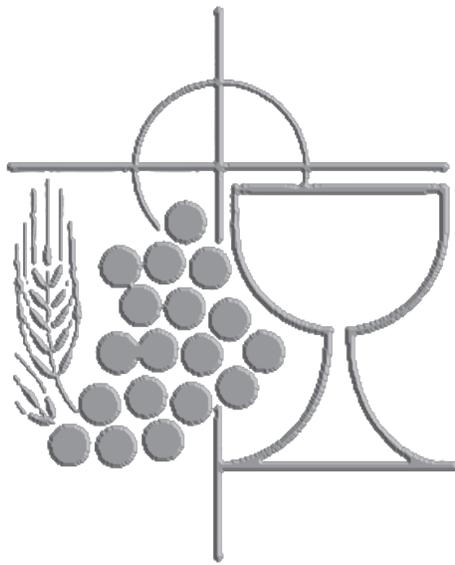


EUCCHARIST



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

~ St. Augustine

SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

Celebrate!

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.