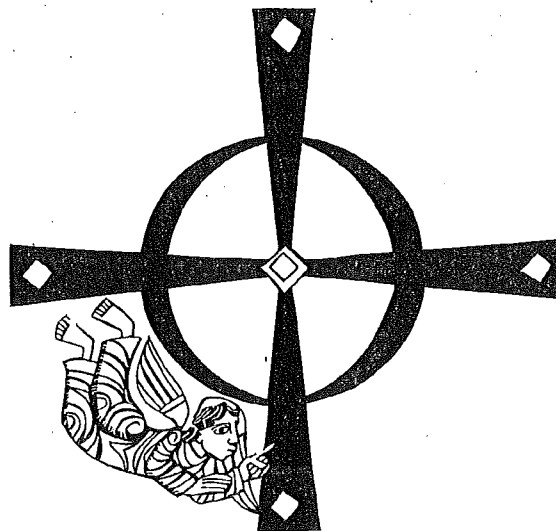


DIOCESE OF GARY

GUIDELINES FOR THE
SACRAMENTS OF

BAPTISM
CONFIRMATION
FIRST EUCHARIST
FIRST PENANCE
FOR CHILDREN



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INTRODUCTION

The Sacramental life of the Roman Catholic Church is what uniquely distinguishes it from other Christian denominations. The whole liturgical life of the Catholic Church in fact revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the seven sacraments.

“Sacraments are “powers that come forth” from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are “the masterworks of God” in the new and everlasting covenant.”
(CCC 1116)

Parents play a primary role in the formation of their children. It is in the domestic church, the home, where faith is first taught and practiced. The role of the Diocesan bishop is to ensure that the preparation and reception of the sacraments are in accord with Church teaching and practice. Pastors, clergy, pastoral associates, and directors of parish faith formation programs also share in this responsibility to see that those preparing to receive the sacraments are well formed in accordance with Church standards and teachings.

It is in this context that Bishop Melczek at the May 11, 2010 Diocesan Priest Council commissioned a committee with the task of formulating a set of pastoral guidelines for the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist and First Penance for children outside the realm of RCIA.

Fr. David Kime agreed to direct this committee in collaboration with Frank J. Zolvinski of the Office of Religious Education. Fr. Ed Tlucek, and Fr. Mick Kopil were added to the committee along with ten Directors of Religious Education and Pastoral Associates serving in parishes within the Diocese of Gary. The heads of the Office of Worship and Marriage Tribunal were also invited to contribute to the discussions.

The committee began its work on July 1, 2010 and convened for four months to produce four draft documents on Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist and First Penance. These drafts were reviewed by Bishop Melczek and sent to Diocesan clergy for their discussion and critique at the November Deanery meetings. The insights and information gathered from the priest's deaneries was reviewed by the committee and many were incorporated into the final document.

It is our best hope that these guidelines will provide a pastoral approach and direction to parents and the parish community members who are assigned to prepare children the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance within the Diocese of Gary.

Committee Members: Fr. David Kime, Fr. Ed Tlucek, OFM, Fr. Mick Kopil, Frank J. Zolvinski, Patricia Malinowski, La Verne Papich, Mary Anne Shaw, Pat Franz, Sally Davis, Vickie Blackwood, Linda Pizza, Diane Pupilava, L. B. Angel, Della VanderPol.

Endorsed by the Diocesan Priests' Council April 5, 2011
Promulgated by Bishop Dale J. Melczek April 15, 2011

DIOCESE OF GARY
GUIDELINES FOR
THE SACRAMENT
OF BAPTISM
OF CHILDREN



The Sacrament of Baptism for Children

Introduction

The holy Sacrament of Baptism is a powerful moment of grace, conversion and renewal of faith in the life of the Church. Pastors and shepherds of souls should make every effort to welcome parents and godparents of those to be baptized with joy and acceptance. Every effort should be made on their part to deal pastorally with those who come to request the Sacrament of Baptism for their children. These guidelines are proposed to assist the clergy and other pastoral leaders to fulfill their role as pastoral leaders in a more conscientious and Christ like manner. These guidelines for the Sacrament of Baptism are proposed only for children under the age of reason (normally the age of seven years old) outside the scope of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. (RCIA)

Holy Baptism is the foundation 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 and daughters of God; we become members of Christ's Body, 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

The child to be baptized:

(The word *child* or *children* includes the use of the word *infant*)

1. "Every un-baptized person, and only such a person, can be baptized." (CIC 864)
2. Parents, whose children have not attained the age of reason and are not of catechetical age (normally seven years old), may request to have their child baptized according to the Rite of Baptism for Children. Children who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age fall under the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children. (RCIA 252)

Parents:

1. It is the responsibility of parents to request baptism as soon as possible after the birth or even before the birth of their child. They should go to their pastor or his delegate to request the sacrament for their child. (CIC 867)
2. For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that:
 - the parents or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully takes their place, gives consent;
 - there be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the

prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason.
(CIC 867, 868)

3. Sacramental preparation of parents/guardians is required in order that they may understand their role as the primary teachers of the faith. Sacramental preparation of godparents is strongly encouraged in order that they may understand their role as godparents.
4. According to the precepts of Canon Law, parents requesting Baptism of the child should ordinarily be members of the parish unless a just cause suggests otherwise.
5. The practice in the Diocese of Gary is that parents be registered in a Catholic parish and a practicing Catholic in good standing who regularly attends Sunday Mass prior to a request of Baptism for their infant or child. (see Pastoral Note, p. 9)
6. Baptism shall not be refused to children of parents who have no permanent domicile. People without a parish, e.g. migrants and transients, are to be dealt with in the best pastoral way possible.

Godparents:

1. Each child may have one godfather and one godmother; the word 'godparents' is used in the rite to describe both. "One sponsor, male or female, is sufficient; but there may be two, one of each sex." (CIC 873)
2. Only one godparent is necessary. The godparent must be:
 - a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, received Eucharist);
 - at least 16 years old;
 - Be leading a sacramental life in harmony with the church." (CIC 874)

The godparent should be willing to accept the responsibility of assisting the parents in developing the faith life of the child. "Since the sponsor's role extends beyond the ceremony of baptism and includes the responsibility 'to help the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent to it' (CIC 872), it is only fitting that the sponsor be a Catholic who has already received the sacraments of confirmation and the Eucharist. But even a fully initiated Catholic may be restricted from exercising the office of sponsor, if he or she does not live the faith in a manner that is in keeping with the responsibilities of this office. Thus, people who do not participate regularly in the Eucharist or who are living in marriages not recognized by the Church may not be qualified to function as sponsors." (CIC commentary 874)

3. The godparent may not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.
(CIC 874)
4. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register. (CIC 873)
5. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may not be a godparent but may act as a Christian witness at the request of the parents, provided there is one Catholic godparent. (CIC 874)

6. A baptized Catholic may never serve as a Christian witness in the Rite of Baptism.
7. Any person may serve as a proxy if the godparent is unable to be physically present at the baptism. The Church requires no specific stipulations regarding who may serve as a proxy.
8. Potential sponsors from another parish should provide a certificate of verification from their current parish, or pastor to the parish, or pastor of the church where the child is to be baptized. The certificate verifies that that they are a fully initiated Catholic and in good standing with the Church.
9. "In the case of Eastern Christians who enter into the fullness of Catholic communion no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith, even if such persons are permitted, in virtue of recourse to the Apostolic See, to transfer to the Latin rite." (RCIA 474)

Parish:

1. A priest or deacon is the ordinary minister of Baptism. If Baptism is celebrated during Mass, the celebrant of the Mass will ordinarily confer the Baptism.
2. Priests and deacons should not agree to baptize children from another parish without consultation with the pastor of the family of the child to be baptized. If the family's pastor has determined that baptism is to be delayed, that judgment should be respected.
3. It is advantageous that the Baptismal Rite be celebrated, if possible, in the context of a Sunday liturgy before the entire community. "To bring out the paschal character of baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, when the Church commemorates the Lord's resurrection. On Sunday, baptism may be celebrated even during Mass so that the entire community may be present and the relationship between baptism and Eucharist may be clearly seen; but this should not be done too often." (The Rite of Infant Baptism # 9)
4. The pastor or his delegate is responsible for providing an effective catechesis for Baptism preparation for those who seek Baptism for an infant, consistent with the parents' need for catechesis. When parents are in need of additional faith formation prior to Baptism, it is the responsibility of the pastor to offer opportunities for their faith development.

Record of Baptism

1. The pastor of the parish where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay provide for the recording in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, identifying the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth. (CIC 877, 1, 2, 3; CIC 878)
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 of the child 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 parents of the child. (CIC. 877, 2)

3. Issues regarding the case of parents of children who are adopted. For questions regarding the recording of children who are adopted please consult the USCCB website on Canon 877.3 "Recording the Baptism of Adopted Children".

www.usccb.org/norms/877-3

4. 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. (CIC 878)

Baptism: Valid and Invalid

Water baptism by immersion or pouring, with the Trinitarian formula is valid. Therefore, if the rituals, liturgical books or established customs of a Church or ecclesial community prescribe either of these ways of Baptism, the sacrament is to be considered valid, unless there are serious reasons for doubting that the minister has observed the regulations of his or her own community or Church. Wherever doubts arise about whether or how water was used, respect for the sacrament, and deference toward these ecclesial communities listed below require that a serious investigation of the practice of the community concerned be made before any judgment is passed on the validity of its Baptism.

Baptism by sprinkling, although illicit in the Latin Church, is valid provided the water makes physical contact with the candidate while the minister is reciting the Trinitarian formula.

The following are some non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities that have valid Baptism:

- All Eastern non-Catholic
- African Methodist Episcopal
- Amish
- Anglican
- Assembly of God
- Baptist
- The Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Church of the Brethren
- Church of Christ
- Church of God
- Church of the Nazarene
- Congregational
- Disciples of Christ
- Episcopalian / Anglican
- Evangelical
- Evangelical United Brethren

- Liberal Catholic
- Lutheran
- Methodist
- Old Catholic
- Old Roman Catholic
- Polish National
- Presbyterian
- Reformed
- United Church of Canada
- United Church of Christ
- United Reformed
- Uniting Church of Australia
- Waldensian
- Zion

Communities whose Baptism is doubtful and for which is required an investigation into each case are:

- Mennonite
- Moravian
- Pentecostal
- Seventh Day Adventist

Some ecclesial communities without valid Baptism:

- The Apostolic Church
- Bohemian Free Thinkers
- Christadelphians
- Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Christian Community (Rudolf Steiner)
- Christian Scientist
- Church of Divine Science
- Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons)
- Church of Scientology
- Church of the Universal Brotherhood (Doukhobors)
- Jehovah's Witness
- Masons
- New Age
- The New Church of Mr. Emmanuel Swedenborg (called the Church of the New Jerusalem in the USA)
- People's Church of Chicago
- Reunification Church (Moonies)
- Salvation Army
- Shakers
- Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Unitarians
- Universal Unitarians
- Other world religions (Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism)

Reference: www.aodonline.org/aodonline-sqlimages/Evangelization/ValidBaptism.pdf

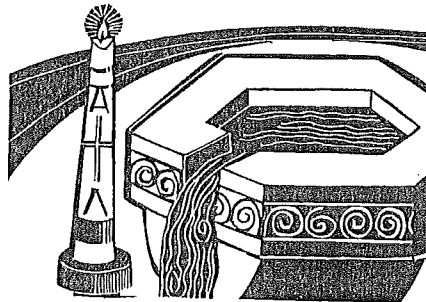
This list is not exhaustive, nor is it authoritative, it is merely a guide. A thorough inquiry should be made before determining whether a baptism is valid or not. (CIC 896)

Pastoral Note

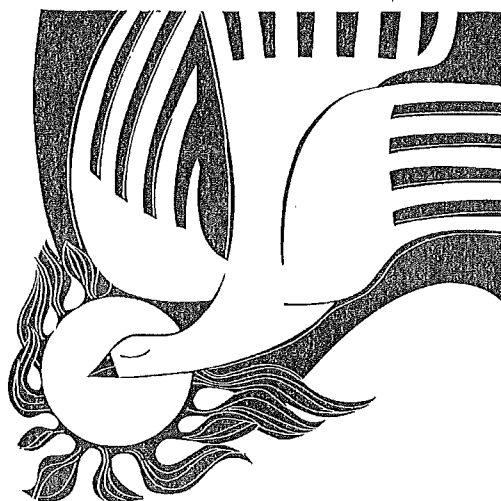
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“The best pastoral approach is to welcome the parents and during the course of preparation help them to realize what Baptism means and entails so they become motivated to be proper role models in the faith for their child. “Force conversion” never works. Baptism may be delayed only when there is no “founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith . . . It may happen that the godparents, or a grandparent, or another person will see to the child’s Catholic upbringing, and the parents do not object. In such a case there is a founded hope, a hope based on reason, that the child will be brought up Catholic. For an infant to be baptized licitly, it is necessary that at least one parent (or the person who lawfully takes the place of the parents) consents to it, and there is a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion.” (CDF, reply, July 13, 12970 *Notitiae* 7, 1971)

An instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith of October 20, 1980, discussed the historical, theological, and pastoral issues at some length. In speaking of the “well-founded hope,” in the case of parents who are irregular Christians, the instruction states: “If sufficient assurances are given, for example, by the selection of godparents who will sincerely undertake the care of the child, or by the assistance of the faithful of the community, then the priest cannot refuse to celebrate the Baptism without delay, exactly as he would do regarding the children of Christian families.” (CDF, reply, October 20, 1980, AAS 72m 1980, 1137)



DIOCESE OF GARY
GUIDELINES FOR
THE RECEPTION
OF THE SACRAMENT
OF CONFIRMATION



The Sacrament of Confirmation

Introduction

The holy Sacrament of Confirmation is a powerful moment of grace, conversion and renewal of faith in the life of the Church. Pastors and shepherds of souls should make every effort to welcome the candidates for Confirmation with joy and acceptance. Every effort should be made on their part to deal pastorally with those who come to request the Sacrament of Confirmation. These guidelines are proposed to assist clergy and other pastoral leaders in the Diocese of Gary to fulfill their role as pastoral and catechetical leaders in a more conscientious and Christ like manner. These guidelines for the Sacrament of Confirmation are proposed for validly baptized children of catechetical age outside the scope of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. RCIA)

“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

The Minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation

“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, mindful that the celebration of Confirmation has been separated from Baptism for this reason.” (CCC 1313)

Those to be Confirmed

1. In the Diocese of Gary the sacrament of Confirmation is normally celebrated in grade eight or high school.
2. A candidate for Confirmation must:
 - a. be validly baptized in the Catholic faith and not previously confirmed. (proof of baptism must be obtained) A person validly baptized in another Christian tradition must make a profession of faith prior to the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.
 - b. be capable of renewing his/her baptismal promises.
 - c. be properly instructed or catechized.
3. It is expected that all Confirmation candidates participate in the parish Confirmation catechetical preparation process. This includes public school, Catholic school, and home-schooled children.

4. Immediate "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, 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." (CCC 1309)

5. The candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation is expected to participate in yearly ongoing faith formation since his/her reception of First Eucharist to assure a continuous, systematic, age appropriate catechesis. When this is not the case the candidate should complete at least two (school) years of formal catechesis, either in a parish faith formation program or parish school, immediately prior to the time of the reception of the sacrament.

6. Parish catechesis for the reception of Confirmation is to include a retreat experience appropriate to the age level of the candidate. The retreat content should include an understanding of the relationship of Confirmation to the Sacrament of Baptism, the role and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the candidate, the importance of participation in the life of the Church, Christian discipleship, the opportunity for the Sacrament of Penance, and the celebration of the Eucharist.

7. The candidates for Confirmation should have an understanding and knowledge of the "essential rite of Confirmation: anointing the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism, together with the laying on of the minister's hand and the words: 'Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (CCC 1320)

8. In the Diocese of Gary catechetical preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation requires that all catechetical materials and textbooks be approved by the USCCB. These materials are found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. For a current listing go to www.usccb.org/catechism. Preparation for the sacrament is also to include a review of the video "Introduction to the Cathedral" by Bishop Dale Melczek using the appropriate lesson plans for instruction purposes. (Diocese of Gary publication, 1999)

9. "To receive Confirmation one must be in the state of grace. One should receive the Sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit." (CCC 1310)

Sponsors

1. At the beginning of the immediate formation process, each candidate for Confirmation chooses a sponsor. (Intro to the Rite of Confirmation # 5) The sponsor is encouraged to be:

- An active participant in the preparation and formation of the candidate
- A mentor
- A 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 unless there is a just reason determined by the pastor.
- Be fully initiated themselves having received Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.
- Be one who actively participates in the sacramental life of the Church,
- Not under canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared,

- Be either male or female. (CIC 874)

“The sponsor’s function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the duties inherent in this sacrament.” (CIC 892)

2. Potential sponsors from another parish must provide a certificate of verification from their current parish or pastor to the parish or pastor of the candidate to be confirmed. This certificate verifies that the sponsor is a fully initiated Catholic and in good standing with the Church.

3. 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 the candidate’s baptismal godparent serve as his/her sponsor, thus emphasizing more clearly the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation.

4. Appropriate catechesis for both sponsors and parents should be provided before or during the candidates catechetical formation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The content of this catechesis should include the Theology of the Sacraments of Initiation, the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian disciple, and the significant role of the parent and sponsor in the life of the candidate.

5. Appropriate and ongoing catechesis (mystagogy) must be provided to the newly confirmed at the parish level as well as an invitation to parish ministries appropriate to the abilities of the newly Confirmed. This insures an opportunity for continued faith formation and Christian discipleship.

Record of Confirmation

1. “The names of the confirmed with mention of the minister, the parents and the sponsors, the place and date of the conferral of Confirmation are to be noted in a record book in the parish archive; the pastor must advise the pastor of the place of Baptism about the conferral of Confirmation so that notation be made in the Baptismal Register.” (CIC 895) When a Confirmation takes place at the Cathedral, the parish records should indicate it took place at the Cathedral and recorded at the home parish (parish of baptism)

Adult Confirmation

2. “The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time; their parents and shepherds of souls, especially pastors, are to see to it that the faithful are properly instructed to receive it and approach the sacrament at the appropriate time.” (CIC 890)

3. Adult Catholics who were previously baptized, must be confirmed by the bishop either at the Cathedral or parish unless the faculty to confirm is granted by the bishop or as prescribed in the RCIA.

DIOCESE OF GARY
GUIDELINES FOR
THE RECEPTION OF
THE SACRAMENT OF
FIRST EUCHARIST



The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist

Introduction

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) Every facet of the Church's life has its birth in the Eucharist. Children who are brought to eat and drink at the Eucharistic table continue the process of initiation that began at their Baptism.

Norms

In regard to sacramental preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for the first time, a candidate must have attained the use of reason and be of catechetical age (normally seven years of age) and must meet the following requirements:

- a. The child must be baptized – baptismal certificate is a requirement
- b. The child must be properly instructed for the reception of the sacrament.
- c. The child must celebrate the Sacrament of Penance prior to reception of the Holy Eucharist for the first time.

Diocesan Guidelines

1. Children should not begin sacramental preparation unless there is regular attendance and participation at the Sunday Mass.
2. Parent/guardian participation sessions are an integral part of preparation for each sacrament. *"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."* (NDC126)
3. Appropriate catechesis for parents should be provided as part of the preparation process for the reception of the sacrament. Sufficient catechesis should be provided to parents that will cover the content of the sacrament. This catechesis should include an adult understanding of the Theology of the Eucharist and its connection to everyday Christian living, a review of the order and the meaning of the Mass, and the Eucharist as it relates to church teachings on social justice. Ideally, preparation for the parent and the child takes place in the parish of the registered family.
4. The pastor, along with the parents and catechist(s) of the child, are to determine the readiness of the child to receive the holy Eucharist for the first time.
5. The celebration of the sacrament takes place in the family's parish, ideally during the Easter Season.

6. The candidate preparing for the reception of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for the first time is expected to participate in ongoing faith formation to insure a continuous, systematic, age appropriate catechesis. When this is not the case, the candidate should complete at least one (school) year of formal catechesis either in the parish faith formation program or parish school prior to the reception of the sacrament.

7. The Catholic School, faith formation program and home-schooled child must participate in his/her parish sacramental preparation programs. *"Home schooling alone cannot replace catechesis or sacramental preparation in the parish church."* (NDC 32)

8. The formational component for the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (i.e. parent sessions, retreats, etc.) is distinct and separate from parish religious education, Catholic school, or home school curriculum.

9. Children are expected to continue their faith formation process by participation in parish religious education programs or Catholic school after the reception of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Attendance at Sunday Mass is also required so the child and family may continue to grow deeper into the mysteries of faith in a personal and communal environment.

10. In the Diocese of Gary catechetical preparation for the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for the first time requires that all catechetical materials and textbooks must be approved by the USCCB. These materials are found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. For a current listing go to www.usccb.org/catechism.

Record of First Eucharist

The names of those receiving the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for the first time should be recorded in the First Communion Register at the parish where the sacrament was celebrated.

Pastoral Note

In the Diocese of Gary a common courtesy practiced by pastors is to notify each other if a parishioner's intent is to receive the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist for the first time in a parish other than his/her home parish.

Parents who have been away from the practice of the faith, or who are not fully initiated into the life of the Church, should be encouraged by their pastors to see their child's reception of First Holy Eucharist as an opportunity to be welcomed back to the worshipping community and/or complete his/her initiation process. These situations should be dealt with a high level of pastoral sensitivity, sincerity and honesty.

DIOCESE OF GARY
GUIDELINES FOR
THE RECEPTION OF
THE SACRAMENT OF
FIRST PENANCE



The Sacrament of Penance

Introduction

As sinners we not only recognize our human limitations and failures, but also believe in God's limitless love for us. God loves and forgives us, and the sacrament of reconciliation makes this gift of forgiveness a reality in the life of the sinner. We are restored to a proper relationship with God through the cleansing of our sins and guilt, and we are once again made whole and holy.

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, Jesus showed himself to his apostles. He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"
(CCC 1485)

The Sacrament of Penance is one of two sacraments of healing. It is the sacrament that brings spiritual healing for Catholics who have distanced themselves from God by sin. This involves four parts:

1. The penitent's contrition for sin
2. Confession to a priest
3. Absolution by the priest
4. Satisfaction for the wrong committed. Completion of an act of penance and reparation (CCC 1450)

Through penance, the faithful receive pardon through God's mercy for the sins they have committed. At the same time they are reconciled with the Church community. The confession or disclosure of sins frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. "The celebration of this sacrament is thus always an act in which the Church proclaims its faith, gives thanks to God for the freedom with which Christ has made us free, and offers its life as a spiritual sacrifice in praise of God's glory, as it hastens to meet the Lord Jesus."
(Rites p. 531)

Norms

In regard to sacramental preparation for First Penance, a candidate must have attained the use of reason and be of catechetical age (normally seven years of age) and must meet the following requirements.

1. The child must be baptized – baptismal certificate is a requirement
2. Any child baptized in a Christian tradition other than the Catholic tradition must be formally received into the Church by a profession of faith and an act of reception.
(RCIA 490-492)
3. The child must be properly instructed for the reception of the sacrament
4. The child must celebrate his/her first Penance prior to the reception of First Eucharist

Diocesan Guidelines

1. Parent/guardian participation sessions are an integral part of preparation for each sacrament. 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 forgiveness and reconciliation.
2. Appropriate catechesis for parents should be provided as part of the preparation process for the reception of the sacrament. Sufficient catechesis should be provided the parents that will cover the content of the sacrament. This catechesis should include: an understanding of the unconditional love by God our creator, the nature of grace, sin and forgiveness, the call to conversion, and the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation.
3. The pastor, along with the parents and catechist(s) of the child are to determine the readiness of the child to participate in this sacrament.
4. The celebration of the sacrament of Penance for the first time takes place ideally during the season of Lent or Advent.
5. Penitents must always have the right of an anonymous Confession with the use of a private screen. (CIC 964)
6. The candidate for the Sacrament of Penance is expected to participate in yearly ongoing faith formation to assure a continuous, systematic, and age appropriate catechesis. When this is not the case the candidate should complete a least one (school) year of formal catechesis either in a parish faith formation program or parish school prior to the time of the reception of the sacrament.
7. The Catholic school, faith formation program, and home-schooled child must participate in his/her parish sacramental preparation programs. *"Home schooling alone cannot replace catechesis or sacramental preparation in the parish church."* (NDC 32)
8. The formational component for the Sacrament of Penance (i.e. parent sessions, retreats, etc.) is distinct and separate from parish religious education, Catholic school, or home schooled curriculum.
9. Children are expected to continue their faith formation process by participation in parish religious education programs or Catholic school after the reception of the Sacrament of Penance.
10. Regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance and participation at Sunday Mass is necessary to grow ever more deeply in the mysteries of God's love and mercy within a communal environment.
11. In the Diocese of Gary catechetical preparation for the Sacrament of Penance requires that all catechetical materials and textbooks must be approved by the

USCCB. These materials are found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church. For a current listing go to www.usccb.org./catechism.

References

CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church
CDF – Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CIC – Code of Canon Law
CSL – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
GDC – General Directory for Catechesis
IRB - Instruction to the Rite of Baptism, Rites, Vol. 1
NDC – National Directory for Catechesis
RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults