than from a single sheet of paper, a missalette, or any book other than the lectionary.

## **5) Communion Under Both Forms**

It is appropriate for the candidates who receive First Communion to receive both forms of Holy Communion. They may, like everyone else, be given a choice whether or not to drink from the cup. Careful catechesis for the candidates and their parents should be provided.

## **6) Environment for Worship**

The Art and Environment committee in the parish has the responsibility for the preparation of the worship space. The liturgical space should reflect the festive nature of the celebration. If the celebration takes place during the Easter season, as suggested above, the Easter decorations of the church will contribute to the festive nature. Within the worship space there are certain focal points: the altar, the ambo or lectern, the presider's chair, the baptismal font, and the tabernacle, to name a few. It is important to respect the sacredness of these focal points.

Pictures, drawings, names, or projects made by the children can be part of a decorative display in the church entrance or elsewhere.

## **7) Baptismal Connections**

Since Eucharist is one of the sacraments of initiation and has close links to the sacrament of Baptism, it is appropriate that the liturgy reflect this.

The Sprinkling Rite, which may replace the Penitential Rite on some Sundays of the liturgical year, would be appropriate for the celebration of First Communion. An alternative to this would be to include a renewal of the Baptismal promises, followed by the sprinkling of the assembly with holy water as is recommended for Easter Sunday. (See the Sacramentary for Easter Sunday.)

## **8) Photography**

Care should be taken so that photography (video and flash cameras) does not become a distraction from the sacredness of the sacramental celebration. The following announcement may be reprinted or adapted in any way and given to the parents prior to the celebration.

“Out of respect for the sacredness of this event, we request that you refrain from taking pictures during the celebration.”

Several parishes have found that the designation of one person to make a video, which can be copied and provided for the entire group, provides an acceptable alternative. Parents also may be assured that they will be able to use the church for a designated time after the ceremony so that they can take pictures.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How do I know when my child is ready to celebrate First Communion?**

Readiness means that the child is prepared to celebrate the presence of Christ in his or her life. This is more of a spiritual and emotional readiness than it is an intellectual grasp of theological facts.

The child:

- Should be able to distinguish the Eucharistic bread from ordinary bread.
- Should have some basic understanding of the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation. Simply put, that means he or she should be aware of God's love for us, aware that God gives us Jesus, and aware that Jesus gives us his spirit of love to help us love one another.
- Must have a desire to receive Holy Communion.

The child began life in the Church at Baptism and should be brought to the awareness that the celebration of First Communion will be the beginning of a closer relationship with Jesus.

### **During what season should First Communion be celebrated?**

In order to provide that the preparation for First Communion and Reconciliation should remain clear and distinct, they should not be prepared for or celebrated in the same liturgical season. The readings of the Easter season lend themselves well to the celebration of First Communion.

### **What resources are available to assist parents and/or catechists in preparing children with special needs for celebration of the sacraments?**

The *Rose Kennedy Curriculum* is available in the catechetical consultant's office as well as the "Resources for Individualizing Lesson Plans for Sacrament Preparation" from the Center for Ministry with People with Disabilities of the University of Dayton. The consultant will offer assistance as best he or she can.

### **What do you do with regard to family celebration of the sacraments when there are stepparents as well as parents in the child's family?**

If both parents are still actively involved in the child's life, then it is certainly appropriate that both should be invited to celebrate with the child. In deciding these sometimes delicate matters, consideration should be given to whatever is in the best interest of the child.

## The Sacrament of Reconciliation

“But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She replied, ‘No one, sir.’ Then Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more’” (John 8:2-11).

“Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1422).

“The Lord said to Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven’” (Matthew 16:19). “In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the forgiveness of sins by baptism: ‘Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins’” (Acts 2:38). Since then the Church has never failed to call people from sin to conversion and through the celebration of penance to show the victory of Christ over sin” (*The Rites: The Rite of Penance* #1).

## Community’s Story

Reconciliation has been, and continues to be today, a longing of the human heart. Because of human nature share, estrangement and alienation (sin) have been a reality in the lives of all. Seeking reconciliation and yearning to be whole again causes persons to acknowledge their brokenness and seek forgiveness. The mission of Jesus seemed to be that of freeing persons from the entanglement of sin and helping sinners to build and live in the reign of God.

“Jesus himself described his mission not as calling the just, but sinners. His first words were, ‘Repent and believe in the Good News’ ( Mark 1:15). He told stories about the

Merciful Father (Prodigal Son) and left as his dying legacy that blood ‘which shall be shed for many for the remission of sins.’ After his resurrection, his apostles would heed his words and themselves continue the Good News: ‘In his name, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all the nations’ (Luke 24:47). On Pentecost day when the people asked Peter what they should do, he naturally replied that they should be baptized for the forgiveness of sins” (Act 2:38). (Bausch 152).

“After Baptism, the premier sacrament of forgiveness is the Eucharist. Even such an early theologian as Origen, who died in the third century, stressed the importance of the Eucharist as the place for the forgiveness of sins” (Bausch 153).

In the early Church, Baptism was considered the rite of repentance. Once baptized, a person was expected to lead a sinless life ever afterwards. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, excommunication was the punishment for people who were guilty of scandalous public sins such as apostasy, murder, and adultery. They could be readmitted only after first confessing to the bishop and then doing prolonged public penance. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries private confession became a widespread means of spiritual guidance. It embraced all types of sin and could be repeated as often as needed. The tariff penance system laid down a specific penance for each sin in “penitential handbooks.” The system was abused by wealthy sinners, who paid poor people to perform their penance for them.

Penance had been formalized by the time of the Council of Trent in 1566. The emphasis was on confession of sins with less stress on contrition and conversion. The enclosed confessional was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to give more privacy and anonymity.

The Second Vatican Council revised the form for Penance and renamed it the Sacrament of Reconciliation placing the emphasis on reconciling the sinner to God and the community. The setting changed to a comfortable place where the priest could warmly welcome the penitent. The reading of God’s Word was introduced as a way of assuring the penitent of God’s love. In addition to the private form, the new rite offers a communal rite to emphasize the communal effects of sin and forgiveness.

We may say that the Eucharist is the traditional sacrament of forgiveness of post-baptismal sins. And this is as it should be. After all, the Eucharist celebrates those very acts of Jesus by which we are saved (Bausch 154).

## **Theology**

Reconciliation is the Church’s way of celebrating what God does in, with and through human persons. Sacramental reconciliation happens only after ongoing conversion brings a person to the point of recognizing his or her offenses, seeking forgiveness for those offenses, and approaching sacramental reconciliation. Reconciliation is a means of celebrating the forgiveness of God that is extended to all when persons turn back to God through the conversion process. When God’s Spirit enters the lives of individuals, those

individuals are able to celebrate a change of heart that enables them to make changes in their lives. This is what we call the conversion process or *metanoia*. The new *Rite of Penance* says:

“We can only approach the kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange [one’s] life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance...God grants pardon to the sinner who in sacramental confession manifests [this] change of heart. This change of heart comes about only because of previously repeated reconciling actions” (#6a,d).

Conversion is a response that draws people back to the love of God, which allows for changes in the way people relate to God, themselves, and others. It is the Holy Spirit who breaks into their lives, brings them to the awareness of their weakness, and calls them to renew their lives. Reconciliation is a celebration of God’s loving forgiveness.

Acknowledging faults happens only after a change of heart has taken place within the penitent. To confess sins would not be meaningful or valid if conversion had not first taken place. Confessing sins is the external expression of what has happened internally as a result of conversion. Confession of sins is not minimized but it is no longer the essence of the sacrament. “The introduction to the *Rite of Penance* puts it this way: ‘The sacrament of penance *includes* the confession of sins, which comes from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins...in the light of God’s mercy’” (#6b, emphasis added).

Celebration then becomes the most natural response to Penance/Reconciliation because of God’s unconditional love and willingness to forgive everyone even before they ever confess their sins. “The sacrament of reconciliation does not bring about something that was absent. It proclaims and enables us to own God’s love and forgiveness that are already present” (DeGideo 94).

In Sacramental reconciliation the priest begins with a welcome to the penitent. The sacrament thus manifests the love God has for each of all, giving more attention to God’s love than to the sins being confessed.

By accepting the forgiveness of God, penitents learn to forgive themselves and to recognize the importance of forgiving each other. They strive to live at peace with themselves, with God, and with others. As each person acknowledges the role of community in his or her journey toward reconciliation, each person recognizes the importance of community in the celebration of Reconciliation. When the sacrament is celebrated communally, all experience the unconditional love and forgiveness of God has so freely given us and all experience a new resolve to assimilate the grace of the sacrament into their daily lives.



## **Preparation for Reconciliation**

“From now onwards, then, we will not consider anyone by human standards: even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer. So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the older order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God’s work: God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone’s faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ”  
*(2 Corinthians 5: 16-20).*

### **Criteria for Catechesis for Reconciliation**

In order to provide for a full and continuing catechesis for reconciliation, parish catechetical leadership is asked to provide for catechesis throughout formal religious education that reflects both the “family and the community” or relational base of reconciliation and the developmental level of the person. (*Code of Canon Law c. 779*).

Catechetical leadership should provide a catechesis, which helps the family to:

- Recognize the need for reconciliation and healing within everyone’s life.
- Confess their belief, individually and as a family, in the unconditional love and mercy of God.
- Confess their own areas of sin, alienation, and need.
- Accept the healing love and mercy of God and of each other.
- Discover new, reconciling ways to relate to God, neighbor and self.
- Recognize that the goal of reconciliation is unity, a unity that is fully celebrated in Eucharist.

Catechetical leadership should ensure that catechesis has a future orientation and:

- Challenges participants to work toward creating a family and community of peace and reconciliation.
- Helps each person to focus on concrete new ways of living.
- Has as a goal a community of reconciling families.

### **Specific Criteria Related to the Preparation and Determination of Readiness for First Reconciliation**

In describing the responsibility of parents and pastors for a child's preparation of First Eucharist, Canon 914 states that First Reconciliation should precede First Eucharist (*Code of Canon Law c. 914*).

Based on this order there are specific criteria for the structuring of preparation and for determining a child's readiness.

1. The catechesis for and celebration of sacramental Reconciliation must be completed in a different season from the catechesis for and celebration of Eucharist – e.g., Reconciliation/fall; Eucharist/spring – so that the two sacraments are not confused. The children are to participate in prayer celebrations of reconciliation during this preparation time.
2. Sufficient care is to be given that each child is able, willing, and ready to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation at the end of the preparation program. Pastors and parents in conversation with catechists can help determine the readiness of the child.
3. Canon 989 requires only those conscious of serious sin to confess before receiving Communion, therefore, children who do not approach the sacrament of reconciliation should not be deprived of their right to receive Communion.

### **Basic Expectations for Reconciliation, Including First Reconciliation**

There are certain understandings and attitudes important for celebrating sacramental Reconciliation. They are an essential part of any catechesis for children preparing to celebrate sacramental Reconciliation.

The following expectations reflect basic understandings about reconciliation for anyone and are important considerations in determining the readiness of a child for sacramental reconciliation. It is the responsibility of the parents, in cooperation with the pastor and catechist, to determine their child's readiness.

Individuals, including children, should be able to internalize a basic understanding of the sacrament, according to their developmental level and individual gifts.

“Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to

- Acknowledge God's unconditional love for us.
- Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both.
- Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them, but from God.
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation.
- Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation.
- Understand that ‘sacramental Confession is a means offered children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore that it is even necessary *per se* if one has fallen into serious sin.’

Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year”  
(*National Directory for Catechesis* 135-136).

## **Celebration of Reconciliation**

Communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance. The faithful listen together to the word of God, which proclaims his mercy and invites them to conversion; at the same time they examine the conformity of their lives with that word of God and help each other through common prayer (*The Rites: Rite of Penance* #22).

“The penitential celebration should be prepared with the children so that they will understand its meaning and purpose, be familiar with the songs, have at least an elementary knowledge of the biblical text to be read, and know what they are to say and in what order” (*The Rites: Rite of Penance*, Appendix II #44).

The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance should include:

### **1) Introductory Rites**

Opening Song.

Greeting.

Introduction.

The priest or another minister speaks about the importance and purpose of the celebration and the order of the service.

Opening Prayer

Several options are given for the opening prayer. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* #50.)

### **2) Celebration of the Word of God**

The Scripture readings may be selected from the Rite of Penance. If there are several readings, a psalm or other appropriate song or even a period of silence should intervene between them. If there is only one reading, it is preferable that it be from the Gospel. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* #51.) A Gospel acclamation precedes the proclamation of the Gospel.

### **3) Homily**

A period of time may be spent in making an examination of conscience. The priest, deacon, or another minister may help the faithful by brief statements or a kind of litany, taking into consideration their circumstances, age, etc. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* #53.)

### **4) Rite of Reconciliation**

The deacon or another minister invites all to kneel or bow, and to join in saying a general formula for confession (i.e. I confess to almighty God...). Then they stand and say a litany or sing an appropriate hymn. The Lord's Prayer is always added at the end, followed by a concluding prayer. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* #54.)

**5) Individual Confession and Absolution**

Then the penitents go to the priests designated for individual confession, and confess their sins. Each one receives and accepts a fitting act of satisfaction and is absolved. After hearing the confession and offering suitable counsel, the priest extends his hands over the penitent's head (or at least extends his right hand) and gives absolution. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* # 55.)

**6) Proclamation of Praise for God's Mercy.**

It is fitting for all to sing a psalm or hymn or to say a litany in acknowledgement of God's power and mercy, for example, the canticle of Mary, or Psalm 136: 1-9, 13-14, 16, 25-26. (See *The Rites: Rite of Penance* #56.)

**7) Concluding Prayer**

Rite of Penance, No. 57 has selections that may be used.

**8) Blessing and Dismissal**

**Liturgical Music**

Communal celebrations of reconciliation normally require an entrance song or song of gathering; a responsorial psalm and a gospel acclamation during the liturgy of the word; an optional hymn after the homily; and a hymn of praise for God's mercy following the absolution. The litany within the "General Confession of Sins" (alternating between the deacon or cantor and the assembly) or another appropriate song may also be sung, as well as the "Lord's Prayer." Singing or soft instrumental music may be used during the time of individual confessions, especially, when there is a large number of people present for the celebration (*Liturgical Music Today* #27).

The music chosen should respect the liturgical season and the selections recommended in the rite for the celebration of Penance. Selecting music for the celebration of the Rite of Penance is the responsibility of the parish music minister. It is important to keep in mind the participation of the entire assembly when making these selections

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the purpose of a “penance” in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?**

In the past Penance was a way of making reparation for sins, sometimes seen as “punishment”. It was an act that had to be carried out, e.g. like saying so many prayers. Today, the understanding is that the real “punishment” is the continuing pattern of sin and the harmful attitudes and actions this pattern of sin creates. Therefore, the purpose of a “penance” is to break that pattern of sin and to help penitents grow. It is no longer understood as punishment.

### **How do I know when my child is ready to celebrate First Reconciliation?**

The following expectations reflect important considerations in determining the readiness of a child for sacramental Reconciliation. It is the responsibility of the parents, in cooperation with the pastor and catechist, to determine their child’s readiness.

Individuals, including children, should be able to internalize *according to their developmental level and individual gifts*, the following:

1. An awareness of the unconditional love of God.
2. A trust that God’s forgiveness is always there.
3. A sense of right and wrong...between an accident and a sin.
4. An ability to describe sin and an awareness of responsibility for these actions.
5. An ability to recognize that others are hurt when one sins.
6. An ability to say I am sorry and ask forgiveness.
7. A desire to celebrate the sacrament – no sign of real reluctance.

### **Should Reconciliation be celebrated before First Eucharist?**

The catechesis for and celebration of sacramental Reconciliation must be completed in a different season from the catechesis for and celebration of Eucharist (e.g., Reconciliation in the fall and Eucharist in the spring) so that the two sacraments are not confused. During the preparation time for the sacrament, the children are to participate in prayers of reconciliation.

Care should be taken so that each child is sufficiently prepared to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation at the end of the preparation program. Pastors and parents in conversation with catechists can help determine the readiness of the child.

## General Questions Frequently Asked

### Why is language important?

Language is important, particularly when speaking of sacraments, because of the relationship found in the celebration of sacraments. The language formerly used was: “getting baptized,” “making one’s First Communion,” “going to confession,” and “getting confirmed.” These phrases suggest a passive approach to the sacraments in order to get something! In reality, it is all about responding to the gift of God’s love for everyone.

Theologians state that sacraments are lived before they are celebrated! They happen in the lives of people who come together to celebrate what is already happening within them. God’s comes to us and we go to God through our human lives and through Jesus sharing that life with us.

Ultimately sacraments are not about what a person does. Rather they are about God’s love, compassion, and presence in the life of each person. Sacraments are opportunities for people who are open and responsive to God’s grace to gather together and celebrate ritual through symbolic actions. Sacraments bring individuals together as a church, or community, to celebrate what has already happened in their lives. Sacraments celebrate the recognition of God’s grace in the lives of human being. The language of sacraments is understandably that of celebration.

### Should children who have not been baptized be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil?

The “Christian Initiation of Children who have Reached Catechetical Age” is described in Part II of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. In "Appendix III: National Statutes for the Catechumenate," found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, there is a section entitled "Children of Catechetical Age." Paragraph 18 of that section lays the guidelines for the initiation of children. It states: "Since children who have reached the use of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (*Code of Canon Law* c. 852:1) their formation should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate as far as possible, with the appropriate adaptations permitted by the ritual. They should celebrate the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens."

### What is the appropriate time to initiate children into the faith?

National statute #18 in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* indicates that the appropriate time is once a child has reached the age of reason, which is generally considered to be age 7. The Rite decrees that children between the ages 7 to 17 who desire baptism should be fully initiated.

**Are there any exceptions to fully initiating children of catechetical age?**

The directives of the rite in national statute #19 state, "Some elements of the ordinary catechetical instruction of baptized children before their reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist may be appropriately shared with catechumens of catechetical age. Their condition and status as catechumens, however, should not be compromised or confused, nor should they receive the sacraments of initiation in any sequence other than that determined in the ritual of Christian initiation. "

**Are the statutes and directives referenced above considered to be part of canon law?**

Yes. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* was canonically approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 11, 1986. The decree from NCCB stated that from September 1, 1988 the use of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is mandatory in the dioceses of the United States of America.

**When do second graders who have not been baptized and are in the catechumenate celebrate initiation?**

As indicated in the rite, they are fully initiated at the Easter Vigil.

**What do you tell parents who are concerned that their children will miss the celebration of First Communion or Confirmation with classmates?**

They are not excluded from their peers' celebration of First Eucharist or Confirmation, but rather can be involved in ways that facilitate their inclusion and participation. Sometimes they are given a role that helps them feel part of the class celebration. Pastoral leaders with children fully initiated at the Easter Vigil have found ways to educate the parents who raise concerns about their child being left out of their class celebration, and they make sure that the children are included in both the catechesis and sacramental celebration with their peers.



## Code of Canon Law

### **Baptism**

**Canon 773** - There is a proper and serious duty, especially on the part of pastors of souls, to provide for the catechesis of the Christian people so that the faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit, and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living.

**Canon 774 -#1** - Under the supervision of legitimate ecclesiastical authority this concern for catechesis pertains to all the members of the Church in proportion to each one's role.

**#2** - Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example; godparents and those who take the place of parents are bound by an equivalent obligation.

**Canon 843 - #2** - Pastors of souls and the rest of the Christian faithful, according to their ecclesial function, have the duty to see that those who seek the sacraments are prepared. to receive them by the necessary evangelization and catechetical formation, taking into account the norms published by the competent authority.

**Canon 851** – It is necessary that the celebration of baptism be properly prepared. Thus:  
**#1** - An adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and, to the extent possible, be led through the several stages to sacramental initiation, in accord with the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms published by it.

**#2.** - The parents of an infant who is to be baptized and likewise those who are to undertake the office of sponsor are to be properly instructed in the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it; personally or through others the pastor is to see to it that the parents are properly formed by pastoral directions and by common prayer, gathering several families together and where possible visiting them.

**Canon 852 – #1.** What is prescribed in the canons on the baptism of an adult is applicable to all who are no longer infants but have attained the use of reason.

**Canon 855** – Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to see that a name foreign to a Christian mentality is not given.

**Canon 856** – Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that ordinarily it be celebrated on a Sunday or if possible at the Easter Vigil.

### **Canon 857**

**#1** - Outside a case of necessity, the proper place for baptism is a church or oratory.

**#2** - As a rule, adults are to be baptized in their own parish church and infants in the parish church proper to their parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise.

**Canon 861 - #1** The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, with due regard for the prescription of canon 530, n.1.

**#2** If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or other person deputed for this function by the local ordinary confers baptism licitly as does any person with the right intention in case of necessity; shepherds of souls, especially the pastor, are to be concerned that the faithful be instructed in the correct manner of baptizing.

**Canon 867 - #1** Parents are obliged to see to it that infants are baptized within the first weeks after birth; as soon as possible after the birth or even before it, parents are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be properly prepared for it.

**#2.** An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without any delay.

**Canon 868** – For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that:

**#1** The parents or at least one of them or the person who lawfully takes their place gives consent.

**#2** There be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason.

**Canon 869 Canon 869 #1** If there is a doubt whether one has been baptized or whether baptism was validly conferred and the doubt remains after serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally.

**#2** Those baptized in a non-Catholic ecclesial community are not to be baptized conditionally unless, after an examination of the matter and the form of words used in the conferral of baptism and after a consideration of the intention of an adult baptized person and of the minister of the baptism, a serious reason for doubting the validity of the baptism is present.

**#3.** If the conferral or the validity of the baptism in the cases mentioned #1 and #2 remains doubtful, baptism is not to be conferred until the doctrine of the sacrament of baptism is explained to the person, if an adult, and the reasons for the doubtful validity of that baptism have been explained to the adult recipient or, in the case of an infant, to the parents.

**Canon 874 - 1.** To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:

**#1** – Be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.

**#2** - Have completed the sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause.

**#3** - Be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.

**#4.** - Not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.

**#5** - Not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

**2** - A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be admitted except as a witness to baptism and together with a Catholic sponsor.

**Canon 878** - If baptism was administered neither by the pastor nor in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which the baptism was administered, so that the may record it in accord with canon 877, #1.

## **Confirmation**

**Canon 876** - If it is not prejudicial to anyone, to prove the conferral of Baptism, the declaration of a single witness who is above suspicion suffices or the oath of the baptized person, if the Baptism was received at an adult age.

### **Canon 889**

**#1** - All baptized persons who have not been confirmed and only they are capable of receiving confirmation.

**#2** - Outside the danger of death, to be licitly confirmed it is required, if the person has the use of reason, that one be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew one's baptismal promises.

**Canon 890** - The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time; their parents and shepherds of souls, especially pastors, are to see to it that the faithful are properly instructed to receive it and approach the sacrament at the appropriate time.

**Canon 891** - The Sacrament of Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age, or there is danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

**Canon 92** - As far as possible a sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present; it is for the sponsor to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament.

**Canon 893 -**

**#1** -To perform the role of sponsor, it is necessary that a person fulfill the conditions mentioned in canon 874.

**#2** - It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be sponsor for Confirmation.

**Canon 894** - The prescriptions of canon 876 are to be observed for the proof of the conferral of Confirmation.

**Eucharist**

**Canon 777** - In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision:

1. That suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments.
2. That children are properly prepared for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and Most Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time.
3. That children are more fruitfully and deeply instructed through catechetical formation after the reception of First Communion.
4. That catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits.
5. That the faith of young people and adults be fortified, enlightened, and developed through various means and endeavors.

**Canon 912** - Any baptized person who is not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to Holy Communion.

**Canon 913 1.** For the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.

**Canon 914** - It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as of the pastor, to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession; it is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.

**Reconciliation**

**Canon 960** - Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the ordinary way by which the faithful person who is aware of serious sin is reconciled with God and with the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses the person from confession of this type, in which case reconciliation can take place.

**Canon 983 #2** - An interpreter, if there is one present, is also obligated to preserve the secret, and also all others to whom knowledge of sins from confession shall come in any way.

**Canon 987** - In order to receive the salvific remedy of the Sacrament of Penance, the Christian faithful ought to be so disposed that, having repudiated the sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, they are converted to God.

**Canon 988 #1** - A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and in number all serious sins committed after baptism and not yet directly remitted through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which one is conscious after diligent examination of conscience.

**#2** - It is to be recommended to the Christian faithful that venial sins also be confessed.

**Canon 989** - After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.

**Canon 990** - No one is prohibited from confessing through an interpreter, avoiding abuses and scandals; the prescription of canon 983, #2, is to be observed.

**Canon 991** - The Christian faithful are free to confess to a legitimately approved confessor of their choice, even one of another rite.

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Sacraments --- Wrapping our lives in the mantle of God's Grace.

Colossians 3: 12-16.

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and...forgive each other... Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”