

**DIOCESAN POLICIES**

**FOR**

**SACRAMENTAL  
PREPARATION**

**DIOCESE OF TOLEDO, OHIO  
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**2002**

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Background**

Catechesis is a process in which believing people share what they believe with others in the effort to nurture faith. The United States Bishops have called our attention to the essential partnership involved:

A correct understanding of experiential learning includes recognition that the entire faith community is an important part of the experience of children and youth: parents, catechists, and community all have roles in the catechesis of the young. (NCD 181-211)

This partnership means that families are involved in catechesis. “Parents are the first and foremost catechists of their children. They catechize informally but powerfully by example and instruction.” (NCD 12)

## **Catechesis for Sacramental Preparation**

Catechesis for the celebration of sacraments involves, in an integral way, the family, the worshipping community, and the catechetical program. We recall that:

1. A sacrament involves a relationship with Jesus and therefore presumes faith on the part of the individual, the family and the community. “The sacraments, symbolic actions which effect what they symbolize, celebrate the coming of the Spirit at special moments in the life of the community of faith and its members, and express the Church’s faith and interaction with Christ.” (NCD 114)
2. The readiness of the individual and the individual’s family are essential criteria for assessing when the celebration of sacraments should take place. Persons do not all become ready for sacraments at the same time. People grow in faith at different rates. (NCD 174)
3. The involvement in the celebration of sacraments is a further initiation into the worship life of the parish. The celebration of sacraments is the action of the community which gathers to celebrate its faith; and, in this celebration, the Lord becomes present in a deeper way. Thus, the preparation for sacraments should lead one to greater involvement with the faith community; and the worshipping community should be visibly involved in an individual’s preparation for sacraments. Therefore, the preparation and celebration of sacraments is essentially a responsibility of the parish which exists as a permanent worshipping and catechizing community.

4. The family has an essential role in preparation for the celebration of sacraments. Parents are constantly teaching and catechizing, positively or negatively, by their attitudes, actions, values; by the way they encourage prayer or not; by their active participation in worship or their lack of it. Parents have no choice about whether to be teachers of their children. Their only choice is to be good teachers or poor teachers. Because of their significant influence, families need to be involved in the preparation for and celebration of sacraments.

### **Some Signs of the Times**

Because of the progressive fragmentation of family life, changing family structures, and diversity of family lifestyles, parental involvement in the sacramental preparation of their children becomes ever more challenging. Dr. David Thomas, Co-director of the Bethany Family Institute, describes today's Catholic family as follows:

Within the last generation, the average size of American Catholic families has decreased by one full member; at the same time, the divorce rate has almost doubled. Catholic families are presently more affluent, more educated, more mobile, more stretched by dual-career parents, more multi-denominational than in any previous time. They are also more desirous of support for and understanding of their uniqueness and of their interest in a realistic, family-sensitive religious education and formation program.

In particular we are challenged to provide "realistic, family-sensitive" sacramental programs for single-parent families, which may be economically stressed, and, because of this, may not have much time for one-on-one attention to individual children; to dual-custody families who may not be able to provide their children access to one ongoing sacramental program; to step families with multiple sets of grandparents and different family histories; and to interfaith or mixed denomination families who may choose to acquaint their children with multiple religious traditions.

### **A Closer Look At Today's Parents**

1. Today's parents are either late baby boomers or generation X'ers. Even within these groups, their experience of church has been varied.
2. Forty percent of families experience at least one divorce; more than half of today's children will experience living in a single parent family.
3. Today's statistics suggest that only 36% of registered parishioners attend Mass regularly. Therefore, it could be that for 64% of the children in our religious education programs, our programs are their only experience of Church.

4. Non-practicing Catholics are the second largest Christian denomination in the country. Many of these still seek sacraments for their children.
5. Baby boomers, while they may carry some hurts from the past, still have a sense of the “church” and want to share that with their children. If they have been away from the church for a time, this may be an opportunity to welcome them back.
6. Some Generation X parents never really experienced the church so there is nothing for them to come back to. Bringing their children to receive the sacraments is a key evangelization moment for them.
7. Some have had very negative experiences often surrounding a sacrament (Marriage or Baptism); in spite of this, they are bringing their children to receive the sacraments.
8. Some baby boomers and Generation X’ers seem to lack the ability to articulate their faith.
9. Many express a desire to learn about their faith so that they can share it with their children.
10. Generation X’ers are looking to form relationships with the Catholic Community. For them, relationships are built on mutual listening and respect; they are attracted to Christ when they meet people who live their faith. When they come to church, we need to be sure they find the Christ for whom they are looking.
11. Many are uncomfortable in large groups. They would welcome the opportunity for discussion, sharing, and having their questions answered.

### **Some Approaches to Today’s Parents**

1. The attitude of the parish leadership needs to be one of welcome, concern, support, and encouragement to parents as they bring their children to receive sacraments.
2. Many of today’s parents have never felt a part of the Church, and we need to reach out to them and offer them an experience of church.
3. Today’s parents feel very differently about what it means to be Catholic. We need to look again at the way we approach this topic with them.
4. We can no longer make assumptions that parents know the basics or fundamentals of the faith.

5. It is important to have a greater sensitivity to the particular needs and circumstances of families when setting expectations and scheduling meetings.
6. One size does not fit all. Today's parents are at many different levels of knowledge and interest. Some need to be evangelized, and others are eager for more information. Their children, too, are at many different levels of knowledge and formation.
7. The sex abuse scandals of the clergy may have an impact on today's parents as well as on their children.

### **Important Ideas to Consider When Planning Parent Sacramental Meetings**

1. Evangelization needs to be understood as the new evangelization discussed in the General Directory for Catechesis: we need to consider the social and cultural milieu of those being catechized.
2. An important goal of the Parent Sacramental sessions should be an opportunity for parish leadership to meet each family at their faith level and invite them to grow.
3. Each year we might begin with an anonymous parent survey to assess needs of each family and then plan the program for the year designed around those needs.
4. Schedule the time to meet the family needs, versus time to meet our convenience.
5. Enrichment sessions might take the form of a menu of options which could include parish meetings; at-home learning packets; parent clusters with a guided process tool such as those available for Renew; take home videos; CD-ROM's, etc.
6. Parents of the previous year's class can be involved in the process perhaps as facilitators or companions.
7. For parent sessions, adapt a Catechumenate model which uses scripture, involves some liturgical symbol and ritual, and is designed to have some non-threatening faith sharing.
8. What creative ways can we use to welcome and inform those who cannot or will not come to meetings? Some examples might include e-mail, a phone call, mailings, videos, personal visits from ourselves or another member of the parish, etc.

9. No matter by what means, however, it is important to keep parents informed about the sacramental experience their children will be having. We must not forget that they need to know practical things, times, appropriate dress, etc.
10. For those who are thirsty for information, what can we send home that will help them? Many published texts have “take home” materials for parents. In addition we could send “Catholic Updates” or other such adult information sheets.

### **The Diocesan Policies for Sacramental Preparation**

It is in the light of this theological understanding of Sacramental Catechesis, as well as consideration of today’s parents, that we are happy to offer these Diocesan Policies for Sacramental Preparation.

## **BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN**

### **Theology**

Baptism is an act of initiation, an introduction to truly Christian life, whereby the redemptive death of Christ which happened but once in history is made present in the visible rite of water immersion. The person baptized can die with Christ and rise again with him to new life.

Baptism is seen to be the cleansing from all sin. The baptismal water is the instrument Christ uses to effect this redemptive purification: filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, on the invocation of God's name, it purges of all sin and awakens one to the new life of those "born again of water and the Holy Spirit." (Jn 3:5)

Baptism allows us to enter into a covenant relationship with God and the faith community. As a union with Christ in his crucifixion, death, and risen life, baptism applies Christ's redemption to the sinner out of mercy and love, without any merit on our part, but demands a life of obedience to God. Baptism proclaims the utter sufficiency of the redemption which Christ won, once for all, in history and which takes effect now in the sacrament.

The saving effect of Baptism has many levels. It includes liberation from sin; inner renewal and sanctification (sanctifying grace); being incorporated into the Church; being incorporated into Christ; receiving a share in the life of Christ, in his saving death and resurrection; the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; and the final meeting with our Creator in heaven.

Baptism may be described as a distinctive sign. It creates distinctions that are valid forever. It confers an indelible character, a mark, as the Council of Trent calls it (Denzinger-Schön. 1600, hereafter DS). Through Baptism the natural relationship of the baptized to the community is intensified and transformed from within. Reception into the community of salvation involves a particular parish; beyond this, a reception into the Church of the Diocese with a Bishop; and beyond this, a membership into the whole Church. Baptism, then, creates brotherhood and sisterhood between all believers. "For indeed we were all brought into one body by Baptism, in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink. A body is not one single organ, but many." (1 Cor. 12:13ff.).

For the Christian of today, therefore, Baptism is still the entrance to all the sacraments, the gate to Christian life and eventual eternal life. It is here that we see the ultimate consequence of Baptism.

## **History of the Sacrament**

In the early Church, the Baptism of believing adults was the norm. The author of The Acts of the Apostles traces Baptism back to the very first day of the twelve's preaching, the Jewish feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41). It is clear from the beginning that salvation through Baptism was not automatic; it had to be accompanied by faith in Christ and good works toward others (Mk. 16:15-16 and James 2:14-26).

Prospective candidates for Baptism first had to find a member of the Christian community who would sponsor them during a period of moral formation and who would present them for Baptism after about two or three years of preparation. This lengthy period of preparation was known as the "catechumenate," from the Greek word meaning "instruction."

Those who died before the yearly baptismal celebration had been taught that they were being saved by being baptized in their own blood. Some Church leaders also taught that the explicit desire for Baptism would save those who died from natural causes before they could be baptized.

For the first three-hundred years of the Church, children, as well as adults, were baptized, although the age of children varied with local and family customs.

There were no provisions in Church practice for a second Baptism, and for this reason, converts (even the emperor Constantine) chose to remain catechumens until the end of their lives, thinking that a death-bed Baptism would be more effective and wash away more sins. Some Christian parents delayed the Baptism of their children until after adolescence when there would be less chance of their giving in to temptation.

The Fathers of the Church taught that Baptism was necessary for salvation, and there were some who took this doctrine of necessity of Baptism literally to mean that children who died unbaptized were lost forever with no chance of eternal salvation. This belief, together with the high rate of infant mortality, prompted some parents to baptize their children right after birth without waiting for the yearly liturgical Baptism. Gradually, the idea of baptizing infants became widely accepted even if it was not universally practiced.

Cyprian of Antioch (300) taught that infants should be baptized because they were guilty of the sin of Adam and Eve. Augustine (354-430) further developed this notion by calling it "original sin." Augustine taught original sin as being in the soul from birth, and this is why all persons should be baptized. Augustine taught that infants who died without Baptism would be damned,

although he believed their punishment would be mild since they had not personally committed the sin for which they were being punished.

In this way, then, because of Augustine's influence on later ages, Cyprian's rationale for infant Baptism became an essential ingredient in the Catholic theology of Baptism.

The role of sponsors developed because infants were unable to state what they believed in, so the sponsors spoke in the child's name. It became the sponsors who supplied the needed faith until the child was old enough to speak for him/herself. Sponsors were sometimes called godparents. In any event, they were the guardians of the child's faith and were considered responsible for insuring that the child received religious instruction and remained a good Christian as the child grew up.

Infant Baptism also brought a change into the ritual. Total immersion eventually came to be replaced by the pouring of water over the head of the child. In the East, the triple immersion was simplified into a single immersion; in the West, it was simplified into a triple pouring.

Another important change occasioned by infant Baptism was the separation of the traditional initiation ritual into distinct steps. In the western Church the baptismal washing came to be separated from the final anointing by the bishop, and eventually the first reception of Communion dropped out of the initiation ritual altogether. The bishop's anointing eventually became an official sacrament called Confirmation, while the ceremonial reception of first Communion became an unofficial sacrament.

Beginning in the eleventh century some bishops and councils noted that infants were always in danger of dying unexpectedly and started encouraging parents not to wait until the annual Baptism at Easter. During the twelfth century Baptism soon after birth was encouraged even more, and by the thirteenth century a number of dioceses allowed infants to be baptized at any time of the year. Finally, in the fourteenth century, the new custom took the force of law, and episcopal and conciliar decrees in most parts of Europe ordered that infants be baptized anytime from a day to a week after birth since it was the only means by which they could be protected from the danger of dying with original sin on their soul. When this happened, the baptismal ceremony disappeared from the Easter Vigil entirely.

A word on Limbo. Augustine (354-430) and some of the Fathers had contended that infants who died without Baptism suffered eternal damnation. Some of the early scholars like Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) agreed that this was logically consistent with the belief that Baptism was necessary for salvation, but to them it seemed inconsistent with the belief that God was all-merciful. How could a loving God torment souls for a sin they did not commit? The logical answer was that he did not, and yet it was also logical that these souls did not get to heaven. Anselm proposed a solution which was consistent with both points: the souls of unbaptized infants did not get to heaven, but they were not

tortured either; their only punishment was that they would never see God; but other than that, they were in a state of natural happiness. The most logical place for these almost-sinless souls to go was therefore just outside heaven, on its border (“limbo,” in Latin).

During the Middle Ages the essential “matter” of the sacrament was the water poured or bathed in, and its essential “form” was expressed in the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If either of these were lacking, part of the sacramental sign was missing and so it was not a valid ritual.

A priest was the usual minister of Baptism, but since Baptism was Christ’s and not the minister’s, even lay men and women could baptize in emergency situations because of the necessity of Baptism.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) regarded martyrdom as a sort of Baptism, and in fact he regarded it as the “most excellent” form of Baptism since a martyr truly imitated Christ in his death and resurrection. This came to be known and accepted as Baptism by blood.

Baptism of desire came to mean a desire to lead a good and upright life, a desire to live like a Christian, so to speak, which was thwarted not by personal fault but by the Church’s failure to bring the sacrament to lands it never heard of. Some theologians postulated that these people would not be denied entrance into heaven because if they had been offered the chance to be baptized, they would have accepted it.

The bishops of Vatican II used primarily Pauline language when writing about Baptism, saying people “are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy, #6); they put on the new person and become a new creation, reborn by water and the Spirit, children of God, dead to sin and alive in Christ. The bishops also wrote that, in the sacrament, it is Christ who baptizes, which is an Augustinian idea, and that Catholics by their baptismal character are consecrated into a holy priesthood to worship God in the liturgy, which is an idea Aquinas developed. They reaffirmed the Tridentine teaching that baptisms outside the Roman Church are valid, but they went beyond the Council of Trent in asserting that “Baptism therefore constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it.” (Decree on Ecumenism #22)

The bishops ordered the revision of the Rite of Baptism and the composition of a new rite of adult Baptism. They decided that baptismal themes should be more prominent in the Lenten liturgies and that the liturgy of the Easter Vigil should be used for actual baptisms, especially in mission lands. They also revived the idea that a catechumenate of moral and doctrinal instruction should precede the baptism of adults.

In conclusion, it may be said that Baptism continues to express much of what is understood about the meaning of Christ and membership in the Christian

community. The New Testament speaks of Baptism in terms of death and resurrection; it can, therefore, be concluded that Baptism sets forth a rejection of self-centered attitudes and an acceptance of values which change the meaning of human life toward love and service of others. “The God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King. Amen.” (from The Rite of Baptism, #98).

**Resources used:**

Joseph Martos, Doors To the Sacred (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981).

Karl Rahner, Encyclopedia of Theology (The Seabury press, 1975).

Michael Schmaus, Dogma 5: The Church As Sacrament (Sheed and Ward, 1975).

The Rites of the Catholic Church, (The Liturgical Press, 1990).

## CANON LAW

### Canon 851

Article 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 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 860

Article 1, Outside the case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private homes, unless the local ordinary has permitted this for a grave cause.

### Canon 867

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.

### 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 872

Insofar as possible one to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who is to assist an adult in Christian initiation, or, together with the parents, to present an infant at the baptism, and who will help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism, and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it.

### Canon 873

Only one male or one female sponsor or one of each sex is to be employed.

## **Canon 874**

Article 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 the mother of the one to be baptized.

Article 2, A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be admitted to the role of sponsor, but may be admitted as a witness to Baptism, together with a Catholic sponsor.

## **Canon 877**

Article 1, The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal book the names of those baptized making mention of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses if any and the place and date of the conferred baptism, together with an indication of the date and place of birth.

Article 2, If it is a question of a child born of an unmarried mother, the name of the mother is to be inserted if there is public proof of her maternity or if she asks this willingly, either in writing or before two witnesses; likewise the name of the father is to be inserted if his paternity has been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; in other cases, the name of the one baptized is recorded without any indication of the name of the father or the parents.

Article 3, If it is a question of an adopted child, the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded, and the names of the sponsors. (cf. p.10, #3)

## **DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

“Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: ‘Therefore . . . we are members one of another.’ Baptism incorporates us *into the Church*. From the baptismal font is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: ‘For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.’”  
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1267, hereafter CCC)

### **Parents** (cf. Canons 851, 868, and 874)

- Parents must be prepared to bring up their child in the Catholic religion.
- They must be properly instructed in the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and the obligations attached to it. If this is lacking, Baptism should be put off and the reason for this action explained to the parents and discussed with them.

### **Sponsors (godparents)** (cf. Canon 874)

- Sponsors are designated by the one to be baptized, the parents or by the one who takes their place; or, in their absence, by the pastor.
- They must understand their role and have a good intention to perform it. Attending baptismal preparation sessions for the first child would be helpful.
- They must be at least 16 years of age, unless a different age has been designated by the diocesan bishop or the pastor for a good reason.
- One sponsor must be a practicing Catholic who has received all of the Sacraments of Initiation and leads a life in harmony with the faith. Other Christians may serve as witnesses.
- They cannot be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
- They cannot be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.
- It is the Catholic understanding that godparents, in a liturgical and canonical sense, should themselves be members of the Church or ecclesial Community in which the baptism is being celebrated. They do not merely undertake a responsibility for the Christian education of the person being baptized (or confirmed) as a relation or friend; they are also there as representatives of a community of faith, standing as guarantees of the candidate’s faith and desire for ecclesial communion.

(continued on next page)

- 1) However, based on the common baptism and because of ties of blood or friendship, a baptized person who belongs to another ecclesial Community may be admitted as a witness to the baptism, but only together with a Catholic godparent. A Catholic may do the same for a person being baptized in another ecclesial Community.
- 2) Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, it is permissible for a just cause for an Eastern faithful to act as a godparent together with a Catholic godparent at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the godparent is a suitable one.
- 3) A Catholic is not forbidden to stand as a godparent in an Eastern Orthodox Church, if he/she is so invited. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education binds in the first place the godparent who belongs to the Church in which the child is baptized.

## **Catechesis for Parents and Sponsors (godparents)**

- The parent(s) or family member presenting the child for Baptism\* should be sufficiently instructed before the actual baptism of their child.
- Parents are required to participate in the parish's preparation program only for their first child celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism. However, they are welcome to attend for their other children, if they so choose.

Because of the natural relationships, parents have a ministry and a responsibility in the baptism of infants more important than those of the godparents.

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. They should be provided with suitable means such as books, letters, addressed to them, and catechisms designed for families. The pastor should make it his duty to visit them or see that they are visited; he should try to gather a group of families together and prepare them for the coming celebration by pastoral counsel and common prayer. (The Rites of the Catholic Church, p.367.)

- Sponsors are also invited and strongly encouraged to attend these sessions. (Canon 851)

Baptismal instruction should include the following:

1. The importance of the primary role parents play as first and foremost catechists of their own children. Emphasis should be placed on helping them to find ways to share their faith with their children, from early childhood through their maturing years.
2. An explanation of how the sacraments aid us in participating in the life of God.
3. An explanation of the Sacraments of Initiation, with special emphasis on Baptism and its close connection with Confirmation and Eucharist.
4. Instruction in the Rite of Infant Baptism including the meaning of its rituals and symbols.
5. The role of the sponsor; what is expected of them, not only at the time of Baptism, but as the child matures.

\* Note: this phrase is to be understood throughout pp. 9-11 as based on Canon 868.1

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CATECHETICAL LEADER**

### **A. Before the Rite of Baptism:**

1. Assure that baptismal preparation sessions and visits are held on a regular basis in the parish. You may want to invite parents who have had prior experience to assist you in planning and facilitating these sessions. You may also wish to use audio-visual materials or other resources from the Diocesan Media Resource Center.
2. Encourage parents to attend these sessions before the birth of their child. During the sessions or in visits, encourage parents to discuss their own faith, especially ways they can nurture it. Be especially sensitive to parents in interfaith marriages.
3. Check with the minister of Baptism to assure the details of the sacramental celebration are complete.
4. Encourage parents to ask that the baptism be celebrated during the regular Sunday liturgy. Be sure that they and your parishioners understand the reason for this.
5. It is normative in the Diocese of Toledo that all celebrations of the Rite of Baptism take place in the designated area in worship spaces where baptisms are held. No baptisms are to be celebrated in private homes or public places, unless a grave reason exists; e.g.; emergency situations.
6. Announce the names of newly baptized infants, their parents and godparents in the parish bulletin and newsletter.
7. Be certain that baptismal records are properly kept.
8. In the case of a child who was baptized in an emergency which prevented the celebration of baptism in Church, cf. the Rite for Baptism, #165-185.
9. Establish a team of visitors who will visit families of the newly baptized at least once a year until the child enters school and help the parents realize the following:  
After baptism it is the responsibility of the parents, in their gratitude to God and in fidelity to the duty they have undertaken, to assist the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to prepare the child to receive confirmation and participate in the holy eucharist. In this duty they are again to be helped by the parish priest (pastor) by suitable means.  
(The Rites of the Catholic Church, p.367)

**DIOCESAN POLICY REGARDING BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES**  
**FEBRUARY 17, 1998**

1. A complete record of baptismal information is to be sent from the parish only on the following occasions:
  - on the occasion of marriage;
  - on the occasion of entrance into a seminary;
  - on the occasion of entrance into deacon formation;
  - on the occasion of entrance into an institute or society of religious or apostolic life;
  - on the occasion of applying for Social Security (Social Security will not accept short form because it does not give date of birth)
  
2. On all other occasions the approved form is to be used. This form states that **the person was baptized, gives the person's name, date of Baptism and name of minister.** This is the only information to be shared.
  
3. For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information shall be entered in the register:
  - a. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s);
  - b. the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s);
  - c. the date and place of birth;
  - d. the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s);
  - e. the place and date of the baptism;
  - f. the name of the minister performing the baptism;
  - g. the fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parents.
  - 1) Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.
  
  - 2) For children baptized before their adoption is finalized, the following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized and with due regard for the civil law of the jurisdiction:
    - (a) parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents;
    - (b) the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added;
    - (c) the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added;
    - (d) a notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted.

# **SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

## **Theology**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance is rooted in the Sacraments of Initiation. Our election by God and the gift of faith call us to turn away from sin and follow Christ. We remain, however, subject to human weakness and the inclination to sin; and we continue always in the struggle of conversion to which Christ calls us.

When we sin, we damage our relationship with God. God faithfully and repeatedly offers to us mercy and loving forgiveness. God always calls us back to intimate relationship.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are joined to each other as one. Our sinfulness also damages and weakens this relationship with the community.

Jesus' work on earth was to call people to repentance, to offer them forgiveness and healing, and to reintegrate them into the community. The Church continues Jesus' work of reconciling the world and does this in a sacramental and formal way in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance.

We all need this sacrament. Our world is torn apart by war, violence, greed, hatred, inhumanity, abuse, mistrust, broken relationships, and destruction of our earth. We are all sinners, not just those who have seriously separated themselves from God and the community. We all find in this sacrament "an opportunity to confront our sinfulness, acknowledge our need for conversion, seek pardon and peace, and celebrate our union with the healing, merciful Christ and His Church." (Sharing the Light of Faith #125)

## **History of the Sacrament**

Forgiveness and reconciliation have been celebrated in many ways in the history of Catholicism. Forgiveness of sins has always been associated with Baptism and Eucharist. Throughout Christian history, prayer and the reading of scripture, fasting and physical self-discipline, almsgiving and other works of charity have also been sacramental actions through which people could discover, experience, and practice the conquest of sin. Amidst all this, however, there has usually been in every age one sacrament for the forgiveness of sins that stood out from the others. Whatever form it took, it combined admission of guilt, interior and exterior acts of repentance, and an assurance of divine forgiveness given to the penitent.

The first communities of Jesus' followers were convinced that the conversion experience which took place at Baptism was so complete that they could not imagine that public sin was a possibility. However, reality did not find

this to be true, and the early communities did not know how to respond to these persons and resorted, finally, to expelling them from the church.

In the mid-second century (approximately 150) the first indications of modifying the belief of Baptism as a once-in-a-lifetime forgiveness of sins began to emerge. The community said that sins could be forgiven only one time (other than Baptism) in a person's life. If this one time was used up, the sinner was turned over to the mercy of God. The second Baptism of forgiveness, following the committing of serious sin, also came into being during the second century. There was a long period of preparation similar to the catechumenate which lasted for years. There were no words of absolution, but, rather, an invitation back into the Christian community. The first "confessors" in this process were those who witnessed the sincere repentance.

This process was known as canonical penance, and, because of the severity of penances, was rare.

In the earliest days of the Church there was no private form of penance recognized, only the previously referred to public repentance of sins. As a result many persons were baptized at a later time and some not until they were in danger of death.

In the third century the persecution of Christians was widespread, and many, under pressure, renounced their faith. A debate ensued regarding forgivable and unforgivable sins and those that could be forgiven only by God and not by the Church. This led to two extreme positions on forgiveness: the rigorists, who claimed that excommunication for sins like apostasy and adultery should be permanent, and the bishops, who generously readmitted people who seemed to be sorry for what they had done. Different interpretations were present in various parts of the Roman Empire.

In the early part of the fourth century, Constantine called the bishops to a meeting at Nicea to bring greater unity to Church doctrine and practices. The bishops approved the traditional notion of a single repentance after Baptism and affirmed the legitimacy of reconciling apostates and adulterers after public repentance. More importantly, they agreed that anyone dying and requesting reception of the Eucharist be granted the permission. This was a small but important move toward modifying the Church's rigid rule about only one reconciliation for Christians.

As the Church grew in the early centuries, the attitude toward moral behavior changed from seeing it as a sacred responsibility, to seeing it more in terms of laws and specific actions. As a result, the attitude toward the Sacrament of Reconciliation became more legalistic.

The Celtic Churches in the fifth century brought about the origins of the twentieth century pre-Vatican II understanding of Reconciliation. As there were no cities in Ireland, the monks traveled to the countryside bringing Baptism and the Mass and the preaching of forgiveness. The classfolk did not adjust easily to

the moral norms of the new religion, and, in their daily affairs, continued to behave much the same as before their conversion. Because of the distance between monasteries, the monks could not assure the people that they would be there at their deathbed to assure them of the Church's forgiveness. To remedy the situation, the monks prescribed private, repeated confession and continuous works of penitence. As travel from Ireland to Europe increased in the sixth century, the penitential system of the Irish monks spread.

As the monks traveled, they prepared and carried with them books which contained lists of sins and appropriate penances. Repeated, private confession to a priest was encouraged and eventually required. The practice of giving absolution before the penance also evolved.

This trend continued to grow during the centuries so that the outward elements of the sacrament were stressed with the result that relationship with God and the internal conversion of heart were minimized. The Reformation and the subsequent Council of Trent corrected many abuses in the Church's penitential system, but the legalism of the sacrament persisted for several more centuries.

The study and renewal that preceded and accompanied the Second Vatican Council rediscovered the original spirit of the sacrament. The Council directed emphasis again toward the covenant with God, the call to conversion, the inner attitudes of the heart, personal responsibility, and reconciliation with God and the community.

Following the Council, the rites of the sacrament were revised to include scripture and the option of face-to-face encounter with the confessor. Three rites of celebrating the sacrament were developed: private, individual reconciliation (Rite I); communal celebration with individual confession and absolution (Rite II); and, in grave necessity or imminent danger of death, communal celebration with general confession and general absolution (Rite III).

**Resource Used:**

Joseph Martos, Doors To the Sacred.  
Pope John Paul II, "Misericordia Dei," 2002.

## CANON LAW

### **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.

### **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**

Article 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.

Article 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.

## **DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION**

1. Every child, whether enrolled in Catholic School or participating in the Parish Religious Education Program, upon coming to the age of reason will be catechized for the Sacrament of First Reconciliation. Once First Reconciliation has been received, the child is to be catechized for First Eucharist. If a child is not prepared to make First Reconciliation, the reception of First Eucharist is to be delayed until such time as the child has received First Reconciliation.
2. Parents are to be involved in the preparation of their child for this sacrament. (cf. Canon 914)
3. Catechesis with parents/guardians may include:
  - a. an opportunity for parents/guardians to develop their own understanding and appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
  - b. an introduction to the history and theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the life of grace, covenant relationship, and the call to Christian discipleship;
  - c. catechesis on sin, metanoia, conversion, sorrow for sin, penance or satisfaction for sin, and reconciliation;
  - d. an explanation of moral, psychological, and faith development from infancy to adulthood with emphasis on childhood;
  - e. an opportunity for parents/guardians to clarify their intentions in bringing their child to this sacrament;
  - f. assurance that families live the sacramentality of reconciliation in daily life by developing trusting love, by asking and accepting forgiveness, by offering choices and helping each other accept consequences, by letting relationships mend and grow;
  - g. opportunities to be engaged with their child in the catechesis for the sacrament;
  - h. an explanation of the Rites of Reconciliation in its three forms; (cf. p. 3)
  - i. assistance with judging their child's readiness and freedom in receiving the sacrament;
  - j. encouragement to celebrate First Reconciliation with their child; ideally, parents first, followed by their children.
  - k. encouragement to continue the developmental process of growing in morality and reconciliation and to celebrate the sacrament regularly and as a family.
4. Catechesis of the children should include:
  - a. teaching and reflection on God's love and forgiveness;
  - b. teaching and reflection on sin, reconciliation and amendment for sin;
  - c. teaching and practice in the rite of Reconciliation in the individual and communal form.

5. A child is ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation when the child:
  - a. has a sense of relationship between purposeful right and wrong; i.e., good choices and bad choices;
  - b. is able to describe wrongdoing in his/her own words: knowing it is wrong and choosing to do it anyway;
  - c. is able to and desires to express sorrow.
  
6. The decision regarding the child's readiness to celebrate this sacrament rests primarily with the parents and the catechist in consultation with the confessor and catechetical leader.
  
7. There are a number of components of the program of preparation for First Reconciliation:
  - a. the catechesis in the Catholic school;
  - b. the catechesis in the Parish Religious Education program;
  - c. parent sessions;
  - d. parent-child sessions.
  
8. It is recommended that the immediate preparation for First Reconciliation provide special parent-student sessions that involve the students and parents of both the parish school and the religious education program. These augment but do not replace classroom catechesis.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CATECHETICAL LEADER**

### **A. Before the Rite of Reconciliation:**

It is the responsibility of the parish catechetical leader to work with the pastor/al leader and principal (if applicable) to:

1. set dates for parent meetings and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
  
2. select and prepare catechists; (The catechist for children and adolescents continues to be indispensable. This catechist has the delicate mission of giving "the first notions of catechism and preparation for the sacrament of Penance, for First Communion and Confirmation. This responsibility is all the more pressing today if children and adolescents do not receive adequate religious formation within the family. General Directory for Catechesis #232);
  
3. select appropriate catechetical materials;
  
4. assure that the Religion Course of Study is being taught, especially the "Sacrament of Reconciliation" section;

5. arrange for the parents' catechetical sessions and the children's immediate preparation; parents of home schoolers should be invited;
6. coordinate the effort of parents, confessors, and catechists to determine the readiness of the students;
7. obtain the needed certificate of Baptism for each student who will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a parish other than the place of Baptism;
8. provide ongoing catechesis regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation for children and parents;
9. no certificate is to be issued for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation; no record may ever be kept of individuals celebrating the sacrament.

**B. Connecting With Families:**

Because faith experience is built upon human experience and because moral development is an on-going process that begins very early in life, efforts should be made to work with parents/guardians of very young children to encourage them in the day-to-day nurturance of these aspects of their children's lives. In the case of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a child needs to have experienced the human dimensions of trusting love, forgiveness, pardon, reconciliation (reunion), and renewed hope in mended relationships. Because the human dimension of these elements is so much a part of everyday living, it is in the home and through family (especially parents) that they can be developed from earliest infancy more effectively than in any other environment.

1. In earliest childhood (1-3 years of age) the following will help a child develop toward morality and the Sacrament of Reconciliation:
  - a. provide a safe, secure atmosphere to develop faith and trust;
  - b. express love and affection (both parents) in appropriate physical ways, e.g., eye contact, hugs, smiles;
  - c. be available for constant assurance in times of shame, and "crisis";
  - d. correct the child in ways that show displeasure with the action but not with the person of the child;
  - e. establish and demand limits so the child can be free to know what he/she can do.
2. During pre-school years (approximately 4-5 years of age) the following will support the child's development:
  - a. show consistency in parent-child relationship that builds up confidence in love;
  - b. use "teachable moments" involving relationships to help the child discern right from wrong in a positive way;

- c. let the child witness adult reconciliation;
- d. begin reviewing the day with the child to build an initial sense of responsibility toward himself/herself and the persons in his/her life. Help the child discern right and wrong actions, accepting admissions of wrongdoing with detached restraint. Once the child has experienced these elements on a human level, he/she can be led to an awareness of God's forgiveness through the action of Christ in a special sign and celebration called "sacrament."

**C. After The Child Has Celebrated First Reconciliation:**

Parents, catechists, pastors/pastoral leaders, and catechetical leaders should continue to expand and enrich the child's understanding of the sacrament. This would include continued consistent, loving parenting; further development through the formal religious education program of the understanding of reconciliation and of faith commitment to Christ; encouragement to participate as family in the reception of this sacrament on a regular basis.

## SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

### Theology

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life, both for the universal Church and for the local congregations of the Church. “The other sacraments, like every other ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the holy Eucharist and have it as their end. 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.” PO no. 5 [DOL 18, no. 260].

The Eucharistic celebration always includes: the proclamation of the Word of God; thanksgiving to God the Father for all his benefits, above all the gift of his Son; the consecration of bread and wine; and participation in the liturgical banquet by receiving the Lord’s body and blood. These elements constitute one single act of worship. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1408; hereafter CCC)

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, that is, of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a work made present by the liturgical action. (CCC 1409)

It is Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priest, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice. (CCC 1410)

Only validly ordained priests can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and the wine so that they become the Body and Blood of the Lord. (CCC 1411)

The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: “This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood . . . .” (CCC 1412)

By the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, loving and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his body and his blood, with his soul and his divinity (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1640; 1651). (CCC 1413)

As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead and to obtain spiritual or temporal benefits from God. (CCC 1414)

Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the Sacrament of Penance. (CCC 1415)

Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicant's union with the Lord, forgives his[sic] venial sins, and preserves him[sic] from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. (CCC 1416)

The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion each time they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so at least once a year. (CCC 1417)

Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honored with the worship of adoration. "To visit the Blessed Sacrament is . . . a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord" (Paul VI, Mysterium Fidei 66, as quoted in CCC 1418)

Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his Heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints. (CCC 1419)

## **History of The Sacrament**

### **Origin of the Word**

For Catholics, the word Eucharist connotes the Body and Blood of Jesus. This belief has endured throughout the ages. But it is important to realize that Eucharist refers to more than the Body and Blood of Christ. It comes from the Greek word meaning "to give thanks," and in the early Church it designated not only the bread and wine, but also the ritual of worship which surrounded their use. The history of the Eucharist is, therefore, not just the history of sacramental objects, but the history of a sacramental action.

### **Passover Event**

To understand the history of Eucharist, one must first understand the Jewish Passover meal. This event commemorated the passing over of Yahweh who slew the first-born of the Egyptians and the crossing over of the Hebrews from slavery to freedom through the Red Sea. Yahweh had ordered them to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts to protect them against

death and to eat their last meal in Egypt with unleavened bread since they would not have time to wait for it to rise. This meal commemorating this event was celebrated every spring, and in Jesus' time it began with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God and a first course of bitter relishes which symbolized the bitterness of the Hebrews' slavery. Then after the story of the first Passover was read, the meal of roasted lamb was eaten with wine and unleavened bread, over which further prayers of blessing and thanks were offered. The meal ended with a psalm of praise and a final thanksgiving prayer over the last cup of wine.

The Israelites were ritualizing, in this Passover meal, liberation and freedom. God stepped into Israel's history and by mighty power delivered the Israelites when they did not expect it. God showed them mercy and compassion when they knew they did not deserve it. God did this. Out of love God formed a covenant with them. The Exodus became for them the paradigm of deliverance and freedom. The Passover meal celebrated what God had done, could do, and would do. God would lead this people everlastingly into freedom.

The evening before Jesus died he celebrated his last Passover meal with his disciples. What he was doing during this Last Supper had much to do with freedom. What he did, the change he made, and the emphasis he put on this already highly established symbolic ritual meal, would bring the theme of freedom to its fulfillment. The actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper were the simple beginnings of the eucharistic liturgy.

### **The Last Supper**

The bread and wine used symbolized and expressed the meaning of his impending death: bread was the product of wheat ground; wine was the product of grapes crushed. So, Jesus' death, ritually shown in the Last Supper symbols would effect reconciliation between God and humanity.

Jesus' presence in the Eucharist must be taken in a larger context in order to make sense: Jesus is not present merely to be a passive object to be looked at and admired; he is, rather, celebrating the ritual meal of death and deliverance.

The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the cross. Each time we celebrate, we enter into Jesus' experience of death and its meaning for him and for us.

### **Early History**

To the early Christians what mattered was not that Jesus was truly present in the words used, but rather what he was doing in them, what demands he was making in that ritual meal.

In the early days of the Christians, the Liturgy of the Word was held on Saturday, while the common meal, the Eucharist, was held on Sunday. By the second century the two services were combined. The celebrant was free to use his own words.

## **Continuing History**

The following are some of the important dates in the history of the Eucharist:

### Mid-2nd to early 3rd centuries

- Uniform outlines of the Mass were established, and the shift from seeing Eucharist as meal to seeing it as redemptive sacrifice took place.

### 4th century

- In 384 the language of the Mass was changed from Greek to Latin so that people could participate.
- The old Roman canon became fixed (and remained for 1500 years).

### 6th century

- Gregory the Great set a new era for the Mass by inaugurating reforms.
  - The Eucharistic Celebration became more solemn.
  - Gestures, prayer and chants were added.
  - Bishops became the main celebrants.
  - A theological shift took place due to the Arian heresy which denied the divinity of Christ.
- The reaction of the official Church was to place a strong emphasis upon the divinity of Christ.
- This resulted in a shift that increased the distance between the altar and the people so that people felt awed and unworthy.

### 11th century

- Uniformity in celebrating the Eucharist was required.
- Private Masses were introduced in the monasteries with the following results:
  - The priest took over completely the action of the Mass, and the communal aspect of the liturgy disappeared. (Separation of the clergy from the laity)
  - The canon was whispered.
  - The altar was fixed to the wall.
  - The congregation was relegated to watching.
  - The cross and candles were added to the setting of the altar.

### 12th century

- Because people could not see the consecrated bread and wine, the elevation at the Mass was added. As the consecrated bread and wine were elevated higher and higher, they became something to be adored.
  - Genuflections were added out of respect for the Eucharist.
  - Reception of Holy Communion became rare.

### 13th century

- The Fourth Lateran Council promulgated the term transubstantiation; i.e., the substance of bread and wine is changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, with only the species or accidents of the bread and wine remaining.
- The Church had to order reception of Eucharist once a year because people had been afraid to receive.
- The role of Bishops and priests changed.
- The celebrant became the focal point, to the exclusion of community participation.
- The celebrant began wearing special vestments.
- The feast of Corpus Christi was established.
- Benediction and exposition began.
- All this led to privatism in worshipping the Eucharist rather than celebrating it communally.

### 16th century (The Reformation)

- With the reformers' opposition to exposition, the Church countered with more frequent use of the practice.

### 17th century

- The Official Church prescribed the use of a tabernacle to reserve the Eucharist.
- New ceremonials developed.
- Congregations continued to be spectators, passive and watchful.

### 20th century

- Pope Pius X lowered the age for reception of the Eucharist. (1910)
- "Mystici Corporis" described the image of us as parts of the "Mystical Body of Christ." (1943)
- Vatican Council II began. (1962)
- "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy" called for liturgical reform which included:
  - Mass is celebrated in the vernacular.
  - The earlier practice of receiving the Eucharist under both species is restored.
  - Full participation by the congregation changes the role of the people at Mass.
  - The celebrant faces the congregation during Mass.
  - Creation of the roles of lay ministers, lectors, cantors, eucharistic ministers, etc.

## CANON LAW

### 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.
2. The Most Holy Eucharist may be given to children who are in danger of death, if they are able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and to receive Communion reverently.

### 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 diligent lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.

### Canon 919

Article 1: One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion.

Article 3: Those who are advanced in age or who suffer from any infirmity, as well as those who take care of them, can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have taken something during the previous hour.

## **DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST**

1. Every child, whether enrolled in a Catholic school, participating in a religious education program, or being home schooled, upon coming to the age of reason, will be catechized for the Sacrament of Eucharist. It is required that the child first be catechized and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving the Eucharist.
2. Catechesis for children celebrating the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time should include: (cf. Grade Two Religion Course of Study)
  - a. a belief in the person of Jesus, the main events in his life, death, and resurrection.
  - b. a belief that the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ.
  - c. an awareness of Eucharist as both a sacrifice and a sacred meal and memorial celebrated in community.
  - d. an understanding of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist and participation in the Mass appropriate to the child's age.
  - e. explanation of, and practice for, the proper preparation for receiving Holy Communion: one hour fasting from food and drink (water not included); an attitude of respect; e.g., folding hands; focusing on who it is we are going to receive, making a gesture of reverence, not chewing gum or candy.
  - f. the opportunity to receive under both species. (cf. note on Celiac Sprue Disease)\*
3. In order to celebrate First Eucharist, the child is required to:
  - a. have an understanding of who Jesus is, including the main events in his life, death, and resurrection.
  - b. be able to distinguish between the bread of the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
  - c. have a desire and a devotion toward receiving the Eucharist according to his/her age.
4. The decision as to the child's readiness to celebrate this sacrament in consultation with the pastor/pastoral leader rests primarily with the parents, the catechist, and parish catechetical leader.
5. Parents are to attend a program of preparation to assist them in their role as primary educators. The length of this preparation shall be adapted to the needs of the parish as necessary to adequately assist parents in this important task. Catechesis may include:
  - a. an introduction to sacramental theology, including the life of grace;
  - b. the history and theology of the Sacrament of Eucharist, including the Eucharistic Liturgy;
  - c. the importance of the Eucharist as the heart of Catholic life; the role of parents as models of Eucharistic living;

- d. emphasis that full and active participation in Sunday Eucharist is essential for parents as models to their children;
  - e. parental right and privilege as well as their role and serious responsibility in preparing their child;
  - f. a deeper understanding of the Sacraments of Initiation;
  - g. the spirituality of the sacrament; the presence of Christ in Word, Sacrament, assembly and Presider.
  - h. specific local details; e.g., dates for special celebrations, retreats, etc;
6. The parish community should be apprised of and made a part of the preparation and celebration of First Eucharist, for this, too, is a celebration of initiation into the Christian community.
  7. Ideally first Eucharist should be received at Sunday liturgy.
  8. If Eucharist is to be celebrated in a parish other than that of Baptism, the parent(s) must provide a certificate of Baptism from the parish where the child was baptized. The names of those children receiving First Eucharist should be entered in the parish Eucharistic register.
  9. Reception of Eucharist in a place other than a parish: the usual and recommended place for the reception of a Sacrament of Initiation is the Parish Church. For serious pastoral reasons, the principal of a private or non-parish school may request, from the pastor of the parish in which the school is located, and the pastor of the person to celebrate the Sacrament of Initiation, the permission to celebrate within the school community instead of the parish.

The directives contained in the document Diocesan Policies for Sacramental Preparation, which has been distributed to each school principal and parish catechetical leader, are to be carefully observed. This especially includes sending an official notification of the sacrament received to the parish of Baptism of the recipients so that the proper sacramental information may be recorded in their records. Also the documentation must be recorded in the sacramental records of the parish in which the school resides (Canon 877 & 895).

\* **Note: Children with Celiac Sprue Disease**

Celiac Sprue Disease is a disorder causing an allergic intestinal reaction to the gluten in wheat. Gluten is not an ingredient but a protein enzyme which activates when flour is kneaded and functions to bind the wheat together. Gluten is a toxin to persons with the disease and damages the digestive system. The damage inhibits the absorption of vitamins and nutrients and predisposes its victims to osteoporosis, neurological illnesses, and even lymphoma. Persons suffering from Celiac Disease can control it by not ingesting any gluten whatsoever. This includes the gluten which occurs naturally in communion wafers and communion bread made of wheat and water alone. The consequences of exposure to gluten are so serious that physicians often advise against receiving Holy

Communion under the form of bread, and even to avoid drinking from the main chalice into which a particle of the host is broken, or even from a cup which has been used for intinction. (From the Office for Worship, Archdiocese of Boston, January 2001)

Therefore, if a child with Celiac Sprue disease is to make his/her First Eucharist, the pastor must be notified, so that at the time of the celebration of First Eucharist, the child with Celiac Sprue Disease may be offered only the cup, in order to receive the Eucharist only under the species of wine. Cf. Canon #325, which permits the reception of Holy Communion under the form of wine alone in cases of necessity.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CATECHETICAL LEADER**

### **Before the Reception of the Sacrament**

1. Work with the pastor/al leader and principal (if applicable) or liturgist in choosing dates for parent meetings and individual and/or parish celebrations for all those receiving First Eucharist this year.
2. Plan and schedule the process for catechetical preparation. This process should include:
  - a. assuring that the Religion Course of Study Grade Two is being taught well.
  - b. preparing catechists and/or religion teachers. (The catechist for children and adolescents continues to be indispensable. This catechist has the delicate mission of giving “the first notions of catechism and preparation for the sacrament of Penance, for First Communion and Confirmation. This responsibility is all the more pressing today if children and adolescents do not receive adequate religious formation within the family. General Directory for Catechesis #232)
  - c. setting dates for meetings with parents; parents who home school should be invited.
  - d. engaging guest speakers, if needed.

### **After the Reception of the Sacrament**

1. Register the names of the children who received First Eucharist in the parish registry.
2. Continue to “connect” with the families and children by providing ongoing catechesis.

## **SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION**

### **Theology**

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:14-17)

Baptism, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “Sacraments of Christian Initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For “by the sacrament of Confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” (CCC 1285)

Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit, in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds. (CCC 1316)

Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian’s soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one’s life. (CCC 1317)

### **History of the Sacrament**

The Spirit is present in the Church moving, breathing, acting and allowing historical events and cultures to shape our understanding and practice of the faith. This is clearly evident as we look at the history and the evolution of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Confirmation as a separate sacramental ritual in Christianity did not exist before the third century, and it did not become a regular practice until after the fifth century. The ritual did have precedents, however; the New Testament mentions that the apostles sometimes laid their hands on converts and, during patristic initiation ceremonies, bishops usually anointed or imposed their hands on the new converts. This action was often associated with the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it was not until the Middle Ages that the ritual became definitively separated from baptismal initiation and that it was included among the seven

official sacraments of the Church and received a separate theological justification. The rite which is now called Confirmation has meant different things in different periods of history, and there are many questions, even today, with regard to the timing and meaning of Confirmation.

In the early Church, from the time of Christ to the fourth century, the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) were received at the Easter Vigil by adult catechumens. The catechumens were rubbed with oil, descended into a pool where the local bishop baptized them and, upon emergence from the pool, were given a white robe and experienced the laying on of hands and anointing. They were then allowed to enter fully into the Eucharistic celebration. Initiation consisted of one event with several moments.

In the fourth century Constantine proclaimed Christianity as the state religion. This action led to mass baptisms which included children and infants. However, the question arose: if Baptism was supposed to be for the remission of sins and children were not old enough to commit sin, why baptize infants? From Cyprian of Antioch came the answer: the sin of Adam and Eve.

Augustine, 150 years later, helped to theologize the practice of infant Baptism and contributed to the separation of the rites of Christian initiation. Augustine called the sin of Adam and Eve “original sin” and said it was in the soul from birth, and its removal could take place only through Baptism. This change caused the separation of the traditional initiation ritual into distinct steps which gradually led to the three related, but distinct, sacraments.

Due to the large numbers of baptisms, it was impossible for bishops to preside. The practice was carried out then by the local priests who baptized, anointed and gave Eucharist to the children each year during the Easter Vigil. Pope Gregory objected to the practice of priests signing infants with Chrism but allowed the ritual to continue because of local support for it. In Rome, though, this rite of “consignation” was reserved to the bishop, and, eventually, this practice spread and became the norm.

In the medieval times, Confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church came to be viewed less as a rite of initiation and more as separate sacrament that enabled the receiver to defend the faith. The age of Confirmation varied, but the idea of Confirmation as a separate sacrament remained.

The Protestant Reformation, which rejected Confirmation as neither Christian nor scriptural, caused a brief, but to the point, reaction from the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Trent issued no doctrinal statement on Confirmation, but attached to its decree on sacraments were canons condemning those who said that Confirmation was a useless ceremony, that, at one time, it was just a form of catechesis and public profession of faith, that attributing spiritual power to the Christian was an offense against the Holy Spirit, or that any priest could administer the sacrament. The Catechism of the Council of Trent, issued in 1566, stated that Confirmation could be given to any baptized

Catholic, but that it was not necessary to receive the sacrament until the age of seven, even though it should not be postponed beyond the age of twelve.

The Roman Rite of Confirmation was modified only slightly when, in the eighteenth century, Pope Benedict XIV reintroduced into the rite the individual imposition of the bishop's hands.

The only other change in Catholic Confirmation was in its relation to the Eucharist. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Confirmation was still given before Eucharist. During the nineteenth century the practice of receiving the Eucharist before Confirmation began, and the practice was later approved by Pius X in 1910.

In the twentieth century Confirmation came to be more a sacrament of maturity and witness. The bishop's tap on the cheek signified that a person was ready to suffer for the faith. Confirmation followed the reception of First Eucharist and was performed outside of the Mass.

Vatican II caused further reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation and directed that Confirmation should be revised to indicate its close connection with Baptism; the result was a rite which could be used either immediately after the baptism of adults or at a later time for those who were baptized as infants. In the postbaptismal form of the rite, its meaning is less clear. The bishop is instructed to remind the candidates that they are called to be witnesses to Christ and more perfect members of the Church. This is reminiscent of the medieval theology of Confirmation. The candidates then, however, renew their baptismal promises, and the bishop prays that they be filled with the Holy Spirit, almost as if they had just been baptized.

Paul VI's preface to the revised rite which was issued in 1971 acknowledged that the ritual had undergone many changes and added some new changes beside those already mentioned. Primarily the rite has been simplified and made adaptable to different circumstances.

In the Eastern Churches, the rite of Chrismation at Baptism prevails for the conferring of the Holy Spirit.

Current thinking sees Confirmation as integrally related to Baptism and Eucharist. Together with these sacraments, Confirmation constitutes a process by which the Spirit brings the believer to full union with the Christian community. Confirmation does not complete Baptism in the sense that Baptism leaves something incomplete, but rather the Sacraments of Initiation are united in the initiation process. Confirmation renews and strengthens the baptismal call to bear witness to Christ and to work toward the mission of Christ.

### **Resources Used:**

Joseph Martos, Doors To the Sacred.

William Bausch, A New Look at the Sacraments.

## CANON LAW

### **Canon 843**

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Most Holy Eucharist are so interrelated that they are required for full Christian initiation.

### **Canon 879**

The Sacrament of Confirmation impresses a character and, by it, the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the Church; it strengthens them and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith.

### **Canon 881**

It is desirable that the Sacrament of Confirmation be celebrated in a church and during Mass, but for a just and reasonable cause, it may be celebrated outside Mass and in any worthy place.

### **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 892** (Responsibility of Sponsors)

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** (Qualifications of Sponsors)

1. To perform the role of sponsor, it is necessary that a person fulfill the conditions mentioned in Canon 874 as follows:  
To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:
  - a. be designated by the one to be confirmed, 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;
  - b. have completed the sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop, or, as seems to the pastor or minister, an exception is to be made for a just cause;
  - c. be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the Sacrament of Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;
  - d. not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
  - e. not be the father or the mother of the one to be confirmed.
2. It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be sponsor for Confirmation.

## **DIOCESAN POLICY FOR THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION OF CHILDREN**

### **1. AGE OF CONFIRMANDS**

In accord with the decree of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin Rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion which is about the age of 7 and 16 years of age.

### **2. BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES**

If Confirmation is celebrated in a parish other than that of Baptism, the candidate must obtain a certificate of Baptism from the parish where he/she was baptized. These should be requested well in advance of the date of Confirmation. Following the celebration of the sacrament, notice of the Confirmation should be sent to the parish of Baptism. The names of those Confirmed should be entered in the parish Confirmation register. (Canon 895).

### **3. SPONSORS**

- a. In view of the contemporary pastoral practice and in conformity with the rite of Confirmation, it is desirable that the godparent at Baptism, if available, also be the sponsor at Confirmation. (cf. Canon 893 #2)
- b. Besides the qualifications for sponsors listed in Canon 893, the following should be considered: sponsors bring the candidates to receive the sacrament, present them to the Bishop for the anointing, and will later help them to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit whom they have received. The renewed Rite of Confirmation seeks to return importance and a spiritual dimension to the role of the Sponsor/Godparent. In the early church, St. John Chrysostom called sponsors “spiritual parents who instructed spiritual children in Christian living.”

The new Rite of Confirmation seeks to restore to the Sponsor/Godparent an authentic ministry, with the sponsors giving personal witness to the faith of the Church, and guidance to their candidates both before and after reception of the sacrament. Sponsors and Godparents are for life.

Since the role of sponsors is meant to be distinct from that of parents, who are the first witnesses and guides of their children, parents (step-parents) may not act as sponsors. However, in certain circumstances when a qualified sponsor cannot be found, the church allows a parent to present the candidate for Confirmation. In these circumstances the parent brings the candidate to the bishop, presents her/him and testifies to her/his readiness. The

parent does not lay a hand on the shoulder during the conferral of the sacrament. In the Confirmation register no name is listed as sponsor.

4. **CATECHESIS FOR PARENTS AND SPONSORS**

As the primary educators of their children, parents, as well as sponsors, are to participate in the catechesis of their children for Confirmation. The length of this preparation shall be adapted to the needs of the parish as necessary to adequately assist parents in this important task. Sponsors are invited and encouraged to participate in these sessions. The catechesis should include the following:

- a. an introduction to sacramental theology including the life of grace;
- b. a brief history as well as the theology of the Sacraments of Initiation and their interrelatedness;
- c. the important role of the Christian parent and sponsor, in conjunction with the Christian community, in nurturing faith and in preparing the child for Confirmation;
- d. an explanation of the rite of Confirmation;
- e. the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian;
- f. the integral role of service in the life of a Christian.

5. **CATECHESIS FOR CONFIRMANDS**

Preparation is centered in the parish community; therefore, ideally students in Parish Religious Education Programs and Catholic School students are to be catechized together and celebrate the sacrament together. This catechesis should take place over a proper period of time as deemed necessary by the parish.

- a. The preparation should include age-appropriate catechesis on the following:
  - 1) the theology of Confirmation
    - as a Sacrament of Initiation intimately related to Baptism and Eucharist;
    - as a renewal and strengthening of one's baptismal call to bear witness to Christ and to share in the mission of the Church;
    - as a sacrament of being signed with the fullness of the Spirit;
  - 2) the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian;
  - 3) the integral role of service in the Christian life including opportunities for the candidates to offer service as well as theological reflection on this process;
  - 4) the rite of Confirmation;
  - 5) the important role of the sponsor (cf. Canon 893 and section 3 "sponsors").
  - 6) the importance of the Confirmation name. It is preferable that the baptismal name be chosen for Confirmation or a new name be selected. It is to be a Christian name.

- 7) dress: those to be confirmed are to be appropriately dressed for the occasion. Special robes, stoles, etc. are neither necessary nor desirable. (Diocese of Toledo Pastoral Policy Handbook).
- b. The preparation may also include:
- 1) opportunities for involvement with adult members of the Christian community in order to be more fully integrated into the parish community;
  - 2) a time of retreat during which the candidates may prayerfully reflect on and discern their desire to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation;
  - 3) an opportunity for candidates to meet with the pastor/pastoral leader, or a member of the parish staff to discern their readiness and desire to be confirmed.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CATECHETICAL LEADER**

### **A. Before the Celebration of the Rite of Confirmation:**

1. Work with the pastor/al leader and principal (if applicable) and liturgist in choosing a date for the celebration of Confirmation. The pastor/al leader contacts the Chancery and requests a date when the Bishop can come to the local parish for the celebration. The request is usually made six months prior to the desired date of the sacramental celebration.
2. Reception of Confirmation in a place other than a parish: the usual and recommended place for the reception of a Sacrament of Initiation is the Parish Church. For serious pastoral reasons, the principal of a private or non-parish school may request, from the pastor of the parish in which the school is located, and the pastor of the person to celebrate the Sacrament of Initiation, the permission to celebrate within the school community instead of the parish.

The directives contained in the document Diocesan Policies for Sacramental Preparation, which has been distributed to each school principal and parish catechetical leader, are to be carefully observed. This especially includes sending an official notification of the sacrament received to the parish of Baptism of the recipients so that the proper sacramental information may be recorded in their records. Also the documentation must be recorded in the sacramental records of the parish in which the school resides (Canon 877 & 895).

3. When the Chancery officially confirms a date for the celebration of the sacrament, the Chancery will forward guidelines for:
  - the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.
  - the liturgy; (note: the liturgical planning forms should be completed and returned to the Chancery at least two weeks before Confirmation.)
  
4. A process for catechetical preparation should be planned and placed on the parish calendar:
  - use the Religion Course of Study, “Sacraments section.”
  - set dates for meetings with parents and sponsors; parents and sponsors of home schoolers should be invited.
  - communicate the dates to the parties involved.
  - select and train catechists. (The catechist for children and adolescents continues to be indispensable. This catechist has the delicate mission of giving “the first notions of catechism and preparation for the sacrament of Penance, for First Communion and Confirmation. This responsibility is all the more pressing today if children and adolescents do not receive adequate religious formation within the family. General Directory for Catechesis #232)
  - plan service projects so that an attitude of life-long service may be fostered. It is important to include a time of reflection concerning the student’s experience in giving service. (cf. Religion Course of Study, “Service” handouts)
  - schedule a retreat which will include prayer, reflection and the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation in daily living. .
  - schedule an opportunity for the students to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to being confirmed.
  - prepare Confirmation cards that will be used to introduce the student to the Bishop (these may later be sent to the parish of Baptism).
  - schedule a Confirmation rehearsal for the students and their sponsors (consult the liturgical guidelines)
  - prepare Confirmation certificates to be presented to those receiving Confirmation.
  - schedule sessions after Confirmation to assist the students in reflecting upon the experiences of the newly confirmed and to help them to better enter into the life of the parish community. (Mystagogy)

## **B. Suggestions for Involving the Parish Community:**

1. Have a rite of enrollment for candidates during the Sunday parish liturgies.
2. Place occasional announcements in the parish bulletin informing the parishioners of the coming celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and requesting prayers for the candidates.
3. Place pictures of those to be confirmed on a bulletin board in the parish church.
4. Arrange for prayer partners with shut-ins of the parish.
5. Invite parishioners to speak with the candidates on topics such as:
  - what it means for them to be a Catholic Christian.
  - the ways the Spirit works in and through them.
  - the ways in which service is an integral part of their lives as Christians.
6. Invite parishioners to serve as discussion leaders for classes or the retreat.
7. Invite parishioners to suggest service projects.
8. Invite parishioners to attend the Confirmation ceremony.

# **CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE REACHED CATECHETICAL AGE**

## **Background**

The Church is experiencing more and more children of catechetical age who have not received the Sacraments of Initiation or at least some of the Sacraments of Initiation. Today's reality finds many parents presenting older children who have not been baptized or children who have been baptized in infancy but not catechized. The challenge for pastors, pastoral leaders, catechetical leaders and the parish is to warmly welcome these families and to properly prepare these children to be fully initiated into the Church.

## **Introduction**

This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children, not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians, or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation in conscience. But they cannot yet be treated as adults, because, at this stage of their lives, they are dependent on their parents or guardians and are still strongly influenced by their companions and their social surroundings.

The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children's growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults #252, 253)

## **History**

Vatican Council II decreed that the Catechumenate, the formal process for entrance into the Church, should be restored. The Council called for the revision of rites and sacraments of adult initiation, and in 1966, the Commission on the Liturgy drew up a provisional ritual and distributed it for experimentation to the different parishes throughout the world. After review and revision of two drafts of the proposed ritual, the formation of the new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was promulgated in January, 1972. The Rite was revised, adapted and canonically approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1986. In September, 1988, the Rite was mandated to be implemented by the Bishops of the United States in all dioceses of the United States.

## **Rites**

Canon 852 states “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.”

Therefore, those who catechize unbaptized children who are no longer infants and who have attained catechetical age should follow #252-330 from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This section (#252-330) is entitled “Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age.”

Further instruction is given in Appendix III of the same document:

Since children who have reached the use of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (Canon 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 receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the other catechumens.

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.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CATECHETICAL LEADER:**

In preparing children for the Sacraments of Initiation, it is important to purchase and to be familiar with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and to adapt it for children according to the needs of the parish as suggested in #250-330 of The Rites of the Catholic Church, (Volume One, Study Edition, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1990.)

1. Select the staff--individuals who are willing to share their faith, be hospitable, journey with the children and their parents, witness the presence of Jesus, have a desire to grow and are willing to share the Scriptures.
2. Catechize the parish about the process through bulletin inserts, announcements, letters, phone calls, and invitations to participate.
3. Interview families and children listening to their faith story; gather information from these families.
4. Choose materials to be used for catechesis (a list of resources can be found at the conclusion of this section). Include interactive materials in the preparation process; e.g., puzzles, games, role-playing, drama, art or music.
5. Plan the ways in which parents will be involved.
6. Bring families together often so that they may feel a sense of belonging.
7. Arrange a tour of the church, a visit with the pastor/pastoral leader, service projects and prayer rituals, in order to help parents and children feel comfortable in the parish.
8. Make sure that, although “book learning” is important in this process, the important outcome is the conversion process and helping the child to live the Good News as a Catholic Christian.
9. Initiate a “family-sponsor” program. Family sponsors attend sessions with parents and children, plan social events and help the family “bond” with the parish and feel welcomed, affirmed and included. These families could have children the same age as the candidates and could be included in the children’s classes as a means of help and support to them.
10. Keep an open line of communication with all families involved. (cf. the “Introduction” section of this document for descriptions of today’s parents)



# **SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

## **Background**

Every Christian community considers those who suffer handicaps, physical or mental, as well as other forms of disability--especially children--as persons particularly beloved of the Lord. A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy, makes it possible for the family and other formative centers to provide adequate catechesis for these people, who, as baptized, have this right and, if nonbaptized, because they are called to salvation. The love of the Father for the weakest of his children and the continuous presence of Jesus and His Spirit give assurance that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness.

Education in the faith, which involves the family above all else, calls for personalized and adequate programs. It should take into account the findings of pedagogical research. It is most effectively carried out in the context of the integral education of the person. On the other hand, the risk must be avoided of separating this specialized catechesis from the general pastoral care of the community. It is therefore necessary that the community be made aware of such catechesis and be involved in it. The particular demands of this catechesis require a special competence from catechists and render their service all the more deserving. (General Directory for Catechesis #189)

## **“Guidelines For Celebration Of The Sacraments With Persons With Disabilities”**

### **Preface**

Catholics with disabilities, as well as those who minister to or with them, often point out that pastoral practice with regard to the celebration of the sacraments varies greatly from diocese to diocese, even from parish to parish. Inconsistencies arise in such areas as the provision of sign language interpreters for persons who are deaf, in the accessibility of church facilities for persons with mobility problems, and in the availability of catechetical programs for persons with developmental and mental disabilities. Pastoral inconsistencies may occur in other areas as well.

The inconsistencies in pastoral practice often arise from distinct yet overlapping causes. Some result from a misunderstanding about the nature of disabilities. Others arise from an uncertainty about the appropriate application of church law toward persons with disabilities. Others are born out of fear or misunderstanding. Still others are the result of a studied and honest acceptance of the realistic limitations of a parish's or diocese's available resources.

The Bishops of the United States offer the “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments With Person With Disabilities” in order to give a more concrete expression to our long-standing concern for “realistic provision” for the means of access to full sacramental participation for Catholic persons with disabilities. While they do not address every conceivable situation that may arise in pastoral practice, the guidelines present a set of general principles to provide access to the sacraments for persons with disabilities. Diocesan staff, pastoral leaders, catechists, parishioners, health care workers and all those who minister to or with Catholics with disabilities are invited and encouraged to reflect upon and accept these guidelines in their continuing effort to bring Christ’s healing message and call to justice to the world.

### **General Principles**

1. By reason of their Baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God and have the same divine calling.
2. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community.<sup>1</sup> Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them.<sup>2</sup>
3. Parish sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active and conscious participation, according to their capacity. Pastoral ministers should not presume to know the needs of person with disabilities, but rather they should consult with them or their advocates before making determinations about the accessibility of a parish’s facilities and the availability of its programs, policies and ministries. These adaptations are an ordinary part of the liturgical life of the parish. While full accessibility may not always be possible for every parish, it is desirable that at least one fully accessible community be available in a given area. Parishes may, in fact, decide to collaborate in the provision of services to persons with disabilities.
4. Since the parish is the center of the Christian experience for most Catholics, pastoral ministers should make every effort to determine the presence of all Catholics with disabilities who reside within a parish’s boundaries. Special effort should be made to welcome those parishioners with disabilities who live in institutions or group homes and are unable to frequent their parish churches or participate in parish activities. However, pastoral ministers should remember that many persons with disabilities still reside with their families. Pastoral visitation, the parish census and the diverse forms of parish and diocesan social communication are just a few of the many ways

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Canon 213.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Canon 843.1.

in which the pastoral staff can work toward the inclusion of all parishioners in the parish's sacramental life.

5. In accord with Canon 777.4 pastors are responsible to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, their advocates and their families, as well as those knowledgeable in serving disabled persons can make a most valuable contribution to these programs. Parish catechetical and sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities. Further, parishes should encourage persons with disabilities to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry; e.g., as care ministers, catechists, etc. Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate support services for pastors to facilitate the evangelization, catechetical formation and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities.
6. The creation of a fully accessible parish reaches beyond mere physical accommodation to encompass the attitudes of all parishioners toward persons with disabilities. Pastoral ministers are encouraged to develop specific programs aimed at forming a community of believers known for its joyful inclusion of all of God's people around the table of the Lord.
7. In the course of making pastoral decisions, it is inevitable that pastoral care workers will encounter difficult cases. Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate policies for handling such cases which respect the procedural and substantive rights of all involved and which ensure the necessary provision of consultation.

## **Particular Sacraments**

### **Baptism**

- Through the Sacrament of Baptism the faithful are incorporated into Christ and into his Church. They are formed into God's people and obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They become a new creation and are called, rightly, the children of God.<sup>3</sup>
- Because it is the sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving it. Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion.<sup>4</sup> Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring Baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one parent or guardian consents to it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rite of Christian Initiation, General Introduction #1.

<sup>4</sup> Canon 868.1.2.

<sup>5</sup> Canons 868.1.1 and 852.

- So that Baptism may be seen as a sacrament of the Church's faith and of admittance into the people of God, it should be celebrated ordinarily in the parish church on a Sunday, or if possible at the Easter Vigil.<sup>6</sup> The Church, made present in the local community, has an important role to play in the Baptism of all of its members. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the baptized have the right to the love and help of the community.<sup>7</sup>
- Either personally or through others, the pastor is to see to it that the parents of an infant who is disabled, or those who take the place of the parents, are properly instructed as to the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and the obligations attached to it. If possible, either the pastor or a member of the parish community should visit with the family, offering them the strength and support of the community which rejoices at the gift of new life and which promises to nurture the faith of its newest member. It is recommended that preparation programs for Baptism gather several families together so that they may commonly be formed by pastoral direction and prayer, and so that they may be strengthened by mutual support.<sup>8</sup>
- If the person to be baptized is of catechetical age, the Rite of Christian Initiation may be adapted according to need.<sup>9</sup>
- A sponsor is to be chosen who will assist the newly baptized in Christian initiation. Sponsors have a special role in fostering the faith life of the baptized person. As such, they are to be chosen and prepared accordingly. Persons with disabilities may be sponsors for these Sacraments of Initiation.

## **Confirmation**

- Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation. In this way they receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his Body in faith and love.<sup>10</sup>
- Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities and shepherds of souls, especially pastors, are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized are properly instructed to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation

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<sup>6</sup> Canons 856 and 857.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rite of Baptism for Children, # 4, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Canons 851.2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Canons 851.1 and 852.1.

<sup>10</sup> Rite of Confirmation, # 1-2.

and to approach it at the appropriate time.<sup>11</sup> The diocesan Bishop is obliged to see that the Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred on his subjects who properly and reasonably request it.<sup>12</sup>

- All baptized, unconfirmed Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew their baptismal promises.<sup>13</sup> Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the appropriate time.
- Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful between the age of discretion (which is about the age of 7) and 16 years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan Bishop, or when there is a danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.
- A sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present. The sponsor assists the confirmed person on the continuing path of Christian initiation.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, it is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be the sponsor for Confirmation.<sup>15</sup>

## **Eucharist**

- The Eucharist is the most august sacrament, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. It is the summit and the source of all Christian worship and life, signifying and effecting the unity of the people of God, providing spiritual nourishment for the recipient and achieving the building up of the Body of Christ. The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life.<sup>16</sup>
- Parents, those who take the place of parents and pastors are to see to it that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely that the person be able to distinguish

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Canon 890.

<sup>12</sup> Canon 885.1

<sup>13</sup> Canon 889.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Canon 892.

<sup>15</sup> Canon 893.2.

<sup>16</sup> Canon 897.

<sup>17</sup> Canon 914.

the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture or reverential silence rather than verbally. Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist.

- Eucharistic celebrations are often enhanced by the exercise of the diverse forms of ministry open to the laity. In choosing those who will be invited to use their gifts in service to the parish community, the parish pastoral staff should be mindful of extending Christ's welcoming invitation to qualified parishioners with disabilities.

## **Reconciliation**

- In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Christian faithful obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins. At the same time they are reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example and prayer.<sup>18</sup>
- Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even small children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contribution for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities who cannot experience even minimal contrition may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability.
- Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language if sign language is their primary means of communication. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice.<sup>19</sup> The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession.<sup>20</sup> When no priest with signing skills is available, nor sign language interpreter requested, Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in

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<sup>18</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, #11.

<sup>19</sup> Canon 990.

<sup>20</sup> Canons 983.2 and 1388.2.

writing. The written materials are to be returned to the penitent or otherwise properly destroyed.

- In the case of individuals with poor communication skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally. In posing questions and in the assignment of penances, the confessor is to proceed with prudence and discretion, mindful that he is at once judge and healer, minister of justice as well as of mercy.<sup>21</sup>

(Taken from Origins, June 29, 1995; Vol. 25: No. 7. Reprinted with permission.)

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<sup>21</sup> Canons 978.1, 979 and 981.