



## **Norms, Catechesis, & Preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation & First Reconciliation**

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Office for Catechetical Formation  
Department of Catholic Education  
Diocese of Toledo

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## Appendix Documents

- A. Decree on Sacraments of Preparation and Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, Bishop Daniel E. Thomas (2016)
- B. Clarification on Decree Regarding the Preparation and Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, Fr. Monte Hoyles, JCL (2017)
- C. Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchies, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2012)
- D. Guideline for Sacramental Preparation for Confirmation Mass, Diocese of Toledo (2015)
- E. Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities: Revised Edition, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2017)
- F. Required Catechetical Teachings and Competencies for the Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation, Diocese of Toledo (2021)
- G. Decree on Policy Regarding Baptismal Register Entries, Bishop Daniel E. Thomas (2020)
- H. Sacramental Records (Appendix T), The Sanctifying Function of the Church, The Pastoral Policy Handbook, Diocese of Toledo (2010)

## Abbreviations

CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CIC	Code of Canon Law
DRSI	Decree Regarding the Preparation and Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, Bishop Daniel E. Thomas (2016)
GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
NDC	National Directory for Catechesis (2005)
NS	National Statutes for RCIA in United States (cf. Appendix of RCIA Rites Book)
RCIA	Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
USCCA	United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (2006)
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

## I. Introduction

*The Sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. “The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these Sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity” (CCC 1212).*

The following passage from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* provides a fine launching point for this revised guide for sacramental preparation and the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation:

*As we come to understand the sacraments, it is important to recognize that the sacraments have a visible and invisible reality, a reality open to all the human senses but grasped in its God-given depths with the eyes of faith. When parents hug their children, for example, the visible reality we see is the hug. The invisible reality the hug conveys is love. We cannot “see” the love the hug expresses, though sometimes we can see its nurturing effect in the child.*

*The visible reality we see in the sacraments is their outward expression, the form they take, and the way in which they are administered and received. The invisible reality we cannot “see” is God’s grace, his gracious initiative in redeeming us through the death and Resurrection of his Son. His initiative is called grace because it is the free and loving gift by which he offers people a share in his life and shows us his favor and will for our salvation. Our response to the grace of God’s initiative is itself a grace or gift from God by which we can imitate Christ in our daily lives. The saving words and deeds of Jesus Christ are the foundation of what he would communicate in the sacraments through the ministers of the Church. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church recognizes the existence of Seven Sacraments instituted by the Lord...*

*“The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” through the work of the Holy Spirit (CCC, nos. 1131; cf. no. 774)...the sacraments transmit divine life. Our share in this life is God’s grace, his gift to us. In the sacraments, we encounter Jesus Christ. The Spirit heals us and draws us closer to Christ and makes us partakers in the life of the Holy Trinity... (USCCA, p. 168-160).*

The focus of this guide is the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is a Sacrament of Healing. It is organized in similar fashion for each sacrament. The sections include first the norms arising from Canon Law and then the diocesan policies are presented. Next, the norms are explained followed by catechetical content, which draws from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB, 2005). The third section presents practical guidelines for preparing others for these sacraments. May these norms, guides, and suggestions prove helpful for a fruitful ministry of sacramental catechesis in the Diocese of Toledo.

## **A. Preparation for a Sacrament of Initiation (cf. DRSI)**

(1) Catechetical preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) begins in the family and continues through the preparation provided by the parish via the Catholic school, religious education program including the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, a private/non-parochial Catholic school, or homeschooling.

(2) “Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority” (*CIC* 843 §2).

(3) Parishes, Catholic schools, religious education programs, and homeschool programs assist in this duty. All such preparation is to be conducted under the guidance of the pastor and in close collaboration with the parish director/coordinator of religious education.

(4) Each parochial, private, and non-parochial Catholic school is to identify at least one individual who will work closely with the parish’s director religious education (DRE) of the candidate’s parish of membership, in preparation for the reception of First Holy Eucharist and Confirmation, but also for the reception of the Sacrament of First Penance. Homeschool families are likewise to maintain a close collaborative relationship with the pastor and the parish director/coordinator of religious education (cf. DRSI).

## **B. General Catechesis Program**

(5) From a curriculum, structuring, and scheduling standpoint, a systematic catechesis on the general content of the Catholic Faith is to be communicated in a “General Catechesis Program” that is faithful to the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and is consistent with the content outlined in the Diocesan Religion Course of Study (2018). This general instruction in the doctrinal and moral truths of the Catholic Faith may take place in any of three settings:

- A parish-based religious education program
- A parochial or non-parochial Catholic school
- A homeschooling program that is verified by the parish

(6) Ordinarily, candidates for a Sacrament of Initiation should have completed at least one year in a General Catechesis Program prior to being enrolled in a preparation program for a sacrament.

## **C. Sacramental Preparation Program**

(7) Since any given group of candidates may consist of students with varying catechetical backgrounds (i.e. public school students, Catholic school students, and homeschool students), the parish “Sacramental Preparation Program” should emphasize what is essential for the particular sacrament, rather than a general catechesis on the Catholic Faith. Of course, some overlap in content between a general catechesis and preparation for a sacrament is to be expected. The

extent to which particular candidates may need a more general catechesis as part of their sacramental preparation will be a matter for the parish to determine.

(8) Parents are responsible for ensuring that both they, and their children, complete the sacramental preparation requirements of their parish of membership. Should special circumstances or needs arise, parents should communicate these to the pastor and inquire about any possible accommodations or alternatives. Should the parents determine that they wish to enroll their child in the program of another parish, (i.e., rather than the program of their parish of membership) they must first bring this to the attention of the pastors, and obtain their mutual consent, or else register as parishioners at the other parish.

(9) The pastor is responsible for ensuring that his candidates are prepared well, and to that end, he has the discretion to tailor the preparation as needed and as specific circumstances warrant. For example, though it is important to strengthen the connection of parents and candidates to their parish of membership, and thus to provide sacramental preparation in that parish, pastoral discretion may determine that a different approach is warranted, such as utilizing the sacramental preparation program of a neighboring parish (with the mutual knowledge and consent of both pastors).

(10) Catholic schools that participate in providing sacramental catechesis for their students are to follow the norms and catechetical content guidance of both this document and the relevant sections of the revised Religion Course of Study. This catechesis serves to enhance, but not replace, the sacramental preparation requirements of the parish of membership.

(11) The parish DRE, and the designated individual from the Catholic school, are to stay in close communication regarding the parish requirements for sacramental preparation (i.e. enrollment procedures, parent meetings, catechetical sessions, pre-celebration meetings with pastor, etc.). The specifics of how this collaboration will operate in practical terms are local decisions, and under the authority of the local pastors.

#### **D. Catechetical Texts**

(12) Regarding the selection of texts for both general catechetical instruction and sacramental preparation, it is the policy of the Diocese of Toledo that texts are to be selected from the Conformity List regularly updated by the USCCB's Subcommittee on the Catechism:  
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/catechism/conformity-review-list>

(13) Should a particular text not appear on the Conformity List, it is not an automatic disqualifier. In this case, one must direct any questions in this regard to the Department of Catholic Education.

#### **E. Proper Place for the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation**

(14) The parish church where the candidate is a member or Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral, the mother church of the diocese, is the proper place for the celebration of the

**Sacraments of Initiation.** Where pastoral prudence dictates, the parish celebration of a Sacrament of Initiation may be combined with the celebration of another local parish, with the permission of the pastors. In such situations, it is to be understood that the celebration is being conducted in the name of each parish represented (cf. DRSI).

#### **F. Recording the Reception of a Sacrament of Initiation (Certificates)**

(15) The *Code of Canon Law (CIC)* requires that both Baptism and Confirmation be recorded in the proper sacramental registers of the parish (or parish territory) in which they were celebrated (*CIC*, canons 877 §§ 1-3, 878, 895). The sole exception to this norm is the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation at Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral. This sacrament should be recorded in the proper parish of the individual receiving the sacrament.

(16) Notification of the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is to be sent to the parish of baptismal record (*CIC*, canon 895).

(17) While it is not required by the universal law of the Church to record the reception of First Holy Eucharist, it is highly recommended that this register be used and that notifications of the reception of First Holy Eucharist be sent to the parish of baptismal record.

(18) It is also highly recommended that all other sacraments be noted in the electronic registration system of the Diocese of Toledo for easy reference. (This, however, may not be used to substitute for the recording in the parish sacramental registers.)

(19) The reception of First Penance is *not* to be recorded in any sacramental register, in writing or electronically.

(20) The norms found in the particular law of the Diocese of Toledo provide the appropriate methods for properly recording the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. Consult the Pastoral Policy Handbook, The Sanctifying Function of the Church, Appendix T, and the Decree on Policy Regarding Baptismal Register Entries (2020). For extraordinary situations, contact the Office of the Chancellor.

## II. Baptism for Infants and Children

*Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word” (CCC 1213).*

### **Norms for Baptism**

#### **A. The Child to be Baptized**

(21) Parents of children who have not attained the use of reason and are not of catechetical age (normally seven years), are to request baptism for their child according to the Order of Baptism of Children.

(22) Children who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age are to be initiated using the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children.

#### **B. Parents (cf. *CIC*, canons 851, 868, and 874)**

(23) Parents must be prepared to raise their child in the Catholic faith.

(24) They must be properly instructed in the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and the obligations attached to it. If this is lacking, Baptism should be postponed and the reason for this action explained to the parents.

#### **C. Sponsors or Godparents (cf. *CIC*, canon 874)**

(25) Godparents, in a liturgical and canonical sense, should themselves be members of the Church or ecclesial community in which the baptism is being celebrated (i.e., the Catholic Church). They do not merely undertake a responsibility for the Christian education of the person being baptized (or confirmed) as a relation or friend; they are also representatives of a community of faith, standing as guarantees of the candidate’s faith and desire for ecclesial communion.

(26) However, based on the common baptism and because of ties of blood or friendship, a baptized person who belongs to another ecclesial Community may be admitted as a witness to the baptism, but only together with a Catholic godparent. A Catholic may do the same for a person being baptized in another ecclesial community.

(27) Sponsors are designated by the one to be baptized, the parents or by the one who takes their place or in their absence, by the pastor.

(28) Sponsors must be Catholic, understand their role and have a good intention to perform it. Thus, sponsors are encouraged to attend baptismal preparation sessions.

(29) If there are two sponsors, one sponsor must be male (godfather) and the other one must be female (godmother). It is possible to have one sponsor.

(30) The sponsors must be at least 16 years old; the local ordinary may grant permission to have a sponsor below the age of 16 years old.

(31) Sponsors must be practicing Catholics who have received all of the Sacraments of Initiation and lead a life in harmony with the faith. Other non-Catholic Christians may serve as Christian witnesses of the baptism, but not as sponsors. One non-Catholic Christian may serve as a witness only along with a Catholic sponsor.

(32) The sponsors cannot be bound by a canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.

(33) Sponsors cannot be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

(34) Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, it is permissible for a just cause for a member of an Eastern Orthodox church to act as a Godparent together with a Catholic godparent at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the godparent is a suitable one.

(35) A Catholic is permitted to stand as a godparent in an Eastern Orthodox Church if he/she is so invited. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education binds in the first place the godparent who belongs to the Church in which the child is baptized.

#### **D. Record of Baptism**

(36) Canon 877 §1: The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth.

(37) Canon 877 §2: If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

(38) Canon 877 § 3: If it concerns an adopted child, the names of those adopting are to be inscribed and, at least if it is done in the civil records of the region, also the names of the natural parents according to the norm of 1 and 2, with due regard for the prescripts of the conference of bishops.

(39) Canon 878: If the baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was

administered of the conferral of the baptism, so that he records the baptism according to the norm of Canon 877 §1.

#### **E. Norms for Baptismal Certificates in the Diocese of Toledo**

(40) A complete record of baptismal information is to be sent from the parish only on the following occasions:

- on the occasion of marriage
- on the occasion of entrance into a seminary
- on the occasion of entrance into deacon formation
- on the occasion of entrance into an institute or society of religious or apostolic life
- on the occasion of applying for Social Security (Social Security will not accept short form because it does not give date of birth)

(41) On all other occasions the approved form is to be used. This form states that the person was baptized, gives the person's name, date of Baptism and name of minister. This is the only information to be shared.

(42) For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information shall be entered in the register:

- the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s)
- the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s)
- the date and place of birth
- the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s)
- the place and date of the baptism
- the name of the minister performing the baptism
- the fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parents baptismal certificates issued by the parish for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.
- for children baptized before their adoption is finalized, the following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized and with due regard for the civil law of the jurisdiction:
  - parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents;
  - the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added;
  - the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added; a notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted.

## Catechesis for Baptism

*For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized – child or adult – on the road of Christian life. Their task is a truly ecclesial function. The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism (CCC 1255).*

**F. Catechesis for the Sacrament of Baptism is to be faithful to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the following selection from the *National Directory for Catechesis* (cf. p. 120-122, USCCB):**

(43) “Catechesis for Baptism is directed primarily to adults: that is, catechumens --- including children who have reached the age of reason --- as well as the parents and godparents of infants who are to be baptized . . . This preparation is an especially important opportunity for the Church to encourage the parents and godparents of infants to reexamine the meaning of the Christian message in their own lives. It is also the proper time to remind the parents and godparents that “an infant should be baptized within the first weeks after birth. If the child is in danger of death, it is to be baptized without delay . . .” Dioceses and parishes should present a baptismal catechesis which teaches that:

- Baptism (1) is the foundation of the Christian life because it is the journey into Christ's death and Resurrection, which is the foundation of our hope; (2) gives sanctifying grace, that is, God's life; (3) gives them a new birth in which they become children of God, members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit; (4) cleanses people from original sin and from all personal sins; (5) incorporates them into the life, practices, and mission of the Church; and (6) imprints on their souls an indelible character that consecrates them for Christian worship and is necessary for salvation in the case of all those who have heard the Gospel and have been able to ask for this sacrament through Baptism we receive a share in the mission of Christ as king, priest, and prophet.
- “enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues.”
- “giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”
- “allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.”
- that “having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to him who died and rose for us. From now on he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to 'obey and to submit' to the Church's leaders, holding them in respect and affection.”
- Includes a thorough explanation of the Rite of Baptism together with the fundamental signs and symbols that it employs: immersion in or the pouring of water, the words of the Trinitarian formula, and the anointing with oil.
- that the ordinary minister for the Sacrament of Baptism is a priest or deacon (in the Eastern Catholic Churches the priest is the only ordinary minister of Baptism, since Chrismation follows immediately) but that, in the case of necessity, any person who intends to do what the Church does can baptize by pouring water on the candidate's head and saying the Trinitarian formula.

## **G. Catechesis for Parents and Sponsors (Godparents)**

(44) The Baptismal instruction for parents and sponsors should be conducted in the parish of membership and should include the following:

- The importance of the role parents play as the first and primary catechists of their own children. Emphasis should be placed on helping them to find ways to share their faith with their children from early childhood through their maturing years.
- An explanation of how the sacraments aid us in participating in the life of God.
- An explanation of the Sacraments of Initiation, with special emphasis on Baptism and its close connection with Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Instruction in the Rite of Infant Baptism including the meaning of its rituals and symbols.
- The role of the sponsor and what is expected of them, not only at the time of Baptism, but as the child matures.

### **Preparing for Baptism**

## **H. Before the Rite of Baptism**

(45) Ensure that baptismal preparation sessions and visits are held on a regular basis in the parish. You may want to invite parents who have had prior experience to assist you in planning and facilitating these sessions. You may also wish to utilize online, or other audio-visual materials or resources.

(46) Encourage parents to attend these sessions before the birth of their child. During the sessions or in visits, encourage parents to discuss their own faith, especially ways that it can be nurtured. Be especially sensitive to parents in interfaith marriages, and separation or divorce situations.

(47) Check with the minister of Baptism to ensure the details of the sacramental celebration are complete.

(48) Encourage parents to ask that the baptism be celebrated during the regular Sunday liturgy. Be sure that they and your parishioners understand the reason for this.

(49) It is normative in the Diocese of Toledo that all celebrations of the Rite of Baptism take place in the designated area in churches where baptisms are held. Baptisms are not to be celebrated in private homes or public places, unless a grave reason exists such as an emergency situation (Pastoral Policy Handbook, Sanctifying Function, 3030). In circumstances that warrant emergency baptism, the appropriate information regarding the baptism is recorded in a baptismal register which is kept at the hospital and conveyed to the parish of the baptized person. Pastoral care departments are to facilitate this procedure (Pastoral Policy Handbook, Sanctifying Function, 3031).

(50) Announce the names of newly baptized infants, their parents and godparents in the parish bulletin and newsletter.

(51) Double check that baptismal records are properly kept.

(52) Consider forming a team of visitors who will visit families of the newly baptized at least once a year until the child enters school. Help the parents understand that after Baptism it is the responsibility of the parents to faithfully assist the child to know and love God, and support the child's new life with God and the Church, and to complete his/her Christian initiation through the reception of Confirmation and First Eucharist.

(53) In the case of a child who was baptized in an emergency which prevented the celebration of baptism in a church, the pastor and the parish must be notified promptly. There is a *Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church* and may be used in extraordinary situations per the guidance of the pastor.

### **III. Confirmation**

*Confirmation perfects baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit, incorporates us more firmly into Christ, strengthens our bond with the Church, associates us more closely with her mission, and helps us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds (CCC 1316).*

#### **Norms for Conformation**

##### **A. Minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation**

(54) “In the Latin Rite, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. Although the bishop may for grave reasons concede to priests the faculty of administering Confirmation, it is appropriate from the very meaning of the sacrament that he should confer it himself” (CCC 1313). However, priests who baptize an adult or child of catechetical age are the ministers of Confirmation as required by the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

##### **B. Norms for Those to be Confirmed**

(55) In the Diocese of Toledo, the normative time for candidates to be presented for Confirmation is eighth grade. For further guidance regarding what is considered in compliance with this norm, see the memo in the Appendix of this document titled, “Clarification on Decree Regarding the Preparation and Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.”

(56) A candidate for Confirmation must obtain all of the following:

- be baptized in the Catholic faith and not previously confirmed (proof of baptism must be obtained)
- be capable of renewing one’s baptismal promises
- be properly instructed

(57) Adult Catholics must be confirmed by the diocesan bishop for validity unless written delegation has been granted by the bishop to a specific presbyter. Confirmation for adult Catholics is held once per year on Pentecost Sunday at Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral.

(58) Children in the Catholic schools, parish religious education programs, and homeschooling programs are to be concurrently enrolled in a parish Sacramental Preparation Program in order to be a candidate for Confirmation. Preferably, the Sacramental Preparation Program for Confirmation should occur in the candidate’s parish. However, pastoral discretion may determine that circumstances warrant another approach, such as utilizing the sacramental preparation program of a neighboring parish.

## C. Sponsors

(59) At the beginning of the formation process, each candidate for Confirmation chooses a sponsor. The sponsor is an active participant in the preparation and formation of the candidate, a mentor, and fellow believer who remains involved with the candidate both before and after the celebration of Confirmation. In light of the sponsor's role and duties, a sponsor must be at least 16 years old and be fully initiated themselves having received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist (CIC, Canon 874). The sponsor must be one who actively participates in the sacramental life of the Church, is not under canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared (CIC, Canon 874), and may be male or female for any candidate.

(60) Since parents have their own particular role in the faith formation of their children, and because of the unique aspects of the sponsor's role, parents do not serve as sponsors for their own children. It is recommended that if at all possible, the candidate's godparent serve as his/her sponsor thus emphasizing more clearly the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation.

## D. Record of Confirmation

(61) Confirmation Register: record all information. If the minister is a priest who has been delegated the faculty to confirm, in the remarks column of each person, place the notation "c. 884§1." This indicates that the faculty to confirm has been granted so there is no future doubt about the validity of the sacrament.

- Baptism Register: notify the Catholic Church of baptism.
- Communion Register: if appropriate, record all information.

### Catechesis for Confirmation

*Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts, and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands (CCC 1309).*

## E. Catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation is to be faithful to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and with the following selection from the *National Directory for Catechesis* (cf. p. 122-123):

(62) *Teaches that Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character on the soul.*

(63) *Teaches that Confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ, strengthen their bond with the Church, associate them more closely with the Church's mission, increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds.*

(64) *Teaches about the role of the Holy Spirit, his gifts, and fruits.*

(65) *Is developmentally appropriate and includes retreat experiences.*

(66) *Includes instruction on the Rite of Confirmation and its basic symbols: the imposition of hands, the anointing with Sacred Chrism, and the words of the sacramental formula.*

(67) *Ensures that parents and sponsors are involved in the catechetical preparation of the children for Confirmation.*

(68) *Teaches that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation (in the Eastern Catholic Churches, however, the priest is the ordinary minister of Chrismation).*

## **F. Preparation for Confirmation**

(69) Preferably, preparation for Confirmation should occur in the candidate's home parish. However, pastoral discretion may determine that circumstances warrant another approach, such as utilizing the Sacramental Preparation Program of a neighboring parish (with the mutual agreement of the pastors).

(70) Distinct from the Sacramental Preparation Program, candidates are to be concurrently enrolled in one of the following general catechesis programs:

- a parish-based religious education program
- a parochial or non-parochial Catholic school
- a homeschooling program [verified by parish]

(71) The parish Sacramental Preparation Program for Confirmation must include formation sessions for parents/guardians which cover, at minimum, the topics listed below in the Formation Session for Candidates paragraph. This should involve at least two meetings, but may involve more at the discretion of the parish. At least one parent is required to participate in these sessions; sponsors should also be highly encouraged to attend.

(72) The parish Sacramental Preparation Program for Confirmation Formation must include formation sessions for candidates. The following are suggested thematic groupings for a basic catechesis on Confirmation. Parishes may include additional catechetical themes according to local needs, and in light of the particular texts and preparation materials being used.

### (73) The Sacraments of Initiation

- Unpack the meaning, symbolism, and effects of Baptism.
- How are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist related?

### (74) The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11: 1-5, Galatians 5:22)

- Help candidates come to a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit and his role in the divine plan of salvation.
- Help candidates understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and in their own spiritual lives.
- Deepen the candidate's understanding of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

**(75) Discipleship** – What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? (Mark 16:15)

- Reflect on the commandments, beatitudes, the life of Jesus, works of charity, and mercy as these relate to being followers of Christ.
- Help young people grow in faith and actively participate in the evangelical mission of Jesus Christ and his Church.
- Help the candidates develop a greater awareness of sin and the need for forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Lead the candidates to a deeper understanding of the Mass.
- Provide opportunities to practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

**(76) Rite of Confirmation and Role of the Bishop**

- Include instruction on the rituals of the sacrament, the symbols that are used, what candidates are to do and to say during the celebration.
- Teach that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation (CIC, Canon 882; NDC 123).
- Explain the importance of the candidate's attire for the occasion (cf. "Attire and Comportment," p.11, *Guide for the Preparation of Mass with the Conferral of Confirmation*, Office for Divine Worship, Diocese of Toledo).

**(77) Pre-Confirmation retreat**

- Candidates are expected to attend a pre-Confirmation retreat. This should be conducted or coordinated by the candidate's parish. In light of the value of connecting the candidate more firmly to his/her own parish, whenever possible, a parish-based retreat, rather than a school-based retreat, should be considered. Since scheduling conflicts and unexpected circumstances are inevitable, when necessary, families should be encouraged to check with neighboring parishes for possible alternative pre-Confirmation retreat dates. The specifics and logistics of the retreat, as well as what circumstances warrant a candidate not attending the retreat, are all local decisions and subject to the discretion of the pastor or his delegate.

**(78) Opportunities to perform works of charity**

- Works of charity (which is preferred to the term "service hours") should be integral to the life of every Christian. These take on concrete form in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and while no requirement of any particular number of hours may be imposed upon a candidate for Confirmation, it is expected that all candidates will take part in activities during their time of preparation which may be categorized under the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Combined with other indicators of readiness, completion of these charitable works may serve as additional objective criterion by which pastors may evaluate a candidate's readiness to receive the sacrament.

**(79) Opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

- Opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be offered by parishes to those candidates preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. A review of the steps for celebrating this sacrament is encouraged. Since the celebration of this sacrament is never recorded, there is no verification process for receiving it.

**(80) Conference (or Interview) with the Pastor or his Delegate**

- A conference with the pastor is an opportunity to discern the candidate's readiness for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Where it is not possible for the pastor to carry out this meeting personally, he may delegate another to conduct it on his behalf. It should not primarily take the form of a "test" or "quiz," but rather a conversation of accompaniment intended to help determine a candidate's readiness to receive the sacrament. While only one conference is required, two are recommended: the first one taking place at the beginning of the sacramental Preparation Program for Confirmation, and another taking place one to two months prior to the reception of the sacrament. In the context of these conversations, the pastor should be able to discern whether candidates are sincere in their faith and are properly disposed to receiving the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and living a life of Christian discipleship.

**Preparation for Confirmation**

**G. Before the Celebration of the Rite of Confirmation**

(81) Work with the pastor/pastoral leader and principal (if applicable) and liturgist in choosing a date for the celebration of Confirmation. The pastor/pastoral leader contacts the Chancery and requests a date when the Bishop can come to the local parish for the celebration. The request is usually made six months prior to the desired date of the sacramental celebration.

(82) When the Chancery officially confirms a date for the celebration of the sacrament, the Chancery will forward guidelines for:

- the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- the liturgy
  - The liturgical planning forms should be completed and returned to the Chancery at least two weeks before Confirmation (see the diocesan Office of Worship's *"Guide for the Preparation of Mass with the Conferral of Confirmation"* in the Appendix of this document).

(83) A process for catechetical preparation should be planned and placed on the parish calendar:

- set dates for meetings with parents and sponsors
- communicate the dates to the parties involved
- select and train catechists

(84) The catechist for children and adolescents continues to be indispensable. This catechist has the delicate mission of giving "the first notions of catechism and preparation for the Sacrament

of Penance, First Communion, and Confirmation. This responsibility is all the more pressing today if children and adolescents do not receive adequate religious formation within the family (General Directory for Catechesis #232). Additional items catechists should consider:

- As mentioned previously, schedule opportunities for the candidates to perform works of charity projects (cf. “Works of Mercy” reflection handout), schedule a retreat that includes prayer, reflection, and the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation in daily living, and schedule time to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to being confirmed.
- Prepare Confirmation cards that will be used to introduce the student to the Bishop. These may later be sent to the parish of Baptism.
- Schedule a Confirmation rehearsal for the students and their sponsors (consult the liturgical guideline found in Appendix D).
- Prepare Confirmation certificates to be presented to the candidates.
- Schedule sessions after Confirmation to assist the students in reflecting upon the experiences of the sacrament and to help them better to enter into the life of the parish community.

## **H. Ongoing Faith Formation**

(85) The parish should provide a comprehensive youth ministry program that includes ongoing catechesis after Confirmation. For guidance regarding catechetical content, see the USCCB’s, *“Adaptation of --- Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age --- for Use in Parish and Youth Ministry Programs.”*

## **I. Involving the Parish Community**

(86) The following are suggestions to involve the parish community to further engage the candidates:

- Have a rite of enrollment for candidates during the Sunday parish liturgies.
- Place occasional announcements in the parish bulletin informing the parishioners of the upcoming celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and request prayers for the candidates.
- Place pictures of those to be confirmed on a bulletin board in the parish church.
- Arrange for prayer partners with shut-ins of the parish.
- Invite parishioners to speak with the candidates on topics such as:
  - what it means to be a Catholic Christian.
  - the ways the Spirit works in and through them.
  - the ways in which works of charity are an integral part of their Christians lives.
- Invite parishioners to serve as discussion leaders for classes or the retreat.
- Invite parishioners to suggest opportunities for works of charity.
- Invite parishioners to attend the Confirmation ceremony.

## IV. First Holy Communion

The Eucharist, one of the Sacraments of Initiation, is the core of the Church's sacramental life. Through this sacrament, "*we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body*" (CCC 1331). The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life. Children who are brought to the Eucharistic table continue the process of initiation that began at their Baptism. In the Eucharistic celebration, they encounter Christ and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation the children learn they can turn to Christ for forgiveness of sins.

### **Norms for First Holy Communion**

#### **A. Candidates for First Holy Communion**

(87) The normative age for First Penance and First Holy Eucharist is approximately age seven (i.e., second grade). Every baptized Catholic child, whether enrolled in a Catholic school, participating in a religious education program, or being home schooled, upon reaching the age of reason, will be catechized for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is required that the child first be prepared for, and receive, the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving First Holy Communion.

(88) In order to celebrate First Holy Communion, the child is to:

- Articulate who Jesus is, including the main events in his life, death, and resurrection.
- Distinguish between the consecrated bread of the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
- Desire for and a devotion toward receiving the Eucharist according to his/her age.

(89) The decision as to the child's readiness to celebrate this sacrament, in consultation with the pastor/pastoral leader, rests primarily with the parents, the catechist, and parish catechetical leader.

(90) At least one parent/guardian is required to participate in a parish Sacramental Preparation Program for First Eucharist to assist them in their role as the primary educators in the Catholic faith of their children. "Children's preparation...begins in the home. The family has the most important role in communicating the Christian and human values that format the foundation for a child's understanding of the Eucharist" (NDC 126).

(91) The length of this preparation may be adapted to the needs of the parish as necessary to adequately assist parents in this important task.

(92) Preferably, Sacramental Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist should occur in the parish where the family is registered. However, pastoral discretion may determine that circumstances warrant another approach, such as utilizing the preparation program of a neighboring parish (with the mutual agreement of the pastors).

(93) The reception of First Eucharist is to take place in either the family's parish or Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral. Where pastoral prudence dictates, the parish celebration of a Sacrament of Initiation may be combined with the celebration of another local

parish, with the permission of the pastors. In such situations, it is to be understood that the celebration is being conducted in the name of each parish represented (cf. DRSI).

(94) Ordinarily, a child should have completed at least one year of catechesis in a General Catechesis Program in either a Catholic school, parish religious education program, or a homeschool program, prior to being enrolled in a Sacramental Preparation Program for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

(95) Since First Eucharist is a celebration of initiation into the parish community, the parish should be apprised, and made a part of, the preparation and celebration.

(96) Ideally First Eucharist should be received at a Sunday liturgy.

(97) If First Eucharist is to be celebrated in a parish other than that of Baptism, the parent(s) must provide a certificate of Baptism from the parish where the child was baptized. The names of those children receiving First Eucharist should be entered in the parish Eucharistic register.

(98) Those to receive First Communion are to be appropriately dressed for the occasion (for guidance, see “Attire and Comportment,” p.11, *Guide for the Preparation of Mass with the Conferral of Confirmation*, Diocese of Toledo).

## **B. Record of First Communion**

(99) The names of those receiving First Communion should be recorded in the First Communion Register at the parish where the sacrament is celebrated. The First Communicant’s place of Baptism is to be notified so that the date of reception of First Holy Communion can be noted in the Baptismal Register.

## **C. Children with Celiac Sprue Disease**

(100) Celiac Sprue Disease is a disorder causing an allergic intestinal reaction to the gluten in wheat. Gluten is not an ingredient but a protein enzyme which activates when flour is kneaded and functions to bind the wheat together. Gluten is a toxin to persons with the disease and damages the digestive system. The damage inhibits the absorption of vitamins and nutrients and predisposes its victims to osteoporosis, neurological illnesses, and even lymphoma. Persons suffering from Celiac Disease can control it by not ingesting any gluten whatsoever. This includes the gluten which occurs naturally in communion wafers and communion bread made of wheat and water alone. The consequences of exposure to gluten are so serious that physicians often advise against receiving Holy Communion under the form of bread, and even to avoid drinking from the main chalice into which a particle of the host is broken, or even from a cup which has been used for intinction.

(101) If a child with Celiac Sprue Disease is to make his/her First Eucharist, the pastor must be notified, so that at the time of the celebration of First Eucharist, the child with Celiac Sprue Disease may be offered only the cup, in order to receive the Eucharist only under the species of

wine. Canon #825 permits the reception of Holy Communion under the form of wine alone in cases of necessity.

### **Catechesis for First Holy Communion**

*The Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church (CCC 1407).*

*For the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity (CIC, Canon 913).*

**D. Catechesis for First Eucharist is to be faithful to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and with the following selection from the *National Directory for Catechesis* (cf. p. 126-28)**

(102) *Children's preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist begins in the home. The family has the most important role in communicating the Christian and human values that form the foundation for a child's understanding of the Eucharist. Children who participate with their family in the Mass experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer.*

(103) *Parents and the parish catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. Because reception of the Eucharist, especially for the first time, is integral to the child's full incorporation into the ecclesial community, the pastor has a responsibility in determining every child's readiness to receive First Communion. Parents also have the right and the duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion. The catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.*

(104) *Catechesis on the Mass provided in systematic parish catechetical programs is an indispensable part of the preparation of children for their first reception of the Eucharist. Suited to the children's age and abilities, catechesis should help children participate actively and consciously in the Mass. During planning, it is essential to remember that children around the age of reason ordinarily think concretely. Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis in preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist that:*

- *Teaches that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples*
- *Teaches not only "the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on . . . they can as full members of Christ's Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters"*
- *Ensures that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the*

*Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion*

- *Develops in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit*
- *Teaches that "the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ" and that "what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body"*
- *Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread*
- *Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine*
- *Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass*
- *Helps children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner*

(105) *The Eucharist is the heart of the Catholic Christian life. A child continually grows in his or her understanding and living the meaning of the sacrament. Ongoing catechesis on the Eucharist is to be integrated and developed throughout the catechetical years.*

## **E. Preparation for First Holy Communion**

(106) Candidates should receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the first time with other members of their parish at a celebration which takes place at their parish church or Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral. Where pastoral prudence dictates, the parish celebration of a Sacrament of Initiation may be combined with the celebration of another local parish, with the permission of the pastors. In such situations, it is to be understood that the celebration is being conducted in the name of each parish represented (cf. DRSI).

(107) Before receiving Holy Communion for the first time, parents must enroll their child in a Sacramental Preparation Program for First Communion in their parish. Candidates must also be concurrently enrolled in a General Catechesis Program.

(108) The parish Sacramental Preparation Program for First Holy Communion must include formation sessions for parents/guardians which cover, at minimum, the topics listed below. Spiritual formation for parents and children together form an important part of the preparation for children to receive their First Holy Communion. At least one formation session covering the themes below should be conducted with parents and their children. The length of this preparation may be adapted to the needs of the parish as necessary to adequately assist parents in this important task. The topics are:

- An introduction to the sacraments in general, and the Holy Eucharist and Penance in particular, including the life of grace that begins with Baptism.
- A deeper understanding of the Sacraments of Initiation.
- A deeper understanding of the Mass, including an introduction to the Mass and the importance of the Eucharist as the heart of Catholic life.
- The role of parents as models of Eucharistic living, emphasizing that full and active participation in Sunday Eucharist is essential for parents as models to their children.
- The role of the parents in preparing their child for the sacraments.
- Providing specific local details e.g., dates for special celebrations, retreats, etc.

(109) The parish Sacramental Preparation Program for First Holy Communion must include formation sessions for students. The following are suggested thematic groupings for a basic catechesis on receiving First Holy Communion. Parishes may include additional catechetical themes according to local needs, and in light of the particular texts and preparation materials being used. This catechesis should include:

- A belief in the person of Jesus, the main events in his life, death and resurrection.
- A belief that the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ.
- The ability to distinguish between ordinary bread and the Eucharist. *“The Holy Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ. What appears to be bread and wine are actually the living Body of Christ”* (NDC, 128).
- Understand the meaning of the reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species, bread and wine (NDC, 127).
- An awareness of membership in the Catholic Church.
- An awareness of the love of God in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
- The Mass including Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Dismissal Rites.
- Understand that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples (NDC, 127).
- An understanding of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist and participation in the Mass appropriate to the child’s age.
- Provide an explanation of, and practice for, the proper preparation to receive Holy Communion: one hour fasting from food and drink (water not included); an attitude of respect (i.e., folding hands, focusing on who it is we are going to receive, making a gesture of reverence, not chewing gum or candy, etc.)
- The opportunity to receive under both species (cf. note on Celiac Sprue Disease above).

(110) Holding a pre-First Communion retreat is highly encouraged. This should be conducted by the candidate’s parish. However, the specifics and logistics of this retreat are local decisions.

### **Preparation for First Holy Communion**

#### **F. Preparation for and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

(111) Since it is required for children receiving First Holy Communion to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once prior to reception of the Eucharist, opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be offered by parishes for these children. Parents of the student are encouraged to participate first in this sacrament as an example to their child. Since the celebration of this sacrament is never recorded, there is no verification process for this particular requirement.

#### **G. Before the Reception of First Holy Communion**

(112) Work with the pastor/pastoral leader and principal (if applicable) or liturgist in choosing dates for parent meetings and individual and/or parish celebrations for all those receiving First Eucharist this year.

(113) Plan and schedule the process for catechetical preparation. This process should include:

- Ensuring that the content as outlined in the diocesan Religion Course of Study (2018) for Grade Two is being implemented.
- Prepare catechists and/or religion teachers.
- Set dates for meetings with parents.
- Engage with guest speakers, if needed.

#### **H. After the Reception of the Sacrament**

(114) Register the names of the children who received First Holy Communion in the parish registry.

(115) Continue to engage with the families and children by providing ongoing catechesis.

## V. First Reconciliation

*This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The Sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members. Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland:*

*“It must be recalled that . . . this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation” (CCC 1469).*

### **Norms for First Reconciliation**

#### **A. Norms for First-time Penitents**

(116) Every child, whether enrolled in Catholic School, or participating in the parish religious education program, or homeschool program, upon coming to the age of reason is to be catechized for the Sacrament of First Reconciliation. Once First Reconciliation has been received, the child is to be catechized for First Eucharist. If a child is not prepared to make First Reconciliation, the reception of First Eucharist is to be delayed until such time as the child has received First Reconciliation.

(117) Parents are to be actively involved in the preparation of their child for this sacrament.

(118) A child is ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation when the child:

- has a sense of relationship between purposeful right and wrong; i.e., good choices and bad choices;
- is able to describe wrongdoing in his/her own words: knowing it is wrong and choosing to do it anyway;
- is able to and desires to express sorrow.

(119) The decision regarding the child’s readiness to celebrate this sacrament rests primarily with the parents and the catechist in consultation with the pastor/confessor and catechetical leader.

(120) There are a number of converging components of the preparation for First Reconciliation. They include:

- the catechesis received in one of the three kinds of Catechetical Instruction Programs (Catholic school, Parish Religious Education program, or Homeschool Religious Education)
- parent sessions
- parent and child sessions

(121) The reception of First Penance is *not* to be recorded in any sacramental register, in writing or electronically.

### **Catechesis for First Reconciliation**

“Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation first depends on the person's acknowledgment of God's faithful love, of the existence of sin, of the capacity to commit sin, and of God's power to forgive sin and reconcile the sinner with himself and with the Church... The normative point of reference for catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is the Rite of Penance.” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, p. 132)

#### **B. Catechesis for First Reconciliation is to be faithful to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and with the following selection from the *National Directory for Catechesis* (cf. p. 135-136, USCCB)**

*(122) Like preparation for Confirmation and First Communion, parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.*

*(123) In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist." Since the celebration of First Confession precedes First Communion, "catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to be done so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent and so that, before receiving First Communion, the child will be familiar with the revised Rite of Reconciliation and will be at ease with the reception of the sacrament."*

*(124) Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love.*

*(125) Dioceses and parishes should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to:*

- Acknowledge God's unconditional love for us.
- Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both.
- Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them, but from God.

- *Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation.*
- *Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation*
- *Understand that "sacramental Confession is a means offered to children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore that it is even necessary per se if one has fallen into serious sin.*

(126) *Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year.*

(127) Catechesis with Parents/Guardians may include:

- Opportunity for parents/guardians to develop their own understanding and appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Introduction to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the life of grace
- The call to Christian discipleship.
- Catechesis on conscience, sin, conversion, contrition, penance, and reconciliation
- Explanation of moral, psychological, and faith development from infancy to adulthood with emphasis on childhood.
- An opportunity for parents/guardians to clarify their intentions in bringing their child to this sacrament.
- Importance of families living the sacramentality of reconciliation in daily life by developing trusting love, by asking and accepting forgiveness, and helping each other accept consequences, by letting relationships mend and grow.
- Opportunities to be engaged with their child in the catechesis for the sacrament.
- Explanation of the Rite of Reconciliation.
- Assistance with judging their child's readiness and freedom in receiving the sacrament.
- Encouragement to celebrate First Reconciliation with their child (ideally, parents first, followed by their children).
- Encouragement to continue the developmental process of growing in morality and reconciliation and to celebrate the sacrament regularly and as a family.

(128) Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Holy Communion and distinct and separate from the preparation for First Holy Communion: *"Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation"* (NDC 135).

(129) Catechesis for First Reconciliation should result in children being able to:

- Have the ability to distinguish right from wrong and to express sorrow for unloving behavior and turn to God.
- Be accountable for their actions and recognize their need for forgiveness.
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and Scriptures of the Rite of Penance (NDC 136).
- Explain how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation (NDC 136).
- Articulate that sacramental Confession is a means to obtain pardon for sin.
- Comprehend the terms: contrition, confession, penance and absolution.

(130) Because continuing lifelong conversion is part of what it means to grow in faith, the catechesis begun in the early years is to be continued and developed throughout the child's life. In this way children continue to develop a deeper awareness of this Sacrament of God's love and mercy.

### **Preparation for First Reconciliation**

#### **C. Before the Rite of Reconciliation**

(131) It is the responsibility of the parish catechetical leader to work with the pastor/pastoral leader and principal (if applicable) to:

- Set dates for parent meetings and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Select and prepare catechists.
- Select appropriate catechetical materials.
- Ensure that the Religion Course of Study (2018) is being implemented.
- Arrange for the parents' catechetical sessions and the children's immediate preparation.
- Coordinate the effort of parents, confessors, and catechists to determine the readiness of the students.
- Obtain the needed certificate of Baptism for each student who will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a parish other than the place of Baptism.
- Provide ongoing catechesis regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation for children and Parents.

(132) No certificate is to be issued for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation; no record may ever be kept of individuals celebrating the sacrament.

#### **D. Connecting with Families**

(133) Because faith experience is built upon human experience and because moral development is an on-going process that begins very early in life, efforts should be made to work with parents/guardians of very young children to encourage them in the day-to-day nurturing of these aspects of their children's lives. In the case of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a child needs to have experienced the human dimensions of trusting love, forgiveness, pardon, reconciliation (reunion), and renewed hope in mended relationships. Because the human dimension of these elements is so much a part of everyday living, it is in the home and through family (especially parents) that they can be developed from earliest infancy more effectively than in any other environment.

(134) In earliest childhood (1-3 years of age) the following will help a child develop toward morality and the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

- Provide a safe, secure atmosphere to develop faith and trust.
- Express love and affection (both parents) in appropriate physical ways (i.e. eye contact, hugs, smiles).
- Be available for constant assurance in times of shame, and "crisis."
- Correct the child in ways that show displeasure with the action but not with the person of the child.

- Establish and demand limits so the child can be free to know what he/she can do.

(135) During preschool years (approximately 4-5 years of age) the following will support the child's development:

- Show consistency in parent-child relationship that builds up confidence in love.
- Use "teachable moments" involving relationships to help the child discern right from wrong in a positive way.
- Let the child witness adult reconciliation.
- Begin reviewing the day with the child to build an initial sense of responsibility toward himself/herself and the persons in his/her life. Help the child discern right and wrong actions, accepting admissions of wrongdoing with detached restraint. Once the child has experienced these elements on a human level, he/she can be led to an awareness of God's forgiveness through the action of Christ in a special sign and celebration called "Sacrament of Reconciliation."

#### **E. After the Child has celebrated First Reconciliation**

(136) Parents, catechists, pastors/pastoral leaders, and catechetical leaders should continue to expand and enrich the child's understanding of the sacrament. This would include consistent, loving parenting; further development through formal religious education; and encouragement to participate as a family in the regular reception of this sacrament.