



Go and make
disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the
name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the
Holy Spirit.

~ Mt. 28:19

Celebrate!

SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES

CELEBRATE... a new baby...
gathering around the table for a meal...
moments of forgiveness...milestones on the
journey of life. These are some of the ordi-
nary, yet extraordinary events
in our lives. We celebrate
with family and friends, with
food and drink, with rituals
and symbols that enhance the
celebrations - and at every
moment, our God who loved
us into existence, who knows
us each by name, is journey-
ing and celebrating with us.



The sacraments provide opportunities for us to focus our attention on that reality and to lead us to discipleship. Sound formation of our children for sacraments is vital. But an essential element of this formation is the partnership with the parents, the primary “catechists” of their children. It is through the lived example of parents that children will be more likely to live out their Catholic faith.

Through sacramental preparation, pastors, pastoral teams, catechetical leaders have opportunities to journey with the parents of the children being prepared to receive Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation and Penance. This is a tremendous evangelizing opportunity, leading parents into a deeper relationship with Christ and/or conversion of heart and a continuing participation in our Catholic life. We must recognize that this is a time to evangelize households, not just catechize children.

As such, we must create opportunities to personally invite and engage parents in a way that fosters conversion. Participants should experience a hospitality, joy, and passion that reflects our faith and models discipleship. Everything about the experience should point toward encounter with and conversion to Jesus Christ and a resultant transformative understanding of each person’s importance in the Body of Christ.

The following guidelines are revisions of past sacramental guidelines, updated to meet contemporary expectations. These are meant to be resources for catechetical leaders and catechists, as well as for pastors and pastoral teams. The liturgical information is based on current instructions from the Office of Liturgy for the Diocese of Syracuse. Diocesan Faith Formation staff, parish directors of faith formation and clergy were involved in the process.

A website has been developed which will provide practical suggestions for digital, print and video resources, as well as helpful articles and effective practices for both student and parent formation. It can be found at www.sacprepsyr.weebly.com. Parish leaders are encouraged to submit ideas, resources, lesson plans, faith sharing experiences, etc. so that this website is able to provide innovative and evangelizing ways to invite, welcome, share faith - and celebrate.

Catherine Cornue
Diocesan Director of Faith Formation
2016

BAPTISM



You have been
enlightened by
Christ.

Walk always as
children of light
and keep the
flame of faith
alive in your
hearts.

~Rite of Baptism



THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The History

In the Christian era, it was John, the cousin of Jesus, who first preached baptism. His was a baptism in the waters of repentance, but he foretold that “the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11). This prophecy of John the Baptist was fulfilled in the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, the day on which, inspired by the Spirit, they made public their conversion to Christ and their commitment to spread the good news of the Reign of God. The Scriptures tell us that on that very day “about three thousand were added to their number” (Acts 2:41) through baptism.

In the early Christian community, adults were baptized by immersion, which symbolized death to the candidates’ old life and transformation into new life in Christ. This death/resurrection experience replicated in a symbolic way the pattern of Christ’s death and resurrection, the central mystery of the Christian faith. It was the bishop who presided over these baptisms; he then certified or “confirmed” that they had taken place by laying hands on the newly baptized. Following this, the community shared a fellowship meal of thanksgiving.

During the third and fourth centuries, concern for the integrity of the gospel in a time of persecution led to the development of a lengthy catechumenal process culminating in the celebration of the sacred mysteries during the Easter Vigil. During this vigil, catechumens (those to be baptized) professed their faith and were immersed in the waters of baptism. Clothed in new white garments, they were presented to the bishop who confirmed them with the ritual laying on of hands and anointing. After this they took

their places in the midst of the assembly and completed their initiation by sharing in the Eucharist. During the Easter season, the neophytes spent time together reflecting on the paschal mystery which they had celebrated sacramentally.

The rigors of the catechumenate tested the sincerity of the candidates and, along with the prayers and support of the community, strengthened them in their new faith. The distinctiveness of childhood was not a concern in ancient times. Infants and children were brought to the Easter sacraments by their parents.

With the end of persecution and the growth of the Church, differences developed in the catechumenate process. In the East, the unity of the sacraments was preserved. Presbyters baptized, confirmed and admitted infants to Eucharist. In the West, presbyters baptized infants, but bishops retained their prerogative to confirm. Distance and growing administrative concerns prevented the bishop from getting around his diocese to confirm. Thus, the completion of initiation – Confirmation and Eucharist – was delayed.

Historical and doctrinal development through the centuries caused a shift in the focus of baptism from initiation into the Christian community to salvation from original sin. By the 13th century, in an effort to assure the salvation of the infant, baptisms were routinely celebrated at any time of year. Consequently, this celebration disappeared from the Easter Vigil. Baptisms were celebrated instead in a short service in the presence of a small group rather than the entire faith community. This practice continued until the second half of the 20th century, when the Second Vatican Council emphasized the role of the laity in the work of the Church as a consequence of their baptismal call. The catechumenate was restored for adults and those unbaptized children of catechetical age, but infant baptism remains the norm. The revised Rite of Baptism echoes the vision of Vatican II and recaptures the spirit

of the early Church practice of initiation into the Christian community. The rite is ideally celebrated in the midst of the community where all present promise to support parents and godparents in their duty to “keep the light of faith alive” (Rite of Baptism) in the heart of the child.

Baptism is a time for evangelization. The RCIA process and preparation for infant baptism provide an opportunity to speak with others about our faith. Pope Francis in his papal exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, invites parishes to consider that their work is to be missionaries:

“The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s Word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration (27) In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers (28) It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a center of constant missionary outreach” (29).

Bishop Cunningham’s Pastoral Letter on the Year of Faith tells us the parishes who strive to be missionaries need to witness with joy:

“Credible agents of the New Evangelization accept the Gospel and have a personal relationship through prayer and study. Before we can evangelize others we must know and love Him as the true source of enduring happiness. Only then can we proclaim Christ to our family and friends - many whom are hungry for a deeper relationship with God.”
(*Pastoral Letter on the Year of Faith*, p3)



Theological Understanding

The First Letter of John proclaims, “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God, and God in them.” (1 John 4:16) In the original Greek, the word which is translated as “love” is agape, which means the pure and perfect gift of self. As Christians, we believe in a God who is Trinity – a communion of love shared eternally among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. St. Augustine, reflecting on God as agape, spoke of the Trinity as the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love eternally shared among them. We know from our experience that love cannot be self-contained. It is expressed “outward”, as it were, as self-gift. So it is with God. The love of God shared within the Trinity is expressed outward...in creation. We are loved into existence by the God who is love.

In Christian marriage

“Married love is an eminently human love because it is an affection between two persons rooted in the will and it embraces the good of the whole person;... A love like that, bringing together the human and the divine, leads the partners to a free and mutual self-giving, experienced in tenderness and action, and permeating their entire lives; ...”
(*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* #49)

The married couple may thus become co-creators with God, giving the gift of self to the other, and loving new life into existence. As Catholics, we believe that human life begins at the moment of conception, loved into existence by God.

“To see a child held in the arms of its father or mother is to glimpse what God is like, to see an image of the relationship between the human race and the creator. The infant makes present the reality of who we are before God: creation, radically dependent on our loving Parent...By its very being the infant preaches Good News, telling us of the wonders of God’s love.”
(*Richstatter, Thomas.OFM, Catholic Update: Infant Baptism: Gift to the Parish*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1995.)

Therefore, we as church celebrate this new life in the Sacrament of Baptism, by which the newly baptized is welcomed into the community of faith and washed clean of sin. When an adult or a child of catechetical age is baptized, all personal sin is forgiven as well.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that Original Sin is “an essential truth of our faith” (#388), yet it is not a truth which can or should be understood in isolation, apart from other essential truths... As the Catechism explains, “The doctrine of Original Sin is, so to speak, the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all” (#389) ...Original sin is removed when the person is filled with the Holy Spirit, the saving love and grace of Christ.

Consequently when we speak of Original Sin it is important to remember that Catholics baptize infants not primarily for what Baptism takes away but for what it gives!... When parents look into the smiling face of their newborn and feel the love they have for it, they know deep in their hearts that God loves this innocent child and has created it for eternal happiness.
(Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M., S.T.D. *Infant Baptism-Gift to the Parish*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995)

The Universal Call to Holiness

Baptism carries with it what the Second Vatican Council called “the universal call to holiness.”

...all in the church, whether they belong to the hierarchy or are cared for by it, are called to holiness, according to the apostle’s saying: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Th 4:3; see Eph 1:4). This holiness of the church is shown constantly in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful and so it must be; it is expressed in many ways by the individuals who, each in their own state of life, tend to the perfection of charity, and are thus a source of edification for others; ...
(*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* #39)

Baptism is therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ. That is why the church believes that it is its most basic and necessary duty to inspire all, catechumens, parents of children still to be baptized, and godparents, to that true and living faith by which they hold fast to Christ and enter into or confirm their commitment to the New Covenant.
(*Christian Initiation, General Introduction* #3)

DISCIPLESHIP

“Baptism is... the beginning of a ... lifetime journey of commitment and discipleship. Our journey begins with an invitation, a call from God through the Christian community to live the gospel as a committed disciple of Christ. To be a disciple is to be a learner, a journeyer with others who learn along the way. Discipleship is built on the concept of Church as a community of followers who support one another in sharing the Spirit and mission of Christ as found in the New Testament. It suggests that life is not a static condition, but a continual movement toward making real the actions of Jesus in today’s world. That’s what we agree to when we say “yes” to Baptism. When we accept the invitation, that call and response is ritualized and made visual and “real” for us in the celebration of Baptism...

“The largest percentage of Baptisms are still infant baptisms, even though the process of faith and conversion is essentially an adult experience. Obviously, infants cannot respond immediately to the call/response aspect of the sacrament. Nor can an infant understand the change of allegiance, the putting off of the old and the putting on of the new, the dying and rising, the new life, or the sharing of the life of Christ. However, the parents of those infants can understand and live those values and pass them on to their children. They can also experience the support of the community in living those ideals, and that is extremely important. In addition to infant baptism, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is now the norm for initiation in the Catholic Church.

“The Rite of Baptism for Children emphasizes the importance of faithfulness on the part of parents when it says to parents: In asking to have your children baptized, you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. Considering the future orientation of Baptism and the fact that we are marked for a lifelong journey of discipleship, it is important that parents be strong role models and to lead the way. (Godparents) are significant supporters of parents and the ones who first begin to reveal to their godchildren the value of the Christian community. ...” (DeGidio, Sandra, OSM. *Catholic Update: The Sacrament of Baptism-Celebrating the Embrace of God*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1989.)

Signs & Symbols

As the first and primary experience of the Initiation Rite, Baptism invites one into the community of faith on a life long journey following Christ. Rich in tradition and meaning, the symbols of water, oil, and light join us with the communion of saints.

WATER

Water is like a double-edged sword in that it has the power to take away life and the power to give life. Immersed in the water of baptism, we die to a life of sin. This experience purifies us as we are born into the life of Christ’s resurrection. “By the power of the Holy Spirit give to this water the grace of your Son, so that in the sacrament of baptism all those whom you have created in your likeness may be cleansed from sin and rise to a new birth of innocence by water and the Holy Spirit.” (*Christian Initiation of Adults* #222A)

OIL

Anointed with the sacred oil of catechumens, which sets us on the journey of initiation and with chrism, which strengthens us as Christians, we are signed and sealed by the Holy Spirit for priestly, prophetic and royal roles.

The healing properties of these oils not only soften, soothe and strengthen our skin, but these sacred oils soak deep within us as we are signed with the cross, signifying that we have been consecrated by God in the very depths of our being – a mark which can never be washed away. “The sign of the cross, on the threshold of the celebration, marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1235)

LIGHT

A candle is set alight from the paschal candle and given to the newly baptized (or to the godparent). It symbolizes one’s new life in Christ. This powerful symbol of overcoming the darkness becomes a beacon of faith as we learn to walk in the light of Christ. “You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of light and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts.” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* #230)

BAPTISMAL GARMENT

The newly baptized is clothed with a white garment, a symbol of purity and new life. This putting on of the new garment is a visual reminder of the Christian’s commitment to turn away from sin to follow Christ as a new creation in this covenant relationship of love and community. “See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity.” (*Rite of Baptism for Children* #99)

Roles & Responsibilities

Through the sacrament of baptism, we welcome a child into the community of faith. The ceremony is itself an act of faith on the part of the parents and the faith community, a sign of the covenantal relationship of God with the Church. Because the child cannot make this act of faith for him/herself, the responsibility of those involved is significant.

PARENTS

From the very beginning, parents bear a unique and primary role in the faith formation of the child. Thus, they have the responsibility to:

- celebrate and nurture their own faith as regular participants in the parish community, especially at Sunday Eucharist
- model a life of Christian witness
- continue their faith formation in order to ready themselves to form their children in the faith
- participate in the baptism preparation program offered in the parish.

GODPARENTS

Throughout the history of the Church, those presented for baptism were accompanied by sponsors who represented the Christian community in supporting the faith development of the candidate for baptism. In our times, the sponsor or godparent of an infant presented for baptism pledges to help the parent(s) to keep the light of faith alive in the heart of the child and, if necessary, to assume primary responsibility for his/her faith formation. The person chosen for this responsibility:

- is a fully initiated Catholic who has received all three sacraments of initiation.
- A baptized person who belongs to a non-catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the baptism (*Canon 874.2*)
- practices the Catholic faith and is a model of living the Christian life
- is willing and able to undertake the stated responsibilities of the role
- participates in the baptism preparation program offered in the parish to the best of their ability.

THE PARISH COMMUNITY

“The people of God, that is the Church, made present in the local community, has an important part to play in the baptism of both children and adults. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community.” (*Rite of Baptism #4*)

A welcoming parish community is at the heart of the faith life for families who bring their children to be baptized, as well as for adults who are journeying through the

catechumenate process. Those who have already been baptized celebrate the new life in faith of infants and adults, supporting the families by their prayers and their presence. Celebrating baptism within the Sunday Eucharist strengthens that support and the connection with the Eucharist, which, with Confirmation, will complete the initiation journey. It underscores the role of the community in its ongoing relationship with the family.

Some suggestions which may assist those who are planning a celebration of infant baptism during the weekend liturgies are:

- have greeters welcome the family and their friends and show them to their seats, where they can leave diaper bags, bottles, etc.
- include parents, godparents and infants in the entrance procession
- invite the assembly to respond to the baptismal promises along with the parents and godparents
- present the child with a baptismal garment made by, or personalized by a member of the parish
- include the newly baptized and their families in the prayer of the faithful
- introduce the newly baptized to the parish at the end of the liturgy and hold the child(ren) so that all may see and welcome them
- congratulate the newly baptized and their families in the parish bulletin
- encourage the parishioners to keep the family in prayer
- send a card to the family on the anniversary of the baptism.

The Parish-Sacrament of Welcome:

The parish may still benefit when baptism is held outside of Sunday Eucharist if the parish is made aware of the new member of the community. Here are some effective methods of communicating this information to the parish:

- Welcoming bulletin announcements that encourage the community to keep the family in prayer,
- Including the family names in the prayer of the faithful
- An annual parish ceremony in which all the newly baptized are introduced to the community and given a blessing

THE MINISTER

The ordinary ministers of the Sacrament of Baptism are the bishop, priest or deacon. In case of emergency, anyone, even a non-baptized person who has the proper intention, may baptize with water, saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Irregularities: Baptism may be postponed or delayed, but not refused if these conditions are not met:

- 1.) At least one parent, or the person who lawfully holds their place, must request Baptism for their child
- 2.) There must be a hope, however remote, that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith
- 3.) Parents & godparents must be prepared for their role as teachers of the faith.

BAPTISMAL TEAMS

In addition to meeting with the minister of baptism, it is recommended that parishes specifically train baptism teams who will meet with the parents of the children to be baptized. Team members welcome the parents—it gives them a chance to ask questions and get to know members of the parish community.

The people who greet and who meet with the parents should be trained to be welcoming, non-judgmental and hospitable. And most importantly, they should be credible witnesses to the Gospel.

The location for Baptismal preparation may be either the new parent's home or at the parish. The candidates' training for their role on the baptismal team might include:

- a.) The receptionist who will receive the request.
- b.) Selected parishioners (lay ministers) who welcome the couple and represent the community. These may be couples who meet with the parents of the children to be baptized, inviting them to attend a gathering where they can meet other new parents. This helps build community and may keep these families more connected to the parish. Team members welcome and give information about baptismal preparation, offer an opportunity for questions, arrange meetings with sponsor couples/catechists, mingle informally with one another, and send them forth with a blessing.

- c.) Clergy or deacon who will clarify any irregularities and who will perform the rite of baptism.

The Diocesan Family Life Education Office offers a Baptismal Preparation Manual with guidance on how to train baptism team members. The binder has many handouts that can be reproduced as well as lesson plans and ideas for use by Baptism teams. The Regional Diocesan Resource Centers at the Faith Formation Offices provide resources that includes Baptism resources and websites that can be used to enhance Baptism Preparation sessions & follow-up.

BAPTISMAL PREPARATION

Each parish regularly schedules baptism preparation programs for those desiring to have a child baptized and for those who will act as godparents to that child. This preparation may be accomplished in different ways, e.g. home visits by baptism team members, instructional sessions at parish facilities, a retreat for expectant parents and their chosen godparents. Whatever the format, the Baptismal Preparation process is a moment of encounter; each contact with new parents is a welcoming opportunity. Baptismal Preparation includes the following:

- welcome to the Parish Community
- explanation of God's unconditional love for all persons and the role of baptism in salvation from sin & death
- the signs and symbols in the Rite of Baptism
- theological understanding of family as domestic church and faith practices within the family setting
- the call to discipleship and the responsibility to live the Christian life stages of faith development and how to nurture faith in the life of a child
- guidance on ways to strengthen a marriage.

Godparents are encouraged to attend parish baptismal preparation along with new parents. If this is not possible, several solutions are possible:

- 1.) Godparents can be encouraged to seek out a baptismal preparation program at their home parish.
- 2.) They can be encouraged to join the class via a video phone call.
- 3.) Handouts can be offered that will explain the importance of their role in supporting the faith of the child.

AFTER THE BAPTISM

A question that communities must continue to ask themselves if they wish to remain vibrant is this: are we a welcoming and supportive community in which to raise a child? Are there opportunities to grow and learn about the Catholic faith? Some tried & true ways to encourage and promote faith and a connection with the parish community are:

- offering mentors: personal witness from other parents about which activities helped them to pass on their faith to their children
- teaching parents to view ordinary things as sacred so they will speak of their family life this way
- special events or bulletin helps that support the concept of their family as “the domestic church”, the church of the home

- provide opportunities in the parish to educate parishioners about keeping marriages strong
- set up a “parents’ corner in the gathering space that provides helpful information on children & church
- have a Mom’s group or other parent support group that keeps new parents connected with the parish.
- invite new parents to parish-wide faith formation events focused on the needs of new families.

Suggestions taken from A Holistic Approach to Infant Baptism, pg 142. More suggestions can be found in Part IV of this resource, Keep the Faith Journey Going.



Baptismal Guidelines: An Overview

“Baptism is therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ.”

(Christian Initiation, General Introduction #3)

Baptism celebrates our universal call to holiness and is the beginning of a lifelong journey of commitment and discipleship. The rite is ideally celebrated in the midst of the community where all present promise to support parents and godparents in their duty to “keep the light of faith alive” (Rite of Baptism) in the heart of the child.

PARENT(S)

From the very beginning, parents bear a unique and primary role in the faith formation of the child. Thus, they have the delight and the responsibility to:

- celebrate and nurture their own faith as regular participants in the parish community, especially in the Sunday Eucharist
- model a life of Christian witness
- continue their own faith formation in order to ready themselves to form their children in the faith
- participate in the baptismal preparation program offered in the parish.

GODPARENTS

The Godparent is a sponsor who represents the parish community and who assists the parent in the faith development of the child. The person chosen for this responsibility:

- is a fully initiated Catholic who has received all three sacraments of initiation. A baptized person who belongs to a non-catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the baptism.
- practices the Catholic faith and is a model of living the Christian life.
- is willing and able to undertake the stated responsibilities of the role.
- participates in the baptismal preparation program offered in the parish to the best of their ability.

BAPTISMAL PREPARATION

Preparation for the sacrament may be provided by a trained baptismal team, priest, deacon. It may be held in the home of the parent(s) seeking baptism or at the parish. It may include an instructional session(s) and or a retreat. It would include the following:

- welcome to the parish community
- explanation of God’s unconditional love for all persons and the role of baptism in salvation from sin and death
- the signs and symbols in the Rite of Baptism
- theological understanding of family as domestic church and faith practices within the family setting
- the call to discipleship and the responsibility to live the Christian life.



SACRAMENTS OF PENANCE & EUCHARIST

Most of the effective lessons that a child needs in order to be prepared for life are usually taught by example. Children imitate our example more eagerly than they listen to our words.

~John Powell, SJ

MORAL & FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Just as children grow physically, they also grow morally and spiritually. Over the years, a number of psychologists and theologians have examined the way we form our decisions and grow in faith. Very young children are influenced by the wishes and regulations of their parents. The motive for behaviour is reward or punishment. The child has not yet developed a personal conscience. As children grow into pre-adolescence, moral judgment begins to slowly develop, according to the child's social experiences. "Good" is that which allows one to live in harmony with others. "Bad" is that which destroys friendships and confidence. The adolescent years bring a more finely developed ability to think abstractly. The values and virtues behind rules, regulations and laws are understood and seen more clearly.

Gradually, moral people move from choosing behaviors for exterior reasons such as reward/punishment, laws, or social acceptance, to choosing behaviors that coincide with their own inner values.

For Christians, this development is bound closely to their relationship with God. Parents and catechists who are guiding children through this pattern should be aware of the following:

- God should be presented as loving and forgiving.
- Cooperation, kindness, and respect should be taught, in word and by example, and the good feeling experienced as a result of such behavior should be pointed out.
- As children grow, parents should establish a habit of discussing moral questions and the values behind certain decisions.
- Children should be encouraged to think through their motives.
- As children come to discover who God is, they will also learn that loving actions are what God desires, and that the inner happiness experienced when we act with love is God's presence within us.

Growth in faith occurs when some new life experience invites a person to a deeper understanding of God. The way each person is welcomed into the world, and the environments in which each person grows, will affect that person's understanding. Through interactions with others, beginning with family, we learn to be part of a community, celebrate with rituals, and discover the words which will help us in our relationship with a loving God.

Although all children are unique in their development, they go through a sequence of growth experiences. From birth to early childhood, a child experiences faith in others to meet basic needs, trust, courage, the will to survive, and hope. This is the beginning of a child's faith journey.

Primary school-age children derive their faith from the faith of the family. Hence, it is imperative that families integrate prayer and participation in the liturgy into their everyday lives. As children move into the intermediate grades, they develop a sense of the story of family, church and community and where they fit into that story. Symbols, myths, rituals, music and heroic figures can help children identify and feel connected with other people, past and present, and groups. Children begin to understand church as a community of people who help others because it is the right thing to do. Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance connects them with the forgiveness of God and with others. Eucharist enables them to participate in the meal shared with Jesus, their families and friends....the community of faith.

As children grow in faith, they come to understand more deeply God and their relationship with God and God's people.

THE SEQUENCE OF FIRST PENANCE AND FIRST EUCHARIST

According to the *Code of Canon Law*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1983,

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

Furthermore, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1994, clearly states that "Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time."

(CCC #1457)

The Church places this special emphasis on children's confession so that from the earliest years an evangelization will begin that will make ever stronger and more conscious the support of a living faith for their celebration of the sacrament and above all for a sure and consistent way of living the Christian life. This will require a pastoral concern not only for the child's first confession, but for the second, third, fourth, etc., during their young and formative years.



THE INITIATION OF CHILDREN BEYOND CATECHETICAL AGE

Children beyond catechetical age (older than age 7) who are unbaptized and uncatechized should be enrolled as catechumens in a catechumenate process for children.

- Children of catechetical age are considered, for the purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults. (*Canon 852.1; NS, 18*) Their formation is to follow the general pattern of the catechumenate. Given their young age, a catechumenate for children may need to be longer than one designated for mature adults. (*RCIA 254*)
- The permission of the parents, or at least one of them, is required before children are accepted into the catechumenate and before they are initiated into the Church. Parents are encouraged to participate in the process of formation to whatever extent they are able in order to offer the support and example the children will need. (*RCIA 254*)
- In the diocese of the United States it is clearly expected that when a child of catechetical age is baptized, the child must be confirmed and share in the Eucharist at the same celebration. (*NS 14, 18, 19*) It is preferable that the sacraments of initiation be celebrated at the Easter Vigil. (*RCIA, 8, 256; NS 18*) Children of catechetical age are the subject of Part II, Chapter I of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and not the Rite of Baptism for Children. The priest who baptizes is to confirm the children and does not need special permission to do so. (*RCIA, 305; Canons 885.2, 866, NS 13, 18, 19*)
- Children who are catechumens preparing for baptism do not celebrate the Sacrament of Penance prior to baptism. They should receive a thorough catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance and be encouraged in the frequent celebration of the sacrament. (*NS, 27, 36*) They may also be invited to participate in non-sacramental penitential rites as outlined in Part II of the RCIA (291-303) so that they may come to understand the reality of sin and appreciate the comforting message of God's pardon. Baptized children can be invited to celebrate these penitential services with children who are catechumens.

Children beyond catechetical age (older than age 7) who are baptized but uncatechized should be enrolled as candidates for full communion in the catechumenate process for children.

- Technically the consent of the parents is sufficient. The children are passed into the faith when the parents are received into the Church. Children can also make a profession of faith inasmuch as they are able. When parent(s) are not received into the Church, the Catholic parent may make this desire known and/or the child can, as inasmuch he or she is capable, make a profession of faith at the Rite of Reception.
- Because children of catechetical age are considered, for the purpose of Christian Initiation to be adults (*Canon 852.1*), The Rite of Reception of a Baptized Christian into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church (*RCIA 473-504*) is used. Their formation may be similar to unbaptized children preparing for the initiation sacraments. Some elements of the ordinary catechetical instruction of baptized children before their reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist may be appropriately shared with the candidates of catechetical age. (*NS, 19*)
- Children who are baptized, but not Roman Catholic, and are now preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church should be adequately prepared and encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance sometime before their formal reception into the Roman Catholic Church. (*RCIA, 482; NS, 36*) Children of catechetical age who were baptized Roman Catholic are to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before their first reception of Eucharist. (*Canon 914; NS, 27*)
Adapted from The Rite of Christian Initiation: A Parish Resource, A Guide to the Most Frequently Asked Questions, Diocese of Syracuse

PENANCE



God the Father of mercies,
through the death and
resurrection of your son,
you have reconciled the
world to yourself and sent
the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins.
Through the ministry of the
church, may God grant you
pardon and peace.

~Prayer of Absolution

SACRAMENT OF PENANCE



First Penance

HISTORICAL CONTEXT— SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

In Mark's Gospel, the first public words of Jesus are "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (*Mark 1: 15*) and ever since, the Church has pondered the mystery of repentance and reconciliation.

For the first three centuries of Christianity, BAPTISM was the "sacrament of reconciliation"; baptism forgave all sin. As the Christian community grappled with those who "failed" by committing public, serious sin, the question arose as to the possibility of a "second Baptism"—but the idea was quickly dismissed. The embrace of the community For the first three centuries of Christianity, BAPTISM was the "sacrament of reconciliation"; baptism forgave all sin. As the Christian community grappled with those who "failed" by committing public, serious sin, the question arose as to the possibility of a "second Baptism"—but the idea was quickly dismissed. The embrace of the community represented the absolute fidelity of God; thus, since God's fidelity never faltered, "re-baptism" was impossible.

A document from the second century indicates the possibility of repentance and a one-time only forgiveness of public, serious sin. By the fourth century, this process was embodied in the Order of Penitents. The process was similar to the catechumenate, consisting of four stages: an interior admission of sinfulness; recourse to the Bishop and enrollment in the Order of Penitents; a long period (in some cases, a minimum of seven years) of penitential practices and the witness of a sponsor; and the invitation by the community and /or the Bishop to rejoin the Eucharistic feasts, usually for the Holy Thursday liturgy.

During the early Middle Ages, in the monasteries of Ireland, the practice of monks serving as "soul friends", first to other monks and eventually to lay people, began to emerge. In conversations, a person would speak about their struggles, their sins, their growth in faith and be assured that God's loving forgiveness was always present. For more public, serious sin, there was a sense of the need to be reconciled with the community. Thus developed a recognition of the need for someone to act as the "official representative" of the community as well as the one who spoke assurances of God's love and forgiveness—the priest. At first, there were no formal words of absolution; rather, there were prayers of petition, praise, and gratitude.

For the first three centuries of Christianity, BAPTISM was the "sacrament of reconciliation"; baptism forgave all sin.

By the twelfth century, we find that a shift has taken place: from once-only public penance to frequent, repeated, private confession, from an understanding of the role of the priest as representative of the community and healer, to judge and from acts of penance signifying inner conversion to penance as acts of satisfaction. The Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, mandated confession in private, ratified the specific words of absolution, and required the confession of serious sins at least once a year.

In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent required that all serious sins be confessed by number and kind; strictly speaking, venial sins did not have to be confessed, but the Council encouraged the confession of venial sins as an act of religious devotion.

“The new *Rite of Penance*, promulgated in 1973 as a response to the call of the Second Vatican Council for revision of the rites and revised in accordance with the Second Edition of the Lectionary of the Mass and the emendations required by the 1983 Code of Canon Law, proclaims: The celebration of this sacrament is thus always an act in which the Church proclaims its faith, gives thanks to God for the freedom with which Christ has made us free, and offers its life as a spiritual sacrifice in praise of God’s glory, as it hastens to meet the Lord Jesus.”
(*Rite of Penance*, #7)

Though the sacrament officially retains the title “Penance”, the term used throughout the rite is “reconciliation”. (Within the Rite of Penance are three “rites of reconciliation”.) The role of the community is emphasized, and the vision of priest as healer, wise judge and as representative of the community is restored.

The whole Church, as a priestly people, acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation that has been entrusted to it by the Lord. Not only does the Church call sinners to repentance by preaching the word of God, but it also intercedes for them and helps penitents with maternal care and solicitude to acknowledge and confess their sins and to obtain the mercy of God, who alone can forgive sins. Further, the Church becomes itself the instrument of the conversion and absolution of the penitent through the ministry entrusted by Christ to the apostles and their successors. (*Rite of Penance*, #8)

The Sacrament of Penance is also “called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion”. (CCC, #1423) “It is called the sacrament of forgiveness because the priest, standing in the place of Christ, extends his hand in absolution, granting the penitent pardon and peace”. (CCC, #1424) “It is called the sacrament of reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles”. (CCC, #1424)

Guidelines for the Sacrament of Penance

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The child is expected to have been previously involved in the liturgical life of the parish faith community by regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist with his/her parent(s).
- The child is expected to have participated in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education classes for at least one year (e.g. First Grade) before he/she begins the direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance.
- Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance is distinct from regular parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and is the responsibility of the parish.
- Both Catholic school and public school students are expected to participate jointly in all direct parish preparatory events. The direct preparation program should be explained in such a way that all parents clearly understand the distinction between regular Catholic school religious education and parish faith formation and direct preparation for the sacrament, as well as the responsibilities and events which pertain to them.
- When preparing students for the Sacrament, the person responsible for this preparation should be certain that there is a clear and distinct separation between the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

COMPONENTS OF DIRECT PREPARATION

Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance is that time period prior to the celebration of First Penance which focuses on the nature and meaning of the sacrament in the life of the Christian, as well as the preparation of the child and the parish community to meaningfully celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation. Direct preparation may consist of: student sessions, parent/child sessions, retreat days, and home options.

Parents, catechetical leaders, catechists, and pastors need to be conscious of the developmental level of the children when helping them to understand the sacrament.

Catechesis for direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance should enable each child to develop on an age appropriate level:

- a realization of God as One who always forgives
- some knowledge of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- an ability to distinguish right from wrong, mistake from sin, as well as an ability to make choices
- a realization of his/her participation in the parish faith community
- a recognition of the need for healing wounded or broken relationships
- a desire to celebrate the sacrament, not only for the first time, but regularly as an ongoing experience of God's forgiving love.

Parents and catechists involved in the preparation of children should come to realize when the child, by attitude and understanding, is ready for First Penance.

FAMILY CATECHETICAL SENSITIVITY

The attitudes, actions and values of families constantly call individuals to open themselves to a Christ-centered life. Parents, especially, influence their children during each phase of the faith journey and need to be involved in the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments.

Effective preparation programs recognize and consider the many different family structures and respect the uniqueness of each. In addition, the parish recognizes that the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments presents an opportunity to minister to the special needs of families. Pastoral care and sensitivity should characterize the components of preparation programs that touch family members.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Parents or guardians have a unique role to play in the initiation of their children into the sacramental life of the Church. They are to form and foster, along with the faith community, a spirit of faith which will help prepare the children for a fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Penance. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments, especially Penance and Eucharist.

The lived experience of sacraments in the family is most important. An atmosphere in which faith is witnessed and discussed is most conducive to growth in faith. By becoming more aware of the meaning of the sacraments, and by participating in the preparation process, parents can fulfill their baptismal promises and nurture the faith life of their child.

For children, the family plays an important role in their faith formation and introduction into the sacramental life of the Church. Sacramental preparation is the responsibility and concern of the parent(s) with the full support and cooperation of the faith community. (NCD 25,212,229; RB 4)

Parents, by their Christian life, form children in prayer, a sense of faith, and in the importance of sacramental life. Parents have the responsibility to:

- assist children in the preparation for the sacramental celebration by:
 - ♦ celebrating regularly as part of the parish community, including Sunday Eucharist
 - ♦ modeling a life of Christian witness
 - ♦ assuring ongoing and in-depth catechetical formation through participation of their children in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and in parish sacramental preparation processes
- full and active participation in the parent component of the parish sacramental preparation process
- provide continuing faith formation of their children after the reception of the sacraments by participation with their children in the life of the church.

“Parents you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practices of the faith...”
(*Rite of Baptism*)

PARENT/GUARDIAN SESSIONS

Parent sessions are an integral part of preparation for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. During these sessions, the parents will have the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of reconciliation in their daily lives and to focus on the Sacrament of Penance in a way that will help their children to understand its importance in Christian living. Areas to be explored during parent sessions include:

- the personal attitude of parents toward relationship with the Lord, the Church and the Sacrament of Penance
- the theology of the Sacrament of Penance and the Rites of Reconciliation
- the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Penance
- the individual’s relationship with Christ and with all others in Christ
- the role of the parent(s) in the parish sacramental preparation process
- the development of faith in young children and how to communicate with them about this sacrament
- the readiness of the child and how this is assessed by the parent(s) and members of the parish staff.

THE MINISTERS

The Pastor/Priest

In Jesus, God is revealed as one who forgives and heals. Children experience that forgiveness and healing first within the family, then within the parish community during their preparation for, and in the celebration of First Penance. It is extremely important that a child’s introduction to the Sacrament of Penance be one of gentleness and understanding, in order that the child be drawn to the sacrament throughout his/her life.

Pastors have a special responsibility to assure that proper catechesis for the sacrament be provided by:

- fostering in the parish an understanding of its role in sacramental preparation and celebration
- participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the preparation process
- determining the readiness of the children, in consultation with parents, catechetical leaders, and catechists.

Catechetical Leader/ Sacramental Coordinator

The role of the catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator is to assist the pastor in his responsibility to provide for the sacramental preparation of the young children preparing to receive the Sacrament of Penance. This role often includes coordination of the preparation period, working with the parish staff, liturgy committee, parents, and the Diocesan and Regional Faith Formation Offices.

The catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator is responsible to see that the diocesan guidelines for the reception of First Penance are implemented. The following directives are essential to an effective preparation program for the Sacrament of Penance:

- The catechesis of the children preparing for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance is age-appropriate according to diocesan guidelines.
- There are parent sessions during the time of preparation so that the parents are well informed about the process and methods of preparing the children for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance.
- Parents receive catechesis on the history and theology of the Sacrament of Penance.
- Parents are encouraged to reinforce, throughout the life of the child, regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance.

Catechists

The fundamental tasks of the catechist are to proclaim Christ's message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead the children to a sense of prayer and worship, and to motivate children to serve others.

The catechist plays an important part in the preparation of the children for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance. The catechist for the First Penance Preparation Program provides opportunities to join the pastor, the catechetical leader and the parents in the direct preparation of children for the Sacrament of Penance. The catechist, pastor, catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator, and parents provide instruction and formation for those preparing for this sacrament. The catechist should be encouraged to use experiential methods of catechesis employing audio-visuals, digital tools, paraliturgical, scriptural as well as instructional techniques to prepare the children for their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance. They should guide the children into experiences of a loving and forgiving God within a loving and forgiving faith community.

THE PARISH COMMUNITY

A critical aspect of all the sacraments, including Penance, is the vitality of the existing community and its ongoing relationship to each member of the faith community, even the very youngest members. This shifts the focus away from the individual at the moment of reception of the sacrament and underscores the role of the community in its ongoing relationship to its young members.

We celebrate reconciliation because of the community's experience of its sinfulness as well as of our individual sin and of God's love and forgiveness. In sharing our experiences of God's love and forgiveness with our young members, the entire parish community is reminded of how much our gracious God loves and forgives us.

The parish community is ever learning, celebrating, suffering, rejoicing, hoping, failing, forgiving, questioning, healing, loving but is always centered in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Role of the Parish Community

As with Baptism, catechesis for Penance takes place within the parish community, who is invited to prayerfully support those preparing for this sacrament. The parish is the faith community where the children will experience the loving forgiveness of God. The following are some ways a parish community can become involved in the children's preparation for Penance:

- The parish community strives to be a welcoming community to the young persons and their parents as they prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance.
- Parishioners may also serve as prayer partners (adults who agree to pray for an individual child who is preparing for the Sacrament of Penance.) Parishes may have the parish community participate in an Enrollment Ceremony.
- Homilies may be given and /or mention made about the preparation program for the Sacrament of Penance.
- The entire parish may be invited to the liturgy celebrating the Sacrament of Penance.

FIRST PENANCE AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

“By reason of their Baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God and have the same divine calling. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community. Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at the appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them.”

(Celebrating the Sacraments with Person with Disabilities, The USCCB, 1998)

Parents should be instructed as to their right and privilege, as well as assisted in their role in the preparation of children with disabilities for the reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

When preparing persons with disabilities for the Sacrament of Penance, the person responsible for this preparation should be certain that there is, according to diocesan guidelines, a clear and distinct separation between the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Great care should be taken in the preparation so that negative attitudes towards God are not conveyed to persons with disabilities. Because the person with disabilities responds to a warm and tender personality, a good catechist begins by presenting God’s goodness, love and mercy, especially in the person of Jesus. The person with disabilities experiences God’s forgiveness from parents, peers, and the entire faith community.

There is no definite age for persons with disabilities to receive the Sacrament of Penance. Each person will be ready for the sacrament in his or her own time and all concerned must be sensitive to this. Judgments should be made in a way that the reverence for the sacrament is maintained, while realistically taking into account the person’s need.

In assessing the readiness of a child with disabilities for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance one should consider:

- the ability to distinguish between right and wrong
- the awareness of the need for forgiveness and trust in Jesus’ forgiving love

- the ability to express sorrow
- the ability of the person with disabilities to describe wrongdoing in his/her own words.

A person with disabilities may find language difficult, and may express his/her sins in a halting or ungrammatical manner. However, this should not be an impediment to the sacrament. In addition, if there is difficulty with oral confession, it is sufficient for the person with disabilities to nod consent or denial to the questions of the confessor.

PASTORAL LITURGICAL GUIDELINES

Introduction

Thorough planning for both the catechesis and celebration of the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance itself is essential. It is extremely important, moreover, that a candidate’s introduction to the sacrament be one of gentleness and understanding, with primary emphasis on the reconciling love of God.

Preparation for the Rite

Rituals are symbolic actions that help us to realize the significance of an event or a celebration. Although personal confession of sin and individual absolution are at the center of this sacrament, the communal celebration expresses more clearly its ecclesial character (CCC, #1482) in the supportive presence and prayer of the community gathered. In this celebration we are aware, as well, that in being reconciled to God, we are also reconciled to the Church. (CCC, #1469)

Children must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving the Sacrament of Eucharist for the first time. (CIC, can. 914; CCC, #1457)

Planning the Rite

In a communal celebration of the rite of reconciliation, “the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common”. (CCC, #1482)

Children receiving the sacrament for the first time should participate fully in the celebration through song and prayer. (*Rite of Penance*, #23-26)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Space

Using the Reconciliation Chapel/Room for individual confessions is ideal. When several priests are available to hear confessions and other space is needed, each space should be private and welcoming for the children. Two chairs facing one another with a table on the side bearing a single candle or cross adds to a comfortable and prayerful atmosphere. The option to kneel behind a screen for the celebration of the sacrament should be provided for those who wish to remain anonymous.

Dress of Candidates

The celebration of the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance should be given the importance it deserves. Dress should be suitable for a weekend liturgy but not extreme. New or expensive clothing is not necessary.

Models for Reconciliation Celebrations

The Sacrament of Reconciliation may be celebrated using:

- Individual Rite-The children receive First Reconciliation by appointment with the priest or during regularly scheduled Reconciliation times.
- Communal Rite-Parents and family members may be invited to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation either after their child or after all the children have received the sacrament.
- Parish Communal Service-Children may receive the sacrament at a Parish Reconciliation Service.

Music

"Whenever...penance (is) celebrated communally, music is important. The general structure is introductory rite, liturgy of the word, sacrament and dismissal. The introductory rite and liturgy of the word follow the pattern of the Mass. At the time of the sacrament an acclamation or song by all the people is desirable."
(*Music in Catholic Worship*, #81)

"Communal celebrations of reconciliation normally require an entrance song or song of gathering; a responsorial psalm and a gospel acclamation during the liturgy of the word; an optional hymn after the homily and a hymn of praise for God's mercy following absolution. The litany with the General Confession of Sins

(alternating between the deacon or cantor and assembly) or another appropriate song may also be sung, as well as the Lord's Prayer. Singing or soft instrumental music may be used during the time of individual confessions especially when there is a large number of people present for the celebration."

(*Liturgical Music Today*, #27)

It is appropriate to have music which children can sing. Music invites them to become actively involved, and creates a prayerful atmosphere. Music that expresses the theme of the celebration unites the community in giving thanks and praise to God.

Rehearsal

In addition to practicing their roles for the prayer service, the children may be given the opportunity to:

- explore the Reconciliation Chapel/Room
- sit in the chair that faces the priest
- kneel behind the screen
- practice where to sit, stand, or kneel while waiting their turn to go to confession, making sure to leave ample room for the privacy of each penitent.

These considerations will help to eliminate any anxiety the children may be feeling.

Sanctuary Arrangements

The church may be decorated to complement the liturgical season. The paschal candle may be brought forth as a sign of new life in baptism. Holy water and candles remind us to take the new light of Christ with us following the celebration.

Seating

Seating arrangements should be made so that penitents may experience a quiet, reflective atmosphere. Children seated with their family, at the ends of the pew closest to the aisle, will have the opportunity to see and participate in the action of the celebration, taking the place of honor while enjoying the comfort of their family.

Following the Celebration

A simple party following the celebration of the sacrament allows the parish to express the message of God's loving embrace to the children. If there isn't space conducive to a reception, families may be encouraged to prepare a special meal at home following the sacrament.

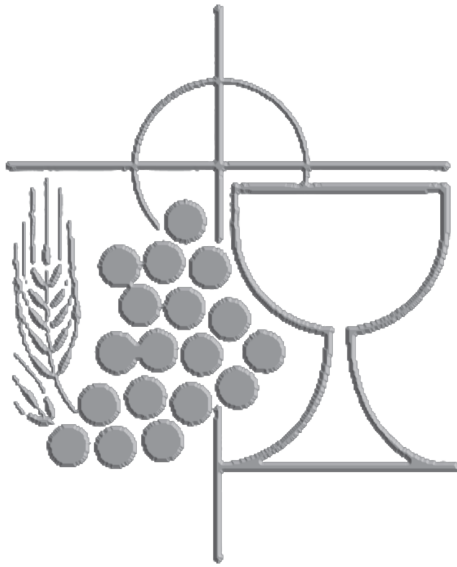
Preparation for First Penance: An Overview

“Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practices of the faith...”

Parents, following up on the commitment made at their child’s Baptism, are called to form children in prayer, live an example of faith and share in the sacramental life of the church. Parents have the responsibility and delight to:

- assist children in the preparation for the sacramental celebration by:
 - celebrating regularly as part of the parish community, including Sunday Eucharist
 - modeling a life of Christian witness
 - practicing an example of loving forgiveness in the home
 - assuring ongoing and in-depth catechetical formation through participation of their children in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and in parish sacramental preparation processes.
- The child is expected to have participated in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education classes for at least one year (e.g. First Grade) before he/she begins the direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance.
- Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Penance is distinct from regular parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and is the responsibility of the parish.
- Both Catholic school and public school students are expected to participate jointly in all direct parish preparatory events.
- Full and active participation in the parent component of the parish sacramental preparation process is expected. (e.g. 3-4 sessions; parent/child retreat or workshop)
- Children must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving the Sacrament of Eucharist for the first time.
- There is no definite age for persons with disabilities to receive the Sacrament of Penance. Each person will be ready for the sacrament in his or her own time and all concerned must be sensitive to this. Judgments should be made in a way that the reverence for the sacrament is maintained, while realistically taking into account the person’s need.
- As this is the first celebration of the sacrament of forgiveness, parents will continue to bring their children to the Sacrament of Penance. Parents are expected to provide continuing faith formation of their children after the reception of the sacraments by regular attendance at Mass and ensuring their participation in further faith formation classes.
- The dates for parent/student sessions are:
- First Penance will be celebrated on _____ at _____.
Date Time

EUCCHARIST



Behold what *you* are
Become what *you* receive

~ St. Augustine

SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is at the heart of “Christian initiation,” together with Baptism and Confirmation, and it constitutes the source of the Church’s life itself. From this Sacrament of love, in fact, flows every authentic journey of faith, of communion, and of witness.

~Pope Francis, General Audience, Feb. 2014

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Luke’s Gospel, when Jesus gathered his disciples for the last supper, he said to them, *I have longed to share this meal with you before I suffer...* (Luke 22:15) Jesus’ longing is God’s longing - to share his very life with us, to fulfill in a new and more profound way the promise God has made from the beginning: *I will be with you.* Later, when the Christian community gathered to give praise and thanks to God, they experienced the Risen Christ present among them: “they recognized him in the breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35) and responded to His exhortation to *do this in memory of me.*

From the beginning, then, the Christian community has experienced Eucharist as an encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus. From the beginning, the Christian community has proclaimed that Jesus is truly and really present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, taught that Christ is always present in his church, especially in liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass both in the person of the minister, “the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross”, and most of all in the eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in church. Lastly, he is present when the church prays and sings, for he has promised “where two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them.” (#7)

The Council also taught that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed: it is also the source from which all its power flows.” (#10)

How has the Christian community articulated its understanding of the gift of Eucharist?

The Eucharist as MEMORIAL

We remember and give thanks for all of creation; we recall the sacrifice of Abraham and of Melchizedek; we come before God remembering what it means to encounter Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist as PASSOVER

The Passover celebrates and makes present the action of God leading God’s people from slavery to freedom. Eucharist celebrates and makes present the action of Jesus, the Son of God, leading God’s people from darkness to light, from estrangement and sin to union and forgiveness, from death to life.

The Eucharist as MEAL

In Jesus’ time and culture, sharing a meal signified peace, trust, and unity. It was an invitation to intimate relationship. Jesus spoke of his longing to share the meal we call the Last Supper with his disciples, and at that meal, instructed them to *Take and eat...this is my body; take and drink...this is my blood...* He invites us to do the same when we participate in the Eucharist. In Jesus, God offers us the opportunity to be in intimate relationship with him.

The Eucharist as SACRIFICE

In the Hebrew tradition, the offering of a sacrifice was understood as giving back to God what is God’s from the beginning, as a sign of the desire for union with God. Christ offered his entire life in loving submission to the will of his Abba, Father. In his passion and death, Christ offered his very life for us, “accepting even death, death on a cross” rather than change his message that *God is love.* In Jesus, God is revealed as one who heals, forgives, and gives life. The celebration of the Eucharist makes present this paschal mystery of the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Eucharist as CELEBRATION OF AND CALL TO SERVICE

In serving others, Jesus found freedom. He gave himself for others. In dying, he found freedom for himself and for us. In the act of washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus revealed the intimate link between Eucharist and service. He instructed his disciples to go and do the same. Our response to that command is the “acid test” of our worship.

The Eucharist as THANKSGIVING

The word eucharist comes from a Greek word which means to give thanks. Once again, the early Christian community gathered to give praise and thanks to God, and in so doing experienced the presence of the Risen Jesus with them. We, too, gather as a faith community to give praise and thanks to God, and in so doing, encounter Jesus.

The Eucharist as CONTINUATION OF THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

In Jesus, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God became human, to show us again what was revealed in the beginning - the goodness of being human.

“God created man in his image; male and female he created them.” (*Gen 1:27*)

“God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.” (*Gen 1:31*)

Jesus reveals God to us, and he reveals us to ourselves.

The Eucharist as REAL PRESENCE

“The mode of Christ’s presence under the eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all sacraments. In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly; really, and substantially contained.” (*CCC #1374*)

“It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood that Christ becomes present in the sacrament.” (*CCC #1375*)

St. Augustine spoke of the Eucharist in this way: *Receive what you are; become what you receive.* When we receive the Body of Christ, we are graced, nourished, strengthened, to become ever more fully the Body of Christ on earth.

THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST: SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

God’s self-revelation occurs most often in ways that are familiar to us through our human experience. It is in the Sacrament of Eucharist that we see this truth most clearly. Bread and wine, as food, nourish the body. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, bread was a sign of God’s covenant, and the “cup of blessing” at the end of the Passover meal pointed to the messianic rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave new and definitive meaning to the blessing of bread and wine. (*CCC #1334*) Bread and wine are the most profound sacramental symbols we possess, for at the Last Supper, Jesus said, “This is my body; this is my blood.” We believe in the *real presence* of Christ in the Eucharist.

In addition, Christ is present in the community gathered, for it is in the celebration of the Eucharist that all who participate “may be one body and one spirit in Christ”. (*CCC #1353*)

Finally, the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the words of consecration (the institution narrative) make sacramentally present the body and blood of Christ under the species of bread and wine. (*CCC #1353*)

Guidelines for First Eucharist

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- The child is expected to have been previously involved in the liturgical life of the parish faith community by regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist with his/her parents/guardians.
- The child is expected to have participated in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education classes for at least one year before he/she begins the direct preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist.
- Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist is distinct from regular parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and is the responsibility of the parish.
- Both the Catholic school and public school students are expected to participate jointly in all direct parish preparatory events. The direct preparation program should be explained in such a way that all parents clearly understand the distinction between regular Catholic school religious education or parish faith formation and direct preparation for the sacrament, as well as the responsibilities and events which pertain to them.
- When preparing persons for the Sacrament of Eucharist, the person(s) responsible for this preparation should be certain that there is a clear and distinct separation between the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

COMPONENTS OF DIRECT PREPARATION

Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist is that time period prior to the celebration of First Eucharist which focuses on the nature and meaning of the sacrament in the life of the Christian, as well as preparation of the child and the parish community to meaningfully celebrate that rite.

Direct preparation may consist of: student sessions, parent/child sessions, retreat days and at home options.

Parents, catechetical leaders, catechists and pastors need to be conscious of the developmental level of children when helping them to understand the sacrament.

Catechesis for direct preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist should enable each child to develop on an age-appropriate level:

- some knowledge of God as creator and loving parent, Jesus as God's son, and the Holy Spirit as the giver of gifts who helps us to share our gifts and live good lives and some knowledge of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- an ability to distinguish between consecrated bread and ordinary bread to recognize that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in a special way
- an understanding that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine
- a realization of his/her participation in the parish faith community
- a desire to participate in the Eucharist and to receive Holy Communion.

Parents and catechists involved in the preparation of children should come to realize when the child, by attitude and understanding, is ready for First Eucharist.

FAMILY CATECHETICAL SENSITIVITY

The attitudes, actions and values of families constantly call individuals to open themselves to a Christ-centered life. Parents, especially, influence their children during each phase of their faith journey and need to be involved in the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments.

Effective preparation programs recognize and consider the many different family structures and respect the uniqueness of each. In addition, the parish recognizes that the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments present an opportunity to minister to the special needs of families. Pastoral care and sensitivity should characterize the components of preparation programs that touch family members.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Parents or guardians have a unique role to play in the initiation of their children into the sacramental life of the church. They are to form and foster, along with the faith community, a spirit of faith which will help prepare the children for a joyful reception of the Sacrament of Eucharist. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments, especially Penance and Eucharist.

The lived experience of sacraments in the family is most important. An atmosphere in which faith is witnessed and discussed is most conducive to growth in faith. By becoming more aware of the meaning of the sacraments, and by sharing in the preparation process, parents can fulfill their baptismal promises and nurture the faith life of their child.

For children, the family plays an important role in their faith formation and introduction into the sacramental life of the church. Sacramental preparation is the responsibility and concern of the parent(s) with the full support and cooperation of the faith community. (NCD 25, 212, 229;RB4)

Parents by their Christian life, form children in prayer, a sense of faith and the importance of sacramental life. Parents have the responsibility to:

- assist children in their preparation for sacramental celebration by:
 - ♦ celebrating regularly as part of the parish community, including Sunday Eucharist
 - ♦ modeling a life of Christian witness
 - ♦ assuring ongoing and in-depth catechetical formation through participation of their children in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education, and in parish sacramental preparation processes
- full and active participation in the parent component of the parish sacramental preparation process
- provide continuing faith formation of their children after the reception of the sacraments by participating with their children in the life of the church through word, worship, witness and service.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SESSIONS

Parent sessions are an integral part of the preparation for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Eucharist. During these sessions parents will have the opportunity to focus on the Sacrament of Eucharist in a way that will help them and their children to understand the importance of the sacrament to their faith life. Areas to explore during these sessions include:

- the personal attitudes of parents toward relationship with the Lord, the Church, and the Sacrament of Eucharist

- the theology of the Sacrament of Eucharist the signs and symbols within the celebration of Eucharist.
- the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist
- the individual's relationship with Jesus and exploration of what it means to be a eucharistic community
- the role of the parent(s) in the parish sacramental preparation process
- the development of faith in young children and how to communicate with them regarding this sacrament
- the readiness of the child and how this is assessed by the parent(s) and the members of parish staff
- the importance of continued faith formation for the children.

THE MINISTERS

Pastor/Priest

In Jesus, God is revealed as one who longs to share his very self with his people, nourishing them with his own body and blood. Children's experience of being nourished at the family table enables them to understand the Eucharist as coming to the Lord's table. The priest, as presider at the Lord's table, welcomes the people of God to the banquet.

Pastors have a special responsibility to assure that proper catechesis for the sacrament is provided, by:

- fostering in the parish an understanding of its role in sacramental preparation, and **"full, conscious, active participation"** in the celebration of Eucharist
- participating in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the preparation
- determining the readiness of the children, in consultation with parents, catechetical leaders, and catechists.

Catechetical Leader/Sacramental Coordinator

The role of the catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator is to assist the pastor in his responsibility to provide for the sacramental preparation of young children to receive the sacrament of Eucharist for the first time. This role often includes coordinating the preparation period, working with the parish staff, liturgy committee, parents, and the Diocesan and Regional Faith Formation Offices. The catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator is responsible to see that the diocesan guidelines for the first reception of Eucharist are implemented. The following directives are essential to an effective preparation process for the Sacrament of Eucharist:

- the catechesis for the children who are being prepared for the first reception of Eucharist is age-appropriate according to diocesan guidelines
- there are parent sessions during the time of preparation so that the parents are well informed about the process and methods of preparing the children for the first reception of Eucharist
- parents receive catechesis on the history and theology of the Sacrament of Eucharist
- Parents share in the decision regarding the readiness of their child for the first reception of Eucharist.
- record keeping for the first reception of the Sacrament of Eucharist is followed according to diocesan and parish guidelines. in the sacramental register at the parish where the sacrament was celebrated
- service is an integral element of Christian discipleship: therefore, families may be invited to participate in a service experience.

Catechists

The fundamental tasks of catechists are to proclaim Christ's message, to participate in efforts to develop community, to lead the children to a sense of prayer and worship, and to motivate children to serve others. The catechist plays an important part in the preparation of children for the first reception of Eucharist. The catechists, pastor, catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator and parents provide instruction and formation for those who are preparing for the first

reception of Eucharist. The catechists should be encouraged to use current methods of catechesis, employing audio-visual, digital tools, paraliturgical, liturgical, scriptural as well as instructional techniques to prepare the children for the first reception of Eucharist.

THE PARISH COMMUNITY

A critical aspect of all the sacraments, including Eucharist, is the vitality of the existing faith community and its ongoing relationship with each member of the community, even the youngest members.

The parish community is ever learning, celebrating, suffering, rejoicing, hoping, failing, forgiving, questioning, loving...but is always centered in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the essence of Eucharist. This is who we are as a community of faith - a community who gathers to celebrate the gift of life in the Eucharist, the real presence of Jesus in the Sacrament of Eucharist. A community that is nourished through the Eucharistic celebration is empowered to go and "be Christ" to others.

The Role of the Parish Community

As with Baptism, catechesis for Eucharist takes place within the parish community, which has an obligation to participate in the preparation of those who will receive the Eucharist for the first time. The parish is the faith community where the children will continue to celebrate Eucharist. The following are some ways a parish faith community can become involved in the direct preparation of the young people who will receive the Eucharist for the first time:

- The parish community strives to be a welcoming community to the young people and their parents as they prepare to receive Eucharist for the first time.
- Parishioners may serve as prayer partners, (adults who agree to pray for an individual child who is preparing to receive Eucharist.)
- Homilies may be given and or mention made about the preparation process for Eucharist.
- The entire parish is invited to the liturgy celebrating the Sacrament of Eucharist.

FIRST EUCHARIST AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

“By reason of their Baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community. Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at the appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them.”

(Celebrating the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1998)

When preparing persons with disabilities for the sacrament of Eucharist, the person responsible for this preparation should be certain that there is, according to diocesan guidelines, a clear separation between the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Parental involvement is essential during the time of preparation.

A person with disabilities should, as far as possible, be included in the parish preparation program. While it may be necessary to instruct the person with disabilities separately from the other children in the program, the person with disabilities should always be invited to become a participant in all the special events of the preparation process.

The instruction to be given before the first reception of Eucharist will be in proportion to the intellectual capacity of the individual child. The child should be able to distinguish ordinary bread from the Body of Christ and understand that he/she receives the Body of Christ at Mass - a special meal where Jesus is present.

The pastor, the catechetical leader/sacramental coordinator, the parents, and the catechists should be aware that persons with disabilities require patience with their limitations and ability to understand.

When necessary, because the person may have an inability to swallow the host or have a gluten allergy, the Blood of Christ, in form of wine alone, may be received. Gluten free hosts may be made available, if the family notifies the pastor well in advance. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be appraised.

PASTORAL LITURGICAL GUIDELINES

Introduction

Thorough planning for both the catechesis and the celebration of the Sacrament of First Eucharist itself is essential. Because the celebration of Eucharist is at the heart of the parish community, great care should be taken to include in the planning for this special celebration not only the parish liturgy committee, but also the program coordinator, catechists, parents and children preparing to receive the sacrament for the first time.

Preparation for the Celebration

In planning the liturgy, due consideration must be given to the liturgical season in which First Eucharist is celebrated. First Eucharist should be celebrated at a regularly scheduled weekend Mass. Redemptionis Sacramentum, 87 presupposes that weekdays, such as Saturday morning or early afternoon, are not appropriate times to celebrate First Eucharist. Above all, First Holy Communion should unite families, the parish, and all communicants more closely to the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day – Sunday. Use of the Children's Lectionary is not encouraged as it has not been revised.

The celebration of First Eucharist should be the beginning of a lifelong pattern of participation in the faith community. Children should be involved as much as is appropriate in the celebration of their First Eucharist liturgy. This may include participation in the entrance and offertory procession. Children should be well prepared for these roles. Family members and representatives of diverse parish ministries should be involved in the celebration as ushers, music ministers, altar servers and eucharistic ministers. The solemnity of the occasion should be preserved at all times.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Dress of the Candidates

The dress of the candidates should be suitable for a special occasion but not overshadow the focus of the celebration. Emphasis should be placed on the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist and not on gloves, veils and ties. The color of the children's clothing is once again more a practicality than a requirement. A more lasting gift to your child would be a Sunday outfit that way they could wear again and again.

If it is a tradition in your parish for girls to wear gloves, they must be removed before receiving communion. It is recommended that purses, books, rosaries not be held during liturgy.

Gifts

At times, receiving a gift may become the highlight of a celebration. Children should be helped to understand that the focus of the celebration is on their full participation in the liturgy. A party following the celebration is a great way to share the joy in the Lord's presence with others. Care should be taken not to overshadow the day with the incidentals.

Models for the First Eucharistic Celebration Parish Celebration:

Children may come with their families and friends to celebrate their First Eucharist at a regularly scheduled weekend Mass either as a family or as a group. If done as a family group parishes may offer dates that are available to small groups of families allowing parents to choose a meaningful date for their celebration. The benefit is that the celebration includes the parish community with whom they regularly worship.

- It is important that mention of this special celebration be shared with the congregation months and weeks ahead of the event. Building up excitement and understanding of the celebration allows parishioners to participate or choose to attend a different liturgy.
- The children may either enter the church with partners or process to their places with their parents. Just as they did at their child's baptism, the parents may present their child to the assembly for initiation. This practice can be quite beautiful and symbolic. Sensitivity is essential, as family units may have changed since the child's baptism.

- Children may be involved in the active ministerial roles - such as gift bearers, and song leaders. Children should be well prepared for these roles.
- Communion under both species is highly recommended.

Music

"Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith." (*Music In Catholic Worship*, # 23) Music that can be sung again and again throughout the year following First Eucharist is a reminder to everyone of the special day when this sacrament was first received. Care should be taken so children do not "perform" for parents and congregation. If they sing together as a class the congregation may be invited to sing along, leading all to a deeper expression of prayer.

Rehearsal

To help children to understand the Mass, it is important that they are invited to participate actively. Rehearsal should be well planned before the children arrive so that the practice time will be kept to a minimum.

Sanctuary Arrangements

The church may be decorated with Eucharistic symbols, such as baskets of wheat, grapes, and bread, or flower arrangements containing some of these natural items. Symbols should speak for themselves and should not need to be explained.

Following Celebration

A simple reception following the celebration of First Eucharist allows the parish to express their joy that the children have joined them at the table. If there isn't space conducive to a reception, families may be encouraged to celebrate at home with family and friends.



First Eucharist Guidelines: An Overview

The candidate is expected to have been previously involved in both the liturgical and sacramental life of the faith community and participated in the process of faith formation, giving particular attention to regular attendance at Mass.

PARENT(S)

- Provide the lived experience of sacraments within the family and witness to lived Catholic Faith.
- There is an expectation that parents participate in parent sessions.

PRE-REQUISITES BEFORE DIRECT PRE PARATION

- The child is expected to have been previously involved in the liturgical life of the parish faith community by regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist with his/her parents/guardians.
- The child is expected to have participated in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education classes for at least one year, e.g., First Grade.

DIRECT PREPARATION

Direct Preparation is distinct from regular parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education and is the responsibility of the parish. Both the Catholic school and public school students are expected to participate jointly in all direct parish preparatory events. Catechesis should include:

- some knowledge of God as creator and loving parent, Jesus as God's son, and the Holy Spirit as the giver of gifts who helps us to share our gifts and live good lives and some knowledge of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- an ability to distinguish between consecrated bread and ordinary bread--to recognize that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in a special way
- an understanding that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine
- a realization of his/her participation in the parish faith community
- a desire to participate in the Eucharist and to receive Holy Communion.

There should be a clear and distinct separation between the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

CONFIRMATION



“Christ’s death and
resurrection brought
new life to the apostles.
The coming of the Spirit
enabled them to confess

Jesus is Lord
and empowered them to
spread the good news of
salvation. And every day
the Lord added to their
number those who were
being saved.”

~Acts 2:47

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The History

During the third and fourth centuries, concern for the integrity of the gospel in a time of persecution led to the development of a lengthy catechumenal process culminating in the celebration of the sacred mysteries during the Easter Vigil. During this vigil, catechumens professed their faith and were immersed in the waters of Baptism. Clothed in new white garments, they were presented to the bishop who confirmed them with the ritual laying on of hands and anointing. After this, they took their places in the midst of the assembly and completed their initiation by sharing in the Eucharist. During the Easter season, the neophytes spent time together reflecting on the paschal mystery which they had celebrated sacramentally.

The rigors of the catechumenate tested the sincerity of the candidates and, along with the prayers and support of the community, strengthened them in their new faith. The distinctiveness of childhood was not a concern in ancient times. Infants and children were brought to the Easter sacraments by their parents.

With the end of persecution and the growth of the church, differences developed in the catechumenate process. In the East, the unity of the sacraments was preserved. Presbyters baptized, confirmed and admitted infants to Eucharist. In the West, presbyters baptized infants, but bishops retained their prerogative to confirm. Distance and growing administrative concerns prevented the bishop from getting around his diocese to confirm. The completion of initiation- Confirmation and Eucharist - was delayed.

Later, it became normative to delay Confirmation and Eucharist until the age of discretion, which was variously interpreted and this, along with the challenge of the availability of the bishop, led to the practice of Confirmation at different ages over time.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council officially defined and set the number of sacraments at seven. Reflection on practice at that time and conciliar definitions contributed to the breakdown in the patristic understanding of the unity of the sacraments of initiation. In 1910, Pope Pius X lowered the age for the reception of First Eucharist. In practice, this effectively reversed the order of the sacraments of initiation.

Vatican II called for the restoration of the catechumenate for adults. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, introduced in the United States in 1974 and mandated in 1988, restores the order and the unity of the sacraments of initiation for adults. The RCIA also provides an adaptation for use in the Christian initiation of unbaptized children who have reached catechetical age and restores the order and unity of the sacraments of initiation for them.

Vatican II also called for the revision of the Rite of Baptism for infants and the Rite of Confirmation. The *praenotanda* (introduction) to the 1969 *Rite of Baptism for Children*, (Section III-8.3), the 1980 *Instruction on Infant Baptism*, and *Canon 867* all call for the baptism of infants... "within the first weeks after birth." Both the *praenotanda* to the 1971 *Rite of Confirmation* and *Canon 891* postpone Confirmation to the age of discretion or even later.

Thus, we have two distinct orders for the initiation of children. For those baptized in infancy, completion of initiation is postponed to at least the age of discretion. For those who have attained the use of reason and were not baptized in infancy, what is prescribed for an adult is applicable; i.e. full initiation. (*CCL*, 852).

Some advocate for restoring the order of the sacraments of initiation to Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist. Historically, full initiation at infancy is practiced in the Eastern Rite. Others maintain that Confirmation should always precede Eucharist. The renewed norms on Christian initiation and weight of papal teaching regarding Confirmation preceding Eucharist seem to point in their favor. The structure of the early church would become the experience of the whole church.

Others advocate for Confirmation sometime during adolescence, or even propose Confirmation being delayed to young adulthood or whatever age an individual experiences a conversion of life. They see the development of the present practice as a result of the activity of the Spirit and the call from Vatican II for “full, conscious, and active participation.”

If RCIA envisions a process of years for the preparation of adults for initiation, then a lengthy process for children is certainly in order. Vatican II and later catechetical congresses encouraged pastors to draw on the human sciences and read the signs of the times. These sciences have demonstrated the distinctiveness of both childhood and adolescence. Confirmation in adolescent years permits the recipients to place themselves more consciously in God’s loving care as they utter, to the best of their ability and with all the insecurity that characterizes the human condition, their yes to God. It also permits them to express their belonging to a larger community, and it permits the community to express its encouragement to them in its own act of faith.

Canon law allows much latitude and suggests that the question of the proper age for Confirmation is not yet closed. The Bishops of the United States have agreed that each diocese should make its own policy concerning the age for Confirmation. Given the above and the current pastoral practices of the Diocese of Syracuse, Confirmation will be celebrated during adolescence within the context of a comprehensive parish high school program.



Adolescent Faith Formation

The time of adolescence is filled with change. Exciting changes occur such as a deeper sense of self identity, expansion of authentic freedom, an enhanced ability to relate to others and greater maturity. Depression, alienation, self-doubt and anxiety, however, also accompany the changes of adolescence. Because of these many divergent possibilities, this time of adolescence is a unique opportunity for the Catholic community to affirm, support and challenge young people to grow as persons and as believers. Over the past decade the Church has developed an all embracing approach to ministry with youth. This comprehensive approach to, with and by youth recognizes their personal, familial, social, and spiritual needs and the environments which affect their lives. It also invites them into the life, mission, and work of the faith community. The ongoing evangelization and catechesis of youth are essential and integral elements of fostering the maturing faith of the young church of today.

The growth of catechetical theory and practice and the evolution of the church's ministry with youth has forced church leaders to rethink adolescent catechesis to clarify its aim and scope, and to recognize its contribution within the broader context of ministry. This changing and somewhat perplexing scene presents the church with a marvelous opportunity to develop new initiatives in vision and practice that will shape adolescent catechesis. It is also an opportunity to engage parents in a way that fosters conversion and/or deepening discipleship.

When Confirmation is celebrated in the adolescent years, it affords the parish a significant opportunity to foster the faith of adolescents. Sacramental preparation for Confirmation has a distinct catechesis with its own focus and elements situated within the broader context of adolescent catechesis. We need to recognize, however, that the fully initiated Christian is not the fully mature Christian. Catechesis is life long and the Catholic community needs to provide learning opportunities for continuing growth in faith.

In striving to enrich and affirm the life and faith of young people through catechesis, it is humbling to realize that our best efforts may not always bring forth the fruit that was intended or hoped for. Youth deserve our very best efforts even if we do not often see the fruits of our efforts. Yet in the long run we all must rely on the presence and power of the Spirit of God. Adults and youth are challenged to be open to the urging and movement of the Holy Spirit in the process of catechesis.

The decision to seek Confirmation should be based on a person's readiness to assume the responsibilities expected of a confirmed Catholic and that person's willingness to participate in the parish/high school faith formation program.

"Apart from the danger of death, to receive confirmation lawfully a person who has the use of reason must be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises." (CL 889.2)

The emphases during this time should be on the sharing of faith stories and the personal integration of Catholic teachings. It is recommended that the sessions include ample opportunities for prayer and time to reflect on the meaning of these themes in their lives. These guidelines situate Confirmation within the context of a comprehensive parish high school program.

Adolescent Faith Themes

Prior to Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, the following adolescent faith themes based on the themes of the Framework for Adolescent Catechesis from the USCCB are to be included in the faith formation process:

- faith and identity
- justice and peace
- meaning of the sacraments
- mission of the church and the call to ministry
- morality and moral decision-making
- personal prayer and community worship
- relationships with Jesus and the Body of Christ
- responsibility in loving relationships
- scripture
- theology of service

Confirmation Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines for the structuring of a Confirmation preparation process are based on a comprehensive parish high school program:

- The candidate is expected to have been previously involved in both the liturgical and sacramental life of the faith community and in an on-going process of faith formation.
 - **High school students must be actively participating in the parish faith formation program, which has included all faith themes, before entering the process for Direct Preparation of the Sacrament of Confirmation.**
 - **Direct preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is the sole responsibility of the parish.**

- Students who attend Catholic High School religious education classes, which have included all faith themes, should join in the Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation at their home parishes.
- Both Catholic school and public school students are expected to participate jointly in all the direct parish preparatory events. The program should be explained in such a way that all students and parents clearly understand what responsibilities and events pertain to them.

CANDIDATE'S READINESS

High school students who are involved in parish faith formation or Catholic school religious education programs are invited to enter a parish process for the Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. **The celebration of the sacrament takes place ideally when a candidate is in the eleventh grade, with Spring of tenth grade being the earliest time.**

Signs Of Readiness

Some signs of readiness in the individual candidate for Direct Preparation for Confirmation are:

- a personal faith consciousness – as indicated by some type of personal prayer life and awareness of God in his/her life
- an appreciation of Sacred Scripture as a unique aspect of God's revelation and as invitation to ongoing relationship
- a communal faith consciousness – as indicated by participation in the faith community according to his/her ability, including Sunday Eucharist
- a sense of service – as indicated by participation in service within the parish and/or larger community and evaluated in light of the gospel mandate
- a sense of Christian identity – as indicated by participation in the faith formation program or other faith formation opportunities including workshops and/or retreats.

Interviews

Interviews may be done by the pastor, catechetical leader, youth minister, or catechist, to determine readiness to enter the Direct Preparation component and/or readiness to celebrate the sacrament. Areas to be explored during the interview(s) might include:

- an opportunity for the candidate to express reasons for desiring the sacrament
- an opportunity for the candidate to reflect on and articulate his/her experience of the journey of faith - and to discern how he/she will continue to share his/her gifts with and within the parish community in response to the baptismal call to holiness
- an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions regarding the preparation program and/or the sacrament, and to make suggestions.

The interviewer needs to keep in mind that he/she is not looking for mature faith, but a maturing faith. The interviewer should affirm the candidate, and assure him/her of the continuing support of the parish community.

Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation

Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is that time period prior to the celebration of the sacrament which focuses on the nature and meaning of the sacrament in the life of the Christian as well as preparing the individual and community to meaningfully celebrate the rite in the liturgical assembly.

It is one component of the parish's regular high school catechetical and/or youth ministry program.

This Direct Preparation may begin with a Rite of Enrollment. This is a ceremony patterned after the Call to Continuing Conversion in the RCIA. It is a ceremony in which the parish community celebrates God's action in the lives of the candidates and the candidate's response, expressing their desire to be fully initiated into the Christian community by enrolling their names in a parish Book of Enrollment or Covenant. The parish, in turn, is asked to pledge its example, its prayer, and its support of the candidates.

It is recommended that at least six to eight well-planned sessions be provided, which include ample opportunities for prayer and time to reflect on the meaning of the candidates' ongoing experience of service. Direct Preparation should also include a full day retreat centered around one or several of these topics: discipleship, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, continued relationship with Jesus and living out the Catholic faith. These sessions may be scheduled in a variety of ways in order to meet the needs of the individual parish. Possibilities include (but are not limited to):

- Weekly sessions:
six to eight sessions, offered once a week in the weeks immediately preceding the scheduled date for the celebration of the sacrament
- Monthly sessions:
six to eight sessions, offered once a month in addition to the regular catechetical sessions during the year in which the candidates will be confirmed
- Summer may provide an opportunity for flexible scheduling of sessions that are at least 6 to 8 hours in total length.

Some topics for the Direct Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation include (but are not limited to) the following:

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Through *WISDOM*, the Spirit enables us to recognize and respond to the presence of God in our lives.
- Through *UNDERSTANDING*, the Spirit enables us to grow beyond an intellectual knowledge of faith toward a deeper experience of faith as response to God's presence.

- Through **RIGHT JUDGMENT**, the Spirit guides us to make decisions and choices which reflect our commitment to gospel values as disciples of Jesus.
- Through **COURAGE**, the Spirit empowers us to “stand firm in the Lord” (*Phil. 4:1*), to witness to the faith regardless of personal difficulty or suffering.
- Through **KNOWLEDGE**, the Spirit enables us to be certain of God’s love for us and to share that love with others.
- Through **REVERENCE**, the Spirit leads us to honor God as the source of all life, to see all people as brothers and sisters, and to see all of creation as redeemed by Christ.
- Through **WONDER AND AWE**, the Spirit enables us to recognize, respect, and trust God’s divine role in the unfolding of human history and in all creation.

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In biblical theology, the concept of “fruit” refers to the result of God’s saving actions.

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, wrote “. . . the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (*Gal 5:22-23*) The Latin Vulgate translation added modesty, continence, and chastity.

The fruit(s) of the Holy Spirit, then, refers to the effect(s) of the Holy Spirit active in the lives of the followers of Jesus.

- Through the experience of the profound **LOVE** and mercy of God, the Spirit enables us to surrendered our selves to God and to persons in our lives, and from that surrender flows **JOY**.
- Through **PEACE** the Spirit enables us to live in tranquillity and serenity.
- Through **PATIENCE** and **KINDNESS**, the Spirit enables us to bear wrongs without anger or vengeance.
- Through **GENEROSITY**, the Spirit enables us to act out of gospel values in choosing to do what is right, and to consider the ultimate good of even those who might be enemies.
- Through **FAITHFULNESS**, the Spirit enables us to persevere in doing what is right, and to endure suffering in order to overcome evil.
- Through **GENTLENESS**, the Spirit enables us to relinquish the desire for power over others and to trust in the power of Jesus.

- Through **SELF-CONTROL, MODESTY, CONTINENCE** and **CHASTITY**, the Spirit enables us to moderate and to balance natural human desires.

THE THEOLOGY OF SERVICE

We are called through Baptism to service as a way of life, as the way of discipleship.

Candidates should be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their experience(s) of service, and are invited to consider new opportunities for service as fully initiated members of the Christian Community.

THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION: SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

• Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Candidates renew Baptismal promises and profess the faith of the Church. This renewal and profession of faith links the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation to Baptism as a Sacrament of Initiation.

• The Laying On Of Hands

The laying on of hands is an ancient biblical symbol invoking the presence of God, the imparting of divine power for a special task, and the passing on of blessings and promises of God. By this ritual action, the bishop invokes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the candidates, and perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.

• Anointing with Chrism

In biblical symbolism, anointing with oil is a sign of abundance, joy, cleansing, healing, and makes one radiant with beauty, health and strength. Anointing is an ancient symbol used to consecrate persons and to set them apart for a special task.

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

“The Seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service forever, as well as the promise of divine protection...” (CCC, 1296)

LETTER TO THE BISHOP

Each candidate is requested to write to the bishop, articulating his/her desire to receive the Sacrament.

In order for the bishop to have ample time to read and review, please send these letters two weeks prior to the celebration.

CANDIDATE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Name

It is recommended that the candidate for Confirmation retain his/her baptismal name as a witness to the intimate relationship between Baptism and Confirmation as Sacraments of Initiation. However, candidates may choose to take the name of any other saint whose life has special meaning for them.

Retreats

Confirmation calls for a personal decision on the part of the candidate. Therefore, the opportunity to reflect on one's faith journey as well as the time and space necessary for integrating personal beliefs and experiences with one's understanding of a Catholic lifestyle need to be offered. The retreat experience provides this opportunity, time, and space, and is an essential part of the Confirmation process. The parish provides a Confirmation retreat for all candidates, distinct from any other retreats offered for Catholic or public high school youth.

The retreat setting should be a comfortable one both in environment and in atmosphere. It is recommended that the retreat be held at a location other than the parish. The retreat should last at least one day, although a longer period, such as an overnight, allows more time for reflection and community building. The retreat should be interactive and different from what has been experienced in Confirmation classes.

The Confirmation retreat should provide the time necessary for the candidates to reflect upon their participation in the Confirmation process and the meaning of the sacrament for them. It should include quiet time for reflection and prayer. The retreat experience is an opportune time to witness to the value of young people's faith. Therefore, it is suggested that previously confirmed teens from the parish be invited to be part of the retreat team and to share their faith story with their peers.

A retreat also provides the opportunity for young people to participate in the Eucharist in a way which is particularly meaningful to them. It is recommended that the opportunity for the reception of the Sacrament of Penance, in addition to Eucharist, be offered during the retreat.

A good retreat takes planning, effort and communication among the team. Your Office of Faith Formation can provide you with assistance in planning your retreats.

Service

As baptized Catholics we are participants in the mission of the Church which calls each of us to service. Therefore, service opportunities are an essential part of all catechetical programs. In providing opportunities for young people to be involved in service, we recommend that the emphasis be placed on the opportunities afforded them rather than an accumulation of "hours completed". Service opportunities should be offered through activities taking place within both the parish community and the community-at-large.

This time allows the candidate to reflect on their experience of service to others which they have already experienced, are presently experiencing, and will continue to experience as confirmed Catholics. It is a time to make significant connections between the gospel mandate to bring about the Reign of God and their own life experiences.

FAMILY CATECHETICAL SENSITIVITY

The attitudes, actions and values of families constantly call individuals to open themselves to a Christ-centered life. Parents especially influence their children during each phase of their faith journey and need to be involved in the preparation for and celebration of sacraments.

Effective preparation programs recognize and consider the many different family structures and respect the uniqueness of each. In addition, the parish recognizes that the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments present an opportunity to minister to the special needs of families. Pastoral care and sensitivity should characterize the components of preparation programs that touch family members.

PARENT(S)

Parents or guardians have a unique role to play in the initiation of their children into the sacramental life of the Church. They are to form and foster along with the faith community, a spirit of faith, which will help prepare the children for a fruitful reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments. (*RC, 3*)

The lived experience of sacraments in the family is most important. An atmosphere in which faith is witnessed and discussed is most conducive to growth in faith. By becoming more aware of the meaning of the initiation process by sharing in the liturgical celebrations of preparation and times of reflection with the candidate, parents can fulfill their baptismal promises and nurture the faith life of their child.

For children, the family plays an important role in their religious education and introduction into the sacramental life of the church. Sacramental preparation is the responsibility and concern of the parents with the full support and cooperation of the faith community. (*NCD 25, 212, 229; RB 4 RC 3*)

Parents, by their Christian life, form children in prayer, a sense of faith, and in the importance of sacramental life. Parents have the responsibility to:

- assist children in their preparation for sacramental celebration by:
 - ♦ celebrating regularly as part of the parish community, including Sunday Eucharist
 - ♦ modeling a life of Christian witness
 - ♦ assuring ongoing and in-depth catechetical formation through participation of their children in parish faith formation, or Catholic School and parish sacramental preparation processes
- participate in a meaningful way in the parent component of the parish sacramental preparation process
- provide continuing faith formation of their children after the reception of the sacraments by participating in the life of the Church through word, worship, witness and service.

PARENT SESSIONS

Parent sessions are an integral part of the Confirmation process. During these sessions parents will have an opportunity to focus on key themes which will help them to support and journey with the candidate. Areas to be explored during parent sessions include:

- the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation
- the theology of the Sacraments of Initiation
- the signs and symbols within the Rite of Confirmation
- the individual's relationship with Jesus and the Body of Christ
- the role of the parent and sponsor
- the development of faith in adolescents and how to communicate with teenagers in religious matters
- the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and the development of each person's gifts and talents
- the readiness of the candidate and how that is determined by the candidate, parent and parish staff
- exploration of what it means to be Church, the support needed to live out a Christian life style, and the call to ministry.

Pastoral flexibility is encouraged for those parents who have attended Confirmation parent meetings within the preceding year.

SPONSORS

Ordinarily, each candidate for Confirmation will be accompanied by a sponsor. It is desirable, (though not mandatory), that one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be sponsor for Confirmation. A sponsor may be male or female and must be at least sixteen (16) years of age (unless the pastor grants an exception from this age requirement for a just cause.) A sponsor must be a Catholic who is fully initiated – that is, he/she has received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation – and who is in good standing with the Catholic Church. Parents may not be sponsors for their own sons and daughters. (*Canon 874.5*)

The role of the sponsor is to be a “companion on the journey” with the candidate, to be friend and mentor, both during the process of preparation for the sacrament, and beyond. As such, he/she should be invited to be an active participant in the preparation process.

The sponsor is called through his/her own Baptism to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. As a disciple, the sponsor offers to the candidate prayer, encouragement, support, and the witness of a life lived in response to the presence of the Lord Jesus.

The sponsor represents the parish community and the universal faith community in welcoming the candidate.

Sponsor Preparation

In order to fulfill the role outlined above, it is important that the parish provide opportunities for sponsor formation and preparation. During these sessions, sponsors should have an opportunity to reflect upon:

- their own baptismal call to discipleship
- prayer and relationship to Christ
- faith development, especially as it relates to adolescence and adulthood
- the Confirmation process
- conversion as ongoing and lifelong
- skills necessary to “companion” a candidate on the journey, e.g. listening, faith-sharing, and discernment.

Sponsor Proxies - These individuals act only as a representative for the Sponsor should attendance at the Confirmation celebration not be possible. (i.e., unable to be physically present due to illness, military service, transportation issue, etc.) Note: Having a Proxy does not waive Sponsor’s requirements.



The Ministers

BISHOPS & PRIESTS

The bishop is the chief pastor of the diocese, and the leader of the entire liturgical life of the Church committed to him. (*RCIA*, 12) The bishop is the symbol of the unity of the Church. “...he is the foremost dispenser of the mysteries of God, he is constantly to endeavor to have the Christian faithful entrusted to his care grow in grace through the celebration of the sacraments and both understand and live the paschal mystery.” (*CCL*, 387) The bishop is the ‘ordinary minister of Confirmation’. (*RC*, 7)

PASTOR/PARISH LIFE DIRECTOR

Pastor / pastoral administrator has a special responsibility to assure that all the baptized have the opportunity to seal their Baptism through the celebration of Confirmation. Their responsibilities include:

- fostering in the parish an understanding of its role in sacramental preparation and celebration
- becoming familiar with the Confirmation preparation process by participating in its planning and on-going evaluation
- determining the readiness of candidates, in consultation with parents, catechetical leaders and catechists
- insuring that the parish provide opportunities for life-long catechesis so that formation in faith continues after the celebration of Confirmation.

CATECHETICAL LEADERS/ CONFIRMATION COORDINATORS

The role of the catechetical leader/ Confirmation coordinator is to assist the pastor in his responsibility to provide for the sacramental preparation of candidates for Confirmation. This role often includes coordinating the process, working with the parish staff, liturgy committee, candidates, parents, sponsors, the Bishop’s Office, the Faith Formation Office, and the Youth Ministry Office.

CATECHISTS

Catechists in the Confirmation process provide opportunities for candidates to grow in faith under the guidance of the catechetical leader and the pastor. A certified catechist is a critical witness to God’s ongoing revelation in the midst of a believing community. The catechist is comfortable with different learning styles, life experiences, individual needs and faith expressions and can lead the candidates into a deeper sense of worship and community.

The Parish Community

*T*he critical aspect of all the Sacraments of Initiation, including Confirmation, is the vitality of the existing community and its on-going relationship to the newly incorporated member. This shifts the focus away from what happens to the individual at the moment of reception of the sacrament and underscores instead the role of the community in its ongoing relationship to its new members.

We celebrate Confirmation because of the community's life in the Spirit. We mark candidates with the chrism because there is a spirit-filled community in which they can participate. The candidates are not only our offspring for whom we bear responsibility. They are also gifts to the community, each one offering talents and abilities that can make the community far better and richer. In sharing our life in Christ's Spirit with the candidates, in celebrating the gift of the Spirit with them, the entire parish community is renewed in its baptismal way of life.

The parish community, ever learning, celebrating, suffering, rejoicing, hoping, failing, forgiving, questioning, healing, loving... but always being centered in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY

As with Baptism, catechesis for Confirmation takes place within the parish community, which has the obligation to participate in the catechetical preparation of those to be confirmed. The parish is the faith community into whose life of prayer and worship the candidates will be fully initiated. The following are some ways a parish community can become involved in the Confirmation process:

- the parish strives to be a welcoming community to the Confirmation candidates as they celebrate various rites within their process of preparation such as the Rite of Enrollment and Covenant

- parishioners could also serve as prayer partners (adults who agree to pray for individual candidates throughout their Confirmation preparation process). These parishioners can be invited as prayer partners by the candidates, pastor, catechetical leader or in response to an invitation in the parish bulletin. Candidates certainly could have more than one prayer partner and should be encouraged to thank the prayer partner when confirmed
- special liturgies could be celebrated throughout the Confirmation preparation process where the candidates are invited to share the liturgical roles as adult members of the parish community would do
- candidates could be invited to parish activities, organizations, committees, as an introduction into active participation in the parish community
- homilies could be given and/or mention could be made occasionally of various topics related to the Confirmation preparation process
- the entire parish community should be invited to the liturgy celebrating the sacrament and to the reception following the celebration of the sacrament
- individual parishioners could be invited to send encouraging notes to the candidates during the preparation process.

PREPARATION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

Sufficient time should be provided to allow the candidates to participate in planning the liturgical celebration with the appropriate parish personnel. This planning should take place at a time distinct from the time provided for retreat.

Pastoral Liturgical Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Thorough planning for both the catechesis and the Rite of Confirmation itself is essential because of the many options within the rite. Since Confirmation is a celebration of the entire parish community, responsibility for planning the liturgy lies with the Parish Liturgy Committee, working closely with the coordinators, catechists, parents and candidates.

“The whole people of God, represented by the families and friends of the candidates and by members of the local community, will be invited to take part in the celebration and will express its faith in the fruits of the Holy Spirit”. (RC, 4)

This section attempts to offer some suggestions which are norms for our diocese. Personal creativity can enhance the celebration.

PREPARATION FOR THE RITE

Confirmation is celebrated within the context of the Eucharist in order to express more clearly the fundamental connection of this sacrament with the entire process of Christian Initiation. Any other form of celebration is by way of exception.

Concelebration is appropriate and, in this regard it is important to remember that the proper distribution of roles should be maintained throughout the celebration. When a deacon is present, he should function in his full ministerial role.

Representatives of the diverse parish ministries should be involved in the celebration, e.g. music ministers, ushers, servers, etc. The liturgy should be so arranged as to be a celebration of the faith community into which the candidates are initiated.

PLANNING THE LITURGY

In planning the liturgy, due consideration must be given to the liturgical season in which Confirmation is celebrated. The Sacramentary provides several options for the prayers to be used in the celebration of Confirmation when it takes place within Mass.

These prayers may be used except on the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter season; on solemnities, on days within the octave of Easter, on All Souls, on Ash Wednesday, and during Holy Week.

Particular attention should be given to any letters of instruction from the Office of Liturgy and/or Office of the Bishop that pertain to the liturgical celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation.

(See Appendix, pages 17-20)

Celebrating the Rite of Confirmation Within the Eucharist

ENTRANCE PROCESSION

The procession of ministers is arranged as follows:

1. Thurifer*
2. Cross bearer and two candle bearers or, during the Easter season, an Easter candle bearer
3. Chrism Bearer*
4. Candidates
5. Concelebrants
6. Deacon or Lector with the Book of Gospels**
7. Master of Ceremonies
8. Bishop

During the Easter Season, the Easter candle may be used in the procession to recall the relationship of Confirmation to Baptism. It is then positioned prominently in the sanctuary.

**Indicates options*

*** If the Book of Gospels is carried in procession, it should be placed on the altar.*

The Lectionary should already be placed on the lectern or ambo and be open to the readings.

The bishop will follow the procedure which is the usual practice of the celebration at a Sunday Liturgy.

It is appropriate that before or after the Entrance Song, the pastor or one of the candidates welcome the bishop and all who have gathered for the celebration.

Penitential Rite

The invocations of the Penitential Rite focus on God's all embracing mercy and loving forgiveness. If the third form of the Penitential Rite is used, the invocations may be assigned to the deacon, if one is present.

Liturgy of the Word

If the celebration of Confirmation is at a weekend liturgy the readings of the day are used. Readings can be proclaimed by candidates who have been well prepared to exercise this ministry. Other persons involved in the process might also be considered to serve as lector.

All the readings including the Gospel are to be proclaimed from the lectern or ambo.

Ideally the Responsorial Psalm is sung.

The Gospel is proclaimed by the deacon or, in his absence, by a concelebrant (usually the pastor). The deacon or concelebrant stands before the bishop, asks for and receives his blessing before proclaiming the Gospel. Incense may be used. The master of ceremonies should be consulted concerning the bishop's preference for reverencing the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels.

Presentation of the Candidates

It should be kept in mind that, at the presentation of the candidates after the Gospel, the bishop is addressed on behalf of the community. The one who presents the candidates faces the bishop in such a way that he/she can be heard by the assembly. Ideally, a place other than the one that is reserved for the proclamation of the word is used for this purpose.

The pastor or his representative may include the following points in this presentation:

- the request of the candidates for the fullness of Christian initiation
- the experience of the candidates in hearing the Word of God, in shaping their conduct according to this Word, in sharing Christian fellowship and service
- reference the candidates' letters of petition
- the actual presentation of the candidates.

Only if the candidates are few in number, may they be presented by name, in which case the candidates rise as their names are called and remain standing until all the names have been called. After the bishop acknowledges the candidates, all are seated for the homily.

Homily

The bishop gives the homily. The master of ceremonies should be consulted concerning the bishop's preference as to whether he will speak from the chair, lectern / ambo, or the aisle.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

After the homily, the candidates stand and the bishop questions them (the renewal of baptismal promises). The bishop confirms their profession of faith by proclaiming the faith of the Church. The whole congregation responds: Amen. (RC, 23)

The Laying On Of Hands

The bishop invites all to pray.

Suitable importance should be given to the period of silent prayer preceding the imposition of hands.

The candidates kneel for the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit.

The bishop and the priests who are present with him, "lay hands upon all the candidates" (by extending their hands over them). The bishop alone sings or says the prayer.

The Anointing With Chrism

To enable the faithful to participate more fully, the bishop may anoint standing or seated before the altar or in another suitable place visible to the congregation and easily reached by the candidates. The bishop's master of ceremonies should be consulted in this matter.

Each candidate presents him/her self to the bishop or priest in keeping with the local custom.

Although the practice of presenting a card with the name of the candidate and sponsor on it may be retained, the candidate says his/her name aloud to the bishop even if it is written on a card.

The sponsor places his/her right hand on the shoulder of the candidate. The bishop anoints the candidates on the forehead with chrism saying: "N. Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." The newly-confirmed responds: "Amen". The bishop or priest then says: "Peace be with you." The newly-confirmed responds: "And with your spirit." The chrism remains on the forehead as a visible sign of the sacrament. Each candidate returns to his/her place after responding to the sign of peace.

The congregation is seated during the anointing. The candidates also sit until they are ready to approach the bishop, and then are seated again when they return to their places.

After the anointing of the candidates, the bishop, seated in the presidential chair, washes his hands. For this purpose a lap towel, sliced lemon, warm water, bread slices, a basin and a hand towel are provided.

During the anointing, soft instrumental music should be employed so that the words of the sacrament may be heard. This also allows for dialogue between the Bishop and candidate.

Profession of Faith

The Profession of Faith is omitted, because it has already been made in the renewal of Baptismal promises by the candidates.

General Intercessions

The General Intercessions are introduced and concluded by the bishop.

The intercessions are prayed by the deacon. If a deacon is not present the newly confirmed may lead the prayer.

The intercessions may be those which appear in the ritual or may specifically be prepared for the occasion. In their preparation the universal nature of the prayer is to be maintained.

As a rule the series of intentions is to be:

- a. for the needs of the Church;
- b. for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c. for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d. for the local community." (GIRM 70).

Presentation & Preparation of Gifts

Some of the confirmed may present the gifts. The gifts are bread and wine, together with other gifts for the needs of the Church and of the poor. Instrumental music could lend focus to the ritual action which is taking place.

"The priest may incense the gifts placed upon the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church's offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God." (GIRM 75)

Eucharistic Prayer

Concelebrants are requested to follow the procedure for concelebration as stated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is prayed solemnly by the whole community. It may also be sung.

Sign of Peace

The deacon or, in his absence, the presider, invites the congregation to exchange the Sign of Peace.

Lamb of God

The Lamb of God accompanies the breaking of the eucharistic bread and the pouring of the consecrated wine into communion cups. It may be sung or recited.

Communion

Communion should be offered under both species for all present. Provision is to be made for sufficient number of communion stations.

The concelebrants, aided by the extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, assist with the distribution of the Eucharist.

Announcements

Brief announcements may be made following the "Prayer after Communion."

Recessional

As in the Entrance Procession, the thurifer, cross bearer and servers lead the procession out of the church. They are followed by the various ministers, the newly confirmed, and then the bishop and his ministers.

Other Considerations

The readings are found in the Lectionary and are taken either in whole or in part from the Mass of the day or from the Mass for Confirmation. On the greater feasts, e.g. solemnities or holy days, the proper readings are not omitted. On the Sundays of the year, the readings of the day are given primary consideration.

A printed program with congregational responses and hymns is useful to insure participation. Permission for the use of copyrighted materials must be obtained. The program should not include the readings and presidential prayers.

Placement of Music In the Liturgy

Depending on the music resources in the parish, the following parts of the liturgy, in order of importance, may be sung. The length of the piece or the number of verses sung should be in proportion to the ritual action taking place at that time.

1. Liturgy of the Word:
 - a. Responsorial Psalm
 - b. Gospel Acclamation (if not sung, omit)
2. Liturgy of the Eucharist:
 - a. Holy, Holy, Holy
 - b. Memorial Acclamation
 - c. Great Amen
 - d. Lamb of God
3. In addition:
 - a. Entrance (Song of Gathering)
 - b. Gloria
 - c. Preparation of Gifts and Altar
 - d. Lord's Prayer and Doxology
 - e. Song of Praise & Thanksgiving (after Communion)
 - f. Recessional Hymn
4. During the conferral of the Sacrament (instrumental)

General Suggestions For Choices of Music

- In order to insure full participation of the congregation, it is recommended that music which is familiar to the assembly and candidates be chosen.
- Music in keeping with the liturgical season is appropriate.

- Music which calls to mind the sacraments of initiation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the call to Christian discipleship is appropriate.
- Soft instrumental music only is to be played while the Bishop is confirming each candidate.

Recommended Dress Code for teens and sponsors

The dress of the candidates and sponsors should be suitable for the occasion.

Gentlemen:

Dress Pants or Khakis with a belt
Dress shoes with socks
Dress shirt with collar, shirt tucked in
Tie (optional)
Jacket (optional)

Ladies:

Skirt, at the knee or longer
Blouse or sweater: no plunging necklines, strapless, spaghetti straps or exposed mid-riffs
Dress, see above
Dress pants
Dress shoes

Inappropriate for All:

Jeans
Flip-flops
Sneakers
Overly tight clothing
T-shirts

The use of confirmation robes is optional. Stoles are inappropriate vesture for the candidates.

Seating

Candidates should be seated with their sponsors in a special section of the church. Ideally they are seated in a way which allows the homilist to address them as a group.

Rehearsal

Time should be allotted for the practice of ceremonies and music to insure a well-ordered celebration. It is especially important that the lectors, who will proclaim the Word, be chosen for their ability to proclaim the Scriptures. (Suggestion: lectors and those exercising special ministries rehearse separately before the major rehearsal, then with all present.)

Vestments

The bishop's master of ceremonies should be consulted to determine whether the parish or the bishop will provide the bishop's vestments. Red vestments for the bishop, concelebrants and deacons are preferred. White vestments are permissible. On the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season, Solemnities and the days of Holy Week, the color of the day must be used.

Sanctuary Arrangements

The following should be provided:

- Chair for the bishop.
- Table for the chrism.
- Roman Pontifical or Ritual usually brought by the bishop.
- Preparations for Communion under both species for all present.
- Pitcher with warm water, basin, hand towel, sliced lemon, sliced bread, and lap towel.
- Easter Candle, if it is used.
- Only the altar cloth should be on the altar when the celebration begins. The Sacramentary, corporal, purificator, flagon, ciboria, paten and chalice(s) are brought to the altar by the minister(s) at the appropriate time during the liturgy.

Parish Sacramental Registry

The reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is to be noted in the sacramental registry of the Candidates' home parish, that is, where the candidate was catechized for the sacraments, no matter where the Confirmation celebration actually took place. A notice of Confirmation is then to be sent to the candidate's parish of Baptism. If that parish has closed, the diocesan directory has a listing of where to find the sacramental records of reconfigured churches. If you do not have access to a directory, please contact your Regional or Diocesan Director of Faith Formation for the information.

Guidelines for Confirmation: An Overview

The candidate is expected to have been previously involved in both the liturgical and sacramental life of the faith community and in an ongoing process of faith formation, giving particular attention to regular attendance at Mass.

PARENT(S)

- Provide the lived experience of sacraments within the family and a witness to a lived Catholic Faith.
- There is an expectation that parents participate in parent sessions.

SPONSORS

- It is suggested that candidates retain their baptismal sponsor, if possible. However, they may prefer to ask another person who they admire and respect.
- Candidates must be fully initiated Catholics of at least 16 years of age and a Catholic in good standing with the church.
- Parents may not be sponsors for their own sons and daughters. (*Canon 874.5*)
- Parents are invited to be an integral part of the process.

PRE-REQUISITES BEFORE DIRECT PREPARATION

- Readiness (see below)
- Previous involvement in the liturgical and sacramental life of the faith community and ongoing faith formation is necessary.
- A candidate shall have actively participated in at least two full years of parish or Catholic high school faith formation classes which have included the Faith Themes found in the sacramental guidelines, prior to entering direct sacramental preparation.

AGE & READINESS

- Candidates will celebrate the sacrament in Spring of 10th Grade at the earliest: ideally 11th Grade.
- Readiness is determined through interview process.

DIRECT PREPARATION

- Direct Preparation consists of six to eight well planned sessions, focusing on the nature and meaning of the sacrament. There can be a variety of options for scheduling.
- Each candidate will provide a personalized letter to the Bishop requesting Confirmation.
- Candidates will participate in the planning of the liturgical celebration.

CONFIRMATION NAME

- It is recommended that the candidate retain his/her baptismal name, but the candidate is free to choose the name of a saint.

RETREAT & SERVICE

- A confirmation retreat should be at least 6-8 hours. This retreat is distinct from other high school retreat experiences.
- Service is integral to all faith formation. For confirmation, an emphasis shall be placed on opportunities afforded rather than accumulation of hours. These services opportunities shall be varied encompassing both parish service opportunities and community outreach experiences.

Appendix

CONFIRMATION NOTES

MARCH 2016

Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Syracuse
240 E Onondaga Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

I. PREPARATION FOR CONFIRMATION AND LITURGICAL GUIDELINES

Candidates and Sponsors

As noted in the Diocesan Guidelines on Confirmation, "High School students must be actively participating in parish or Catholic high school religious education classes for at least one full year before they begin the direct preparation for Confirmation. " During this time of preparation, each candidate should be interviewed personally to discuss their decision to be confirmed, their appreciation of Sacred Scripture as a unique aspect of God's revelation, a sense of Catholic identity, their regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and a willingness to deepen their faith by regular religious instruction. The Confirmation candidates should be prepared to take an active part in the liturgy, singing and praying all the responses for the Rite of Confirmation and the Mass. A worship aid containing all the hymns, responses, and instructions for the liturgy can be very helpful in this regard.

Each candidate should have a sponsor who is at least 16 years of age and is a practicing Catholic who has already been confirmed. Parents may not be sponsors (Canon 893, 872).

The bishop does not require that the Confirmation candidates be seated in the body apart from their sponsors. Pastors are free to arrange the seating of the candidates and their sponsors at the front of the church in the way that seems most convenient.

Rehearsal

The procedure for the ceremony should be practiced with the candidate and sponsor sometime in advance. **Having the candidates (with sponsors right behind each) approach the bishop double-file is the most efficient way to arrange for the Anointing. In this way, the bishop can begin the Confirmation of the next candidate as soon as he is finished confirming the previous one.** As the candidates stand before the Bishop at the front of the center aisle, the sponsor places their right hand on the candidate's shoulder. When the Bishop turns to the next candidate to be confirmed, he or she should be his/her Confirmation name loudly and clearly. (This may be their Baptismal name or a new Confirmation name. A saint's name is preferred and, in either case, the **candidate should know some information about the saint whose name they have chosen.**) Then the Bishop makes the Sign of the Cross with Chrism on the forehead of each candidate saying:

Bishop: Name, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmand: Amen.

Bishop: Peace be with you.

Confirmand: And with your spirit.

The Bishop may speak briefly to the newly confirmed and sponsor before turning to the next candidate.

Liturgical Ministries

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist together constitute the Sacraments of Initiation. To emphasize the special relationship that Confirmation has with the Eucharist, the sacrament is administered within Mass. The Bishop presides and other priests may concelebrate.

Sufficient ministers should be available for the distribution of Holy Communion in the manner decided by the pastor, whether under the form of bread alone, or under both species. If Communion is to be distributed under both species, the Communion Cups should be filled with wine before the ceremony and placed on the credence table. There should be no pouring of cups, except the Bishop's chalice, at the altar. *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should assist only if there are not a sufficient number of priests and deacons. It should also be noted that the vessels for Holy Communion are to be metal and not made of glass or ceramic materials.*

If a Deacon is present, he reads the gospel and leads the petitions of the General Intercessions. (Candidates should not lead the petitions in place of the Deacon.) When there is no deacon present, the pastor proclaims the gospel and either a newly confirmed or other adults may lead the General Intercessions. (Sample intercessions are enclosed.)

One or more readers proclaim the scripture reading(s) from the Lectionary. It is always assumed that if the Confirmation is celebrated at a Saturday anticipated Mass or Sunday, the Sunday readings will be used.

Six altar servers is the ideal for the ceremony, **seven** if incense is used. The servers should be vested and in the sacristy **one-half hour before the ceremony**. The Master of Ceremonies will meet with them before the liturgy.

Enclosed you will find guidelines to assist your music minister(s) in choosing and leading the music for the liturgy. It is imperative, that during the Confirmation Rite, only **soft, instrumental music** be played.

Setup for the Ceremony

N.B. Please see the enclosed notes for the details concerning the Confirmation Liturgy for the corresponding day and season in the liturgical calendar.

The usual articles needed for Mass should be prepared and on the credence table: the chalice, ciboria, corporal, purificator(s), water cruet, towel and basin, bread and lemons and a second ewer and basin and two large hand towels for the washing of the Bishop's hands after the Confirmation Rite. **Sufficient hosts and wine (for the Bishop's chalice)** should be set out on the gifts table. It is appropriate that some of the newly confirmed present the gifts to the Bishop at the time of the Presentation of the Gifts. Communion cups **should be pre-poured and placed on the credence table before Mass**.

The Bishop will bring the Confirmation Ritual, the Holy Chrism, and his own vestments.

Cameras

The people should be instructed that the Bishop will be happy to pose for photographs after the ceremony. Concerning photographs or videotaping during the ceremony, the Bishop will defer to the local pastor's policy. If they are permitted during the ceremony, this must be done so as not to distract from the sacredness of the liturgy. Ushers should be on hand to exercise gentle direction in this regard.

II. THE LITURGY OF CONFIRMATION

The celebration of Confirmation is administered within Mass so that the complete sequence of Christian Initiation may be clearly shown: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. The Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word take place in the usual way.

Presentation of the Candidates: After the Gospel, the Pastor briefly presents the candidates for Confirmation. **An introductory statement or letter by the Candidates is not necessary.**

Homily: The Bishop will preach the homily.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises: After the homily the candidates stand and respond.

Bishop: Do you reject Satan, and all his works and empty promises?

Candidates: **I do.**

Bishop: Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

Candidates: **I do.**

Bishop: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

Candidates: **I do.**

Bishop: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who today through the Sacrament of Confirmation is given to you in a special way just as he was given to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost?

Candidates: **I do.**

Bishop: Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Candidates: **I do.**

Bishop: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Candidates: **Amen.**

Please note: The Bishop will not instruct the candidates to respond "I do." They should have rehearsed this as a group and be prepared with their responses.

Imposition of Hands: Candidates kneel and the congregation stands, and, at the Bishop's invitation, pray in silence for a short time. Then the Bishop with hands extended over all to be confirmed, prays:

Bishop: Almighty God, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought these your servants to new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, freeing them from sin: 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. Through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**

Anointing and the Sign of Peace: The Bishop makes the Sign of the Cross with Chrism on the forehead of each candidate saying:

Bishop: *Name*, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmand: **Amen.**

Bishop: Peace be with you.

Confirmand: **And with your Spirit.**

General Intercessions: The Creed is omitted **on weekdays** and the General Intercessions follow as soon as the Bishop has finished washing his hands.

The **Liturgy of the Eucharist** continues in the usual way with the Presentation of the Gifts up to and including the Prayer after Communion. After the prayer, any necessary announcement may be made. The Bishop will then say a few words of thanks, after which he prayer the final blessing provided in the Sacramentary or Confirmation Ritual. After the Deacon gives the dismissal, all process out accompanied by the recessional hymn.

Using the Liturgy Form, please notify the bishop of the details of the ceremony **at least two weeks before** Confirmation is celebrated. **It is imperative that the liturgy begin on time. If there is a welcome by the Candidates before Mass, it should be done so that the procession may begin at the appointed time.**

Thank you.

LITURGICAL PREPARATION FOR THE SEASONS OF THE YEAR

On a Sunday of Easter Season

1. White vestments are used. The Bishop may use the parish vestments.
2. The "Gloria" is sung or recited.
3. Orations and Readings are for the Sunday.
4. If desired, one of the day's readings may be replaced by a corresponding reading from the Lectionary Selections for Confirmation.

On a Weekday of the Easter Season

1. The Ritual Mass for Confirmation is used.
2. Red vestments are worn. The Bishop will bring his vestments.
3. The "Gloria" may be sung.
4. One or two readings may be read before the Gospel. If two readings are used, the first one is from the Acts of the Apostles and the second one is from the Epistles or Book of Revelation.

On a Solemnity (e.g., Ascension, All Saints, St. Joseph, Annunciation, Sacred Heart, Holy Trinity, Corpus Christi, etc.)

1. White vestments are used. The Bishop may use the parish vestments.
2. The "Gloria" is sung or recited.
3. Orations and readings are for the Solemnity.
4. If desired, one of the day's readings may be replaced by a corresponding reading from the Lectionary selections for Confirmation.

On a Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. The Ritual Mass for Confirmation is used.
2. Red vestments are worn. The Bishop will bring his vestments.
3. The "Gloria" is sung or recited.
4. The readings may be either those of the Sunday or chosen from the Lectionary selections for Confirmation. If the Sunday readings are used, one of them may be replaced by a corresponding reading from the Lectionary selections for Confirmation.

On a Weekday in Ordinary Time

1. The Ritual Mass for Confirmation is used.
2. Red vestments are worn. The Bishop will bring his vestments.
3. The "Gloria" may be sung.
4. One or two readings may be read before the Gospel.

On a Sunday of the Lenten Season

1. Violet vestments are used. The Bishop may use the parish vestments.
2. The "Gloria" is omitted and the Lenten Gospel Acclamation is used.
3. Orations and Readings for the Sunday.
4. If desired, one of the day's readings may be replaced by a corresponding reading from the Lectionary selections for Confirmation.

On a Weekday of the Lenten Season

1. The Ritual Mass for Confirmation is used.
2. Red Vestments are worn. The Bishop will bring his vestments.
3. The "Gloria" is omitted and the Lenten Gospel Acclamation is used.
4. One or two readings may be read before the Gospel.

GENERAL NOTES

1. The order of the Entrance Procession is as follows: Thurifer, Crossbearer, Knights, Deacon (with Book of the Gospels), Readers, other Deacons, Concelebrating Priests, Master of Ceremonies, Bishop, Mitre Bearer and Crosier Bearer. (The use of incense is at the discretion of the pastor.)
2. The concelebrating priests should sit in close proximity to the altar with easy access to join the Bishop for the Eucharistic Prayer.
3. The Rite of Sprinkling may be used **only** at Sunday celebrations of the Rite of Confirmation as prescribed in the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*.
4. The Liturgy of the Word proceeds as it normally would. The Responsorial Psalm should always be sung.
5. If incense is used, the Thurifer brings the thurible to the Bishop at the beginning of the Gospel Acclamation. The Deacon then asks for the Bishop's blessing, and walked in procession to the Lectern.
6. The General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) should be led by the Deacon, if one is present. The candidates may lead this prayer if there is no deacon present.
7. The Presentation of the Gifts should only be the Hosts and wine for the Bishop's chalice used in the celebration of the Mass. The Communion Cups for the assembly should be poured prior to the liturgy and placed on the credence table.
8. The concelebrating priests should join the Bishop at the altar before the dialogue introducing the Preface.
9. At Communion, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should assist **only** if there are not sufficient priests and deacons present.

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