

*Signs of
God's Love*



*Los signos del
Amor de Dios*

**Regulations and Guidelines
for
Sacramental Catechesis**

**Infant Baptism – First Penance – First Eucharist
Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**

Third Edition, 2004

**This booklet is a service of
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30 June 2004

First Martyrs of the Church of Rome

Dear Friends in Christ,

The sacramental life of the Church is full of inexhaustible riches signifying the love of God and the divine work of salvation accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Mirroring the love of the Holy Trinity, the entire Christian community assembles as living stones—the Church, building with the mortar of Christian love and witness an environment where faith and conversion are nurtured, and the kingdom of God is manifest.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “sacraments are ‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are the ‘masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant.” #1116

In this spirit, I approve and promulgate the third edition of *Signs of God's Love Regulations and Guidelines* as the norm for sacramental formation and praxis in the parishes and schools of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Its provisions become effective on January 1, 2005, the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God.

I express heartfelt gratitude to all parish personnel involved in the vital ministry of sacramental formation, and ask that you carefully implement these regulations, using the guidelines portion to shape your local parish practices for Christian initiation. May God's peace be with you and with all who share in the ministry of sacramental formation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Baltimore

SIGNS OF GOD'S LOVE

Third Edition

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Abbreviations and Bibliography

The following abbreviations and bibliography list the documents and scholarly works referenced in *Signs of God's Love*, Third Edition.

- CT *Catechesi Tradendae*, John Paul II, USCCB, 1979.
- CCC *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.
- GDC *The General Directory for Catechesis*, Congregation for the Clergy, 1997.
- GNLYC *The General Norms of the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, 1975.
- NAB *New American Bible*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1970.
- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council, 1963
- CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici*, The Code of Canon Law, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.
- OHWB *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, USCCB, 1999.
- RBC *Rite of Baptism for Children, The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Pueblo Publishing Co, New York, 1976.
- LG *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council, 1964.
- EN *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation, Paul VI, 1976.
- GS *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council, 1965.
- GCD *General Catechetical Directory*, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1972.
- RCIA *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, USCCB, 1988.
- A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, USCC, 1998.
- FC *Familiaris Consortio*, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, Pope Paul VI, 1975.
- PM *Policy Manual*, Department of Catholic Education Ministries, Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1995.
- DM *Dives in Misericordia*, Encyclical Letter, John Paul II, 1980.

DMC *Directory for Masses with Children*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1973.
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SIGNS OF GOD'S LOVE

Third Edition

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I. General Introduction

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Acts of the Apostles 2: 43 – 47, New American Bible

Our task is to introduce our young people to the sacramental life of the Church, integrate them into the faith life of the community, and form them into disciples committed to living out their baptismal mission. It is a very large task, but one for which God gives us the grace and gifts to accomplish. To all who are responsible for the preparation of infants, children, youth, and adults for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance, we invite you to consider what a privileged time it is to accompany others on their journey to full initiation into the Catholic faith community.

One of the fundamental realities of the Church is that it is a worshipping community responding to God's initiative of unconditional love and grace. In public worship, individuals, gathered together in community, assemble as a part of the Universal Church, the particular Diocesan Church, the Parish Church and the Domestic Church to praise God, acknowledge total dependence on God, and accept the gifts of divine life that God wishes to share in Jesus, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “It is the mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world” (CCC 1068).

Forming such a community of faith requires liturgical catechesis. “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men” (CCC 1074, quoting John Paul II, *CT* 23). In turn, “liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ (It is ‘mystagogy’) by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacrament’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC 1075). This weaving of liturgy and catechesis

unveils the content of prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation, and silence. “It must be regarded as an ‘eminent kind of catechesis’” (CT 23, cf. SC 35 and 3; CIC 777, 1 and 2).

Among the six tasks of catechesis listed in *The General Directory for Catechesis* is liturgical education. Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious, and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy (cf. SC 14) and the dignity of the baptismal royal priesthood of the people of God.

For this reason, catechesis, while promoting knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ ‘for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds...’” (GCD, 1972, 25b).

A. Regulations and Guidelines

Regulations set policy. These regulations and guidelines were revised by a committee of school, parish, and religious education personnel and read and reviewed by a reading committee, the staff of the Division of Evangelization and Catechesis, the Judicial Vicar and Cardinal’s Delegate for Canonical Affairs and the Vicar Bishops.

They are approved for use by Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore. These regulations provide further direction in carrying out the sacramental policies in the *Policy Manual*, Department of Catholic Education Ministries, Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Any exceptions to these regulations are to be obtained from the Archbishop of Baltimore.

Guidelines throughout this document provide guidance, assistance and resources for pastoral application.

B. Reason for the Revision of *Signs of God's Love*

The First Edition of *Signs of God's Love* was written in 1983. The Regulations section set policy for planning and implementation of sacramental preparation programs. The Guidelines section gave assistance and resources for program design. The promulgation of the revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983) and attention to pastoral practices called for the revision of the first edition. The Second Edition of *Signs of God's Love* was written in 1987. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 11, 1986 and subsequently, canonically confirmed by the Apostolic See by decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship on February 19, 1987. On July 1, 1988, *RCIA* was published for use in the liturgy. On September 1, 1988, use of *RCIA* was mandated in dioceses of the United States of America. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in 1994. This document is an excellent compendium of our faith and reference tool for all of the faithful. All teachers and parents are strongly encouraged to have and to study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The General Directory for Catechesis promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome in 1997 and was published in the United States in 1998. This document culls the wisdom of thirty plus years since the Second Vatican Council, and promotes and directs catechesis with a new vigor toward a broader understanding of evangelization and the Catechumenate. The *GDC* calls for the Catechumenate to be an inspiration for all catechesis and gives the responsibility for this initiatory catechesis to the entire Catholic Christian community (*GDC 91* and *RCIA 75*). The local expression of this community (as stated in the *Code of Canon Law*) is the parish – the proper setting for the preparation and celebration of these sacraments. Lastly, *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* (USCC, 1998) states the rights, responsibilities, gifts, and challenges for families today. It is critically important that a family perspective be an integral part of our sacramental preparation and celebration, in fact of the very life of the church itself.

The goal of this edition of *Signs of God's Love* is to call the parish faith community to the fuller vision offered by these documents, offer simplification and clarity in regulations, and provide valuable assistance and resources for implementation. **Particular attention is paid to conversion and sacramental readiness of children and involvement of the whole family.**

C. Theological and Catechetical Principles

There are several basic principles that provide the foundational understanding of, and catechesis for, sacraments. These principles are:

- ❖ **The sacraments are gifts to us from a loving God.**
 - “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind.” (*LG 1*)
 - Christ, through His Spirit has established His body, the Church, as the “universal sacrament of salvation.” (*LG 48*)
 - “The Church is the “universal sacrament of salvation,” simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God’s love for man.” (*GS 45*)
 - “...they (the sacraments) manifest and communicate to men...the mystery of communion with the God who is love, one in three persons.” (*CCC 1118*)
 - At the center of all sacramental life is what God has done for us and is doing for us. Thus, “sacraments have been instituted by Christ.” (*CCC 1114*)
- ❖ **The sacraments not only presuppose faith but nourish, strengthen, and express it** (cf. *CCC 1123*).
 - At significant life events, such as the Baptism of children and the other celebrations of the sacraments of Christian initiation, “people are disposed more than ever to seek out the true meaning of life” (*GDC 176*).
- ❖ **Readiness, not just a particular age or grade level, is the fundamental criterion for determining when an individual should participate in the celebration of a sacrament.**
 - Adaptation of catechesis requires that one consider age, spiritual maturity, the totality of the person and not just the exterior elements of a given situation (cf. *CCC 24, GDC 170*).
 - “The child demands full respect and help in its spiritual and human growth” (*GDC 177*). Those who implement the various phases of sacramental catechesis strive to integrate these principles in their planning and implementation of sacramental preparation programs and celebrations.

-
- Not all children in a particular grade level, Catholic school or a parish religious education program will be at the same stage of readiness. The faith, attitude and religious experience of the family are essential aspects of determining readiness (cf. *CT* 68). *A fuller description of readiness for sacraments and conversion in children will be given in Appendix 1 of this document.*

 - ❖ **Involvement in the celebration of the sacraments is a further initiation into the worship and life of the Church.**
 - The celebration of sacraments is the action of the community under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in which the Lord becomes present in a deeper and more substantial way. The preparation should lead the individual to a greater involvement in the community and the community should be visibly involved in the individual's preparation (cf. *RCIA* 11 and *CT* 24).

 - ❖ **The process of Christian initiation takes place over a period of time.**

 - ❖ **The family, by definition, has an essential role in preparation for the celebration of the sacraments.**
 - Families are to raise children “committed to Jesus and the Church, participate as Catholic families in society, share together in the life and mission of their parish and the wider Church” (*OHWB* 77, citing *FC*, Part 3, *FP*, Chapter 4, and *GDC* 226-227, 255).

 - “The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect” (*GDC* 226). As the children later come for a more methodical catechesis, all of our church documents strongly emphasize the essential **partnership** between the Catholic Christian community and the family.

 - ❖ **The baptismal Catechumenate serves as the inspiration for catechesis in the Church** (*GDC* 90 and 91).
 - The baptismal Catechumenate constantly reminds the whole Church of the fundamental importance of the role of initiation and the basic factors of which it is constituted: catechesis and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

 - The pastoral care of candidates for Christian initiation is vital for every particular Church. The baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community (cf. *GDC* 91). The inspiring elements of the catechumenal process should be kept in mind in the design and execution of all sacramental preparation and celebration.
-

D. Phases of Sacramental Catechesis and Celebration

Persons are meant to enjoy a full and vibrant sacramental life, and catechesis should assist them in attaining this goal. Preparation for the celebration of a sacrament is seen, then, as an important priority for the person and his or her family and the parish community. This preparation occurs in several distinct phases, which are appropriately termed: **remote catechesis, immediate catechesis, celebration, and mystagogical (ongoing) catechesis.**

1. Remote Catechesis

Remote catechesis for the sacraments involves the basic understanding and meaning of the sacraments, the signs and symbols used in the rites, and the attitudes and the values that the sacraments evoke and celebrate.

There are three distinct agents for remote catechesis: the family, the parish community, and the parish or Catholic school religious education program.

- ❖ **The Family** – The family provides remote preparation for the sacraments through its daily, lived experience... “Catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events...care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events” (CT 68). Families continually teach about sacraments by their attitudes and practices, especially in the way family members participate in sacramental celebrations.
- ❖ **The Parish Community** – The worshipping community of the parish is constantly teaching about sacraments by its values, attitudes, words, and actions. Whether the realization is conscious or not, the parish community, by its pattern of celebration and participation, is influencing the members of the community about the importance of fostering a life of faith and the value of sacraments as essential elements of parish life.
- ❖ **The Parish or Catholic School Religious Education Program** – The parish or Catholic school religious education program promotes remote preparation for the sacraments by providing systematic catechesis, which includes a basic and gradually developing understanding of the sacraments in the curriculum. Pastor/pastoral life directors have the right to recognize different options for remote catechesis, (e.g. homeschooling).
 - The parish or Catholic school religious education program assists in identifying those individuals ready to enter the immediate preparation phase and provides appropriate information to both parents and students so

that an informed decision can be made about the individual's readiness to participate in the next phase.

- Children validly baptized Catholic as infants (before the use of reason) upon obtaining the use of reason are offered the immediate preparation process for Penance and Eucharist. This typically occurs around the age of seven, which for most of our children is second grade level.
- Children possessing the use of reason and are not validly baptized in the Catholic Church or another Christian faith tradition are to be invited into the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Part II. "Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age."

2. Immediate Catechesis

Immediate catechesis for sacraments, as the name implies, is that time of catechetical preparation immediately preceding the first reception of sacraments. As in the remote preparation phase, there are three distinct elements, which are essential parts of this phase. Two of these agents, the family and the parish community, remain the same. The third element is a specific immediate preparation process in which the families and the parish will be in a strong partnership.

- ❖ **The Family** – The family involved in the immediate preparation phase intensifies its prayer experiences and discussions about the particular sacrament. It involves itself in preparations for the celebration itself, in the liturgy, in recalling similar family celebrations, and other appropriate activities.
- ❖ **The Parish Community** – The parish community reflects the immediacy of the preparation by becoming more aware of the believer's preparation and marking his or her journey toward the sacrament with appropriate ritual celebrations. There is an increase in prayer and support for those in the immediate phase of preparation.
- ❖ **Free Standing Preparation Program** – This special preparation program assists children whose faith development and readiness level support their desire to receive the sacrament. This readiness level varies from child to child and cannot be considered automatic when a child reaches a specific grade level. (The majority of children reach the use of reason about the age of seven, which usually occurs around second grade, but not all children do). Thus this immediate preparation process is freestanding, that is, distinct from any grade in the parish or Catholic school religious education program.

For more detailed explanations of conversion and readiness in children, consult Appendix 1 of this document.

- ❖ The preparation process is to be offered annually, immediately prior to the reception of the sacrament, specifically for those children who have been identified as ready to begin immediate catechesis for a particular sacrament. This catechesis is for parents, children, and other family members and is to cover in an age appropriate manner the theology of the sacraments to be received.

The catechist can use as a starting point the meaning of the sacraments, the signs and symbols, the child's and the catechist family's relationship with the Lord and with the faith community, and an examination of the rite and the ritual elements of the sacraments. While preparing for the sacraments, children are to continue their involvement in the parish or Catholic school religious education program.

Children ordinarily are to be enrolled in a Catholic school recognized by the Archdiocese or a parish religious education or homeschooling program approved by the pastor/pastoral life director for at least one year prior to entrance into the program for immediate catechesis. *The pastor/pastoral life director, who, in consultation with the parish religious education staff, recognizes specific needs, may alter the regulation of one prior year of formation.*

For guidelines for planning sessions for parents, children, and intergenerational sessions, consult Appendix 2 of this document.

3. Celebration of Sacraments

Following appropriate preparation, the community welcomes the child into the celebration of the sacraments. This celebration integrally involves the family and is always done in the context of the worship life of the parish community. **The normative celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation is within the Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist.** Such celebration is to be seen clearly as further involvement with the parish community. In all cases, the symbols and rituals of the sacraments are presented in such a way that they speak of the interaction of the sacred and the ordinary in which the presence of the Lord is revealed. Sacraments are divinely instituted ritual encounters with the Lord Jesus Christ.

At all times the ritual texts of the sacraments of Christian initiation, the *Rite of Penance* and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* are to be followed.

4. Ongoing Catechesis or Mystagogy

The celebration of a sacrament does not mark the completion of a child's conversion of heart or growth in understanding and living the meaning of a particular sacrament. There is a continuing responsibility on the part of the parents and the entire Christian community to assist children in deepening their knowledge and living of the sacraments.

This task for the child is a life-long – mystagogical, exploring and growing in the sacramental life of the church. The term “Mystagogical” comes from a Greek word meaning mystery. It is “a time for the community and the [newly initiated] together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist and doing the works of charity” (*RCIA* 244).

Parishes and Catholic school religious education programs have an important responsibility for providing continuing catechesis for the sacraments, along with appropriate ritual celebrations throughout the curriculum.

The entire parish community, through carefully planned and vibrant celebrations, homilies, bulletin notices, faith formation programs, charitable acts, and other ways provides for the continual enrichment of appreciation of the sacraments. Families are to be integrally involved in these endeavors.



PART I

II. Preparation for Infant Baptism

A. Regulations

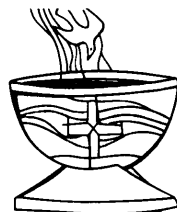
Faith...requires Baptism. The close connection between the two realities is rooted in the will of Christ himself, who commanded his apostles to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them (*GDC* 65).

The entire parish properly shares with the pastor/pastoral life director the responsibility for the catechesis for and celebration of Baptism. Catechesis for Baptism is directed primarily to adults -- the parents and godparents of infants who are to be baptized.

1. Remote Catechesis

“We seek to form parishes that are vitally alive in faith. These communities will provide a parish climate and an array of activities and resources designed to help adults more fully understand and live their faith” (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, 17).

- ❖ It is in the context of a community of faith that adults are able to nurture their own faith, find support for their marriage and be able to be faithful witnesses of the love of Christ for his church.
- ❖ It is within such a community of faith that married couples will unselfishly choose to bring new life into the world and find models of the sacrificial love required for a successful marriage and family life.
- ❖ It is within such a community of faith that young people learn of the expectations of adult discipleship, that is: to proclaim and teach the Christian message, to participate in the life of the community, to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and worship and living a life of justice and service.



2. Immediate Catechesis

The parents of a child who is to be baptized, and those who are to undertake the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. The pastor is to see to it that either he or others duly prepare the parents, by means of pastoral advice and indeed by prayer together; a number of families might be brought together for this purpose and, where possible, each family visited (cf. *Canon 851 #2*).

“Before the celebration of the sacrament, it is of great importance that parents should prepare to take part in the rite with understanding” (*RBC 5*).

Selection of Godparents – Careful consideration of the choice of godparents is to be an element in this catechesis. Canon law requires that godparents meet these criteria:

- ❖ Normally at least 16 years old
- ❖ A member in good standing of the Catholic Church
- ❖ Leading a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken
- ❖ Have received all three of the sacraments of Christian initiation—Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
- ❖ Parents may not be sponsors (cf. *Canon 874*).

Usually there are two godparents, a godfather and a godmother. However, there may be just one Catholic godparent. A validly baptized non-Catholic may serve as a Christian witness, but there must be a Catholic godparent.

3. Celebration of the Rite of Baptism

“If possible, Baptism should take place on Sunday, the day on which the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery. It should be conferred in a communal celebration...in the presence of the faithful...” (*Rite of Baptism for Children 32*).

“The people of God, that is the Church, made present in the local community, has an important part to play in the Baptism of children and adults. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community...it is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but it is the common treasure of the whole Church of God” (*RBC 4*).

“In the celebration of Baptism, the father and mother have special parts to play. They listen to the words addressed to them by the celebrant, they join in prayer along with the congregation, and they:

- ❖ Publicly ask that the child be baptized
- ❖ Sign their child with the sign of the cross
- ❖ Renounce Satan and make their profession of faith
- ❖ Carry the child to the font
- ❖ Hold the lighted candle
- ❖ Are blessed with the special prayers for the mothers and fathers.”
- ❖ Dress the child in a white garment (*RBC 5*).

Remember! Infant Baptism is recorded at the Church of Baptism.



4. Mystagogical Catechesis

“By its very nature infant Baptism requires a post Baptismal Catechumenate. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth” (*CCC 1231*).”

“Those who have given life to children and have enriched them with the gift of Baptism have the duty continually to nourish it” (*GDC 177*).”

“After Baptism, it is the responsibility of the parents, to enable the child to know God, to receive Confirmation, and to participate in the Holy Eucharist.” Continuing catechesis supports the parents in these efforts (*RBC 5*).

B. Preparation for Infant Baptism - Guidelines

“In catechizing adults for the Baptism of their children we share in the Church’s primary catechetical enterprise of adult faith formation (cf. *OHWB* 5).”

“We seek to form adults who actively cultivate a lively baptismal and Eucharistic spirituality with a powerful sense of mission and apostolate. Nourished by word, sacrament, and communal life, they will witness to and share the Gospel in their homes, neighborhoods, places of work, and centers of culture” (*OHWB* 17).”

1. Remote Catechesis

A parish’s catechetical mission is to foster mature adult faith—a faith that is living, explicit, and fruitful (*OHWB* 49). A parish that fosters adult faith formation through vibrant liturgies, a welcoming and hospitable climate, opportunities for practicing charity and promoting justice, and effective adult catechesis, is the optimum environment for preparing families for the Baptism of their children. An evangelizing parish affirms the gift we have received in Baptism—becoming children of God and members of God’s Church. Helping all adults appreciate and respond to their own baptismal mission as disciples of Jesus Christ and participants in the Paschal Mystery prepares husbands and wives for the unique and sacrificial role of parenthood.

2. Immediate Catechesis

Walking with prospective parents as they prepare for the birth of a child is a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege because this is a sacred time. While the parents are concerned with physically preparing for a child, this can also be a time of spiritual growth. We have a responsibility to present formation sessions, not as a “requirement for Baptism,” but rather as a gift to the parents from a community who supports them in their spiritual formation and who rejoices with them during this life event, and will continue to journey with them throughout their faith life.

If we look at this catechesis through an evangelizing lens we shall see it as an opportunity to help couples explore how God is present in their lives, come to a deeper appreciation of their own Baptism, and discern ways to create and maintain a “domestic church” within their own family. It also helps parents carry the value of the gospel into all aspects of their lives. Catechesis for the Baptism of children is to be presented in the context of the lived experience of the family.

Other parents can effectively help facilitate these sessions, since they know the challenges and realities of family life and can share their own experiences of Christian living. Sessions should include opportunities for parents to reflect with each other, with other parents, and with pastoral ministers about their lives. What are their hopes and

dreams for their child, what are their fears, and what difficulties are they facing? Children, while a blessing, also add stress to relationships. An honest discussion of these stressors and how to deal with them should take place.

Key Elements of Serious Consideration

Even though there can be variety in the design of parish Baptism preparation ministry, there are certain key elements which deserve serious consideration in order to insure an effective and fruitful program:

❖ **We respect adults as persons of Catholic faith – Discuss with them:**

- The people and events that have brought us to this stage in our Catholic faith;
- How we find God's presence in the persons, places, and events of daily life;
- The reasons couples wish to have their children baptized into the Catholic Church—the responsibilities that flow from this decision.

❖ **We explore the parents' role as primary educators of their children in the faith. (GDC 226, 227). Look at:**

- Practical ways to pray with children and introduce them to Jesus Christ;
- Family customs, practices, rituals;
- Opportunities and potential challenges of raising children in an interfaith marriage, if applicable.

❖ **We are faithful to the catechetical principle of the rite informing the catechesis.**

- The rite, carefully planned, well prepared for, richly and beautifully celebrated, can be a powerful moment of experiencing the love of God.
Our objectives are to:
 - Use an explanation of the rite as a starting point for a brief introduction of the baptismal theology and Baptism as the foundation of the call to discipleship;
 - Help adults know the rite and their role in it—what they do and say;
 - Lead adults to an awareness of, and openness to, the symbolic depths and power of the rite;
 - Allow adults to be involved in planning the rite and choosing from among the options that the rite and the parish offer.

❖ **We use this time to build/strengthen the connection between family and parish with discussion of the family as part of a community of faith. Explore:**

- How the community helps the parents in their role of raising children in the faith;
- How the family contributes to the life of the community.

3. Celebration of the Rite of Baptism

The entire faith community celebrates the Baptism of a child. Together with the family, the community rejoices that a new member is welcomed into the People of God, the Body of Christ – the Church. Whenever Baptism is celebrated, a representative community should be present.

If possible, Sunday Mass is an appropriate time for the celebration of parish baptisms inasmuch as the community is gathered as family. Sunday is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Christ and we remember that in Baptism we, too, die to sin and rise with Christ to new life. Furthermore, as Baptism is a Sacrament of Initiation, celebrating at Sunday liturgy reminds us that we become full members of Christ's body when we share in the Eucharist.

4. Roles in the Rite

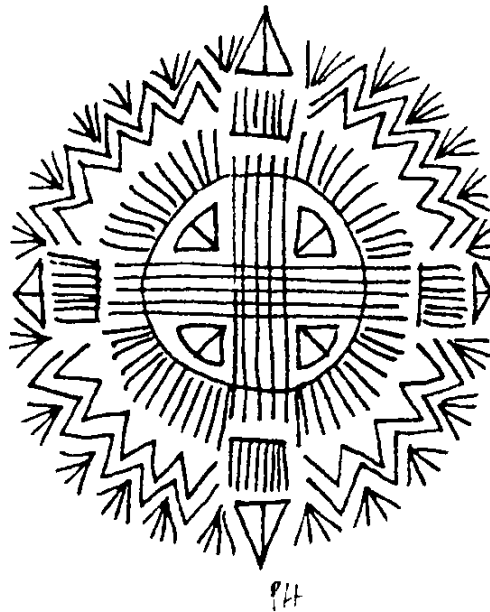
- ❖ Parents present their child for Baptism, give the child a name, claim their faith, and pledge to raise their child as a Catholic Christian.
- ❖ Godparents proclaim they are willing to assist the parents in providing a Catholic Christian upbringing and by supporting the parents in all the circumstances surrounding the upbringing of a child.
- ❖ It is Christ, represented by the priest or deacon, who receives the child into the Church.
- ❖ The other ministers, such as lectors, extraordinary ministers of holy communion, cantors, musicians, altar servers, remind us of the way we can offer our gifts of time and talent for the good of the community.
- ❖ All present witness to the faith that brings us together by sharing in the prayers, songs and ritual actions.

5. Mystagogical Catechesis

No matter how carefully we plan and execute the pre-baptismal catechesis, and how beautifully and joyfully we celebrate the rite of Baptism, we do parents a grave disservice if we do not continue to support and affirm them in their parental role. Parishes need to give the ongoing catechesis of parents serious consideration and effort. The challenges of parenthood can be daunting and raising a child in the Christian faith requires the best of a parish's resources and efforts.

Consider:

- ❖ Providing an opportunity (with childcare) for new parents to meet and socialize with each other.
- ❖ Providing ongoing formation in early childhood development.
- ❖ Scheduling workshops on praying with children, storytelling, and family rituals.
- ❖ Providing parents with print and media resources.
- ❖ Supplying information on services available to parents with special needs.



Remember! The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis is available to provide assistance and resources for infant Baptism.

III. Preparation for the Sacrament of Penance

A. Regulations

As believers, we come to a deeper awareness of the goodness of God and God's gifts to us through the sacraments. What God offers us is freely given, and intended to be freely received. Our faith tradition helps us to grow in deeper awareness of God's love. At times, we fail to love as God calls us to love. The person of Jesus welcomed sinners and reconciled them to the Father.

The sacrament of Penance can be described as a sacrament of healing through which the healing presence of Jesus is manifest. Our relationship with our God is restored through the person of Jesus who reconciles us to God and to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. Jesus continues to welcome sinners back to the Father, through this sacrament.

1. Remote Catechesis

Remote catechesis for the sacrament of Penance recognizes the need for parents and catechetical leaders to work together in providing children with an understanding of sacraments. The formative process at this stage would include a basic understanding of the meaning of sin, God's mercy and forgiveness as gifts, and the element of worship in celebrating Reconciliation.

Remote catechesis for the sacrament of Penance precedes the remote catechesis for Eucharist. In this way, parents are able to make informed decisions about the readiness of their child to participate in immediate catechesis for Penance (*cf. Introduction and Appendix 1*).

It is important to invite children with disabilities and their parents into this process and provide appropriate accommodations for them.

- ❖ The systematic catechetical program in the parish or Catholic school has significant responsibility for providing remote catechesis for the sacrament of Penance.

Pastor/pastoral life directors have the right to recognize different options for remote catechesis (e.g. homeschooling).

- ❖ Parents play a primary role in catechizing their children. Their attitudes, practices, and participation in the sacrament of Penance will play an important role in the remote preparation for this sacrament.
- ❖ Parish and Catholic school leaders provide assistance and direction for parents and families so they might foster the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation in the context of the home.
- ❖ Families are expected to participate weekly in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

2. Immediate Catechesis

“Jesus calls us to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (CCC 1427).

Immediate catechesis for the sacrament of Penance begins with the call to conversion in our lives. Parishes provide parents, children, and adults with opportunities for:

- ❖ The love and mercy that is extended to God's people through this sacrament;
- ❖ Personal growth in their understanding of the meaning of sin and conversion;
- ❖ The psychological, moral, and spiritual development of the child;
- ❖ Conscience and conscience formation;
- ❖ The meaning and forms of worship of the sacrament of Penance.



Remember! Immediate preparation for each of the initiation sacraments is a freestanding process, mandatory within the parish context.

The immediate preparation is exclusive of any sacramental catechesis offered within any curriculum for home schooling, parish religious education, Catholic school or those offered through intentional communities.

Baptized children reaching the use of reason are invited and encouraged to participate in the sacrament of Penance after receiving appropriate formation. The

decision for a child's entrance into this stage is governed by his or her readiness and not by any particular grade level (cf. *Appendix 1*).

- ❖ The immediate catechesis for Reconciliation precedes and is separate from, the immediate catechesis for Eucharist. This order exists so that each sacrament may receive the attention it deserves.
- ❖ Parish leaders schedule the immediate catechesis for Reconciliation so that it naturally precedes the program for the immediate catechesis for Eucharist.
- ❖ **All parents of children who are being invited for First Eucharist are invited to participate in the immediate catechesis for Reconciliation prior to the immediate catechesis for Eucharist.**
 - Parents are to be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament, and parishes can rightfully expect that parents participate in preparation programs to help them carry out their responsibilities in this regard.
 - Some flexibility, however, is provided for those parents who have already participated in parents' sessions on Reconciliation in the same parish for the preparation for an older child, unless the program has been significantly changed in the interim.
- ❖ **The norm of the Church is that first sacramental confession should precede the reception of First Eucharist** (cf. *Canon 914*). It is the responsibility in the first place of parents, and those who take the place of parents as well as 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.
 - This norm affirms the ability of children with the use of reason to realize that their actions and attitudes impact on their relationships with other people and with God. They are to be encouraged to grow in a greater awareness of the values of our faith tradition, and upon the value of the sacrament of Penance in bringing about growth in the practice of forgiveness.
 - This practice can help children to know more personally and to experience more fully the love of Jesus, his mercy and forgiveness, and lead them to the fullness of life.
 - **It is the normative practice of the Archdiocese of Baltimore that First Penance be celebrated prior to First Eucharist.**

- The spirit of the law of the Church seeks to protect the rights of the faithful and to assist them in imitating Jesus in their lives. In the law of the Church, the normative practice is that the sacrament of Penance precedes the sacrament of Eucharist only in cases of serious sin (cf. *Canons* 916, 988-1 and 989). **Exceptions to the norm will arise and must be allowed.**
- Parents, in a particular case, may decide that their child is not ready for the sacrament of Penance before Eucharist. Before reaching such a conclusion, parents are first to be informed of the Church's norm and the reasons for it, and they and their child must participate in the parent/family sessions of the immediate catechesis for the sacrament of Penance. Parents are then to consult with the priest/pastor/pastoral life director, catechetical leader, and catechist.
- These steps allow the parents to make the ultimate decision for their child. Their decision is to be accepted and respected, and an exception to the norm of the Church is to be allowed so that a child can be admitted to First Eucharist without prior sacramental confession. **It should be noted here, however, that these exceptions are very rare.**
- In cases when First Penance is delayed, parishes are to follow the children closely and offer an explicit invitation annually to celebrate the sacrament, as well as provide sound, immediate, age appropriate catechesis.



3. Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

Parishes may provide options for the celebration of the sacrament of Penance. These options include the regularly scheduled times for individual confession, communal opportunities that involve both children and families, or seasonal, communal celebrations of the sacrament such as during Advent, Lent, and other appropriate times. The celebration of First Penance should precede the celebration of First Eucharist.

The priest is the celebrant of the sacrament of Penance. He is to imitate the Good Shepherd in this ministry, and to possess a spirit of love for children as Jesus did. “When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God’s merciful love for the sinner” (CCC 1465).

4. Mystagogical Catechesis

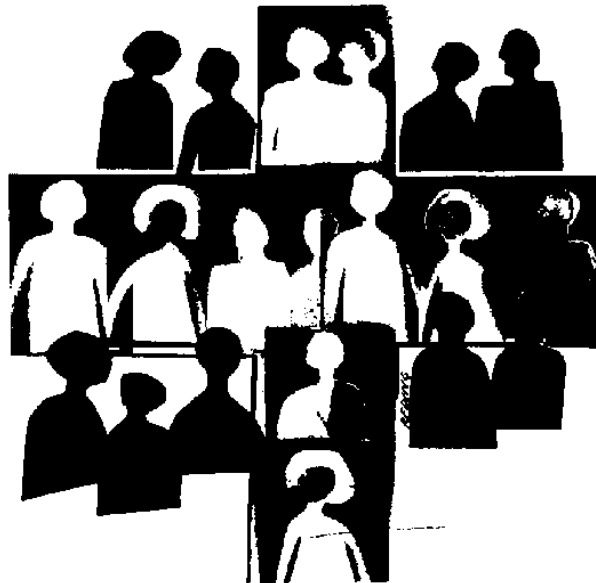
Continuing, lifelong conversion is an essential element of growing in faith. Therefore, catechesis for Reconciliation is on going. Children have a right to an ever-developing catechesis and opportunity for celebrating Reconciliation.

Continued catechesis on Reconciliation, adapted to the readiness level of the learner, is an essential part of the systematic catechetical effort in the parish or Catholic school religious education program (*DM: DECM 2:13, 2.17*). As the children grow and mature, the sacrament of Penance will offer them new possibilities for conversion and restoration of the grace of justification (CCC 1446).

- ❖ Parishes provide opportunities for adults, youth, children, parents and the parish community to deepen their understanding of and participation in the sacrament of Penance. The parish also provides aids for family and home activities so that appreciation for this sacrament can grow.
- ❖ Both parish and Catholic school religious education programs, along with homeschooling parents, provide yearly catechesis for Reconciliation and pay special attention to the moral growth and development that occurs in children in grades four and five. Parents are also to be involved in this expanded catechesis.

- ❖ The invitation to prepare for and receive the sacrament should be offered yearly to those who have chosen to delay, especially in these critically formative years.

- ❖ Children and their parents are encouraged to participate in this sacrament regularly, and periodic celebrations of the sacrament planned for children are provided. The *Rite of Penance*, Chapter II, “Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution,” can be especially effective for these periodic celebrations of Penance for children.



Remember! It is not necessary to record this sacrament in a parish registry.

B. Preparation for the Sacrament of Penance Guidelines

1. Remote Catechesis

Parents are to be involved in the preparation of their children for Penance. The parish religious education program or the school supports parents in their role as catechists. The remote catechesis for reconciliation is to precede the remote catechesis for Eucharist so that parents can make an informed decision about their children's readiness for these sacraments. The parish and/or school provide enough information to enable the parents to decide when their child is ready to participate in immediate catechesis.

This information is shared months in advance to allow time for careful consideration. Offering a remote preparation program for parents in advance of the time of celebration can aid parents in making the decision for the child to enter the immediate preparation program. This decision process is done in consultation with parish personnel. The remote preparation makes it clear that one does not automatically enter into the immediate program. *Sample outlines for remote preparation programs are included in Appendix 2.*

Catechesis for Parents of Children Preparing for Reconciliation includes:

- ❖ Sin as a reality;
- ❖ Conversion and forgiveness of sin;
- ❖ Jesus' deep love and compassion for people;
- ❖ Information on what children need to know about celebrating the sacrament;
- ❖ Adult experiences of this sacrament and their impact on children's experiences of Reconciliation.

2. Immediate Catechesis

The immediate preparation program for children preparing for Sacrament of Penance is **freestanding**, that is, it is separate from but congruent with the regularly scheduled religious education classes in the parish and/or Catholic school.

Members of the Catholic school, homeschooling parents and parish religious education programs are prepared together. **It is time to call forth those who may have**

delayed reception of the sacrament of Penance and provide age appropriate catechesis.

During the immediate preparation phase, a program is offered to parents for their own faith growth, to help them assist their children and to help them determine the readiness of their children for celebrating the sacrament of Penance.

When the children begin the immediate preparation phase for the reception of the sacrament, the celebrant at the parish weekend masses can choose the theme of forgiveness for the homily to draw attention to this time of growth for the children.

These sessions are always in accord with the principles of good adult education please refer to Appendix 2 for more information on adult education.

Topics for Immediate Catechesis of Children for Reconciliation include:

- ❖ Sensitivity to the natural disposition, ability, and age of the individual;
- ❖ Relationship between this sacrament and the child's life;
- ❖ A basic ability to recognize moral good and evil;
- ❖ An awareness of the need for repentance and forgiveness;
- ❖ Instruction on the rite and its options.

The immediate catechesis for parents includes:

- ❖ A brief history of the sacrament of Penance;
- ❖ The concept of sin as a reality in human life;
- ❖ Sin as alienation from God, others, creation, and self;
- ❖ God mercifully forgiving our human sinfulness (*Isaiah 49, The Book of Jonah*);
- ❖ Gospel stories such as the prodigal son and the lost sheep;
- ❖ Differences between objective moral wrong and sinfulness;
- ❖ Sin (fundamental attitude), sins (individual acts), communal sin;
- ❖ Ministering to one another in the healing process (a reconciling assembly);
- ❖ Contrition and ongoing conversion of heart;
- ❖ Fidelity to God, others, creation, and self;
- ❖ Christian hospitality and communication;
- ❖ Preview of the options for the rite
- ❖ Encouragement to regularly examine one's conscience and celebrate the sacrament.

Sample sessions for sacrament of Penance for parents and children are in Appendix 2.

3. Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

Some parishes provide a special “First Penance Celebration” with children and their families. It can also be scheduled at the periodic community celebrations of Penance. It is particularly encouraged for parishes to have periodic celebrations of the rite of Reconciliation for various age levels (primary children, intermediate, junior high, senior high) at appropriate seasons of the liturgical year.

Having periodic Eucharistic celebrations for children and teenagers has become the pattern in many parishes. This development has enabled children and teens to become more actively involved in the weekly celebration of Eucharist. Adopting this pattern with the sacrament of Penance by having periodic celebrations of Reconciliation for particular age groups can enable these individuals to gradually deepen their appreciation of and participation in the sacrament.

The directives in the revised Rite of Penance are carefully followed in planning all celebrations of Reconciliation.

Those who plan celebrations of Reconciliation involving children or teenagers need to be aware of and sensitive to the particular stages of moral and psychological development of these age groups. Emphasizing the mercy of God while enabling people to assess their lifestyles, relationships, attitudes, values, and behavior is always a delicate responsibility. It is especially important when dealing with children and teens. God's loving mercy and forgiveness need to be clearly demonstrated.



4. Mystagogical Catechesis

The entire parish continually catechizes about the sacrament of Penance as it, too, has a vital community dimension. This communal dimension of the sacrament is remembered as families continue to pray together everyday for forgiveness among family members, for forgiveness for everyday hurts, and for the reconciliation of all members of the church.

- ❖ The parish or school religious education program provides opportunities for deepening the participant's understanding of the sacrament of Penance as an integral element of continuing catechesis for the sacrament.
- ❖ The parish is involved in continuing catechesis for Reconciliation in a variety of ways. Liturgical participation helps the parish remain aware of the need for forgiveness. In the penitential rite of the Eucharist, people can be invited to pray for relationships to be healed.
- ❖ The parish liturgical committee can formulate prayers of the faithful to express support and strength for the children and their families as they prepare, and for the faithful as they continue to celebrate the sacrament.
- ❖ The parish newsletter might carry a paragraph about the children and their families who have celebrated Reconciliation and describe the preparation done by the families in the home and how the community can continue to support them.

The sacrament of Penance still focuses on the personal, lived experience of the individual, but places that person within the context of the community of which she or he is a part. It is essential that the link between the family and the parish be encouraged and maintained so that the children have a wider sense of the faith community and can be formed by it.

Remember! The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis is available to provide assistance and resources for catechesis for the sacrament of Penance.

IV. Preparation for the Sacrament of the Eucharist

A. Regulations

“The Eucharist is an efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ, through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1325).

As a sacrament of Christian initiation, the Eucharist stands at the heart of the Christian community’s celebration of the Paschal Mystery whereby the Church is constituted and bound in unity and charity. This communion of love dissolves boundaries and seals one’s baptismal dignity within the divine life of the Holy Trinity.

Children receiving Baptism in infancy and nurtured within the domestic Church continue their sacramental journey, when at the age of discretion they are led to the table of Eucharistic communion. Preparation for participation in this central mystery of our life in Church is the “responsibility of the entire Christian community” (GDC 91).

1. Remote Catechesis

Remote catechesis for Eucharist provides information to children, parents, and family members on a basic understanding of the meaning and rites of the sacrament in order that an informed decision can be made about when a child is ready to participate in immediate catechesis. Children who have reached the use of reason are prepared properly and refreshed with divine food as soon as possible (cf. *Canon* 914).

Although parish sacramental preparation is freestanding from the Catholic school, homeschooling or the parish religious education program and therefore from any specific grade designation, the use of reason generally occurs at the age of seven, or about grade two.

For more information on discerning sacramental readiness in children, consult Appendix 1 of this document.

- ❖ The systematic catechetical program in the parish or Catholic school has significant responsibility for providing remote catechesis for Eucharist.
- ❖ Parishes and Catholic schools strive to make parents and family members aware that they have an important role in remote catechesis for Eucharist by

their attitudes, actions, and the way they participate in the worship life of the Church.

- ❖ “The family as ‘locus’ of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values” (*GDC 255*, citing *GS 52, FC 37a*).
- “On this human base Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God, the Father, the Creator. It is indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods” (*GDC 255*).
- ❖ Families are expected to participate in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist weekly.

Remote catechesis for Eucharist follows the remote catechesis for Penance.

It is important to invite children with disabilities and their parents into the process and provide appropriate accommodations for them.

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| <p>Remember! It is important to obtain a copy of the child’s baptismal certificate as part of the record keeping process.</p> |
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2. Immediate Catechesis

Ordinarily, children enroll in a Catholic school recognized by the Archdiocese, a parish religious education or homeschooling program approved by the pastor/pastoral life director for at least one year prior to entrance into the program for immediate catechesis. The pastor/pastoral life director, who, in consultation with the parish religious education staff, recognizing specific needs, may alter this regulation.

- ❖ The immediate catechesis for Eucharist is a **freestanding** program apart from any grade in the parish or Catholic school religious education program.
- ❖ The program for immediate catechesis includes children, their families, and the parish community. Parents are to be involved in preparing their children as they embark on a lifetime of Eucharistic participation.
 - “In a certain sense nothing replaces family catechesis, especially for its positive and receptive environment, for the example of adults, and for its first explicit experience and practice of the faith” (*GDC 178*).

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- “Parents above others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of the Christian life by word and example.” (*Canon 774:2*).

 - ❖ A child continues to participate in the parish or Catholic school religious education program and also participates in the program for immediate catechesis with the other children and parents in the parish.

 - ❖ The parish community can be involved through rituals such as an enrollment ceremony during the Sunday Eucharistic celebration or other appropriate activities.

 - ❖ The parish conducts the immediate catechesis for Eucharist separately from immediate catechesis for Penance so that each sacrament receives the concentrated preparation it deserves and to prevent confusion in the children regarding the distinctiveness of each sacrament. Refer to the section for the remote catechesis, immediate catechesis, celebration, and mystagogical or continuing catechesis for the sacrament of Penance for information regarding the responsibility of parish leaders to provide immediate catechesis and the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of Penance before the celebration of First Eucharist (*CCC 1457*, citing *Canon 914*).

 - ❖ Immediate catechesis for Eucharist provides learning opportunities that enable parents to deepen their own understanding of and participation in the Eucharist, as well as assistance to prepare their children for participation in the Eucharist.

 - ❖ For children, immediate catechesis enables a basic understanding, according to their level of intellectual and faith development, of the major events of the life of Jesus, the basic meaning and structure of the Mass, that the elements of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus, as well as the experience of unity and belonging to a community which God offers through this sacrament.

 - ❖ Additional aspects of the Eucharist – thanksgiving, memorial of the Last Supper, holy sacrifice of the Mass, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Communion of Saints can be found in paragraphs 1328 – 1332 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

 - ❖ A child’s readiness to celebrate Eucharist is properly the decision and responsibility of the parents, after consultation with the pastor/pastoral life director, the director of religious education, and the catechist.

For guidelines to determine a child’s readiness, consult Appendix 1 of this document.

- ❖ Parishes can rightfully expect the participation of parents in preparing their children for the Eucharist.
- ❖ The parish staff provides flexibility for those parents who have already participated in parent sessions for First Eucharist in the same parish on the occasion of preparing an older child, unless the parish significantly changed the program in the interim.

3. Celebration of the Sacrament of Eucharist

The mystery of Christ unfolds through the liturgical year. At the center of the liturgical year is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery of the Lord and the renewal of baptismal life at Easter. The initiation of children into the sacramental life should accommodate this pattern and be supported by its themes and spirit (cf. *GNLYC* 1, 17, 18).

When discerning celebration options, parishes must remember that sacraments are parish celebrations. First Eucharist initiates children to the faith community's "pre-eminent day of the liturgical assembly, the day of the Christian family, and the day of joy and rest from work" (*CCC*, 1193 citing *SC* 106). Celebrating First Eucharist amid the Sunday liturgical assembly sends the clear message that First Communion brings children into full communion with all the other members of Christ's body (cf. *CCC* 1140).

Further, as the faith community leads children into the Church's Eucharistic life, parishes should offer liturgical participation in accord with the *Directory for Masses with Children* and the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*.

The pastor/pastoral life director needs to approve any other options and all celebrations of First Eucharist are to be clearly linked to the worship life of the parish.

In providing options for the celebration of First Eucharist, there is no distinction made between parish children on the basis of the religious education program, homeschooling program or Catholic school in which they participate.

Remember! First Eucharist is recorded at the church of reception.

4. Mystagogical Catechesis

Since the Eucharist is the heart of the Christian life, a child continually grows in his or her understanding and living the meaning of the sacrament. Ongoing catechesis on the Eucharist, adapted to the readiness level of the learner, is an integral element of all grades of the systematic catechetical effort in the parish, homeschooling or Catholic school religious education program.

“Holy Communion...preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage...” (CCC 1392). Therefore, weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is vital to the ongoing journey of faith of all disciples of Christ.

Parishes also provide opportunities for adults, youth, parents, and the parish community to deepen their understanding of and participation in the Eucharist. The parish provides resources for family activities so that appropriate preparation for the Eucharistic celebration can be done in the home.



B. Preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist Guidelines

1. Remote Catechesis

Remote catechesis for Eucharist for children is ordinarily a part of the regular curriculum in the religious education program in the parish or Catholic school. The remote catechesis for Reconciliation is to precede the remote catechesis for Eucharist so that parents can make an informed decision about their children's readiness for these sacraments (cf. regulations for Eucharist). The parish provides the parents with information regarding the theology of the sacrament and the child's readiness to receive the Eucharist a year or so prior to the event.

Sample sessions for remote catechesis for parents can be found in Appendix 2.

The sessions for parents include the following concepts:

- ❖ An understanding of the faith development of adults and children;
- ❖ A concise, current understanding of the sacraments;
- ❖ An awareness of the decisions to be made regarding participation in programs for immediate catechesis and the celebration of each sacrament;
- ❖ The schedule of sessions for immediate catechesis and opportunities for celebration of the sacraments in the parish.

2. Immediate Catechesis

The program for immediate catechesis for Eucharist is a responsibility of the parish and the parents. This is a **freestanding program** apart from any grade in the parish or Catholic school religious education program in which the child continues. The parish schedules the immediate catechesis for Eucharist after the immediate catechesis for Reconciliation. The concept of Eucharist as a sacrament of unity permeates the child's immediate preparation.

The parish provides sessions for parents and families as an integral part of immediate preparation time prior to the immediate catechesis for children. These sessions are in accord with the principles of good adult faith formation. (Consult *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*).

Criteria for readiness to be used by parents, priests, parish staff, and catechists in assessing the readiness of their children for the sacrament of the Eucharist can be found in Appendix 1.

Sessions for parents include the following concepts of Eucharist as:

- ❖ The center and heart of Christian life (CCC 1324);
- ❖ A memorial of the Lord's Passion, Death, Resurrection – a commemoration of a past event (CCC 1330);
- ❖ The Passion, Death, and Resurrection are present in every celebration here and now (CCC 1330);
- ❖ Based on Jewish roots – a covenant meal (CCC 1334);
- ❖ A holy meal, a memorial of the last supper (CCC 1334)
 - Scripture - nourished by the Word
 - Body and Blood – nourished by the Mystery;
- ❖ A means of reconciliation that reaffirms our conversion;
- ❖ A sign of the coming of God's kingdom (CCC 1326);
- ❖ A sublime cause of unity with Christ and the Church (CCC 1325);
- ❖ Christ's action at work in and through the Church communicating the “mystery of communion with God who is love, one in three persons” (CCC 1118);
- ❖ Utilizing signs and symbols rooted in creation that point to the saving and redeeming work of Christ (CCC 1145);
- ❖ The presence of Christ in his Word proclaimed, in his Church's prayer, in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, in the sacraments, most especially in the Eucharistic species (CCC 1374-1377);
- ❖ An act of thanksgiving (CCC 1328).

A Rite of Enrollment may be celebrated to mark the entrance into the time of immediate preparation and as a means of acknowledgement of this important step in the process of Christian initiation. It is an opportunity for the parish to express support and interest in those preparing to become more involved in the life of the parish through participation in the Eucharist.

The immediate catechesis for children includes the following concepts:

- ❖ An awareness of Baptism and their membership in the faith community – belonging to God's family through sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking, and celebrating (cf. *GDC* 226 and *DMC* 9);
- ❖ An awareness of the main events of Jesus' life, the Eucharist as meal, and the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ, or at least, an understanding that this bread and wine is different from regular bread and wine;
- ❖ An experience of welcoming and being welcomed by family and parish, and an understanding of prayer, and an awareness of the rituals of the Mass.

3. The Celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist

As a sacrament of Christian initiation, the celebration of Eucharist is always an event of the community. This awareness of the faith community should permeate all the options for celebrating First Eucharist. The celebration of first Eucharist is situated within the larger context of the parish's liturgical life and is prepared in consultation with the pastor/pastoral life director and all pertinent pastoral staff. Likewise, it is important to inform a visiting priest a few days before the Eucharistic celebration of the presence of children celebrating first communion.

Regularly Scheduled Parish Mass

Individual families or small groups of families may choose to celebrate First Communion at a regularly scheduled parish mass. This is the preferred option of celebration because of its connection to the Sunday assembly.

- ❖ There are several possible ways of incorporating the celebration of First Communion in a regularly scheduled parish mass while maintaining the integrity and normal rhythm of the celebration.
 - The children who will be joining the Eucharistic community and their family are invited to participate in the entrance procession and sit near the sanctuary.
 - The communicant(s) are introduced at the greeting, and a brief mention of them in the homily underscoring the meaning of this event for them, their family, and the parish is appropriate.
 - A particular intention in the prayer of the faithful, participation in the presentation of the gifts, reception of the Eucharist before the rest of

the community, as well as being called forth for a special blessing and reception of a certificate are also acceptable options.

Parish Celebration

A larger parish-wide celebration is an opportunity for all those who have received the Eucharist (and all children who have received sacraments of Christian initiation) during the year to come together to celebrate as a group their awareness of and deeper involvement in the worship life of the parish.

- ❖ This celebration is also an opportunity for the parish community and leadership to welcome in an official way all those who come to the Table of the Lord for the first time.
- ❖ This celebration is also an option for receiving the Eucharist for the first time.
- ❖ A worship booklet giving the order of worship and listing the names of all those who have joined the Eucharistic community, designating those who are receiving communion for the first time at this celebration, is appropriate but not necessary.
- ❖ The music selected is to be appropriate for the occasion and foster full participation. Consult the *Directory for Masses with Children* for good planning principles.
- ❖ As a way of expressing its joy, the parish can provide a reception for the first communicants and their families.

Other Options for Celebrations

- ❖ Depending on the number of parish staff and circumstances of the parish, the pastor/pastoral life director may approve other options. With any option, participation in the Eucharist for the first time signifies a commitment by the child and the family to become more involved in the life of the parish.

Some Further Considerations

- ❖ For a variety of reasons, including differing financial resources, cultures, family traditions, and practices, and authentic differences in understanding the church and sacraments, families have diverse views regarding appropriate attire for First Eucharist. These diverse views need to be supported and respected by parish leaders. Therefore, those who wish to have their children wear white and those who desire that their children wear their “Sunday Best”

or other attire that is appropriate for the importance of the occasion are equally respected and supported.

- ❖ The issue of appropriate dress needs to be kept in perspective. Proper attitudes, understanding, and behavior are more important than a particular style of dress.
- ❖ The communicant and family are to be made aware that the reception of First Eucharist is the reason for the party, money and gifts not vice versa. The party, meal, or other activities associated with Eucharist should not overshadow the reception of the sacrament itself.
- ❖ First Eucharist is the “first” of many – a beginning of a way of life.

4. Mystagogical Catechesis

A loving family and a caring parish support the newly initiated child, give encouragement good example so that there is a continued pattern of celebration, and foster the continuing relationship with God. The parish or school religious education program fosters the development of deeper intellectual awareness and provides opportunities for related prayer experiences as the child continues to grow and mature in faith.

The systematic catechesis needs to convey the message of the Gospel – commitment to further involvement in the community and that “the Eucharist is the heart and summit of the church’s life” (CCC 1407). Understanding and celebrating this central reality will help the child continue to become what he or she is called to be. The Eucharist will sustain the child and bind one to Christ.



It is essential that the link between the family and the parish be encouraged and maintained so that the children have a wider sense of the faith community and can be formed by it. In the phases of remote and immediate catechesis, children and families are to be involved in parish based activities, such as intergenerational learning sessions, social events, Vacation Bible School, Separate Liturgy of the Word with Children, etc.

Remember! The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis is available to provide assistance and resources for the sacrament of the Eucharist.

PART TWO

I. Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age

A. Introduction

Implementation of the “Order of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age” presents many challenges for pastor/pastoral life directors and directors of religious education and faith formation. The *RCIA* and the regulations and guidelines contained here follow the ancient tradition of celebrating the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) as a united whole, presumably at the Easter Vigil.

In many parishes the majority of children will celebrate Baptism as infants, First Eucharist upon reaching the use of reason, and Confirmation as adolescents. (Although the number of children seeking full Christian initiation or full communion into the Catholic Church is growing). The *RCIA* presumes local adaptation to particular circumstances.

It is important to recognize that in the parish there is one initiation process that may have several components (e.g. adults, adolescents, children, families, etc.). To the extent possible, the unity of the process is to be preserved.

B. Ministries within the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children

As is the case with the celebration of any sacrament, the responsibility for the successful preparation and celebration does not fall to one person alone. Pastor/pastoral life directors, directors of religious education, pastoral staff, catechists, the initiation team and the entire faith community share in the pastor/pastoral life director’s responsibility for initiation of new members. The leadership, however, plays a critical role in the implementation of the Rite.

Catechists assist with the formation and often provide a link between the catechumens/candidates and the pastor/pastoral life director. They offer insight in the process of discerning the readiness of children or youth for Christian initiation preparation.

Guidelines for discerning readiness can be found in Appendix 1.

The parents' role is essential. As the first classroom of faith, the home is the place where baptismal faith is nourished and Christian life is modeled. In most cases, it is the parents who present their children for preparation for Christian initiation. **Any process or program must incorporate the participation of the parents. When the child makes the initial inquiry about the sacraments (such as in the case of a child of a different faith tradition in a Catholic school), the parents need to be consulted before the child can begin preparation.**

Attention must be given to the spiritual needs of the parents as well. Some parents presenting children for the sacraments are either of another faith tradition themselves or may have been away from an active practice of the Catholic faith. In all cases, parents have to agree to support the child in his or her practice of the Catholic faith.

It is vitally important to invite children with disabilities and their parents into this process and provide appropriate accommodations for them.

C. Ministries of the Catechumenate Team

The Christian initiation process in the parish is one process that serves children, youth, and adults. Likewise, there is one team who ministers to children, youth, and adults. Members of the team will need to meet together and also separately in order to address the differing needs of adults and children.

Please consult the Guidelines section of this document on the RCIA.

Many excellent resources are available to help parishes with the Christian initiation process for children of catechetical age. The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis offers formal training classes as well as help by telephone, email, or on site visitation.



D. Christian Initiation of Older Children – Regulations

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

Part II of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* makes provisions for the adaptation of the rites for children of catechetical age. These provisions present a process of discerning and ritualizing stages of conversion in a child's life that lead to sacramental initiation according to the ancient tradition and order of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

- ❖ “An adult who intends to receive Baptism is to be admitted to the Catechumenate and, to the extent possible, be led through the several stages to sacramental initiation, in accord with the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms issued by it.” (*Canon 851 – 1*)
- ❖ While only two godparents for Baptism (and one for Confirmation) may officially serve as sponsors, other faith community members of a “sponsor” family (i.e. children who may be the candidate's peers) offer support and encouragement and foster the sense of community that is the Church. **This arrangement is especially appropriate when an entire family (parents and children together) is preparing for Christian initiation.**

1. The Precatechumenate (Remote Catechesis)

The Precatechumenate is the initial period of the process where the child first learns the basic beliefs of the Church, asks questions, prays for guidance, and becomes familiar with the members and the life of the Christian community. The conclusion of this period is normally marked by the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (or the Rite of Welcome for those children validly baptized in another Christian tradition, or older children baptized Catholic but uncatechized).

*Questions concerning Orthodox Christians or Eastern rite Catholics (children) becoming members of the Latin rite Catholic Church (the Roman Catholic Church) should be directed to the **Office for Canonical Affairs of the Archdiocese phone: (410) 547-5551**. **Keep in mind that there are procedures in law, which must be followed, and these procedures take time and certain required permissions.***

Readiness for the Catechumenate

- ❖ “There must be evidence of first faith...and of an initial conversion and ... (a desire) to enter into a relationship with God in Christ...a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians.” (cf. *RCIA* 42-47)
- ❖ There should be familiarity with the basic beliefs of the Church. The rite clearly defines the content of the catechesis.
- ❖ The catechesis for each stage in the initiation process is driven by the ritual steps that complete it.
- ❖ In order for a child to participate meaningfully in the rite he or she needs to be able to answer basic questions and understand the meaning for his or her life. “What do you want to become?” “Why?” “What do you gain by believing in Christ?”
- ❖ Remote catechesis for the sacraments of Christian initiation fosters a desire to be a part of the Church. **Evangelization is at the heart of this process.**
 - The parish should encourage full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful in the life of the Church.
 - Those who are not yet fully initiated, whether adults or young people, feel compelled to draw closer to the Lord and the Church through the sacraments.
- ❖ It is the job of pastor/pastoral life directors and directors of religious education (or coordinators of the Christian initiation process) to determine the readiness of a young person for entry into the Catechumenate.
- ❖ **Like their peers preparing for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation, young people preparing for the Catechumenate must commit to one full year of religious formation (ideally the Precatechumenate) prior to admission into the Order of Catechumens. The parents/families are an integral part of this Precatechumenate process.**

2. The Catechumenate (Immediate Catechesis)

- ❖ “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” (*RCIA, National Statutes, 18*).
- ❖ The Catechumenate is a time of instruction, of participation with the community in prayer and worship, and of deepening faith and conversion. Sponsors accompany the young people on the journey. This catechesis is to be complete but gradual, allowing for the conversion and faith to become strong (cf. *RCIA, 76*).
- ❖ The period of the Catechumenate and the period of purification and enlightenment “should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year” (*RCIA, National Statutes, 6*).
- ❖ “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” (*RCIA, National Statutes 19*).
 - In a combined process, one may also have children baptized in another faith tradition and older children baptized Catholic but not catechized.
- ❖ **The Content of Initiatory Catechesis** – This period of preparation will follow the flow of the liturgical year and readings of the lectionary cycle. Within this structure the teachings of the faith – scripture, dogma, sacraments, moral/social teachings, spirituality and their application to the lives of the young people are taught.
 - As with adults in the Catechumenate, care is taken not to overburden children with information as catechesis with their peers continues beyond initiation. They are adequately prepared to celebrate the sacraments and then join others of their age for

ongoing formation. The young people and their families are integrally involved in the worship and service life of the parish.

- In addition to creating a group experience for young people in the Catechumenate, it may also be necessary to offer one-to-one instruction with catechumens in order to present and engage catechetical material at an age-appropriate level. Their link to the community, however, must not be compromised. Both elements (the communal and the individual) are essential to a formation process that engages the whole person.
 - It is the responsibility of the pastor/pastoral life director and director of religious education/faith formation to evaluate and to discern with each young person and his or her families (to the extent possible) readiness for the sacraments of Christian initiation.
-
- ❖ Children validly baptized in another faith tradition preparing for reception into the full communion with the Catholic Church, or older children baptized Catholic and not catechized, will also need to prepare to celebrate the sacrament of Penance *prior* to their reception into the Church.
 - ❖ Immediate preparation for the sacrament of Penance is integrated into his or her overall preparation for Christian initiation, but the sacrament of Penance is not a stage of Christian initiation. Rather, it is a source of healing and grace accessible to the young person throughout Christian life.



Remember!

It's important to obtain a copy of the baptismal certificate of the child preparing for Confirmation and/or Eucharist or Reception into the Full Communion with the Catholic Church.

3. Liturgical Rites

As with adults, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for the initiation of children of catechetical age includes appropriate rituals that mark progress along the way. These include:

- ❖ The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (or the Rite of Welcome for children baptized in another faith tradition);
- ❖ The immediate preparatory phase begins at the beginning of Lent with the Rite of Election (or the Call to Continuing Conversion for those already baptized);
- ❖ Penitential Rites or Scrutinies.
- ❖ The latter rites (Election and Scrutiny) are integral to Lent, which is intensely more spiritual and prayerful, in immediate preparation for the reception of the sacraments.
- ❖ These rites may be celebrated with the adults at the Sunday Eucharist, acknowledging and adapting for the presence of children. They may also be celebrated in a smaller gathering, but in the presence of representatives of the larger faith community such as parents, sponsors, a catechetical group, or a number of adult friends (cf. *RCIA* 253, 257).

Celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Children of catechetical age receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens (*RCIA, National Statutes*, 18). This is especially important if a child is celebrating the sacraments of Christian initiation together with one or both of his or her parents.

According to the *Code of Canon Law*, “unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, an adult who is baptized is to be confirmed immediately after baptism and participate in the Eucharistic celebration also by receiving communion” (*Canon* 866).

The *RCIA* makes provision for the sacraments of Christian initiation to be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil. Pastoral needs of children may make it necessary to celebrate their Christian initiation at another time, apart from adult catechumens. Christian initiation should happen at Easter Sunday or one of the other Sundays of the Easter season in order to maintain the Paschal character of Christian initiation.

If the initiation of children is celebrated apart from the Easter Vigil, the special form of the Rite of Celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation for Children of Catechetical Age (RCIA, nos.304ff) should be used.

The RCIA provides several opportunities for those baptized in other Christian traditions to celebrate Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. This can be done together with those being baptized or by scheduling a separate celebration at a parish mass during the Easter Season. Whenever these sacraments are celebrated, it is important to distinguish clearly between the elect being baptized, and the candidates being received into full communion.

Both groups are confirmed and receive Eucharist. Pastor/pastoral life directors, directors of religious education and initiation coordinators determine which option is more appropriate, taking into consideration the number of those to be initiated as well as family issues (i.e., parents and children celebrating initiation together) and parish custom.

Remember!

The three sacraments of initiation received by unbaptized children are to be recorded, at the church of reception. For children baptized Catholic, Eucharist and Confirmation are recorded at the church of reception and notice of Confirmation is to be sent to the church of Baptism.

4. The Passage from Infancy to Catechetical Age and the Child Validly Baptized in another Christian Tradition

A child baptized in another Christian tradition often wishes to be received into the full communion with the Catholic Church at the time of First Communion. When it seems pastorally appropriate (for a second or third grade child), presuming they have been adequately prepared for reception of the Eucharist and for reception into full communion, there is no need for the child to celebrate a separate Rite of Reception into Full Communion. It is sufficient to include the Profession of Faith (Creed or Renewal of Baptismal Promises) at the mass during which the child will receive the Eucharist for the first time.

Remember!

A notation of the child's reception into full communion (along with information about baptism) should be made in the baptismal record of the parish where First Eucharist takes place.

5. Continuing Formation and Mystagogy

The period known as Mystagogy, which initially lasts until Pentecost, and then a year of follow-up and continuing formation, is essential to the process of Christian initiation. “The program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community” (*RCIA, National Statutes*, 24). It is only after one has been immersed in the sacred mysteries that one can come to grasp their meaning and effect in the life of the Church.

For children of catechetical age who have celebrated Christian initiation this period is all the more important because their need for ongoing formation increases as they grow and mature. Mystagogy will also take the form of age-appropriate religious education as part of a Catholic school curriculum or a parish religious education. While these young people will not participate directly in other sacramental preparation programs since they will have been fully initiated at the time of their baptism, they participate in many aspects of those programs so that they continue to develop ties with a community of their peers.

For children of catechetical age who celebrate full Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), it is necessary to provide formation and preparation for the sacrament of Penance. Remote catechesis should be included during the Catechumenate, and immediate catechesis should take place soon after their initiation so that they may have adequate preparation to celebrate the sacrament when they feel the need for it. (*In this catechesis, it is important to emphasize that Reconciliation renews the forgiveness they first received at Baptism*).

While one cannot insist when the sacrament will be celebrated, it is appropriate to encourage such young people to experience the sacrament during the Easter season soon after their initiation.



E. Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age Guidelines

1. Precatechumenate (Inquiry)

The content of this period of catechesis prepares the children to participate in the Rite of Acceptance (or the Rite of Welcome, if already baptized).

❖ **Foundational catechetical themes in this period are:**

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Call | Images of God |
| Response | Hospitality |
| Covenant | Community |
| Journey | Church |
| God's love | An introduction to the Mass |
| God's faithfulness | Scripture |
| Jesus as our friend | The Cross, etc. |

❖ **Preparation will be needed for the questions and answers in the rite:**

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Q: What do you want to become? | R: "A Christian." |
| Q: Why do you want to become a Christian? | R: "Because I believe in Christ." |
| Q: What do you gain by believing in Christ? | R: "Eternal life." |

- ❖ The children discover that God has been and will continue to be present in their lives. This discovery often takes place through the weaving of their stories, scripture stories and the stories of our faith tradition.
- ❖ It is critical to involve the parents in a similar process with the inquirers as well. The Precatechumenate lends itself very well to intergenerational catechesis.
- ❖ There are times when the team will want to spend time with the adults alone and the children alone, who can be "grade-grouped;" i.e. primary, intermediate, middle school, high school.

2. Catechumenate

An important aspect of planning for the *RCIA* is to offer a year round Catechumenate. Children and families experience conversion and a readiness to seek full membership in the Catholic Church at varying times and not always on a school year schedule. In a parish that has moved toward a year round Catechumenate, children and their families can be welcomed at any time of year. The Rite of Acceptance (or the Rite of Welcome for the already baptized) is scheduled two or three times a year during Ordinary Time. For a description of this ongoing process, consult the section *Guidelines for the RCIA*.

❖ The content of the Catechumenate comes from:

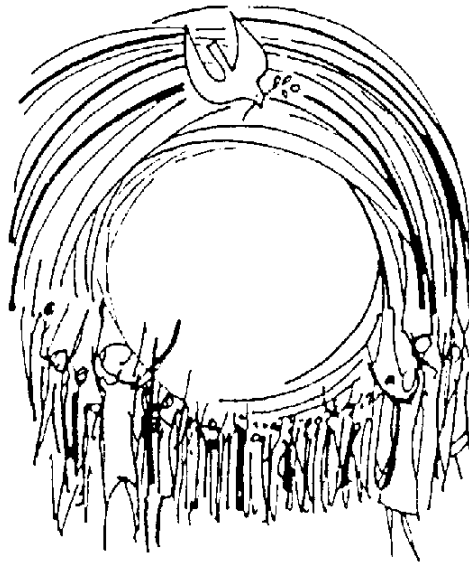
- Readings of the Sunday lectionary for each of the three cycles;
 - Catholic teachings and tradition from these scriptures;
 - The Creed;
 - Tradition of prayer;
 - Catholic dogmas;
 - Application of all of these teachings to their lives.
- ❖ The catechumens will be asked to profess their belief in the Triune God and the Church at their initiation, so they need to understand and be able to apply to their lives all that those teachings convey.
- ❖ **Criterion for readiness is not simply knowledge but conversion.** The catechumens are involved in the entire way of life of the Catholic Christian community (cf. *RCIA* 75, 1-2).
- ❖ The recommended structure for this period of catechesis is the Sunday Liturgy of the Word, followed by dismissal to an extended catechetical session. (If a Sunday dismissal is not possible, the catechetical group can meet on a weekday evening, but the content of catechesis is to remain the same).
- ❖ The adults and the children, each with their catechist, are dismissed together and go to separate settings. When Sunday Eucharist is over, parents, family members, and sponsors join the children in their respective settings.

3. Continuing and Mystagogical Catechesis

In the initial period of Mystagogy, lasting until Pentecost Sunday, the children (their sponsors and families) continue to gather each Sunday after mass and share the meaning of the Easter season readings and reflect on the children's experience of the sacraments of Christian initiation. The neophytes (newly baptized children and adults) could continue to sit together at mass, wear their baptismal garments, and have their presence remind the community of the new life they celebrate.

In addition to the regular religious education programs these children will now join, it is important to gather the neophytes and families monthly until the first anniversary of their initiation. These sessions offer mentoring and a deepening of their awareness of their spiritual journey.

The link between the family and the parish is encouraged and maintained so that the neophytes have a wider sense of the faith community and are formed by it. Children and families continue to be invited to participate in parish based activities, such as intergenerational learning sessions, social events, Vacation Bible School, Children's Liturgy of the Word, etc.



Remember! The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis is available to provide assistance and resources for the *RCIA* adapted for children.

II. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

A. Introduction

Although this document primarily deals with sacraments for children, the writers thought it important to include this section on adult Christian initiation because:

- ❖ It is the context for the Christian initiation of children of catechetical age;
- ❖ It answers many of the questions frequently posed concerning adults;
- ❖ The *GDC* calls for the baptismal Catechumenate to be the inspiration for all forms of catechesis. Familiarity with the process will help parishes to answer this call in their design of sacramental catechesis. (*Some practical ways to do this can be found in Appendix 2*).

B. Regulations

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is the process through which persons join or complete their initiation into the Catholic Church. The entire community is responsible for the initiation of new members.

“Those who have converted to Jesus Christ and who have been educated in the faith by means of catechesis, by receiving the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) are delivered from the powers of darkness through the sacraments of Christian initiation and having died, been buried, and risen with Christ, they receive the Spirit of adoption as children and celebrate with the whole people of God the memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection” (*GDC* 65).

Persons to be initiated or received into full communion with the Catholic Church include:

- ❖ Those who are not baptized;
- ❖ Those who were baptized into another Christian denomination;
- ❖ Baptized Catholics who were not instructed in the Catholic faith and have not completed their Christian initiation through the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

Remember!

It is important to obtain a copy of the baptismal certificate of one who is seeking Reception into the Full Communion with the Catholic Church or preparing for Confirmation and/or Eucharist.

Questions concerning Orthodox Christians or Eastern rite Catholics (Adults) becoming members of the Latin rite Catholic Church (the Roman Catholic Church) must be directed to the **Office for Canonical Affairs of the Archdiocese (phone: (410) 547-5551)**. Keep in mind that there are procedures in law, which must be followed, and these procedures take time and certain required permissions.



Remember!

Adults seeking Confirmation who regularly attend Sunday Mass, were catechized through elementary and middle school and may even be involved in parish ministries are not candidates for *RCIA*. They require only a brief and simple preparation for Confirmation.

Likewise, fully-initiated (that is, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) who have been away from the Church for many years, or who left with hurt and return with some bitterness are candidates for a parish program for reaching out to inactive or alienated Catholics, not the *RCIA*.

C. How does the *RCIA* work?

The *RCIA* consists of four periods or phases of formation that are marked by rituals or steps that celebrate what has been completed and which call a person into the next phase.

1. Phase 1 – The Precatechumenate

Those who are interested in finding out more about the Catholic Church enter into a period of inquiry. During this time, inquirers are introduced to the basic beliefs of the Catholic Church, ask questions, pray for guidance as to where God is calling them at this time of their lives, participate in the activities of a parish, and become acquainted with members of the community. Those who have completed the period of the precatechumenate declare their intention to the Church and the Church in turn, accepts them as persons who intend to become members.



Ritual Step 1 – This intention is then ritualized in the **Rite of Acceptance** (for the unbaptized) or the **Rite of Welcoming** (for those already baptized).

The prerequisite for moving to the next period of formation through the Rite of Acceptance/and/or Welcome “... is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates. Thus there must be evidence of first faith...and of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ...there must also be evidence of the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the Church, and some experience of the company and spirit of Christians” (*RCIA* 42).

It is vitally important to invite persons with disabilities into this process and provide appropriate accommodations for them.

2. Phase 2 – The Catechumenate.

This is a time of instruction, participation with the community in prayer and worship, and deepening faith and conversion. Sponsors from the community accompany the catechumens and candidates on the journey. Since the central and unifying principle of the *RCIA* is conversion to Jesus Christ, the time necessary for formation cannot be rushed. It varies according to the need of the individual.

During this extended period the candidates receive suitable catechesis, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and long enough for the conversion and faith of the catechumen to become strong (*RCIA*, 75).

- ❖ **For Catechumens – The Unbaptized:** “The period of Catechumenate, beginning at acceptance into the order of catechumens and including both the Catechumenate proper and the period of Purification and Enlightenment after Election or Enrollment of Names, should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction, and probation. Ordinarily this period should go from at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent in one year and extend until Easter of the following year” (*RCIA, National Statutes*, 6).
- ❖ **For Candidates—Uncatechized Adult Catholics:** “Even though uncatechized adults have not yet heard the message of the mystery of Christ, their status differs from that of catechumens, since by Baptism they have already become members of the Church and children of God. Hence their conversion is based on the Baptism they have already received, the effects of which they must develop” (*RCIA*, 401). The conversion process takes into account that these adults have a special status because they are already baptized (cf. *RCIA*, 402).
- ❖ **For Candidates Seeking Reception into Full Catholic Communion:** “Those who have already been baptized in another Church or ecclesial community should not be treated as catechumens or so designated. Their doctrinal and spiritual preparation for reception into full Catholic communion should be determined according to the individual case, that is, it should depend on the extent to which the baptized person has led a Christian life within a community of faith and has been appropriately catechized to deepen his or her inner adherence to the Church. Those baptized persons who have lived as Christians and need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation with the Catholic community should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the Catechumenate” (*RCIA, National Statutes*, 30, 31).

When the catechumens and candidates are ready to respond totally to God's call to the Catholic Church, the Rite of Election, celebrated throughout the archdiocese on the First Sunday of Lent, marks the event.

Ritual Step 2 – The Rite of Election – The second step in Christian initiation is the liturgical rite called Election or Enrollment of Names. On the basis of the testimony of godparents, team members and the catechumen's reaffirmation of intention, the Church judges their state of readiness and decides on their advancement toward the sacraments of Christian initiation.

- ❖ Before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity.
- ❖ This step is called election because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on election of the individual by God, in whose name the Church acts.
- ❖ It is also called the enrollment of names because as a pledge of fidelity the candidates inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for initiation. This rite is for the unbaptized. (cf. *RCIA* 118-128)
- ❖ The rite for those already baptized and preparing for Confirmation and Eucharist or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church is the **Call to Continuing Conversion**. (cf. *RCIA*, 547-549).



3. Phase 3 – Purification and Enlightenment

Usually coinciding with Lent, “this is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance” (*RCIA* 139). During the 40 days of Lent, catechumens and candidates search their hearts; scrutinizing their lives to see where evil is still present and praying for enlightenment to see the hand of God in their lives.

Ritual Step 3 – Celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation

The third step in the Christian initiation of adults is the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

- ❖ “Through this final step the elect, receiving pardon for their sins, are admitted into the People of God. They are graced with adoption as children of God and are led by the Holy Spirit into the promised fullness of time begun in Christ and, as they share in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal, even to a foretaste of the kingdom of God” (*RCIA* 206).
- ❖ The celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation for the unbaptized or elect usually takes place at the Easter Vigil. In order to avoid any confusion of baptized Christians with candidates for Baptism “it is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil” (*RCIA, National Statutes, 33*).
- ❖ Preferably candidates for full communion are received at the Sunday Eucharist of the parish community during the Easter Season. This is to underscore that they are indeed Christian believers who have already shared in the sacramental life of the Church and are now welcomed into the Catholic Eucharistic community upon their profession of faith and Confirmation before receiving the Eucharist.
- ❖ However, if the rites are combined at the Easter Vigil, “a clear distinction should be maintained during the celebration between candidates for sacramental initiation and candidates for reception into full communion, and ecumenical sensitivities should be carefully respected” (cf. *RCIA, National Statutes 32-34*).



Remember!

Full Christian initiation is recorded at the church of reception – that is, a record is made in all registries. For baptized Catholics, Eucharist and Confirmation is recorded at the church of reception and notice of Confirmation is to be sent to the church of Baptism.

4. Phase 4 – Mystagogy

Mystagogy is the final period of the *RCIA*. It simply means a deepening understanding of the “mysteries” of the life of Christ we share in the sacraments of Christian initiation. Formal mystagogy lasts until Pentecost, but, in reality, the journey continues throughout life.

- ❖ “The program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community” (*RCIA, National Statutes, 24*).

Did You Know? The *National Statutes for the Catechumenate* state the following:

- ❖ **Minister of Baptism and Confirmation.** The priest who baptizes one who is no longer an infant or admits one already baptized in another faith tradition into the full communion of the Catholic Church has the faculty to administer the sacrament of Confirmation. (See *RCIA, National Statutes, 12; Canon 883.2*)

A Note about Catechumens:

- ❖ Catechumens, since they are of the household of Christ, are entitled to Christian burial should they die before the completion of their initiation (*RCIA, National Statutes 8, 9; Canon 1183*).
- ❖ The marriages of catechumens should be celebrated as a Liturgy of the Word (*RCIA, National Statutes 10*).
- ❖ In order to signify clearly the interrelation of the three sacraments which are required for full Christian initiation, adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration, whether at the Easter Vigil, or, if necessary, at some other time (*RCIA, National Statutes 14*).

D. Discerning Readiness for Each Step and Phase

In the Precatechumenate

The aim of the Precatechumenate is faith and an initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love (*RCIA* 37).

❖ **Qualifications *before* celebrating the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate are:**

- *First* faith and *initial* conversion;
 - The intention to change their lives;
 - The first stirrings of repentance;
 - A calling upon God in prayer;
 - A sense of the Church and experience of Christians (*RCIA*, 42).
- ❖ With the help of sponsors, catechists, and deacons, parish priests have the responsibility for judging the outward indications of such dispositions.
- ❖ Before the rite is celebrated, sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, is set aside to evaluate, and if necessary, to purify the candidates' motives and dispositions (*RCIA*, 43).

In the Catechumenate

The aim of the Catechumenate is training in the Christian life (*RCIA*, 75).

❖ **Qualities nurtured within the Catechumenal Process include:**

- Turning more readily to God in prayer;
 - Bearing witness in the faith;
 - Keeping their hopes set on Christ in all things;
 - Following supernatural inspiration in their deeds;
 - Practicing love of neighbor even at the cost of self-renunciation (*RCIA*, 75.2).
- ❖ **Qualifications *before* Celebrating the Rite of Election:**
- A conversion in mind and action;
 - A sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching;
 - Living in the spirit of faith and charity;
 - The intention to receive the sacraments;
 - And the readiness to express this publicly (*RCIA*, 120).

- ❖ In order to exclude from the Rite of Election any semblance of mere formality, there is a deliberation prior to its celebration to decide on the catechumens' suitability.
- ❖ This deliberation is carried out by the priests, deacons, and catechists involved in the formation of the catechumens, and by the godparents and representatives of the local community (*RCIA*, 122).

1. Marriage Issues in the *RCIA*

The *RCIA* requires the active involvement of the Catholic Christian community in the initiation of new members. The goal of the liturgical, catechetical, and canonical aspects of their spiritual formation is that the catechumen or candidate for full communion with the Catholic Church be able to receive fruitfully the sacraments of Christian initiation so that he or she may live out the covenant of faith entered into with the Holy Trinity and the Catholic Church.

- ❖ If an inquirer is in an invalid marriage, this has an impact on his or her being able to receive fruitfully the grace of the sacraments of Christian initiation.
- ❖ Another delicate situation is that of an inquirer who now intends to marry someone who was previously married.
- ❖ Identifying these situations as early as possible in the *RCIA* process thus becomes of paramount importance so that steps may be taken to determine the status of prior marriages, the freedom of a person to enter into marriage, and the ability of the person to participate in the initiation sacraments.
- ❖ While a person may enter the Precatechumenate and even become a candidate/catechumen before a marriage issue is resolved, candidates and catechumens **are not to be presented** for the Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion unless these issues are resolved and, when appropriate, a decree of nullity has been granted.

2. Identifying Marriage Issues

It is essential for the *RCIA* coordinator to identify the marital status of persons who are in the inquiry stage of the *RCIA*. An interview early in the process should determine if the marital status of the inquirer requires further resolution.

If it appears that there is 1) a prior marriage or 2) an invalid current marriage, then the coordinator sees that the person schedules an appointment as soon as possible with the priest or staff member who handles annulment issues in the parish to begin an

appropriate tribunal process. The interview with the coordinator takes place no later than before the Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming.

It is important to obtain information on all marriages, both civil and church, of the inquirer or of the prospective spouse. All marriages after a first marriage are not necessarily invalid. Each marriage must be examined for its validity.

Remember!

Any marriage between two persons of other faith traditions who were free to marry is a valid marriage provided consent was adequate and there was no impediment.

3. Avoiding Delays and Conflicts Regarding Marriage Issues

❖ **As early as possible in the process the *RCIA* Coordinator:**

- Determines the existence of **all** marriages;
- Identifies possible invalid marriages affecting the freedom of a person to enter into marriage and the ability of the person to participate in the Christian initiation sacraments;
- Researches information on all marriages of the inquirer and his or her intended or current spouse (**This information is obtained and kept in confidentiality.**)
- Interview between priest/deacon/staff member who handles annulment issues and inquirer;
- Begin tribunal process.

Remember! For a marriage to be valid all of the following must hold: There can be no impediments; canonical form must be followed when required; consent must be exchanged.

E. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults Guidelines

1. An Ongoing Process

While many parishes still operate on a school year model, this is not the most effective model for the *RCIA* process. Initiation is a process rather than a program. Our focus is to welcome the person into the Catholic Christian community. The catechetical sessions are subordinate to the life of the Christian community and the process is dependent upon the entire community, not just the catechist. The candidates will come to know God by the way we live the gospel, our example, and the care and concern we offer to them. We discern when a person is ready for Christian initiation *not by what one knows, but when one shows signs of conversion.*

Inquiry and evangelization are year-round, ongoing activities. “These are not programs that happen every fall. They are *foundational ways of being* that every Christian community must foster if they are to be true to what Pope Paul VI called their ‘deepest identity’” (Pope Paul VI: “Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” *EN 14*).

2. What does an ongoing process look like?

- ❖ A welcome response to all inquirers approaching the parish.
- ❖ An initial interview with a priest, staff member or *RCIA* team member leading to an inquirer being invited to attend a Precatechumenate/inquiry session.
- ❖ The inquiry team is always ready to receive new inquirers. Even when no inquirers are there at a given time, the “group” exists at an available time and place on the parish calendar, with team members ready to lead a session for any who come.
- ❖ Sessions take place on a regular, ongoing schedule throughout the year. Information is available in the parish bulletin and **all** staff and parishioners, to the extent possible, are aware of the sessions.
- ❖ The Rite of Acceptance/ Welcoming is scheduled for three or four times a year, depending on need. Inquirers who are ready then become candidates/catechumens.

- ❖ Catechesis during the Catechumenate is gradual and complete. Since the period of formation for catechumens is to be of at least one year duration, this allows for catechesis during all the liturgical seasons.
- ❖ Readiness on the part of the community and the candidate/catechumen determines when a person is presented for initiation/reception into full communion, rather than a pre-determined date.
- ❖ The *RCIA* team has a sufficient number of well trained members. Different team members are responsible for each of the periods of the process.

The Ministry of Sponsors

Qualities of Sponsors include:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| Gratitude; Availability; Honesty; Patience; Willingness to share aspects of their faith journey when appropriate; | Freedom; Compassion; Realism; Personal Warmth; An ability to listen to and respect others. | Hospitality; Openness to questions; Prayerfulness; |
|---|--|--|
- ❖ The relationship between sponsor and candidate is one of mutuality, reciprocity, equality, and support—there is a realization of each individual's "sacred journey."

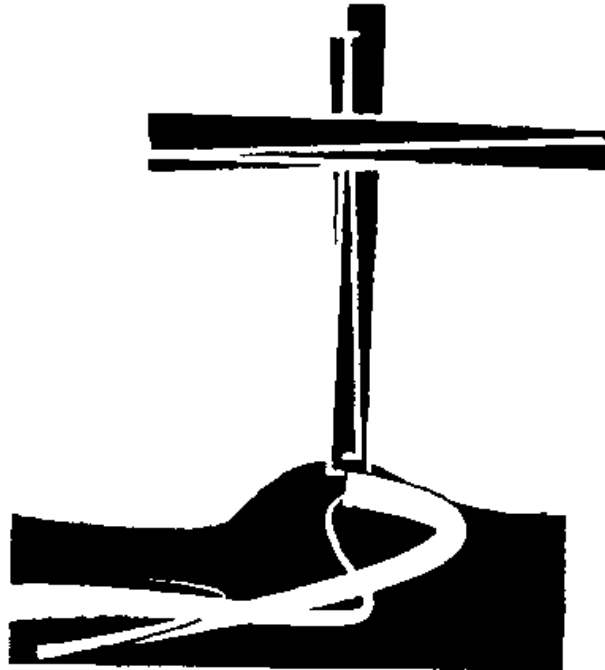
The role of the Sponsor is:

- To be a compassionate guide;
 - An understanding mentor;
 - A living sign of conversion;
 - A link between the candidate and the larger community of church;
 - A soul friend.
- ❖ Being a sponsor calls for a personal dedication of companionship and friendship.
 - ❖ It means sharing personal strengths in a most loving way.
 - ❖ Canonically the sponsor must know the candidate, help him or her, and witness to the candidate's morals, faith, and intention.
 - ❖ The foundation of a sponsor's ministry is a personal conviction of having something meaningful to share and the willingness to share it.
 - ❖ The sponsor shares freely without scaring people away, without insisting on a single way of living faith;
 - ❖ The sponsor is a minister of hospitality that welcomes a diversity of beliefs and experiences.

3. Preparation Rites of Holy Saturday

In proximate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation, the elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday they refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast (*RCIA* 185).

The elect and candidates are welcomed to the Preparation Rites on the morning of Holy Saturday at three locations in the Archdiocese. These rites include the *Recitation of the Creed* and the *Ephphetha Rite*. There is time for reflecting on the journey to Christian initiation and full membership.



III. Sacramental Catechesis and Homeschooling

A. Introduction

The time of sacramental catechesis provides the entire parish community with the opportunity to deepen its spirituality in the sacramental life of the Church while leading others to receive a sacrament for the first time. Systematic, immediate, sacramental catechesis is an activity distinct from religious education whether in the school, the parish religious education program or in homeschooled religious education.

The interaction between the parish community and those preparing for a sacrament gives credibility to the belief that catechesis is the “responsibility of the entire Christian community” (*GDC 220*) and, therefore “not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative” (*GDC 219.b.*). For this reason the *Code of Canon Law* requires the diocesan bishop and pastor ensure that appropriate catechesis is provided to all those preparing to receive a sacrament.

There are situations where some families choose to “homeschool” their children/youth. In this setting they choose to provide secular and/or religious education in the home. The Church encourages families who have the right and responsibility to provide for the faith formation of their children (*Canon 226*), to do this in partnership with those means and institutions for Catholic education (*Canon 793*). Parents and pastor/pastoral life directors are to work together on the administration of a sacrament.

“The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents” (*CCC 2226*). This religious education is the basis of remote catechesis for sacraments. Families are encouraged to meet with the director of religious education to discuss methods and materials used. These regulations and guidelines provide direction for sacramental catechesis for those who homeschool their children/youth.

B. Regulations

Specific regulations for each sacrament can be found in earlier sections.

1. Remote Catechesis

Homeschooling in religious education is recognized as an option to meet the pre-requisite year to sacramental preparation. Those who homeschool their children contact the director of religious education, the pastor/pastoral life director, or the one delegated by the pastor/pastoral life director to be in charge of the sacramental preparation program.

Every year the parish extends an invitation to the parish catechetical programs to those families who are homeschooling. Likewise, an invitation is extended to those children who have disabilities and are being homeschooled. Appropriate accommodations are to be made for these children and their families.

As parishioners, families who homeschool are expected to participate weekly in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

2. Immediate Catechesis

Sacramental catechesis “is an essentially ecclesial act” (*GDC 78*) and therefore “not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative” (*GDC 219.b*). Sacramental catechesis, therefore, takes place in a parish based program.

- ❖ Those who homeschool their children participate in the **free standing** parish based program for sacramental catechesis;
- ❖ Parents who homeschool register their children for sacramental catechesis according to the regulations established by the parish;
- ❖ Parents who homeschool, together with their children, participate in all dimensions of the parish program for sacramental catechesis: catechetical, liturgical, service, spiritual (retreats, etc.) and any other requirements for sacramental preparation as determined by the parish.
- ❖ Parents who homeschool, together with their children, use the catechetical text and supplementary catechetical resources established by the parish program.

Remember! Children not baptized as infants and who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age are prepared for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist according to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA 252, Rite of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age.)* This same ritual text is consulted for children baptized in another Christian faith tradition, or older children, baptized Catholic, who have not been catechized. Specific regulations and guidelines regarding each sacrament can be found in of this document.

3. Celebration

The proper context for the celebration of the sacraments is the parish community. "Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is the 'sacrament of unity'" (CCC 1140).

Children and youth who are homeschooled are to celebrate the sacraments in the parish at the time determined by the director of religious education, the pastor/pastoral life director, and/or the one delegated by him to be in charge of the **freestanding** parish based sacramental program.

4. Mystagogical Catechesis

A loving family and a caring parish continue to support the newly initiated child by good example, encouragement, and continued celebration to foster the continuing relationship with God. The systematic catechesis given in the home needs to convey the message of the Gospel, commitment to further involvement in the community and that the sacramental practices are at the heart of the life of the church (cf. CCC 2407).

C. Guidelines

It is essential that the link between the family and the parish be encouraged and maintained so that the children have a wider sense of the faith community and can be formed by it. In the phases of remote and immediate catechesis, children and families are invited to be involved in parish based activities, such as intergenerational learning sessions, social events, Vacation Bible School, Children's Liturgy of the Word, etc.

IV. Sacramental Preparation for Persons with Disabilities

A. Regulations

In order to be loyal to its calling, and to be truly pastoral, the parish must make sure that it does not exclude any Catholic who wishes to take part in its activities (*Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*, November 1978; revised 1989). A parish can be inviting or dis-inviting to people with disabilities and it is the responsibility of the pastor/pastoral life director and leaders to make sure that the door is always open.

The goal for every parish in the Archdiocese is to make its activities and facilities accessible to all. What a parish does or (fails to do) makes a statement about how accessible God seems to be to all in the community. Most parishes make a good faith effort to be accessible to those with mobility impairments, but disability can take many forms. Therefore, the parish must consider the needs of members who may not have physical disabilities but might have other special needs, such as those who are deaf and hard of hearing, those who are blind or have poor vision and those who have developmental disabilities. Community is built through shared experiences not isolated ones.

1. Inviting Children and Adults with Disabilities into the Catechetical Process

People with disabilities are integrated into the total life of the parish community including the parish based freestanding process of sacramental preparation. All parishes in the Archdiocese welcome and accept all people with special needs into their sacramental preparation programs so that all people receive the sacraments at the appropriate time.

Often, parents of children with disabilities are reluctant to ask for sacramental preparation for their children with disabilities for fear of being rejected, and may have faced rejection in the past. Therefore, it is crucial that parishes reach out to families who have a member with disabilities. The parish is the door to participation for all individuals, including those with disabilities and it is the responsibility of the pastor/pastoral life director and leaders to make sure the door is always open.

Publicity for religious education programs includes a statement that invites people with disabilities. Examples are: “We welcome all people, including people with disabilities. Please contact us if any accommodations are needed to maximize your participation in this event/program,” or “Religious education instruction is available for every child, including those with special needs. Our religious education office looks forward to welcoming and serving your family in the passing on of our Catholic faith.”

2. Discerning Readiness for the Celebration of the Sacraments

Most children and adults with disabilities can benefit from instruction that is identical to their peers (without disabilities) or that is modified slightly to take into account physical and learning needs. (For example, a child with a reading disability might need to have text read to them.)

For some children and adults with severe to profound cognitive disabilities, however, it may not be possible to achieve their peers' level of readiness for the sacraments. However, this should not prevent them from receiving the sacraments. Our Church law is the life giving law of the Holy Spirit intended to be interpreted flexibly, for the benefit of people. If we err, it is better to err on the part of being too open rather than too closed.

For the sacraments of Christian initiation in particular, if in doubt the sacrament should be conferred; and the faith of the family/community fills what may be lacking in the faith of the individual” (*Opening Doors*, Volume II, National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, 1987). “Disability alone does not disqualify a person from receiving the sacraments. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 20). If doubt still persists, please contact the Division of Evangelization and Catechesis for consultation.



3. Baptism

Through Baptism, we enter into the life of Christ, the life of the Church and the life of the community. “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 to receive it. Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring Baptism” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 9).

Code of Canon Law and Baptism

- *Canon* 843 states that the sacraments cannot be refused to a person who asks for them and is properly disposed.
- *Canon* 864 clearly states that any person who is not yet baptized may be baptized. Even those individuals with severe cognitive impairment who have not attained the “use of reason” may be baptized since such individuals at any age are equivalent to infants.
- In such cases, the consent of one parent or guardian is required (*Canon* 868) provided that the individual is brought up in the Catholic faith.

If the person with a disability is older, the usual process of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is to be followed. (For children ages 7-18, use the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age*, Part II of the *RCIA*). Reasonable accommodations are made according to the needs and cognitive level of the individual.

Remember! Baptism is recorded in the church of reception.

4. Confirmation

“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.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1285).

“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.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 16).

Those to be confirmed are baptized persons who have not been confirmed and are capable of receiving Confirmation (*Canon* 889). Any person with a disability who is

baptized and participates in a community according to his or her ability is an active member of the Church. Each is confirmed as a member according to his or her ability.

Remember!

A copy of the person's baptismal certificate needs to be obtained. The notice of Confirmation is sent to the church of Baptism and recorded at the church of reception.

5. Eucharist

“The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life.”

It can be difficult to determine readiness for Eucharistic participation in children who may have social, communication, or cognitive disabilities. Since the Eucharist is a sacrament of Christian Initiation, all baptized Catholics who are in good standing have a fundamental right to share in Eucharistic communion.

Readiness for the sacrament of the Eucharist is indicated by:

- ❖ Desire;
- ❖ Relationship with people of faith;
- ❖ A desire for friendship and closeness to the Lord;
- ❖ A sense of the sacred as demonstrated in behavior.

Family members or catechists often recognize these moments of reverence. These constitute sufficient disposition for reception of the Eucharist.

“It is important to note... 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 the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture or reverential silence rather than verbally” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 20).

If a child or adult with significant cognitive limitations is unable to understand that the consecrated host is not ordinary bread, it is permissible for them to receive the Eucharist in order to support the faith of the family. One can presume that it is God's desire to be in communion with this individual (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 20).

It must be determined if the communicant is able to receive the consecrated host or a portion of it. Water should be available for those who have difficulty swallowing.

Remember!

A copy of the person's baptismal certificate needs to be obtained. The sacrament of the Eucharist is recorded in the church of reception.

6. Penance

Individuals with cognitive disabilities are subject to human limitations and sinfulness. It is a myth that people with disabilities are incapable of sin, even if their disability makes it difficult for them to control their behavior. They can experience a lack of love, selfishness, loneliness and alienation. Some can understand what it means to be sorry for their participation in negative behavior. Penance can be a source of strength and a rich experience for individuals with cognitive impairments.

The elements of the sacrament of Reconciliation to emphasize with a person with cognitive impairments are: a feeling of sorrow, a knowledge, even limited, that someone was hurt by their actions; and a willingness to try to avoid the hurtful action in the future.

“As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* 23).

Remember! This sacrament does not need to be recorded in parish records.

B. Guidelines

Catechesis is sufficient if it is according to a person's cognitive level and takes into account individual strengths and challenges. Whenever possible, persons with disabilities are catechized with their peers without disabilities using the same formational materials. Catechetical programs are adapted to the person's individual chronological age or learning level, and take into account a number of factors including:

- ❖ Language level;
- ❖ Attention span;
- ❖ Possible perceptual difficulties;
- ❖ Hyperactivity.

Special consideration is needed in preparing individuals with severe cognitive impairments.

When planning catechesis:

- ❖ It is important to place emphasis on the strengths of the individual and use these strengths to teach;
- ❖ Materials should provide a variety of formats (auditory, pictorial and tactile) in order to increase the probability of facilitating conversion of faith and growth in knowledge;
- ❖ Activities should be an appropriate length for the developmental level of the child or adult;
- ❖ A checklist and visual reminders help some people retain what is taught or allow for extra processing time.

Use of symbolic catechesis: Our faith and our sacraments are rich in terms of symbols.

- ❖ Baptism has symbols of water, oil, and light;
- ❖ Eucharist has symbols of bread and wine, the cup, the tables of the Eucharist and of God's Word;
- ❖ Confirmation has the symbols of oil, the laying on of hands.

-
- ❖ The symbols of Reconciliation are the words of absolution and the laying on of hands. These symbols readily lend themselves to our everyday reality. It is important to connect these symbols to life so that the individual recognizes the sacredness of everyday life.

1. Sacraments for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Children and adults who are deaf and hard of hearing have the same rights to the sacraments as a person who does not have a hearing loss. Most people who are deaf do not have cognitive delays; however, it may be difficult for them to communicate with hearing people. The result of miscommunication can be a lack of understanding of the individual and therefore an incomplete catechesis. The primary consideration for people who are deaf and hard of hearing is that effective communication is provided in the preparation for the reception of the sacraments. The person should always have an opportunity to request the type of communication they require.

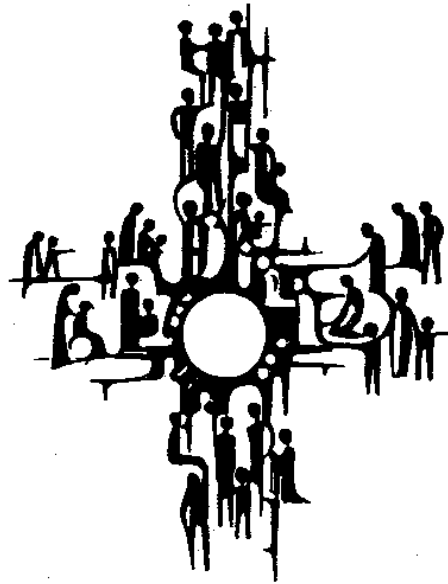
Presentation of the sacraments must take into consideration the person's communication needs. Many individuals communicate through *American Sign Language (ASL)*, although not all do. Some use their residual hearing and speech reading (commonly known as lip reading) and some use a combination of *ASL* and oral communications methods.

For a child/adult who communicates in *ASL* the most effective means of catechesis is to have the material presented to that child/adult by people fluent in *ASL*. Potential teachers can be recruited from the deaf community, and there are training opportunities available to prepare teachers to work with children/adults. One to one teaching at the pace of the person who is deaf/hard of hearing provides another option. Resources are available through the Deaf Ministry in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

In some situations the services of an interpreter may provide the needed communication. In other situations, a listening system that amplifies speech or reduces background noise might be appropriate. For a child/adult that is hard of hearing, a listening system or interpreter in a regular class may be adequate. In the case of very young children, the parents' and godparents' preferred means of communication should be used. If the recipient is of an age to make on his or her own the baptismal promises their preferred means of communication needs to be used.

- ❖ In preparation for First Holy Communion, direct communication needs to be used with the person and his or her parents as appropriate, using the mode of communication preferred by the parent and the child.

- ❖ To assure that communication For Penance, the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* offers the following information in their publication No. 5-027, “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities.”
 - “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 (*Canon 990*).
 - The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession (*Canons 978:2 and 1388:2*).
 - 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 writing. The written materials are to be returned to the penitent or otherwise properly destroyed.”



Conclusion

“The three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring us, the faithful of Christ, to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world” (*RCIA, Christian Initiation, General Introduction, 2*, after the Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium, 31*).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that, “from the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion” (*CCC 1229*).

“You are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus” (*Ephesians 2:10; RBC 231*).

The task of all fully initiated people is to live as God’s work of art and help all children, youth, adults, and families to recognize the work of art God has created in them and live it with conviction. The beginning of this document reminds all work in the ministry of Christian initiation to consider what a privileged time it is to accompany others on their journey to full Christian initiation into the Catholic faith community.

“My brothers and sisters, we commend you to the mercy and grace of God, our Almighty Father, of his only Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May he protect your paths, so that walking in the light of faith you may come to the good things he has promised us” (*RBC 130*).



Exceptions to these Regulations

There may arise circumstances which are not addressed by these regulations, or there may be particular pastoral situations for which an exception to one or another of these regulations may be desirable. The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis is ready to assist in clarifying these situations.

For circumstances that may warrant an exception, all requests for exceptions are to be in accord with *The General Directory for Catechesis*, the approved rites of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, and the *Code of Canon Law*. **The Archbishop, according to these norms, has the responsibility for granting exceptions.**

Requests for exceptions to these regulations should be addressed to the Archbishop and provide for a reasonable time frame for the Archbishop of Baltimore to seek any conclusion which may be necessary. Those making requests await the response of the Archbishop, or his delegate before acting on the request.

Approved: 28 May 2004
Cardinal William H. Keeler
Archbishop of Baltimore

For further information about and assistance with implementing these regulations and guidelines, contact:

The Division of Evangelization and Catechesis
Department of Catholic Education Ministries
Archdiocese of Baltimore
320 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-547-5403

APPENDIX 1

Readiness and Conversion

A. Discernment of Readiness and Conversion in Children

From its earliest days, the church has been sensitive to the needs of children preparing to receive the sacraments, to experience formation and conversion in age-appropriate ways. Tertullian said that “children have the competency and ability to know Christ.” Further, he says, “to know Christ’ means that one understands Jesus’ message, including the call to conversion and discipleship” (Ernest Evans, ed., trans., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, Cambridge: University Printing House, 1964, p.39).

The Apostolic Tradition attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, states of the initiation of children, “that if children can speak for themselves, they shall do so....” (Burton Scott Eastman, ed., trans., *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962.)

Commonly Recognized Forms of Conversion:

- ❖ Affective;
- ❖ Intellectual;
- ❖ Moral;
- ❖ Social;

“The desire for God is written on every human heart” (CCC 27). This innate desire for God leads the human person on a journey that seeks to “know” beyond oneself and come into relationship with the living God. Growth in this relationship is evident in the conversion of heart that accompanies it, and is a gradual journey often happening slowly and quietly.

Children cannot always articulate their experience of affective conversion since affective conversion is about one’s feelings and emotions. Often it is experienced at the deepest level of a person and points to an acceptance of something beyond one’s own experience.

Moral and social conversion can more easily be observed since they more readily affect a person's behavior. Intellectual conversion can often be discerned through questions.

The observations of parents, sponsors, and team members play an important role in discerning conversion. Even when a child or parent may not be able to articulate conversion, the observation of the Christian community may provide evidence that conversion has taken place.

Intellectual conversion moves from knowing to understanding. It is an integration of knowledge that often involves an “aha” moment. The “fact” passes from mere knowledge to an understanding of its intrinsic meaning.

The rite calls for:

- ❖ Appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts;
- ❖ Suitable catechesis;
- ❖ A profound sense of the mystery of salvation (cf. *RCIA* 75.1).

Moral conversion is evidenced by a change in a child's actions and attitudes. It involves the child's personal response to the gospel. When a child truly hears and takes to heart the Good News, his or her behavior will be affected. The behavioral change may be subtle, like being more helpful or less argumentative at home or the change may be more noticeable.

The Church looks for the catechumens “to bear witness to the faith...to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation” (*RCIA* 75.2). The child's actions will witness to the transformation of heart that is taking place within the child, and is evidence of faith development.

This conversion will be evident in the child actions and attitude toward:

- ❖ Childhood associates;
- ❖ Family (parents and siblings);
- ❖ Teachers, coaches, and other people;
- ❖ Life situations.

The **social** dimension of conversion is experienced as moving from being outside the community to feeling inside and a part of the community and responsible for its mission. The child comes to understand that their relationship with Jesus is connected with all of God's people. These changes can be discerned through observation and conversations with the children, parents, relatives, and sponsors, and/or on a retreat/discernment day.

The discernment of conversion in children requires an awareness of the spirituality of the children. In his preaching, Jesus informs his followers that the “kingdom-dweller” is one like a child:

Jesus said, “Whoever receives one such as these in my name, receives me; and the one who receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me” Mk 9:41.

And again: “Amen I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” Mk 10:15.

Robert Coles, in his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, wrote that we should be humble before a child’s movements of “awe and wonder and alarm and apprehension” (Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990).

“Coles’ research found that children ask the eternal questions:

- ❖ Where do we come from?
- ❖ What are we?
- ❖ Where are we going?” (Cole, 19).

Sophia Cavaletti discovered that young children have a “...special attraction to the union with God” (Sophia Cavaletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), pp. 31-32).

The summary of research on children’s spirituality tells us this:

- ❖ “Listen to the silence of children as well as to the questions and insights they express;
- ❖ Trust the child’s openness to God;
- ❖ Relate all activities and discussions to the everyday experiences of life;
- ❖ Understand that the symbols and rites of Christian initiation speak to the mystery of a child’s spirituality;
- ❖ Believe that the relationships built during initiation are helping to form each child’s life of faith” (Kathy Coffey, *Children: Christian Initiation: A Practical Guide*, Living The Good News, CO, 1995. p.9).

It is important to be aware of the developmental stages of a child's faith. At the ages of 7 and 8, when the majority of our children receive the sacraments of First Penance and First Eucharist:

- ❖ Possess a natural openness, wonder and awe of God and creation;
- ❖ Identify with Jesus as a special friend and brother;
- ❖ Are innately ritualistic;
- ❖ Directly relate their images of God to their interpersonal relationships, especially to the parents.

Nine to twelve-year olds are:

- ❖ Are concrete thinkers;
- ❖ Possess ability to reason and measure against personal experience;
- ❖ Recognize the effects of actions;
- ❖ Identify Jesus as wise friend and mentor;

Ten to twelve-year olds may:

- ❖ Know more religious information;
- ❖ Begin to show signs of abstract thinking – though most still exercise concrete thinking;
- ❖ Comprehend the ecclesial symbols and gestures of oil, water, fire, blessing, etc., through an engagement of the child's senses and imagination in a way that words cannot;
- ❖ Have stronger reasoning abilities and question facts (not necessarily doubting facts).

In the discernment “chat” or interview, like in every other step in the initiation process, it is important to approach the child with reverence of his or her blossoming spirituality, and respect the dignity of the child's privacy. Sophia Cavaletti suggests that children's exigencies or deep needs are met by the aspect of God that most corresponds to them (Cavaletti, pp.172-173). Therefore, it may be appropriate to adapt child appropriately, a form of the Ignation *Spiritual Exercises* and ask the question, “What is your deepest desire?” “What do you most need?” The response may indicate the image of God to which a child most relates. For instance, if the child desires health, present Jesus the healer; if the child desire peace at home, present the Jesus who died to bring peace to all.

“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” (RCIA 253).

Robert Duggan and Maureen Kelly in their book, *The Christian Initiation of Children: Hope for the Future*, (Paulist Press: Mahway, NJ, 1991) state that: “For a community that wishes to initiate its young into an experience of Jesus Christ dying and rising, there is only one option: to make conversion the primary, irreplaceable, unrelenting core of all its concerns for the next generation. Training for religious literacy becomes a valuable but clearly secondary handmaiden in the pastoral care extended to the young” (Duggan & Kelly, 92).

Our role is to help children grow in their relationship with God. “Initiation calls a child into a series of relationships which are experienced as redemptive. At root, the core experience of conversion involves a vital relationship with God. Conversion for a child is discovery that God has initiated a love relationship with him or her on a very personal level” (Duggan & Kelly, 93). This push for ongoing conversion and for a deepened awareness of the relationship with God is well served by a strong theologically sound content that is age appropriate and uses the ritual and the liturgy as a starting point.

All of these criteria and descriptions, to some degree, apply to all children receiving all sacraments. They certainly apply to those children receiving full initiation. There needs to be present in the child a desire to receive the sacraments, a desire to belong, a desire to serve, and openness to the Spirit. Following are specific criteria for the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.

B. Criteria for Readiness for Penance

Discerning Physical/Psychological Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Able to reflect on his or her own attitudes and actions. This involves the capacity to become calm, to quiet down, to think about one’s actions, even if only for short periods of time, and to try to determine, as far as possible, why one acted in a certain way.
- ❖ Able to make appropriate choices. This involves the capacity to make choices in simple matters, to understand when such a deliberate choice has been made, and to distinguish between an intentional action and an accidental one.

- ❖ Able to understand the effect of his or her actions on others. This involves the capacity to realize the impact of one's actions on others and to have at least a simple realization that one's actions or omissions can have far-reaching effects.
- ❖ Willing to receive the sacrament. This involves a desire on the child's part to participate in the preparation and to receive the sacrament with reverence appropriate to his or her age.

Discerning Moral Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Able to know the difference between right and wrong. This involves the capacity to act in a loving fashion, to discern the right or wrong of simple actions or omissions, and to know when one has made a loving or selfish choice.
- ❖ Able to take pride in or to regret his or her actions. This involves the capacity to delight in the gifts and talents God has given one and to use these well and to express sorrow for actions and omissions which have been harmful to oneself or others.
- ❖ Able to begin to distinguish between "wrong" and "sin." This involves the capacity, in at least a rudimentary fashion, to distinguish when something is objectively wrong, but perhaps not sinful, and when something is sinful because of the intention of the individual (knowledge and consent vs. ignorance or accident).
- ❖ Able to make amends. This involves the capacity to make up for one's hurtful actions or omissions, and to resolve to change one's behavior in the future to avoid repeating such behavior.

Catechetical Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Able to understand Church affiliation. This involves awareness of one's belonging to the Catholic Christian community through Baptism and the capacity to understand, at least to some degree, that individuals are responsible for the welfare of others.

- ❖ Able to relate to Jesus as one who forgives. This involves knowledge of and the capacity to reflect on the Gospel stories of Jesus that demonstrate him as one who loves, forgives and teaches us how to live in love (e.g. The Parables of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Unforgiving Servant, the Lost Sheep, etc).

Liturgical Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Able to pray and worship. This involves the capacity to respond with praise and thanks to a loving Creator who wants the child to be happy and to participate with as much reverence and understanding as possible in the liturgical celebration of the community.
- ❖ Able to understand the sacramental rites. This involves understanding the rite of the sacrament and the meaning of the event and participating in the celebration according to his or her age and ability.

C. Criteria for Readiness for Eucharist

“In initiation, children are invited into a relationship with the God of Jesus where what is sought above all is free surrender of a loving heart. In a community that has grasped this insight, readiness for first Eucharist will be judged by quite different standards than the knowledge of what is in the book and how well prayers have been memorized. (On the other hand, the child who has heard that invitation to the table as a sign of God’s limitless love will have probably devoured eagerly the content that is ‘in the book’ and will be quite eloquent in the language of prayer)” (Duggan and Kelly, p. 109).

Physical/Psychological Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Willing to receive the sacrament. This involves a desire on the child’s part to participate in the preparation and to receive the sacrament with a reverence appropriate to his or her age.
- ❖ Able to participate attentively in the liturgy. This involves the capacity to be attentive and reverent, at least to a minimal degree, and to participate in the ritual according to his or her ability.

Catechetical Readiness

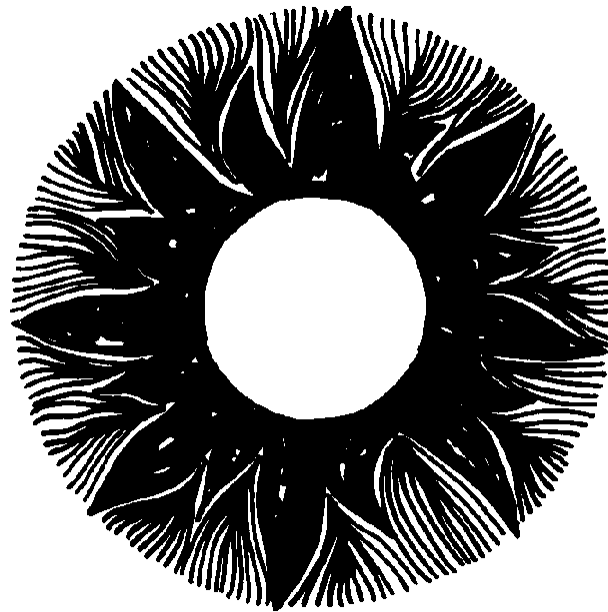
The Child is:

- ❖ Able to understand church affiliation. This involves an awareness of his or her belonging to the Catholic Christian community through Baptism.
- ❖ Able to relate to Jesus as one who loves and cares for us. This involves the knowledge of and a capacity to reflect on the Gospel stories of Jesus as one who loves and cares for us and invites our friendship. This invitation focuses on the last supper, sharing of a meal (e.g. feeding of the 5000 and the sermon on the living bread).
- ❖ Able to distinguish between ordinary bread and Eucharist. This involves knowing the difference between ordinary bread and Eucharistic bread and to recognizing the Mass as the event in which we receive the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist as well as in the Word and in the gathering of the community.

Liturgical Readiness

The Child is:

- ❖ Attending the Eucharistic liturgy regularly. This involves a familiarity with the parish community celebration and participation in the Mass.
- ❖ Able to participate in the Eucharistic celebration. This involves the ability to participate, in at least a simple way, in the ritual of the celebration and to understand the requirements of receiving the sacrament (e.g. simple responses, reverence according to age level, Eucharistic fast, etc.).



APPENDIX 2

The Roles of the Adult Faith Community

This section deals with adult learning principles to be used with parents and families; the role of the sacramental preparation team; the catechist's use of the Catechumenate model and the tasks of catechesis; and includes sample parent/family sessions.

“Adults are eager for resources, guidance, and support that will help them form a community of faith within their families, grow more deeply in love with their spouses, raise children committed to Jesus and the Church, participate as Catholic families in society and share together in the life and mission of their parish and the wider Church” (*OHWB 77*, after *Familiaris Consortio*, Part 3; *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, Chapter 4; *GDC 226-227*, 255).

“Parish communities that help adults to be more intentional about their own faith development are contributing in a substantial way to the conversion process of the young. Where parents have the opportunity to come together for faith sharing and other experiences that further their own continuing conversion, they become more eloquent advocates of the Christian way. Within the confines of the domestic church, they exercise the ministry of evangelization as they live lives that are more explicitly Christian, thus promoting the ‘primary conversion’ of their children” (Duggan and Kelly, pp. 106-107).

A. General Adult Learning Principles

While the sacramental programs provided by parishes are usually focused on helping children to participate in the sacraments, it is essential to realize that the people who come to the parent sessions are **adults**. Therefore, the principles shown by experience to be effective in enhancing learning by adults need to be carefully integrated into the design and implementation of the parent sessions. A few of these principles are listed and explained below.

❖ **Learning is enhanced when adults are treated with respect as self-directing persons**

- Adults are constantly making decisions which significantly influence their lives. They act with much independence, and usually resent being “told

what to do” as if they were children. It is very important to be mindful of this principle when relating with adults through verbal **and** written communication.

- Adults respond more positively when ideas are “suggested for your reflection and action” or when someone is “invited to consider” an idea. Rather than saying, “Parents **must** attend these sessions if they want their children to receive the sacrament of ...” a more cooperative response is usually given when the letter or announcement says: “It is vitally important that parents participate in the preparation of their children for the sacraments. The parish provides learning sessions to assist parents in their essential role.”
- Some adults may indeed be irresponsible. If they don’t attend the sessions, then they can be dealt with as the exceptions, and they may need to be asked to delay a child’s participation in a sacrament until a later time when sufficient preparation has been achieved. In this way, the language and tone of the verbal and written communications do not appear to be based on the underlying presumption that most parents will act irresponsibly.

❖ **Learning is enhanced when adults see the learning situation as related to their past experiences**

- Parents have memories of their own preparation and participation in sacraments and these memories can evoke positive and/or negative feelings. Parents can be invited to recall these memories, and be asked what kind of memories they would like their children to have. What is important is how children can most appropriately participate in the sacraments now.
- The role of the family is a very significant influence, for good or ill, in the faith development of children. If parents can be appropriately expected to be involved in their children’s activities such as sports, scouting, school, social activities, and others, it is all the more important that parents participate actively in preparing their children for the sacraments.
- Sessions designed to help parents reflect on their own sacramental experiences, both positive and negative, understand the meaning of the sacraments and their role in celebrating them, will enhance their ability to prepare their children for a positive and grace-filled participation in the sacraments.

❖ **Learning is enhanced when adults are physically comfortable and can socialize with one another**

- A comfortable setting, breaks, refreshments and opportunities to get to know one another are not just “nice touches.” These elements are important factors in fostering adult learning. Parents’ sessions for sacramental preparation need to be particularly marked by hospitality.

❖ **Learning is enhanced when adults experience a variety of learning activities.**

- It is important to include a variety of learning activities in parent sessions for sacramental preparation. By including a variety of activities, a program responds to the different learning styles of adults, presents a more interesting format and removes the burden of the meeting from one presenter.
- The learning experiences of the parents will have a direct influence on the quality of the learning children will experience as they prepare to participate in the sacraments. (For a more complete description of adult faith formation principles consult *Our Hearts Were Burning*).

B. Sacramental Preparation Teams

The preparation for the celebration of a sacrament is never a solitary endeavor. The initiation and reconciliation of a member of the Church involves the whole community. A strong symbol of the community can be the development and utilization of a team of people who will design and implement the sacramental preparation programs. Priest (s), catechists, parents, directors of religious education, etc. can plan and facilitate sessions for the parents and children. These people can operate as panels and as individual presenters of input and as facilitators of small and large group dynamics.

❖ **The *General Directory for Catechesis* calls for the use of the baptismal Catechumenate as the inspiration for all catechesis and that our doctrinal presentations cover the Six Tasks of Catechesis.**

- *GDC* 90 and 91 call for the principles and process of the baptismal Catechumenate to be the inspiration for all catechesis. The following principles can be applied to the catechesis of children and youth and most especially in designing learning sessions for adults.

These principles are as follows:

- ❖ Use scripture from the Sunday lectionary cycles;
- ❖ Do liturgical catechesis, i.e. break open the rite, rituals, symbols and reflect upon what they mean and why;
- ❖ Use the methodology of storytelling and faith sharing in small groups;
- ❖ Contextualize all catechesis in the rhythm of the liturgical year;
- ❖ Use ritual and prayer as learning and worship tools;
- ❖ Involve many, if not all, segments of the faith community;
- ❖ Provide opportunities for service;
- ❖ Reach out to non-Catholic parents and non-practicing Catholic parents.

(The GDC states three catechetical “moments” in evangelization – the time of initiation, the time of continuing to nurture the faithful, and the time to welcome back and nurture those who have not been actively practicing their faith).

❖ It is important to contextualize the learning for parents in the Six Tasks of Catechesis. They are as follows:

- Knowledge of the Faith (CCC 26 – 1065);
- Liturgical Life (CCC 1066 – 1690);
- Moral Formation (CCC 1691 – 2557);
- Prayer (CCC 2558 – 2865);
- Communal Life;
- Missionary Spirit (GDC 84-87); (OHWB 88-96);

Knowledge of the Faith -- Teach the doctrine of the sacraments. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the ritual texts of the sacraments are good sources.

Liturgical Life -- Encourage parents’ and their children’s active participation in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. Provide good liturgical experiences for them. Validate and challenge their baptismal vocation. Provide opportunities for liturgical reflection on what they and their children do, and why. Break open the rituals and symbols for them so that they are truly “full, conscious, active participants” (SC 10).

Moral Formation -- Teach how to give and receive forgiveness and reconciliation; the 10 commandments, the new commandment, the Beatitudes, the dignity of the human person, freedom, responsibility, sin, grace, conscience formation, moral decision making, social justice teachings, ethics, and the Gospel

of Life. Their children need to live in and witness this lifestyle. “Live a *lifestyle reflecting scriptural values* of holiness, simplicity, and compassion” (OHWB 93).

Prayer – Teach the tradition of prayer and provide opportunities to immerse them in it. Help them with their prayer life and spirituality.

Communal Life – Help them to see their family as a domestic church in the larger church; help them to connect into small faith communities.

Missionary Spirit – Help them to see that by their baptism, they are called to evangelize and to mission; called to serve and to transform society. (OHWB 88 – 96).

C. The Role of Parents and Family

The family provides remote preparation for the sacraments through their daily lived experiences. “Catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events...care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events” (CT 68).

The most recent on adult faith formation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, (1999) stresses greatly the role of adults and families on the formation of their children. “Adult faith formation also benefits children and youth. An adult community whose faith is well formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on to the next generation. Moreover the witness of adults actively continuing their own formation shows children and youth that growth in faith is lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood” (OHWB 40, after CT 43).

1. Suggested Outlines for Parent Sessions

Remote Catechesis for Penance and Eucharist **Session 1:**

- ❖ Welcome, introductions, hospitality, prayer experience;
- ❖ Faith sharing process on their religious experience as a youth and now as an adult and family member;
- ❖ presentation on the stages of faith and moral development;
- ❖ presentation on their role as demonstrating God’s love, and family rituals;

- ❖ presentation on the role of community – belonging, acceptance, etc.

Session 2:

- ❖ Faith sharing process on sacraments;
- ❖ Presentation on the theology of the sacraments; present by category – initiation, healing, service of communion;
- ❖ Readiness and preparation: what children need to know, criteria for conversion and readiness (consult Appendix 1 of this document); parents' decision regarding involvement in the immediate preparation; expectations regarding parents involvement in immediate preparation; what to do between now and then;
- ❖ Questions and Answers;
- ❖ Prayer.

This catechesis can be done in one or two sessions or more.

Immediate Catechesis for Penance

Session 1:

- ❖ Welcome, introductions, hospitality, prayer experience;
- ❖ Faith sharing process concerning the parents' feelings on the Sacrament of Penance;
- ❖ **Brief** history of the sacrament; review the ritual and theology of the Sacrament of Penance;
- ❖ Presentation on objective moral wrong and sin, God's loving forgiveness, examples from scripture;
- ❖ Presentation on conscience formation;
- ❖ Presentation/discussion on Catholic morality and today's culture.

Session 2:

- ❖ Peace making, forgiveness, and good example in the family;
- ❖ The community as ministers of healing;
- ❖ Fidelity to God and others;
- ❖ Family experience of welcoming, reflecting on the day, forgiving, and starting over;
- ❖ Ways for the family to help prepare for the Sacrament of Penance;
- ❖ Options and opportunities for reception of the sacrament;
- ❖ Prayer;
- ❖ Questions and Answers.

This catechesis can be done in one or two sessions or more.

Immediate Catechesis for Eucharist

Session 1:

- ❖ Welcome, introductions, hospitality, prayer experience;
- ❖ Review of the critical role of the parent and family in formation;
- ❖ Review of the age appropriate faith development and spirituality of the child;
- ❖ Presentation/discussion on sign and symbol; the **signs and symbols of the Eucharist and why Jesus chose them:**
 - Covenant meal: Old Testament and New Testament;
 - Memorial of Christ's death and resurrection "re-presented" in the celebration giving promise of the future;
 - Discussion of families' celebrations of special events such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, etc. and their meaning for them;
 - Presentation of being nourished by scripture, Eucharist, and the effect on the community;
 - Small group process: recall the circumstances and events of the times Jesus ate with people in scripture;
- ❖ Closing prayer: an agape.

Session 2:

- ❖ Discuss the specific activities within the family to get ready for Communion;
- ❖ Be prepared to give them many practical suggestions – in booklet form or a prepared sacramental series or both;
- ❖ Have a group of parents whose children have already received the sacraments discuss what they did;
- ❖ A video, such as *Grandma's Bread*, is appropriate, followed by discussion;
- ❖ Hand out a sheet of details/logistics of the event. Avoid general discussion;
- ❖ Parents can consult with the facilitator after the meeting;
- ❖ Intergenerational activities are strongly encouraged, e.g. candle making, bread making, banner making, etc. Such activities can be part of these sessions or you may wish to schedule a separate “retreat” day for the families.

This catechesis can be done in one or two sessions.

2. Parent/Family Sessions for the Initiation of Children of Catechetical age

Much of the material discussed in other parts of this document is useful for this process as well. It is critical that parents/family members be involved in this process. Some of these parents may not be Catholic or are Catholic and are returning to the Church – in both cases they have special needs. In the inquiry period, parents and children can gather together at the beginning and then be separated for catechesis, and come together at the end.

During the Catechumenate, the parents/family members could join their children (who were dismissed from liturgy) after Mass. Again some of these sessions could be together, separate, or combination of both.

Resources for planning parent/family sessions for the initiation of children of catechetical age are available through the Division of Evangelization and Catechesis.