

**DIOCESAN POLICY ON THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST EUCHARIST (14 January 2004; Bishop DiNardo)**

The following policies [**in bold**] apply to the preparation and celebration of First Eucharist for baptized Catholic children under the age of eighteen in the Diocese of Sioux City whether the children are receiving the catechesis of the sacrament in religious education programs or Catholic schools. Guidelines are found under most policies to help parishes to implement policy for preparation and celebration of First Eucharist.

IV.3.1 General Norms regarding the Celebration of First Eucharist

**A. The formation of adults (age eighteen (18) and older) shall follow the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.**

- Adults (age eighteen (18) and older) who have not been admitted to the Eucharist are to be referred to the parish's Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- For more information see Part I of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

**B. If a child (age 7-17 ) is not baptized or baptized invalidly, the child is to be admitted to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at which time First Eucharist would be celebrated.**

- Parishes are to prepare unbaptized children using the format of the RCIA since the initiation of all persons of catechetical age, even at the age of seven, includes the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist in the same ceremony.
- For a list of "SOME CHURCHES WITHOUT VALID BAPTISM," see Appendix II, CCR 1-2.

**C. Parishes in the Diocese of Sioux City shall invite baptized children of catechetical age (approximately seven (7) years of age) to be admitted to the reception of the Holy Eucharist in Holy Communion.**

- Pastors and Directors of Religious Education can invite baptized children of catechetical age to be admitted to the reception of the Holy Eucharist in Holy Communion through methods such as a letter explaining the process, regular newsletters, and informational meetings.

**D. The formation of children of catechetical age shall follow the general pattern outlined in this policy.**

- Preparing children (approximately seven (7) years of age and older) for the celebration of Eucharist can be easily done when it is done as outlined by the Diocesan policy and these guidelines.

**E. Children who have missed the usual time for the celebration of the sacrament, i.e. in second grade, shall receive a minimum of two years of formation prior to the celebration of the sacrament. The pastor and designated coordinator will ascertain the formation the child has received in order to determine catechetical needs at the present time.**

- Children for various reasons and through no fault of their own, may miss the usual time for the celebration of the sacrament. Children who have already adequately participated in two years of formation are not to be expected to complete additional formation unless deemed necessary. Children who have not participated in any formation in a former parish or current parish are expected to take part in at least two years of formation. This formation is to be adapted to each child's situation. Placing the child in a first or second grade class may not be appropriate nor beneficial for the child's development.
- The pastor and designated coordinator will ascertain the formation the child has received in order to determine his/her present catechetical needs. The pastor or coordinator should contact the pastor and/or coordinator of the former parish to learn what preparation was previously completed by the child.

#### IV.3.2 The Catechesis for First Eucharist

- A. A child must receive adequate catechesis according to his or her age level. This includes catechesis for and the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving formal catechesis in the preparation for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.**
- Catechesis is to be done according to age level of the child. In most cases, this is done with the child's classmates in second grade. For older Catholic students who were baptized but were not admitted to the Eucharist at the normative age, proper materials and instruction is to be provided in addition to the catechetical materials being used in the child's current class.
  - In such cases, the child should be placed with his/her own age group (grade level) with additional sacramental instruction as needed for the child and his/her parents/guardians. The use of a tutor for the child could be helpful. It might also be appropriate to provide parents/guardians with catechetical material for home catechesis that would be used to enhance the participation in the parish religious education program. This catechesis is to begin after the child has been catechized for and celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- B. No child shall be deprived of the right to celebrate the Eucharist after adequate catechesis has taken place. No child shall be deprived of the right to celebrate the Sacrament based on the marital status of the parents. Nor may admission be denied or delayed because the child's parents are not registered in the parish.**
- The celebration of the sacrament cannot be denied because a child's parents are in an irregular marriage (i.e. marriage outside the church without proper dispensations). This celebration may be a good time for the parents to consider marital enrichment. Nor may admission be denied or delayed because the child's parents are not registered in the parish.
- C. The decision as to when a child first celebrates the Sacrament of Eucharist is to be done collaboratively between parents/guardians, pastor, coordinator, and catechist. The ultimate decision as to whether or not the child is admitted to the Eucharist lies with the child's parent(s)/guardian(s).**
- D. In cases where there is doubt about the readiness of the child to be admitted to the Eucharist, the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the child. That is, when the child exhibits even a very basic understanding of the Eucharist, the child is to be admitted to the Eucharist.**
- The decision about whether or not a child is ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Eucharist for the first time is to be an informed one and done in collaboration among parents/guardians, pastor, coordinator, and catechist. In cases where there is uncertainty about the readiness of the child, the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the child. That is, when the child exhibits even a very basic understanding of Eucharist, the child is to be admitted to the Sacrament. The ultimate decision as to whether or not the child is admitted to the Eucharist lies with the child's parents/guardians.
  - It is presumed that the child has been prepared for Reconciliation and that the child has celebrated that sacrament prior to the reception of Eucharist.
- E. If a child was not baptized in the parish where First Eucharist will be celebrated, the parents are to obtain from the parish of baptism a new Certificate of Baptism to be presented to the child's current pastor or Director of Religious Education. This Certificate is to be obtained at the beginning of the Catechesis and before the celebration of First Eucharist.**
- At the beginning of the child's catechesis, the parents/guardians are to notified the pastor or Director of Religious Education as to where the child was baptized. If the child was not baptized in the parish where First Eucharist will be celebrated, the parents/guardians are to obtain from the parish of baptism a new Certificate of Baptism to be presented to the child's current pastor or Director of Religious Education. Forms to help with the process are found in Appendix III.

### **IV.3.3 The Celebration of the Sacrament of First Eucharist**

- A. The celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time preferably takes place during the Easter season at a regular Sunday Eucharist since the celebration of sacraments involves rites that are meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating and should as far as possible be celebrated in that way rather than by an individual or quasi-privately. [Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1140]**
- Since Easter is a time of celebration of the Lord's resurrection that focuses our attention on our Baptism, the Easter Season is the perfect time to celebrate Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. This celebration always takes place in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist and, because of its nature, the celebration of First Eucharist should take place at a regular Sunday Eucharist. However, in parishes where a large number of children will celebrate with their parents/guardians, siblings, grandparents, and friends, a celebration at a regular Sunday Eucharist may not be feasible due to the capacity of the parish church building. It would be wise to schedule another time on the Sunday (i.e. Sunday afternoon) to celebrate.
- B. The celebration of First Eucharist is to take place in the child's parish church. First Eucharist is not permitted in private homes and in oratories. First Eucharist is not permitted in chapels without the approval of the pastor of the parish in which the chapel is located. Celebrations as a cluster are an option, but parish celebrations are encouraged in order that the child might celebrate in his/her parish church at a regular Sunday Eucharist.**
- Because of the role of the parish, the celebration of First Eucharist is to take place in the child's parish church. No other location is recommended. While some people like to see the children celebrate with their classmates, cluster are discouraged to hold one celebration, as is done for Confirmation, yet parish celebrations are encouraged in order that the child might celebrate in his/her parish church at a regular Sunday Eucharist.
- C. The norms in the Directory for Masses with Children (1973) should be followed when preparing celebrations of First Eucharist.**
- Consulting the Directory for Masses with Children (1973) would be helpful for preparing celebrations of First Eucharist.
- D. Both forms of Eucharistic communion (bread and cup) should be offered and encouraged. Reception in the hand is to be encouraged with the option to receive on the tongue offered.**
- Children, as well as their Catholic parents/guardians, are encouraged to receive both forms of Eucharistic communion (bread and cup), but are not forced to receive both against their wishes. Reception of the communion host is normally done with the proper offering of one's hand. However, a person's right to receive the communion host on the tongue is never to be denied.
- E. After the celebration of First Eucharist, the said event is to be recorded in the parish's First Eucharist Record book as soon as possible and a notation added to the person's baptismal record. Notification of another parish where the child was baptized is to be done as soon as possible after the celebration.**
- After the celebration of First Eucharist, the Director of Religious Education is to notify the pastor of the parish where the celebration of First Eucharist took place with the names of the First Communicants so that the names can be recorded in the parish's First Eucharist Book. The Director of Religious Education, using the forms and Baptismal Certificates collected from the parents, is to notify the pastor of each child's parish of baptism about the celebration of First Eucharist so this event can be recorded on the person's baptismal record. This should be done within a month after the celebration. Forms found in Appendix III may be used for proper notification.

#### IV.3.4 Persons with Disabilities

**A. Baptism, the sacrament of universal salvation, gives the right of persons to participate in the sacraments. Thus persons who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from celebrating the sacrament are to be permitted to celebrate their First Eucharist. Disability itself is never a reason for deferring the celebration of First Eucharist. A doubt about the use of reason or sufficient disposition should be resolved in favor of the child receive communion. First Eucharist may be deferred only when there is certainty that the child has not attained the use of reason or is not sufficiently disposed to approach Holy Communion. [Canon 914]**

- Because of the sacramental rights that Baptism gives us, persons who are not forbidden to participate and who are properly prepared and ready are not to be denied the participation in the sacraments. Thus, adequate and appropriate catechesis is to be provided to all persons regardless of abilities. This may require special instructional materials, time, and catechists in order that the child is given a basic understanding of the Eucharist.
- No discernible level of cognition need be present as a pre-requisite for receiving Holy Eucharist. Desire to receive the sacrament and an ability to accept nourishment need be the only consideration.
- Desire may be expressed by a family member, loved one, or an advocate on behalf of the person with developmental disabilities who is unable to express the desire in a manner that can be discerned by others.

**B. Whatever the disability (illness, injury, mental, or physical) and whatever the number of persons in the parish, religious education of these members of the faithful shall not be neglected. Appropriate adaptations for their special situations and needs are to be made. [Canon 777, 4°]**

- If appropriate adaptations are made for the person with special situations and needs, the celebration of the sacrament cannot be delayed or denied unless there is certainty that the child is not able to participate. In cases where there are doubts about the child's abilities, the child is to be admitted to the celebration of the sacrament.
- Each individual with ability to participate in catechesis for preparation for First Eucharist should be given the opportunity to do so, although inability to participate should not in anyway prevent reception of the Eucharist. If the child or person can participate in catechesis this should be done. The discernment of readiness is the same process as for anyone.
- The sacrament of the Eucharist by its nature is one that is celebrated in the midst of a loving community and as such should always be so received by persons with developmental disabilities. In this way, the entire community is nourished and enriched by the experience.
- Special adaptations should be made for persons who cannot swallow (e.g. possibly receiving the Precious Blood only, or having a glass of water available).