

the
**SACRAMENTAL
GUIDELINES**

**Addressing
Key Moments in the
Christian Journey**

**New Life
Spiritual Growth
and Healing**

Archdiocese of Louisville
2026

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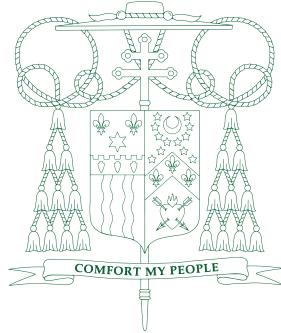
**New Life
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DECREE

The sacraments make the grace of God through the person of Jesus Christ perceptible, revealing the power of the Holy Spirit and embodying the essence of the Church. *The Sacramental Guidelines: Addressing Key Moments in the Christian Journey* aim to improve understanding the importance of the catechumenate and the sacramental experience within each parochial community. The preparation for, and celebration of, the sacraments necessitates a shared discipline and comprehension of the background, the theology, and the role of parents as models of sacramental life throughout our local church.

These guidelines, designed to be pastoral in nature, call upon ministers—catechists, liturgists, and clerics—to educate, foster openness to the Church's teachings, and administer the sacraments with fidelity, ensuring that their signs convey clear meaning to enable the People of God to engage more deeply and commit themselves to the faith we are proud to profess in Jesus Christ. These guidelines provide essential instructions for adhering to the universal discipline of the Church concerning the preparation and celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance within the Archdiocese of Louisville.

Therefore, as bishop of this local church, I hereby decree that the effective date of *The Sacramental Guidelines: Addressing Key Moments in the Christian Journey* will be Ash Wednesday, the eighteenth day of February two thousand and twenty-six. Following the effective date, the Sacramental Guidelines previously approved are abrogated.

Given in Louisville, from the chancery, this tenth day of February,
in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-six,
Memorial of Saint Scholastica, Virgin.

MOST REVEREND SHELTON J. FABRE

Archiepiscopus

DR. BRIAN B. REYNOLDS

Cancellarius

Preface

Dear Catechists,

God, in his infinite wisdom, chose us to receive the precious gift of faith. Our selection signifies not only his trust in us but also his call to empower us to become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. We are fashioned to live in accordance with the will of God, striving to fulfill our unique purpose with fidelity and commitment. As catechists – whether clerics, consecrated religious, or lay men and women – we are fortified by regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church across Central Kentucky.

Through our participation in the Sunday Eucharist, we experience, in a concrete way, how the Church's practice of prayer (*lex orandi*) aligns with her enduring rule of faith (*lex credendi*). This experience teaches us that the sacrifice of the Cross of Christ and its sacramental renewal in the Mass are fundamentally the same, differing only in their mode of offering (cf. GIRM, no. 2). From this wellspring, we are reminded, as a people chosen by God, to embody the glory of the Father through the Risen Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Mindful that the process of catechesis and evangelization is inherently communal and never a solitary endeavor, our work is always rooted in the life of the Church, reflecting a collective mission rather than an isolated effort (cf. EN, no. 60). Therefore, as living and active members of the Church, we must always illustrate and express the familial bond we share in faith by providing connectedness, communion, spiritual commitment, and support to all people, regardless of their stations in life and distinctions of nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, or whatever labels society uses to divide the People of God.

In union with the Church, Christ impels us to help the faithful to participate more actively in our covenant relationship with God, who seeks to give us life in its fullness. As we commit to addressing key moments in the Christian journey, may this resource support your accompaniment of the Christian faithful in the areas of spiritual growth, healing, and newness of life.

Arthur Turner

Director of Faith Formation

F. DeKarlos Blackmon, OblSB, EdD

Vice Chancellor for Pastoral Services

Abbreviations

BLS	Built of Living Stones	OBC	Order of Baptism of Children [<i>Ordo Baptismi Parvulorum</i>]
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church	OC	Order of Confirmation [<i>Ordo Confirmationis</i>]
CIC	Code of Canon Law [<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i>]	OCF	Order of Christian Funerals [<i>Ordo Exsequiarum</i>]
EN	On Evangelization in the Modern World [<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>]	OCIA	Order of Christian Initiation of Adults [<i>Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adulorum</i>]
GIRM	General Instruction of the Roman Missal [<i>Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani</i>]	OP	Order of Penance [<i>Ordo Paenitentiae</i>]
GPD	Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities	RM	On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate [<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>]
ICEL	International Committee on English in the Liturgy	RS	On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist [<i>Redemptionis Sacramentum</i>]
ITC	International Theological Commission	SC	Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>]
LA	Fifth Instruction on Vernacular Translation of the Roman Liturgy [<i>Liturgiam Authenticam</i>]	SSM	Sacraments and Social Mission
LG	Constitution on the Church [<i>Lumen Gentium</i>]	SL	Sing to the Lord
NDC	National Directory for Catechesis		
NPCR	Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite of the Archdiocese of Louisville		

Introduction

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you will renew the face of the earth.

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.

In the same Spirit help us to relish what is right
and always rejoice in your consolation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The English translation of the Prayer to the Holy Spirit from A Book of Prayers

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The sacraments celebrated in the Catholic community are a treasure of the Catholic faith, drawing us into relationship with Jesus Christ. These guidelines are designed to help the parochial (parish) communities celebrate the sacraments fully and with proper understanding, while providing guidance to those responsible for sacramental preparation. The guidelines also reflect the importance of unity within parish communities, encouraging relationships among the various groups that minister within our parishes. These guidelines acknowledge that each parish is part of a broader network of stable communities where people are nourished by the sacraments, comprising the Body of Christ in central Kentucky.

These guidelines present the background and theology for each of the following sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and Reconciliation. Ideas are offered for sacramental preparation and sacramental celebration. Each section contains answers to frequently asked questions, and instructions for celebrating the sacraments for people with diverse-abilities (disabilities).

In multi-parish programs (school or religious education), it is essential to honor the role of the family's home parish. Parents are encouraged to consult with their local pastor to understand the specific policies regarding sacramental preparation and celebration within their parish.

The role of parents as models of sacramental life within the family is paramount. The Church constantly reminds parents that they are the first teachers of faith for their children. Pastoral experience reveals, however, that parents are at various places in their own journey of faith. Some parents are active in their faith, while others may feel inadequate and desire to learn more about their faith, so they can share it with their children. Still others, for various reasons, expect the Church to take full responsibility to educate and form their children in faith. It is important that pastors, catechists, and other ministers in the parish responsible for sacramental preparation include parents in the formation of their children and provide resources for those who feel inadequate to do so. Building relationships and having one-on-one conversations with those who have surrendered their role as first teachers of the faith may be a way to encourage those parents to accept their roles and to see their sacred responsibility as an opportunity to grow closer to their children.

With more opportunities for online learning and the rise of artificial intelligence, it is important to remember that preparation and celebration of the sacraments is an in-person experience. Although some catechesis is possible online, no parish should promote the idea that the total sacramental experience can take place through the screen of any electronic device.

It is also important to recognize the diversity of cultures that exists within the Archdiocese of Louisville. A variety of cultures means a variety of liturgical possibilities for worship which also includes the celebration of the sacraments. Parish leaders should be sensitive to the opportunities to incorporate traditions and practices from other cultures that are compatible with the norms and practices of sacred worship. Some cultural adaptations may be allowed with permission from the Archbishop.

These guidelines supplement the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* (OCIA), the *Order of Baptism of Children* (OBC), the *Order of Confirmation* (OC), the *Order of Penance* (OP) or any official text of the Roman Catholic Church regarding sacred worship or catechesis.

General Guidance about Sacramental Records

Canon law primarily pertains to baptized Catholics or those who are to be received into the Catholic Church (CIC, c. 11). As the standard method for validating baptism is through the use of sacramental records, the Baptismal Register within a parish serves as the central repository for all sacramental records. It is for these reasons that pastors are mandated to keep detailed records of anything that may influence the status of their parishioners. Important milestones such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, and religious profession are documented in the Baptismal Register, ensuring that a person's status is clearly defined and readily available (CIC, c. 535).

The Church's interest in the canonical status of individuals and the maintenance of sacramental records, such as certificates and registers, reflects its commitment to both preserving and validating this information when required. Consequently, a current baptismal certificate is often required when individuals are preparing for marriage, entering religious life, or enrolling in a seminary. Additionally, any sacramental events that occur outside the home parish are communicated back to the parish of baptism for proper documentation in the baptismal record.

Baptismal Register. The baptismal record must be created using permanent ink in a bound volume, as electronic records cannot replace the handwritten documentation required in the Baptismal Register. It is essential that the parish Baptismal Register is stored in a fireproof and securely locked location, such as a file or safe. The pastor responsible for the parish where the baptism takes place must ensure that the record is entered promptly and accurately, including all information mandated by universal and particular law. For instance, if a deacon confers the baptism, the name of the deacon should be recorded as "Deacon Kenneth Roberts." Additionally, the proper pastor of the parish must be notified whenever a baptism occurs to ensure it is documented (cf. CIC, cans. 875-878).

Confirmation Register. A permanent record of the administration of Confirmation should be made promptly in the parish records in accordance with all the requirements of universal and particular law (CIC, cans. 894-896). Notification of the Confirmation is also to be sent to the person's parish of baptism.

First Communion Register. First Communions are entered into the First Communion Register. Notification of the First Communion should be communicated to the person's parish of baptism.

Registers of Catechumens and the Elect. For catechumens (who have not been baptized previously), the baptism is documented in the register on the date the sacrament is conferred, along with all necessary details. Additionally, records are kept for the reception of First Communion and Confirmation. Parishes are encouraged to maintain a Register of Catechumens to document the names of catechumens following the Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate, which should include the catechumen's name, the sponsor's name, the minister's name, and the date and location of the Rite. A Register of the Elect serves to officially record the names of those catechumens who publicly express their intention to seek baptism during the Easter Vigil.

Register of Candidates. Baptized persons who enter full communion are confirmed and receive First Communion during the same liturgy, which also applies to children of "catechetical age" (i.e., those who have attained the use of reason). A record of their profession of faith is entered into the baptismal register on the date of the profession, including details such as the candidate's date and place of baptism, date and place of birth, and the names of their parents. Records are also maintained for the reception of First Communion and Confirmation. In the notations column, the date and the minister responsible for the reception into full communion are recorded, while First Communion and Confirmation are noted in their respective registers.

Records of First Penance? It is important to understand that there is no official record of first penance (reconciliation). To uphold the confidentiality of the sacrament of penance, no documentation should be created regarding the participation in the sacrament of penance of any person. Therefore, no certificates for the sacrament of penance should ever be issued.

General Guidance for Sacramental Celebrations

Sacred Music. Appropriately chosen and skillfully rendered music significantly enhances the celebration and reinforces the faith of those participating in the liturgy. Music selected should foster the good participation of the assembly and be appropriate for the liturgical action it accompanies. In sacramental celebrations, the norms for liturgical music

according to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship” are to be followed at all times.

“Music should be considered a normal and ordinary part of the Church’s liturgical life” (SL, no. 110). As a rule, the Ordinary of the Mass (Gloria, Eucharistic Acclamations, Lamb of God) and Gospel Acclamation are always sung (GIRM, no. 40). Other music that is selected for the celebration is to be chosen according to the following criteria laid out in *Sing to the Lord*:

Liturgical, Pastoral, and Musical Judgment

- **Liturgical Judgment.** Does this composition suit the liturgical action it accompanies? Is its text theologically sound and appropriate to this liturgical celebration and season of the liturgical year? Keep in mind that the seasons of Advent and Lent call for a certain musical restraint.
- **Pastoral Judgment.** Does this composition suit this particular worshiping assembly? Does it work in this particular worship space? Does it foster good participation, both internally and externally?
- **Musical Judgment.** Is this composition aesthetically and expressively worthy of the sacred celebration? Not all religious music is appropriate for the liturgy.

(SL, nos. 126-136)

Participation vs. Performance. Liturgical music fosters the participation of the assembly, and this participation may at times be external – singing along – and at other times internal – listening reflectively. “The role of music is to serve the needs of the liturgy and not to dominate it, seek to entertain, or draw attention to itself or the musicians” (SL, 125). While the parish choir may, at times, sing by themselves, performance pieces (i.e., by the entire class of First Communicants or Confirmandi) are not appropriate. Such pieces are more appropriately sung at the reception following the liturgy or other gatherings, such as retreats.

Recorded Music. Recorded music may never be used in the liturgy because it “lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy” (SL, no. 93). One exception is the use of recorded music during prolonged periods of individual confessions, if this is necessary to maintain adequate privacy (SL, no. 94).

Art and Environment. In sacramental celebrations, the norms for liturgical art and environment according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and *Built of Living Stones* are to be followed at all times. Sacramental celebrations always take place in the Church because the Church is the place where the Christian community gathers for prayer. Exceptions require the archbishop's permission.

The primary decor in the Church on any given day is that of the liturgical season and/or feast. Any additional decorations for sacramental celebrations must be intended to draw the people into the true nature of the mystery being celebrated. Artwork created by those celebrating the sacraments can be a welcome addition to the worship space; however, it may not obstruct the altar or the pathways in and around the sanctuary (BLS, no. 124). Keep in mind that the season of Lent calls for restraint in decoration.

Photography and Videography. It is essential to ensure that photography and videography does not detract from the sanctity of the sacramental celebration. To minimize distractions during the liturgy, designated photographers and videographers may be assigned specific areas where they can capture images and record the ceremony. Printed worship aids should instruct the assembly to refrain from using cellular phones during the liturgy, including the use of cellular phones for personal photography and videography. A verbal reminder to this effect prior to the liturgy is also encouraged.

The Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age

In the current reality of the Church, parents are delaying the baptism of their children for many reasons. When these parents place their child in a Catholic school or a parish religious education program, they may not think about the baptism of their child until second grade when the focus of instruction turns to First Communion. Some families may not even think about Baptism or First Communion until there is talk about Confirmation, when the young person wants to be included in the event with all of his or her friends.

The easy and immediate response is to grant the requests of the parents and rush the child through whatever sacraments are needed, so the child will not feel excluded. Although the Church values the gift of community, the lived reality of the faith is more than just avoiding exclusion. The sacraments of initiation invite us to enter into a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

When sacrament preparation is rushed or fails to acknowledge this call to relationship with Christ, the sacraments are diminished, and the rituals are reduced to a class activity. The appropriate and more challenging response is to invite the parents to consider the catechumenate process for their child which will allow him or her to prepare for and experience all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

The Church considers children who have reached catechetical age, which is age seven (7), mature enough to experience the same catechumenate process as adults (CIC, c. 852.1). In no way is the Church implying that children entering the catechumenate should be treated as adults. “Their initiation requires not only personal conversion of a maturity suitable to their age, but also the help of education necessary at that age. From that point it must be adapted also to the spiritual journey of the children, namely their increase in faith and the catechetical instruction that they receive,” (OCIA, no. 253). To be clear, this process will follow the adult model of initiation that includes steps organized by the rites within the order: Rite for Entrance to the Catechumenate, the Rite of Election, the Scrutinies, and the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation.

The challenge for parish staffs is to help parents understand the importance of this process and to explain the difference between the ongoing catechesis their child is

experiencing in Catholic school or in parish religious education and the process for conversion that happens in the children's catechumenate. In addition, it is important for the parents to understand how the Church categorizes those to be baptized. The *Code of Canon Law* stipulates, "A minor before the completion of the seventh year is called an infant...With the completion of the seventh year, however, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason," (can. 97.2). Again, once an unbaptized child seven (7) years or older approaches the Church for baptism, he or she is perceived as needing the same process for conversion as an unbaptized adult seeking baptism. Those seeking entry into the Church must be allowed to explore their relationship with Jesus Christ, get to know him on a deeper level, and freely commit to follow him for the rest of their lives. With the proper instruction and witness from their catechists, children will be able to engage this process on their level.

Parents, whose children enter the catechumenate, express concern about their child not going through the usual parish celebrations for First Communion and Confirmation. Parish staff, catechists, and those responsible for the celebrations of these sacraments can find ways for children in the catechumenate to participate and to feel included in these parish celebrations. Various liturgical roles that are necessary for the First Communion and Confirmation liturgies could be available for those young people who are going through the initiation process or are fully initiated. It is important for pastoral leaders to address this concern and offer opportunities for children in the catechumenate to be involved in these parish celebrations.

The Sacrament of Baptism

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

Baptism, as the sacrament of regeneration through water and the word, serves as the foundation of the Christian life, acting as the entry point to a life guided by the Spirit and the means through which the human person gains access to the other sacraments. It liberates people from sin and initiates their rebirth as children of God, integrating them into the body of Christ, marking them as new creations, and affirming their identity as true children of God (cf. CCC, no. 1213; CIC, c. 849). As such, the Christian faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ to fulfill the mission entrusted to the Church in their unique way (CIC, c. 204.1).

Background

The Second Vatican Council has given new meaning to actions of the early church reflected in the revised *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The rites within the order challenge those discerning their call to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that is forged in the waters of baptism, sealed in the flowing power of God’s Spirit, and nourished at the table of the Lord.

The early disciples embraced their call to proclaim the “Good News” of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who would listen. The first witnesses eagerly shared the love of Jesus that they had experienced when they were in his presence. As the early church continued to evolve with the second and third generation of Christians, a form of Christian initiation began to emerge focused mostly on adults. Since community witness was the main avenue for spreading the Gospel, candidates were brought to the community leaders for approval. Sponsors would then testify on behalf of the candidate. Once they were accepted, they entered the catechumenate. On Holy Saturday night, they would be baptized, confirmed, and invited to share the Eucharist in one welcoming event.

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

Son, and the Holy Spirit. By the eighth century, our familiar words for baptism would be in place: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

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

The Church places unbaptized infants in the hands of God’s mercy, advocating for their immediate baptism while neither confirming nor denying the existence of limbo (CCC, 1261). Further, the Church expresses optimism regarding the salvation of these infants through the limitless power of God, discouraging delays in the baptismal process (ITC, 2007, no. 101). Currently, funeral rites for children who died away prior to the sacrament can be held when their parents had intended for them to be baptized.. During these ceremonies, the Christian community entrusts the child to God’s infinite love, drawing strength from this divine compassion and from Jesus’s assurance that the Kingdom of God is open to little children (OCF, no. 237; cf. Mark 10:14; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4).

Theology

Baptism is a gift that reminds us that God desires to be in a loving relationship with all people. It marks the beginning of a life-long commitment to the Christian way of life and to a community that strives for the same ideals of discipleship. Baptism is a sacrament that is future-oriented; it is merely the beginning of living out the meaning that is celebrated in the rite. In the case of infant baptism, it is the parents or guardians who request Baptism for the child and assume the responsibility, along with the godparents and the parish, to nurture the faith development of the child (cf. CCC, no. 1255; no. 2226; no. 2252; cf. CIC, c. 774).

The willingness to assume responsibility for Christian parenting is given a stronger focus today than in the past: “In asking for Baptism for your children, you are undertaking the responsibility of raising them in the faith... Do you understand this responsibility?” (OBC, 39). The term “responsibility” serves as an important reminder for parents that this opportunity transcends mere ceremony; it represents a profound commitment to faith that parents are affirming not only for themselves but also on behalf of their child.

Whether Baptism occurs in infancy or later, Catholics believe that God is ever present. This presence of God is central to their faith and is exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. Baptism serves as a means to cleanse original sin and marks the initiation into the Church. Through the sacrament, believers publicly affirm their dedication to living in accordance with the love of God – a moment for the community of faith to witness the commitment of those being baptized, as they invite the same Spirit that inspired Jesus to guide their own lives.

Preparation for Baptism

All those preparing for Baptism, including parents and godparents, need the prayerful support and apostolic witness of the people from the local community of faith – the parish. This preparation is an especially important opportunity for the Church to encourage the parents and godparents of infants to reexamine the meaning of the Christian message in their own lives. Essential guidance on how to present baptismal catechesis from the *National Directory for Catechesis* is provided below.

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

- is the foundation of the Christian life because it is the journey into Christ’s death and resurrection, which is the foundation of our hope.
- gives sanctifying grace, that is, God’s life.
- gives them a new birth in which they become children of God, members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit.
- cleanses people from original sin and from all personal sins.
- incorporates them into the life, practices, and mission of the Church.
- imprints on their souls an indelible character that consecrates them for Christian worship and is necessary for salvation in the case of all those who have heard the Gospel and have been able to ask for this sacrament.

(NDC, p. 121)

It is beneficial for parents to prepare for the celebration of the Sacrament, whether through their own faith or with the assistance of friends and community members, to ensure they can participate meaningfully in the event (OBC, no. 5.1). Catechesis about the rite should include an explanation of the elements and symbols used during the baptismal liturgy, as is illustrated below.

Elements and Symbols in the Baptismal Liturgy

- Reception of the Child
- Celebration of the Sacrament:
 - Blessing and invocation of God over the baptismal water
 - Renunciation of sin and Profession of Faith
 - Baptism-Conferred by immersion or pouring
 - The Trinitarian Formula
- Anointing with Chrism
- Clothing with the White Garment
- Handing on of a Lighted Candle

Family Preparation and Involvement. Parents have a right to look to parish leadership for support in sacramental preparation and celebration (CIC, c. 843). In preparing for infant baptism, it is essential for parents to have the opportunity to enhance their understanding and experience of this significant event. The following key aspects of this preparation are crucial in guiding parents to recognize and fulfill their responsibilities in the baptism process.

Parish Contact. Parents are encouraged to contact the parish, preferably during pregnancy, to request baptism for their infant, (CIC, c. 867).

Pastoral Interview. A private interview with the parents is suggested and should be led by a member of the pastoral staff. Points of discussion should include the parents understanding of baptism and why they are bringing their child to the sacrament, namely:

- questions regarding the need for preparation.
- expectations for ongoing religious formation for their child.

- level of commitment to, and participation in, the community of faith (i.e., active participation in the Eucharist and other sacraments, regular prayer life, and parish involvement).

Group Sessions. Parents are to participate in group sessions (CIC, c. 851). It is recommended that there be two to four sessions with the possibility of one being held after the celebration. This meeting could serve as a bridge for many parents to meet one another, develop new friendships, and build community. In small parishes if only one child is being baptized or, in cases of extreme pastoral concern, an individual parent preparation program with more experienced parents could be designed and presented in collaboration with parish staff.

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

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

Follow-up. A form of follow-up by a member of the pastoral staff or by a pastorally trained parishioner should be pursued. Parents are to have ongoing opportunities for invitation, involvement, and support.

Pastoral Considerations

Effective catechesis for parents preparing for infant baptism needs to recognize the life situation and concern of the parents.

Outreach to Parents. Pastoral staff have a responsibility to provide outreach to young parents—inviting them to enter the preparation program and to begin or deepen their relationship with the parish community.

Place of Baptism. Concerning the place of baptism, the *Code of Canon Law* stipulates, “As a rule and unless a just reason suggests otherwise, an adult is to be baptized in his or her proper parish church, and an infant in the proper parish church of the parents” (c. 857.2).

Therefore, other than in emergencies, adults are to be baptized in their local parish church, while infants are baptized in the parish church associated with their parents. For liceity, before baptizing a person outside the parish, it is essential to obtain permission from the appropriate pastor of the person to be baptized (CIC, c. 862).

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

Special Considerations. There is to be sensitivity to the unique needs and situations of each family. Recognition and support is to be given within the program to parents who are not Catholic. Concern and support needs to be given to single parents, parents of children with disabilities or illnesses, divorced parents, or others with special situations.

People with Disabilities. Disability should never be a barrier to receiving Baptism. Individuals who are unable to use reason can still be baptized, provided that at least one parent or godparent gives their consent. Furthermore, adults and children of catechetical age with disabilities should be fully included in all aspects of the initiation process, participating in every stage and rite. Additionally, Catholics with disabilities are eligible to serve as sponsors and godparents, and like all individuals in these roles, they must be thoughtfully selected and adequately prepared for their responsibilities (cf. GPD, nos. 11-14).

Celebration of Baptism

When to celebrate Baptism. Baptism should be conducted when both the mother and child are in good health, and the parents have successfully completed a preparation program. (cf. OBC, no. 8). Baptism can be performed on any day; however, it is generally advised to hold the ceremony on Sundays or, if feasible, during the Easter Vigil (cf. CIC, c. 856). On Sundays, Baptism can also be incorporated into the Mass, allowing the entire community to participate in the ceremony. This practice highlights the relationship between Baptism and the Most Holy Eucharist, making it more evident to the congregation (cf. OBC, no. 9)

Scripture. When Baptism is celebrated during Sunday Mass, the readings and prayers are taken from the Mass of the day. Biblical readings within the various orders for Baptism outside of Mass are recommended within chapter seven of the *Order of Baptism for Children*.

The Creed. The Creed is omitted, as it is replaced by the community's collective profession of faith, which occurs prior to Baptism (cf. OBC, no. 29.2c).

Liturgical Music. The selection of music for the Baptism celebration should be made by the parish music minister and/or the pastor, ensuring it aligns with the liturgical season and the specific acclamations outlined in the *Order of Baptism for Children*.

Processions. When Baptism is celebrated within the Sunday liturgy, candidates, along with their parents and godparents, may participate in the entrance procession.

Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful). The Universal Prayer is derived from the texts used in the Order of Baptism. Ultimately, prior to invoking the Saints, additional petitions are included to address the needs of the universal Church and the broader world (cf. OBC, no. 29.2c).

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the qualifications for a godparent or sponsor? The *Code of Canon Law* outlines the following qualifications for godparents and sponsors.

To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

- be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
- have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
- not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared; and
- not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

(CIC, c. 874.1)

What is the role of the godparent? According to the most ancient tradition within the Church, an adult cannot be baptized without a godparent. This individual, a member of the Christian community, plays a crucial role by assisting the candidate in their final preparations for the Sacrament and providing support in maintaining their faith and Christian lifestyle post-Baptism. Similarly, when a child is baptized, the presence of a godparent is essential. This person not only symbolizes the broader spiritual family of the baptized but also aids the parents in ensuring that the child grows to embrace and live out the faith (OBC, no. 8).

May a non-Catholic serve as a godparent or sponsor? A person who has been baptized and is part of a non-Catholic ecclesial community may only participate in a baptism if accompanied by a Catholic sponsor, and their role will be limited to that of a witness (CIC, c. 874.2). As the Church expects that the sponsor “be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken” (CIC, c. 874.3), a person who has been baptized as a Catholic but is now sacramentally or canonically disqualified from serving as a godparent or sponsor is also ineligible to act as a Christian witness. This disqualification applies to persons who have since renounced their Catholic faith in deference to a Protestant ecclesial community or a non-Christian faith community.

What preparation is necessary for children of catechetical age (seven years) who have never been baptized? Children who have not been baptized as infants, as well as those who have been baptized but have reached the age of reason and are of catechetical age without having received formal preparation for Reconciliation, Eucharist, or Confirmation, should participate in a suitably adapted form of the catechumenate. After the necessary period of formation, the child should celebrate all sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

An individual who has not yet reached the age of seven is classified as an infant and is deemed incapable of self-responsibility (*non sui compos*). However, upon reaching the age of seven, a minor is generally assumed to possess the ability to reason (CIC, c. 97.2). The prescripts concerning adult baptism apply to those who have progressed beyond infancy and have developed the capacity for reason (CIC, c. 852.1).

The Sacrament of Confirmation

“...send upon them, O Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete;
 give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety;
 fill them with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.” (OC, no. 25)

Following Peter’s initial proclamation on Pentecost and the subsequent conversions, the first community began to emerge (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). The Holy Spirit guides the community of believers to be the Church, and thus, enhances our “bond” with the Church and its members (CCC, no. 1316; SSC, p. 5). Pope Saint John Paul II explained that a key aspect of *mission* is to unite people through the Gospel, fostering fraternal communion, prayer, and participation in the Eucharist. He explained that living in *koinonia* – or fraternal communion – entails sharing a common heart and soul, creating bonds that are human, spiritual, and material (RM, no 26). Through the sacrament of Confirmation, people are more deeply united with the Church, receiving special strength from the Holy Spirit. This provocation obliges Christians to actively promote and defend the faith, serving as authentic witnesses of Christ through both their words and actions (LG, no. 11). Just as the early Church was open and missionary, the Holy Spirit, through Confirmation, enables the Christian faithful to be joyful and generous, welcoming and missionary, and ready to witness beatific lives that “may give off the ‘the aroma of Christ’” (CCC, no. 1294). In other words, the Baptized are bonded as the “People of God,” sharing in the life of Christ who is priest, prophet, and king, led by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News as a means to “contribute to the sanctification of the world...” (LG, 31).

Background

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

the Holy Spirit was a necessary part of being a follower of Jesus, and that the gift of the Spirit was closely associated with the new birth of Baptism.

In the first centuries of the Church, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist were linked together in one sacramental ritual of initiation. The three became separated when it was no longer possible for the bishop to perform all the baptisms. Priests became the ordinary ministers for Baptism while the bishop kept the practice to confer the sacrament of Confirmation. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), bishops called for a reform of the sacraments of initiation and requested that the links among Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist be strengthened. A unified process was developed for receiving adults into the Catholic Church, rooted in the early history and practice of the first and second century Christians. This process is known as the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* or OCIA.

The customary practice in most Catholic communities in the United States is to baptize infants and confirm later in life, usually during adolescence. In this way, Confirmation strengthens the candidates' bonds with the Church and enriches their lives with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, completing the initiation process begun at Baptism. Confirmation potentially provides adolescents with a boost for their spiritual lives offering the gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and fear of the Lord (wonder and awe).

Theology

In the Old Testament, the concept of the promised Holy Spirit is introduced (Genesis 18:1-15; 22:3-19). Isaiah foretold that the awaited Messiah would be endowed with the Spirit for his redemptive mission (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1). Transitioning to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus during his baptism by John served as a confirmation of his identity as the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 3:13-17). Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, lived and fulfilled his mission in complete unity with the Spirit, whom the Father granted to him abundantly (John 3:34). After completing his earthly mission, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the apostles, and on Easter, he breathed on them, instructing them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). Subsequently, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, empowering them to proclaim the mighty works of God.

Those who have received baptism continue their journey of Christian Initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation. This sacrament bestows upon them the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Lord to the apostles during Pentecost. Through this divine gift, the faithful become more closely aligned with Christ and are empowered to witness to Him, contributing to the growth of His Body in faith and love. Additionally, they receive a distinct character or seal from the Lord, ensuring that the Sacrament of Confirmation is a one-time event that cannot be repeated (OC, nos. 1-2).

Preparation for Confirmation

Whether the individual completes initiation through OCIA or experiences the sacrament later in life as a baptized Christian, Confirmation is not an end or a “graduation.” It is a new beginning of living the Christian life fully, devoted to the Gospel and serving God’s people. Confirmation candidates, therefore, are expected to enter a formal process of catechetical formation in which they identify and renew the faith they hold and believe. Candidates are also expected to be fully involved in the life and worship of a parish community where they are welcomed, encouraged, and challenged to deepen their commitment to Christ and his Church. As a public witness of faith and obeying the command of Christ to care for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40), candidates are expected to engage the parish’s outreach ministries of service and care for the poor.

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

Catechesis for Confirmation. The *Order of Confirmation* indicates that the episcopal conferences may designate the appropriate age for Confirmation. In the United States, the age of Confirmation in the Latin Church for children and young people varies widely from diocese to diocese; it can be designated at the age of discretion (age seven) through around 16 years. In the Archdiocese of Louisville, the preferred age range for candidates baptized as infants is 14 years (eighth grade) or older. Parishes celebrating Confirmation at a younger age have until the First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2027, to comply with this policy.

Confirmation for adults preparing for initiation will follow the process as it is presented in the *Order of Christian Initiation for Adults*. Parishes should have a separate process for Catholic adults who have been baptized and are participating in the Eucharist but have not been confirmed.

Parishes should present catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation that:

- teaches that Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character on the soul (CCC, nos. 1303-1304).
- teaches that Confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ, strengthen their bond with the Church, associate them more closely with the Church's mission, increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds (CCC, no. 1303).
- teaches about the role of the Holy Spirit, his gifts, and his fruits:
 - Gifts of the Holy Spirit – wisdom, understanding, counsel (sometimes called right judgment), fortitude (sometimes called courage), knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord (sometimes called wonder and awe) (CCC, no. 1831; Isaiah 11:1-2)
 - Fruits of the Spirit – charity (love), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity (CCC, no. 1832; Galatians 5:22-23).
- is developmentally appropriate and includes retreat experiences (cf. CCC, no. 1309).
- includes instruction on the Order of Confirmation and its basic symbols:
 - the imposition of hands (CCC, no. 1288),
 - the anointing with Sacred Chrism (CCC, no. 1289), and
 - the words of the sacramental formula (CCC, no. 1300).
- ensures that parents and sponsors are involved in the catechetical preparation of the children for Confirmation (cf. CCC, no. 1311).
- teaches that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation (CCC, no. 1313).

(NDC, pp. 122-123)

Key Steps on the Confirmation Journey

Investigation. Investigation is the opportunity for candidates to explore their faith and do a deeper dive into the teachings of Jesus Christ. Understanding the story and role of the Church in the world and what it means to be a disciple of Christ is also a pivotal part of this

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

Confirmation offers the entire parish community an opportunity to be a witness of faith through prayer at Sunday Eucharist or prayerful connections with individual candidates. Parish leaders, such as staffs, parish council members, and coaches, should be invited to the Confirmation liturgy. Other opportunities to enhance the spiritual preparation of Confirmation include retreats, pilgrimages, and prayer services.

Interviews. Interviews prior to the celebration of Confirmation is recommended as way to determine the readiness of the candidate and to address any concerns the candidate may have prior to the Confirmation liturgy.

The interview should be conducted in an area that is comfortable for both parties following safe environment guidelines. The entire parish staff may participate in the interview process, especially if a large number of candidates are involved. Consideration can be given to having the candidates schedule their own interviews with a staff member of their choice. This approach allows flexibility and some ownership of the interview process.

Service. Jesus challenged his followers to care for the least, the outcasts, the forgotten, and the poor. Young people should be exposed to the concept of stewardship and service to the greater community, especially the poor. A specific number of hours or projects for candidates to complete can give a false impression of having accomplished service, and now it is no longer necessary. There is an expectation that some form of service be included as part of the process. Large group service projects are encouraged as a way to bring together candidates in different parish programs (the parish school and the parish religious education program, for example) to help build a better sense of community and create a broader sense of parish identity.

Meeting with the Archbishop. Parish leadership is encouraged to arrange a time for the Archbishop and the candidates to meet approximately thirty (30) minutes before the Confirmation Mass. This is an opportunity for the candidates to ask questions and to engage in a casual conversation with the Archbishop. This session is for the candidates. Parents and sponsors should not be present for this meeting so as to allow candidates the opportunity to

engage freely with the Archbishop. Note: Letters to the Archbishop are no longer required from candidates for Confirmation.

People with Disabilities. Individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, who may not achieve full use of reason, are eligible to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is important to encourage them, either directly or through their parents, to participate in this sacrament. Furthermore, to the extent possible, those with disabilities should be included alongside their peers in both the preparation for and the celebration of the sacrament (GPD, no. 18).

Celebration of the Sacrament

Liturgical Celebration. Confirmation is typically celebrated during Mass to highlight its fundamental connection to the entire process of Christian Initiation, which culminates in the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. Consequently, those who have just been confirmed actively participate in the Eucharist, thereby completing their journey of Christian Initiation (OC, no. 13).

Elements and Symbols in the Confirmation Liturgy:

- Presentation of the Candidates
- Renewal of baptismal promises
- Imposition of hands
- Anointing with Chrism
- Candidate's response during the ritual

(OC, nos. 21-27)

Confirmation Liturgy Preparation Form. The Confirmation Liturgy Preparation Form and detailed instructions for its completion will be sent to the parish. This form must be returned to the Pastoral Center at least six (6) weeks before the scheduled date of Confirmation for review and approval.

Liturgy of the Day. When Confirmation is celebrated on a Saturday evening or Sunday, the liturgy of the day is celebrated without substitution, and the vestment color should be the liturgical color which would be used on that Saturday evening or Sunday Mass. On other

weekdays, the ritual Mass for Confirmation, its accompanying readings, and red vestments are used.

Music. The music chosen should respect the liturgical season and selections should be pastorally fitting, focusing on themes such as baptismal dignity, the Paschal Mystery, the call to mission, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, or recommended in the *Order of Confirmation*. During the Confirmation liturgy, both instrumental and vocal music serve as a fitting accompaniment to the Church's prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, pastoral musicians should remember that it is essential that the Archbishop, candidates, and sponsors are able to engage in meaningful dialogue throughout the rite; therefore, the volume of the musical accompaniment should be moderated to ensure it does not disrupt the conversational atmosphere between the Archbishop and those being confirmed.

Procession and Sacred Chrism. Candidates may be a part of the entrance procession. As the entrance procession represents the church as a pilgrim people journeying toward the heavenly kingdom, the inclusion of candidates in this procession signifies their path toward full initiation into the Church. It is recommended that the Sacred Chrism be carried in the procession and placed on a small table in a rather prominent position in the area of the sanctuary. While the Archbishop will have Sacred Chrism with him, it is most appropriate to use the Sacred Chrism that was distributed to each parish during Holy Week.

Dialogue between Candidate and the Archbishop. The Confirmation dialogue with the archbishop is a graced moment of affirmation and commissioning. Therefore, candidates should be well prepared for this dialogue with the Archbishop.

Dialogue for the Anointing with Chrism

Candidate: Archbishop, my name is N.

Baptismal name or other name selected. The Archbishop asks that candidates wear name tags indicating their name for Confirmation, be it their baptismal name or the name of another chosen saint.

Archbishop: N., be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Candidate: Amen.

Archbishop: Peace be with you.

Candidate: And with your Spirit.

(OC, nos. 26-27)

Presentation of the Gifts. The newly confirmed and/or members of their families, sponsors, and teachers may be involved in bringing the gifts to the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Only the bread, wine, and any monetary contributions or gifts intended for the Church or the needy should be presented during the procession (GIRM, no. 73). Items that do not serve the purpose of being consumed or utilized for the glory of God are to be excluded from this offering.

Universal Prayer. The Universal Prayer should be derived from the *Order of Confirmation*. They are provided with the Confirmation Liturgy Preparation Form. It is desirable that the prayers be announced or sung by a deacon, cantor, or other minister.

The Communion Rite. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be utilized only when there is an insufficient number of Ordinary Ministers (priests and deacons) available. During the communion procession, communicants are encouraged to walk slowly with their hands together in prayer. Upon receiving Holy Communion, each communicant should bow their head in reverence before the Sacrament and accept the Body of the Lord from the minister. The host can be received either in the hand or on the tongue, depending on the preference of the individual (GIRM, no. 160). It is also expected that sponsors will receive Holy Communion. It is recommended that Holy Communion be offered under both forms during the Confirmation liturgy.

For a comprehensive overview of the Confirmation liturgy and the Archdiocesan Liturgy Preparation Form, please refer to the Archdiocesan Office of Worship and “Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation,” guidance provided by the Office of Worship.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who may be a sponsor for Confirmation? It is desirable that the godparent at Baptism, if available, is also the sponsor for Confirmation (can. 893.2). This practice expresses more clearly the link between the two sacraments of initiation. Nonetheless, the option of choosing a special sponsor for Confirmation is not excluded. Although parents may not be sponsors for Confirmation, if they wish, they may present their children for Confirmation by bringing or accompanying their child as the child approaches the Archbishop.

The qualifications are the same as those for a godparent for Baptism. See the section titled, “What are the qualifications for a godparent or sponsor?” and the Table listed on p. 14.

In addition, it is important to note that people who were baptized as Catholic but subsequently renounced their Catholic faith in deference to a Protestant ecclesial community or a non-Christian faith community are ineligible to serve as a sponsor.

Is it necessary to take a new name for confirmation? In order to express the intimate relationship of Confirmation to Baptism, it is encouraged that candidates keep their baptismal name. However, it is a venerable tradition to take the name of a saint. If a new name is taken, the candidate may choose a saint they admire and consider a role model. It is essential that they have a meaningful rationale for their choice. Additionally, they should investigate a saint who shares their chosen name and identify a particular virtue or quality from that saint's life that they can strive to embody in their own life.

How is readiness determined for Confirmation? Readiness for Confirmation is assessed through several key understandings and commitments. Candidates must grasp their identity as fully initiated disciples of Jesus Christ and comprehend what it means to be a fully initiated Catholic. Additionally, they should recognize the significance of the Eucharist and its relationship to both Confirmation and Baptism. Furthermore, a willingness to engage in prayer, service, and active participation within the parish and the broader community is essential for their readiness.

Is there special clothing required for candidates for Confirmation? No special garment is required for candidates for Confirmation. It is appropriate for candidates to dress in a manner respecting the celebration of the sacrament they are going to receive. Note: It is not appropriate for candidates to wear a stole, as this garment signifies ordination. The use of a stole can obscure the unique and indelible "seal" associated with Holy Orders. Confirmation, on the other hand, enhances the sacramental character of baptismal grace, empowering individuals for witness rather than for ordination.

The Sacrament of Eucharist

“The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch’” (CCC, no. 1324).

Background

The story of the Passover in the Old Testament (Exodus 12) provides a foundational understanding of the Eucharist that Christ would offer to his Disciples centuries later. Each household selected a year old male lamb (v. 5), and, when it was slaughtered, some of its blood was placed on the doorposts and lintel of every Hebrew home (v. 7). The blood was a sign, and, with this sign, the believers were promised that the Lord, slaying the first born in Egypt (v. 12), would pass over their homes and spare the residents (v. 13). This would become a day of remembrance (v. 14), and they celebrated it as a festival to the Lord (v. 17).

In the New Testament, the evangelists gave an account of the Last Supper and how the early Christians came to understand the Eucharist (cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The meal that the Jewish people celebrated on the feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:3-11) became the meal whereby Jesus surrendered his body and blood as the covenant that was offered for the forgiveness of sins.

The early church’s experience of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus helped them to connect the sacrifice of the paschal lamb in the Old Testament with the words and actions of Jesus in the New Testament. In doing so, they envisioned Jesus as the new paschal lamb who was able to overcome sin and restore our relationship with God. Members of the early church continued to break bread and praise God at home. In repeating the ritual of the Last Supper, they came to recognize the presence of God in this spiritual and physical reality. The celebration of the Eucharist is more than a remembrance; it is a memorial of Christ, of his life, death, and his resurrection. With each Eucharistic liturgy, we proclaim the Paschal mystery “until he comes.” We celebrate as the pilgrim people of God on our way to the table of the kingdom (CCC, no. 1341; no. 1344).

The Christian assembly is strengthened when it acknowledges itself as a community, when people freely enter into the singing, prayers and responses, when they use silence to recognize the presence of the sacred, and when members of the community really understand gestures used and enter into rites in a meaningful and participative manner. When the community comes to believe "...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," (Matthew 18:20) then Christ becomes real in the gathered assembly. The body of Christ is then ready to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine. The assembly, after consuming His real presence, takes this presence of love and shares it with the world.

Theology

The Eucharist is the central act of worship in the Catholic Church. The Eucharistic liturgy is historically rooted in the Last Supper, the final meal that Jesus would have with his friends before he was arrested. It was at this meal that Jesus blessed bread and wine and gave it to those at table with him, indicating that this food was his body and blood. After Jesus' resurrection, his disciples met regularly to share a special meal in which they remembered Jesus' life and death given for them and experienced his risen presence.

The early Christian Eucharist served as a profound reminder of Jesus' self-sacrifice in obedience to the Father, allowing believers to unite with their risen Lord as they offered themselves to God. This ritual meal is not merely a remembrance; it is a sacrificial act through which Christians engage with the significance of Jesus' sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. The term "Eucharist," meaning "thanksgiving," encapsulates the essence of this celebration, as participants express gratitude for the transformative power of Jesus' death and resurrection. Furthermore, it highlights the revelation that the path to new life often requires self-denial and a commitment to serving others.

The Eucharist invites us to encounter Jesus in an authentic way. "This presence is called 'real' – by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is the presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present," (CCC, no. 1374).

Preparation for Eucharist

Catechesis for Children's First Reception of the Eucharist. Preparation for first reception of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) begins at home. The family has the most significant role in communicating the Christian values that form the foundation for a child's understanding of the Eucharist. The child who participates with the family at Mass experiences the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learns to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer.

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

Liturgical catechesis provided in systematic parish catechetical programs is an indispensable part of the preparation of children for their reception of the Eucharist. Catechesis should be tailored to the developmental stage of children, enabling them to engage actively and consciously in the Mass. Consider that, in planning, children around the age of reason tend to think concretely.

Parishes should present catechesis in preparation for first reception of the Eucharist that:

- teaches that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.
- teaches not only 'the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on...they can as full members of Christ's Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters" (DMC, no. 12).
- ensures that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion.
- develops in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- teaches that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ and that what appears to be bread and wine are actually his living body.
- teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
- teaches the meaning of the reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine.
- helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass.
- helps children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner.

(NDC, pp. 126-127)

People with Disabilities. The criteria for receiving Holy Communion apply equally to all people, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Persons presenting themselves for Holy Communion must be able to recognize the body of Christ as distinct from ordinary food, which can be demonstrated through actions, gestures, or a respectful silence, rather than solely through verbal acknowledgment. If a determination is made that a disabled parishioner is not prepared to receive the sacrament, it is crucial to carefully explain the rationale behind such a decision. In cases of uncertainty, presumption should favor the person's right to receive Holy Communion, as having a disability alone does not disqualify someone from this sacrament (GPD, no. 22).

Catholics who rely on feeding tubes for nourishment are encouraged to partake in Holy Communion. Christ is fully present in both the bread and wine, and Communion may be received in either form. The principle of receiving the sacrament orally remains unchanged for those who use feeding tubes, and it is not appropriate to administer Communion through a feeding tube. It is often feasible “to place one or a few drops of the Precious Blood on the tongue” of a communicant, allowing them to participate in the sacrament meaningfully (GPD, no. 24).

Catholics who endure Celiac Sprue Disease or other gluten intolerances should be given the option to receive a small piece of a standard host, as well as be informed about alternatives such as low-gluten hosts or receiving Communion in the form of the Precious Blood alone. Ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must be aware of, and recognize, the risks of cross-contamination and related concerns to ensure the safe distribution of the sacred species to communicants with gluten sensitivities. Low-gluten altar breads must be kept separate from regular altar breads to prevent any mixing (GPD, no. 25).

When baptized Catholics who regularly partake in Communion develop advanced Alzheimer’s or other forms of age-related dementia, it is important to assume that they can still differentiate between Holy Communion and ordinary food. As long as feasible, Holy Communion should continue to be offered, and all ministers are encouraged to approach their ministry with exceptional patience and understanding (GPD, no. 26).

Celebration of Eucharist

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

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

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

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

When to Celebrate First Communion. Because of the nature of the celebration as one of the sacraments of initiation, the Sundays of the Easter Season are ideal times to celebrate First Communion. On these days, the Sunday scripture readings and the Easter focus of the liturgy are most appropriate for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. If the number of candidates prevents the scheduling of all the candidates for the sacrament at one liturgy, the candidates could be divided among the scheduled Masses on a Sunday or Sundays during the Easter season.

Liturgical Music. The music chosen for the First Communion Mass should be selected for the whole assembly, not just the candidates for the sacrament. Those planning the liturgy should work with the parish music minister to determine appropriate selections. If, as has been suggested, the celebration takes place during the Easter season, then the parish's normal repertoire of Easter music would be appropriate. Time should be spent preparing the children to participate in the sung and spoken parts of the Mass. As mentioned above, practices that segregate the children, or make them wholly distinct from the rest of the worshipping community, take away from the unitive nature of the celebration. Therefore, performance pieces by children are discouraged during the liturgy.

Celebrating the Eucharist. Those who are welcomed to the celebration of the Eucharist have a unique role within the sacramental celebration in that they will be receiving Holy

Communion for the first time. They should be encouraged to participate fully in this Eucharist by taking part in the singing and the spoken prayer and by listening to the scriptures and other liturgical texts spoken in their names by the celebrant.

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

Procession. Candidates for First Communion are sometimes included in the entrance procession. If the candidates and their families are in the entrance procession, they should have the necessary hymnal or worship aid that will allow them to participate in the singing of the entrance hymn. There is no liturgical requirement that the candidates be included in this procession. The decision whether or not to include the candidates and their families in the procession is left up to the parish/pastor.

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

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

Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful). Just as the candidates for First Communion should not be chosen as lectors, so too, it is best to allow the deacon, the cantor, the lector, or one of the lay faithful to announce the Prayer of the Faithful (GIRM no. 71).

The Communion Rite and Communion Under Both Forms. It is appropriate for the candidates who celebrate First Eucharist to receive under both forms. Communicants should make a bow of the head as a gesture of reverence before receiving the Sacred Host and the Precious Blood. The host can be received either in the hand or on the tongue, depending on the preference of the individual (GIRM, no. 160). The communicants may be given a choice whether or not to receive from the cup. First communion is to be administered by a priest (RS, no. 87).

Catechesis on Manners of Receiving. In accordance with the *Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite of the Archdiocese of Louisville*, “Communicants may choose whether to receive the consecrated Host in the hand or on the tongue. Since the Church presents these as equally appropriate options, catechesis on this point may not indicate that either method is better, preferred, or more reverent than the other. As the choice is reserved to the communicant, no minister may require that the faithful receive the consecrated Host in a certain way. The faithful receive the Precious Blood by drinking directly from the [cup] after it is handed to them by the minister” (NPCR, no. 3).

Environment for Worship. The parish Art and Environment committee, or those responsible for decorating and maintaining the church, have the responsibility for preparing the worship space for the First Communion liturgy. The liturgical space should reflect the festive nature of the celebration. Within the worship space, there are certain focal points, such as the altar, the ambo, and the tabernacle. It is important to respect the sanctity of these focal points. Pictures, drawings, names, and projects created by the children can be a part of a display in the church entrance or elsewhere.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know when my child is ready to celebrate First Communion? The child began life in the Church at Baptism and should be brought to the awareness that the celebration of First Communion is the beginning of a closer relationship with Jesus. Readiness means that the child is prepared to celebrate the presence of Christ in his or her life. This is more of a spiritual and emotional readiness than an intellectual grasp of theological truth. Parents should ascertain whether their children are able to distinguish the Eucharistic bread from ordinary bread. All people presenting themselves for Holy Communion should have some basic understanding of the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation and actively desire to receive Holy Communion.

Is there a mandated dress code? While traditionally boys have worn suits and girls have worn white dresses and veils for First Communion, there is no mandated dress code for First Communion. Families are encouraged to choose attire that signifies the day’s importance. Additionally, individual parishes may establish their own guidelines regarding dress for First Communion and other sacramental celebrations.

The Sacrament of Penance

“Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for conversion” (CCC, no. 1422).

Background

Reconciliation and forgiveness continues to be a longing of the human heart. Estrangement, alienation, division and selfishness continue to be sources for our sin. Turning away from God and embracing our own way of doing things leads us to our own prisons of loneliness and despair. Seeking reconciliation and yearning to be whole again forces us to face our brokenness and seek forgiveness. The mission of Jesus included a message of salvation, freeing people from their entanglements of sin and helping sinners find their way back home to God’s merciful love.

Jesus begins his ministry with the words, “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Repentance in the Gospels demanded a change of heart and a change of habit. Disobedience, or failing to listen to God, was seen as rebelling against the one who created us out of love. For Jesus, preaching about God’s forgiveness and changing people’s hearts was central to his message about the Father’s love and the coming of his kingdom. Jesus embodied God’s gift of forgiveness and offered it to anyone willing to accept it.

After Jesus, the message of repentance continued among his followers at Pentecost. Peter proclaimed, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Even today, the Church never ceases to call the Christian faithful from sin to conversion, “and to reveal the victory of Christ over sin through the celebration of Penance” (cf. OP, no. 1).

In the early Church, Baptism was considered the rite of repentance. Once baptized, a person was expected to lead a sinless life ever afterwards. Between the second and fifth centuries, excommunication was punishment for people who were guilty of public sins such as apostasy, murder, and adultery. They could be readmitted only after confessing to the

bishop and then doing prolonged public penance. Between the sixth and twelfth centuries, private confession became a widespread means of spiritual guidance. It embraced all types of sin and could be repeated as often as needed. The tariff penance system established specific and measurable penances, such as fasting, prayers, or almsgiving, for designated sins, as outlined in penitential handbooks (*libri paenitentiales*).

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

The Second Vatican Council revised the form for Penance, placing emphasis on reconciling the sinner to God and the community. This is, in part, why people commonly refer to the sacrament as penance and reconciliation. The revised rite changed the setting to a more comfortable atmosphere, with a face-to-face option between penitent and confessor, if desired by the penitent. The reading of God's Word was introduced as a way of assuring the penitent of God's love and placing the sacrament within the context of sacred scripture. In addition to the private form, the new rite offered a communal rite to emphasize the communal effects of sin and forgiveness.

Theology

Reconciliation is a means of celebrating the forgiveness of God that is extended to all when persons turn back to God through a process of conversion. Sacramental reconciliation happens only after ongoing conversion brings a person to the point of recognizing his or her offenses, seeking forgiveness for those offenses, and approaching sacramental Penance. When God's Spirit enters the lives of individuals, those individuals are able to celebrate a change of heart that enables them to make changes in their lives. This is what is referred to as *metanoia*.

“We can only approach the kingdom of Christ by ‘metanoia,’ that is, by an intimate change of the whole person, so that one begins to consider, to judge, and arrange one’s life, having been overcome by the holiness and love of God, which in these last days have been revealed in his Son and imparted to us abundantly...Therefore, the genuineness of repentance depends on the contrition of heart.”

(*Order of Penance*, no. 6.a)

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

Acknowledging faults happens only after a change of heart has taken place within the person. This acknowledgment, or contrition, leads to the act of confession which is the external expression of what has happened internally as a result of conversion. Confession "proceeds from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition of sins. This inward examination of the heart and outward accusation, however, should be made in the light of God's mercy" (OP, no. 6.b.).

The act of satisfaction or penance follows with a desire to repair the injury that was done and to restore the relationship that was broken. Genesis 3 is a reminder that disobedience to God's will leads, ultimately, to breaks or divisions in relationships: relationships with God, others, and self.

Absolution allows the penitent to experience the freedom that Christ desires for his people. The words of absolution from the priest, who is in the person of Christ and represents the faith community in the moment, prays the words over the penitent, allowing the person to experience a sense of renewal, a new life in the spirit.

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

Preparation for First Penance

Criteria for Catechesis for First Penance. To provide for a full and continuing catechesis for First Penance, parish catechetical leadership is asked to provide catechesis that reflects both the family and communal aspects of reconciliation with the individual's need for forgiveness. It is the primary responsibility of parents and guardians, along with pastors, to ensure that children who have attained the age of reason are adequately prepared for their First

Eucharist. This preparation includes guiding them through the sacramental confession process, after which they should receive this sacred nourishment as soon as possible (can. 914).

Criteria for Preparation and Determining Readiness for First Penance

1. The catechesis for, and celebration of, Penance must be completed in a different season from the catechesis for and celebration of the Eucharist. For example, First Penance (Reconciliation) is celebrated in the fall and First Eucharist in the spring. This is to avoid confusion and to stress that these sacraments are distinct.
2. Sufficient care is to be given that each child is able, willing, and ready to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation at the end of the preparation period. Pastors and parents in conversation with catechists can help determine the readiness of the child.

Basic Expectations for First Penance. There are certain understandings and attitudes important for celebrating sacramental Penance. They are an essential part of any catechesis for children. The following expectations reflect basic understandings about reconciliation for anyone and are important considerations in determining the readiness of a child. It is the responsibility of the parents, in cooperation with the pastor and catechist, to determine their child's readiness. Individuals, including children, should be able to internalize a basic understanding of the sacrament, according to their developmental level and individual gifts.

Catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance should help children to:

- acknowledge God's unconditional love for us;
- turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation;
- recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both;
- recognize their need for forgiveness,
not only from parents and others close to them, but from God;
- explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers,
and scriptures of the Order of Penance;
- understand how to celebrate the Order of Penance; and
- understand that 'sacramental Confession is a means offered to children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin and furthermore that it is even necessary *per se*
if one has fallen into serious sin.

(NDC, pp. 135-136)

People with Disabilities. Only individuals who can reason are capable of committing serious sins. However, even young children and those with intellectual disabilities may recognize when they have done something wrong and can feel guilt and sadness about their actions. Expressions of sorrow for sin should be recognized for those who are nonverbal or have limited verbal communication skills, even if conveyed through gestures rather than words. Penitents facing significant communication challenges may be allowed to confess using communication methods with which they are most comfortable. Confessors are encouraged to collaborate with families and penitents to explore various alternative communication methods, ensuring that everyone who wishes to participate in this sacrament can do so while maintaining the confidentiality of the confession (GPD, nos. 28-29).

Catholics who are deaf should have the chance to confess to a priest who can communicate in sign language, especially if that is their main form of communication. They can also choose to confess with the help of an approved sign language interpreter, who must maintain secrecy. If neither is available, deaf Catholics should be allowed to confess in writing or by using a suitable portable electronic device that can be shared between them and the priest. Any written or digital materials should be returned to the penitent and then properly destroyed or deleted (GPD, no. 30).

It is essential to ensure that penitents who use wheelchairs can access both face-to-face and private confessionals, while also respecting the priest's right to require confession behind a fixed screen (GPD, no. 31).

Celebration of Penance

“A common celebration more clearly manifests the ecclesial nature of Penance.

For the faithful together hear the word of God,
which proclaims the mercy of God and invites them to conversion.

At the same time, they examine the conformity of their lives
to the same word of God and assist each other by their mutual prayers” (*Order of Penance*, no. 22).

Communal Celebration for First Penance

- **Introductory Rites**

- Opening Song (OP, no. 48)
- Greeting – The priest or another minister speaks briefly about the importance and purpose of the celebration and the order of the service (OP, no. 49).
- Opening Prayer (OP, nos. 50)

- **Celebration of the Word of God**

- Scripture readings may be selected from the Order of Penance (no. 51).

- **Homily/Examination of Conscience**

- A homily follows, leading into the examination of conscience (OP, nos. 52-53).

- **Rite of Reconciliation**

- All participate in a general formula for confession (OP, no. 54).

- **Individual Confession and Absolution**

- Penitents go to the priests designated for individual confession and are absolved after receiving and accepting appropriate satisfaction (OP, no. 55).

- **Proclamation of Praise for God’s Mercy**

- It is fitting for all to sing a psalm or hymn or to say a litany in acknowledgement of God’s power and mercy, for example, the Canticle of the Mary or Psalm 136 (OP, 56).

- **Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving (OP, no. 57)**

- **Concluding Rites**

- Blessing (OP, no. 58)
- Dismissal (OP, no. 59)

Frequently Asked Questions

What does “seal of confession” mean? Simply, a priest is obligated to never reveal anything told to him in sacramental confession. “The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason” (CIC, c. 983.1).

What is the purpose or meaning of “penance” in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation? In the past, Penance was a way of making reparation for sins, sometimes seen as “punishment.” It was an act that had to be carried out, (i.e., saying a certain number of prayers). Today, the understanding is that the real “punishment” is the continuing pattern of sin and the harmful actions and attitudes this pattern of sin creates. Therefore, the purpose of “penance” is to help break the pattern of sin, to help the penitent grow spiritually, and to help heal the broken relationships caused by the sin.

Should First Penance be celebrated before First Communion? Yes. The Church emphasizes the responsibility of parents and guardians, along with pastors, to ensure that children who have attained the age of reason are adequately prepared for sacramental confession. It is essential that these children “after they have made sacramental confession, are refreshed with [the Eucharist] as soon as possible” (CIC, c. 914).

Are photography and videography permitted during First Penance? In order to protect the privacy of the penitent, it is not appropriate to take pictures or video of individual confessions.



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