

**PREPARING FOR AND CELEBRATING SACRAMENTS  
WITH CHILDREN IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF TORONTO**

**PART I: PASTORAL GUIDELINES**

## INTRODUCTION

1. Sacraments are, first and foremost, acts of Jesus, in union with the members of His Body, the Church. The Church, therefore, is responsible for determining the specifics of sacramental preparation and celebration.
2. Sacraments are for people - “*sacramenta propter homines.*” The Christian faithful have the right to receive the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments. (*Canon 213*).
3. Sacramental Preparation in the Archdiocese of Toronto is rooted in three principles:
  - ❖ All sacraments are ecclesial celebrations, i.e. celebrations of the Church;
  - ❖ Parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith;
  - ❖ Catholic schools are an integral part of ongoing Religious Education, including *initial* (ongoing Religious Education) preparation for the sacraments.
4. There are two types of preparation for sacraments, *initial* (ongoing Religious Education) and *immediate*.
5. **Initial (ongoing Religious Education) preparation** encompasses:
  - ❖ Sunday worship;
  - ❖ Prayer in the family;
  - ❖ Education in a Catholic School system (or equivalent formation in the parish in Catholic doctrine and life-style);
  - ❖ Daily living of a Catholic life-style appropriate to one’s age and spiritual development.

In the Catholic schools, the catechetical program, *Born Of The Spirit* (grades 1-6) and *We Are Strong Together* (grades 7, 8), are taught to the children. This teaching is an integral part of *initial* (ongoing Religious Education) preparation for the celebration of all sacraments. Children who attend private, public or alternative schools are to receive this *initial* (ongoing Religious Education) preparation at the parish.

6. **Immediate preparation** encompasses:
  - ❖ Sunday worship;
  - ❖ Prayer in the family;
  - ❖ Specific sacramental catechesis on the sacrament being anticipated;
  - ❖ Daily living of a Catholic life-style appropriate to one’s age and spiritual development.

The *immediate* preparation for all candidates for the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation is the responsibility of parents and of the parish.

For more detailed information on the immediate preparation for the sacraments, *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: An Outline of Immediate Sacramental Preparation in a Parish*, pp. 22-23.

For a list of Archdiocesan Resources for sacramental preparation, see *Archdiocesan Resources*, p.12.

Other catechetical resources are listed in the *Recommended Bibliography*, p. 13; *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: Preparing Children with Special Needs to Celebrate the Sacraments*, pp. 25-28, and *Sacramental Preparation for Youth and Teens*, pp. 29-32.

7. Since cooperation among parents, parish and school is essential in sacramental preparation and celebration, we recommend that the details of such cooperation be worked out together locally and communicated to all concerned, especially issues pertaining to the:
- ❖ selection of the most suitable place and time for catechesis;
  - ❖ procedure regarding schedules for preparation (e.g., Enrolment Ceremony, sessions for parents and/or children, retreats before Confirmation, celebration of the sacraments);
  - ❖ announcements in the parish bulletin, school newsletters, parish website;
  - ❖ parish practices regarding dress, photographs, processions, etc.

(See also *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: The Role of the Family, Parish, and School*, pp. 15-16; also *Family/Parish/School Cooperation*, pp. 17-18.)

8. The Second Vatican Council teaches that parents, “by word and example, [are] the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children” (*Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution of the Church], art. 11). It is, therefore, both the right and the duty of parents to take an active part in their child’s spiritual formation.

It is the responsibility of the parish, however, to encourage and support parents in the faith formation of their children. This often involves providing specific catechesis on the sacraments for both parents and children.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

9. The following General Guidelines affect only those baptized in the Roman Catholic Church (*The Code of Canon Law, Canon 1*). In the absence of proper documentation, the declaration of a single witness who is above suspicion (e.g. a parent or godparent, an older family member who was present at the baptism) suffices to establish that someone has been baptized (*Canon 876*).
10. These normative practices, in the Archdiocese of Toronto, call for dialogue and collaboration among parish priests, parents, catechists and teachers to ensure communication and avoid unilateral initiatives and possible misunderstandings.
11. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist (the three Sacraments of Initiation), are intimately related as three distinct sacramental moments which together form the total process of sacramental initiation into the Church (*Canon 842*).
12. Initiation presupposes both gift and response; both of these elements are present in all the sacraments.
13. The Eucharist is the fullness of initiation.
14. The Holy See and the Bishops of Canada have made it clear that children should be encouraged to receive First Eucharist at an early age, preceded by First Reconciliation (*Canon 914*).
15. In the Archdiocese of Toronto, the normal time for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist is between 7 and 8 years of age. The normal time for Confirmation is between 12 and 15 years of age.
16. Children with special needs have a right to the sacraments. They are to be catechised according to their capacity, utilizing the expertise of catechists with training in this ministry (*Canon 777*).  
  
Children with special needs will receive catechesis suitable to their abilities. What is expected of the child is adapted individually to suit his/her development.  
  
The Office of Formation for Discipleship for the Archdiocese of Toronto provides assistance and resources to parents and pastors of children with special needs for their preparation for the sacraments, as requested. See also *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: Preparing Children with Special Needs to Celebrate the Sacraments*, pp. 25-28.
17. Liturgical actions are primarily actions of Christ and celebrations of His Church, not private devotions. Since sacraments are liturgical celebrations, their very nature calls for a communal celebration. The source and place for their celebration is the local worshipping community, i.e. the parish (*Canon 837*).

18. When a child is enrolled in a Catholic school and the family worships in a parish other than that in which the school is located, immediate preparation and the celebration of the sacraments are the responsibility of the parish of worship, i.e. the one the family attends most regularly. (See also *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: Parishes of Worship*, p. 19.)
19. Since sacraments are ecclesial celebrations, it is the responsibility of the parish to collect the baptismal certificates before First Eucharist and Confirmation. Church law requires that a valid Baptism be conferred with water (pouring or immersion) and in the name of the Blessed Trinity (*Canon 849*).
20. Children who belong to Orthodox Churches and attend school within the Catholic Boards may receive initial and ongoing catechesis, as taught in the school's curriculum (See also *Appendix: Orthodox Children in Catholic Schools and the Celebration of the Sacraments*).
21. Orthodox children remaining Orthodox must not be included in a Catholic parish's immediate preparation for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation. (See *Appendix: Orthodox Children in Catholic Schools and the Celebration of the Sacraments*).
22. Children validly baptized in another Christian tradition who wish to be received into full communion in the Catholic Church must have the permission of their parents and receive suitable catechetical instruction before celebrating the Rite of Reception into Full Communion. Confirmation and First Eucharist follow the celebration of the Rite of Reception. (See *Appendix: The Act of Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church*; also *The Sacraments and Children from Other Christian Churches and Communities*).
23. The announcement of registration procedures and parent meetings regarding sacramental preparation should be made by the pastor in parishes, in school newsletters and on the parish website to ensure that all parents are notified.
24. Any decision to delay First Eucharist or Confirmation to a child who has completed the parish preparation process and has been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church is to be made only after the parish priest has consulted the child's parents to determine whether or not the child is ready (*Canon 843*).

Parents also may wish to delay the celebration of a sacrament because they feel their child is not ready, despite being at "the usual age."

## PHASES OF IMMEDIATE SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

### A. Information Meeting

25. The information meeting is conducted prior to families registering their children in the preparation process. The information meeting will:
- ❖ Inform parents and sponsors about the meaning of the sacrament, its history and place in our faith life;
  - ❖ Familiarize families with the preparation process and expectations;
  - ❖ Highlight the family's role and responsibilities throughout the preparation process;
  - ❖ Provide support to parents in their role as the first heralds of the faith.
- (See also *An Outline of Immediate Sacramental Preparation*, pp. 22-23.)
26. To accommodate the number of parents in the parish and their work schedules, it may be necessary to hold an information meeting on two or more occasions.
27. Formal registration for the preparation process is held at the parish. Notice of registration is included in the parish bulletin, school newsletters and on the parish website.

### B. Enrolment and Spiritual Accompaniment

28. The main function of enrolment is to provide an opportunity for parents to present their children to the community, inviting the congregation as a whole to share in the responsibility of providing prayerful support for Christian formation.
29. Enrolment of children for First Eucharist normally occurs during a Sunday liturgy.
30. Since the sacrament of Confirmation is to be celebrated on or close to Pentecost, the enrolment of candidates is normally celebrated during the Sunday liturgy at the end of the liturgical year or at the beginning of Advent. The enrolment marks the beginning of *immediate* sacramental preparation.
31. This period includes, especially before Confirmation, a retreat or a day of recollection in order to enhance the candidate's journey towards the celebration of the sacrament. This retreat or time of prayer could be held on an evening, a weekend or during school time. The coordination, facilitation and any expenses incurred are responsibilities of the parish.

32. Parish gatherings for the children and their families, including a prayer service, are to be held before First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. These are the responsibility of the parish. Suggested formats may be found in the *Archdiocesan Resources*, p. 12.

**C. Celebration of the Sacrament**

33. Although 7 to 8 years of age is the recommended time for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist and 12 to 15 years of age is recommended for the celebration of Confirmation, each candidate should celebrate the sacrament at the time when he or she is most ready. Parents, sponsors, catechists, and priests should collaborate in making this decision.

## PARTICULAR GUIDELINES FOR EACH SACRAMENT

### Baptism:

34. 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. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1213.)
- It is necessary to be validly baptized before celebrating any of the other sacraments.
35. For an infant or child to be baptized lawfully, it is required that:
- ❖ The parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent;
  - ❖ There be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Church. If such hope is truly lacking, the Baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred, and the parents advised of the reason for this (*Canon 868*).
36. A parish provides opportunities for parents to participate in the *immediate* preparation for the celebration of Baptism prior to the birth of their child. This time frame allows parents and families to become connected or reconnected with the local parish.
37. Parish Baptism Preparation Teams consist of men and women who are fully initiated and active members of the Catholic Church. Whenever possible, it is fitting to have team members who reflect the diversity of family life and the ethnic diversity of the parish.
38. "Though baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that normally it be celebrated on a Sunday or, if possible, on the vigil of Easter." (*Canon 856*).
39. All sacraments are ecclesial (acts of the Church) and are celebrated in the midst of the believing community. When infant Baptism is not celebrated during the Sunday liturgy, it is fitting to invite members of the parish community to be present.
40. The parish community is responsible for the preparation of parents and godparents for the Baptism of a child. Such preparation includes instruction on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attaching to it.
41. Except in case of an emergency, the proper place for Baptism is a church.
42. An adult who desires to celebrate Baptism is prepared through participation in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

43. A child of catechetical age who desires to celebrate Baptism is prepared through participation in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children of catechetical age (Part II, Chapter 1). It is generally accepted that a child who has entered his or her seventh year has reached catechetical age. Additional information on this initiation process may be obtained through the Office of Formation for Discipleship, Archdiocese of Toronto.
44. Adults or children baptized in another Christian tradition (whose Baptisms the Catholic Church recognizes as valid) are never to be rebaptized (Canon 869). Prior to celebrating the Rite of Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church, there is a time of pastoral formation and preparation that is determined in harmony with the pastoral notes in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Part II, Chapter 5 and Appendix 3.
45. Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, an adult who is baptized is to be confirmed immediately after Baptism and is to participate in the eucharistic celebration also by receiving Communion. (*Canon 866*).
46. Insofar as possible, a person being baptized is to have a godparent. For more information on the number, qualifications and responsibilities of godparents, see *Appendix: Canons Pertaining to Baptism*, Canons 872-874; also *Form for Godparents*.
47. A stole is the sign that someone has been ordained as a deacon, priest, or bishop. It is not, therefore, appropriate for use as a baptismal garment. An alb (white garment) is the proper baptismal symbol.
48. The responsibility for maintaining the required baptismal record belongs to the pastor of the Church where the Baptism was celebrated. (See also *Appendix: Canons Pertaining to Baptism*, Canon 877.)

### **First Reconciliation:**

49. *Immediate* preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation precedes *immediate* preparation for First Eucharist (Canons 914, 916).
50. It is understood that First Reconciliation is celebrated in the church (Canon 964.1).
51. Parish priests, catechists and parents should cooperate to employ the Second Rite (communal celebration with individual confessions) as the form for this celebration of the sacrament. Every effort should be made to schedule the celebration in such a way that parents may attend and join their children, if the group is not too large and if time permits.
52. It is not permissible to take attendance or to record those present at the communal celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Rite 2), or to monitor those children or adults who choose to participate in individual confession of sins.

### **First Eucharist:**

53. When a child has reached the age of reason, is able to distinguish ordinary bread and the Bread of the Eucharist, and has been adequately prepared (*Canons 913, 914*), he/she is to be admitted to First Eucharist, which is normally celebrated at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. Thereafter, the child should be encouraged to receive Communion on the Lord's Day and, indeed, whenever he/she is present at Mass.
54. Parents introduce and nurture a Catholic way of life in their children by praying with them, worshipping with them at the weekly Sunday Eucharist and forming them in practical ways of loving their neighbours.
55. Adequate preparation is to be understood as the successful completion of the *initial* (ongoing Religious Education) preparation (either in a Catholic school or in a parish) and of the *immediate* preparation provided by the parish of worship.
56. Participation in the weekly celebration of Sunday Eucharist is a hallmark of a Catholic way of life, and the right of Catholics to receive the sacraments is clearly established in canons 213 and 912.

However, monitoring or recording attendance of children or parents at Sunday Eucharist is not permitted.

57. The decision concerning an individual child's readiness to receive First Communion rests with the child's parents in consultation with the parish priest. This is particularly true for parents of children with special (developmental) needs.

58. Normally the reception of First Eucharist takes place at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass with the child's family. The discipline of the Church regarding reception of Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue applies to celebrations of First Eucharist. Children may not be restricted from receiving Communion in the hand.
59. A decision regarding suitable attire is arrived at through a process of consultation involving the pastoral staff and the parents. (See Appendix: *Frequently Asked Questions: Baptism.*)

### **Confirmation:**

60. In the sacrament of Confirmation, God bestows the Holy Spirit on us as Christ promised the Church. This promise was realized at Pentecost. In this sense, it intensifies the effects or capacities given in Baptism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1303-1305*) and can be seen as an extension of Pentecost (Jn. 20:21; Acts 2:1-4).
61. Confirmation underscores the essentially missionary character of the Church. By the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1285*). [See also Appendix: *The Sacrament of Confirmation in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.*]
62. All baptized persons who have not been confirmed and only they are capable of receiving Confirmation (*Canon 889, § 1*). A person validly baptized in another Christian tradition would need to be prepared for and received into full Communion before Confirmation (See Appendix: *The Act of Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church*).
63. To be licitly confirmed it is required, if the person has the use of reason, that one be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew one's baptismal promises (*Canon 889, §2*).
64. Children in the Eastern Churches (Orthodox and Catholic) are confirmed (chrismated) at Baptism and are never confirmed again.
65. Parents of children with special (developmental) needs decide, in consultation with the pastor, when their child is ready to be confirmed.
66. As far as possible, the person to be confirmed is to have one sponsor. The sponsor's function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfils the duties inherent in this sacrament (See Appendix: *Canons Pertaining to Confirmation, Canons 892-894; also Form for Sponsors*).
67. Sponsors are models of faith for a candidate. Therefore, a sponsor for Confirmation is a Catholic who has already celebrated Confirmation, is practicing his/her faith and is

mature enough (usually 16 years or older) to carry out the role of sponsor. A sponsor may be either male or female. Parents cannot be sponsors for their own children (*Canons 874 and 893, §1*).

68. It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook the role at Baptism (Canon 893).
69. "Nowhere in the new rite is mention made of choosing a special name for confirmation. It is recommended that the baptismal name be used, emphasizing once more the important link between baptism and confirmation along the path of Christian initiation."  
  
"The importance of choosing a saint's name or one with a Christian meaning at baptism is reinforced by use of this name in confirmation." (*Rite of Confirmation: Ritual and Pastoral Notes*, copyright © Concacan, Inc., 1987, p. 109).
70. Since, in the Catholic Church, a stole is a symbol of ordained ministry, it is an inappropriate symbol for Confirmation (See *Appendix: Frequently Asked Questions: Confirmation*).

### **Anointing of the Sick with Children:**

71. The Anointing of the Sick may be administered to any member of the faithful who, having reached the age of reason, begins to be in danger of death by reason of illness or old age (*Canon 1004 §1*).
72. Sick children may be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be comforted by this sacrament (*The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, p. 585).
73. In case of doubt concerning the adequacy of their use of reason, sick children are to be anointed.
74. When a baptized child is in danger of death, he/she may also be confirmed and celebrate First Eucharist at the time of Anointing.
75. The central symbolic actions of the Rite of Anointing, apart from the gathering of the assembly and the proclamation of the Word of God, are the prayer of faith, the laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil.
76. Children who are sick are capable of experiencing comfort and peace when family and friends pray with them and the Church officially blesses them. This can occur at an individual or a communal celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing.

## ARCHDIOCESAN RESOURCES

The staff of the Office of Formation for Discipleship, in conjunction with Pastors and Parish Catechists, has produced Archdiocesan Resources for the Immediate Preparation of the Sacraments. Each of the resources has been used effectively in parishes of various sizes across the Archdiocese.

The resources provide theological background on the sacrament being anticipated, a summary of essential catechesis, a detailed outline of the preparation and notes for the facilitator. Each resource has a bibliography, and helpful sample registration forms, enrolment ceremonies, and information on preparing for and celebrating the liturgy.

A copy of the Archdiocesan Resources may be ordered through the Office of Formation for Discipleship, 416-934-3400 ext. 523. Each resource may be accessed on line at <http://www.archtoronto.org/CORE>

*Anointed for Mission, A Parish Confirmation Preparation Programme.*  
©Archdiocese of Toronto, Revised 2007.

*Celebrating God's Love, A Resource for the Immediate Preparation For First Reconciliation in the Parish.* ©Archdiocese of Toronto, 2002.

*Claimed for Christ, Baptism Preparation Resource.*  
©Archdiocese of Toronto, 2005.

*Invited to the Feast, A Parish Resource for the Immediate Preparation For First Eucharist.* ©Archdiocese of Toronto, 2005.

## RECOMMENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Church Documents:

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, especially nos. 1212-1532. Ottawa: Publications Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994.

“*One In Christ Jesus*,” Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1980.

### Additional Resources:

Brusselmans, C. and B.A. Haggerty. *We Celebrate Reconciliation, The Good Shepherd*. Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdette & Ginn, 1990. Distributed through RCL Benzinger.

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O’Connor, Francine M. *First Communion: Preparing Children for the Sacrament of Eucharist Revised Edition*. Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1998.

O’Connor, Francine M. *First Penance: Preparing Children for the Rite of Reconciliation Revised Edition*. Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1998.

*We Remember: Eucharist: A Sacramental Preparation Program for Students with Developmental Disabilities*. Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario (CARFLEO), 2004. Available online at <http://www.carfleo.org>

*We Celebrate Forgiveness: A Sacramental Preparation Program for Students with Developmental Disabilities*. Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario (CARFLEO), 2005. Available online at <http://www.carfleo.org>

Note: An extensive bibliography is included in each of the Archdiocesan Resources. The resources may be accessed online at <http://www.archtoronto.org/CORE>  
See also the additional resources listed in *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: Sacramental Preparation and Children with Special Needs* (pp. 25-28), and *Sacramental Preparation for Youth and Teens* (pp. 29-30).

**PREPARING FOR AND CELEBRATING SACRAMENTS  
WITH CHILDREN IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF TORONTO**

**PART II: IMPLEMENTING PASTORAL GUIDELINES**

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY, PARISH AND SCHOOL

#### The Family

At the Second Vatican Council, the Church taught that the family is the '*Domestic Church*' and that parents are the first educators of their children in the ways of faith. Through word and action the parents hand on to the child an image of God and an emerging awareness of what it means to live a Catholic way of life. Prayer pamphlets, simple suggestions in the bulletin and opportunities for ongoing adult faith formation are some ways a parish may assist parents in their role.

In addition to participation in the weekly Sunday Eucharist, families may be encouraged to pray each day, to eat a family meal together and to be attentive to the religious education that their children receive in the Catholic schools.

#### The Parish

The initiation of new members is the responsibility of the whole Church. Not only must parents be involved with the sacramental preparation of their children, but parishioners also must be involved if we are to recognize fully the call of all Christians to evangelize.

The following are some suggestions of ways in which parishioners may assist with the preparation for the sacraments with children and young people:

- ❖ Discuss the theological and pastoral reasons for parish-based sacramental preparation as well as the baptismal call to evangelize with parishioners. Pastoral Councils are a good place to start;
- ❖ Celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist at regular Sunday Masses;
- ❖ Invite parish groups to give the young people and candidates a prayer card, bookmark, magnet or other memento;
- ❖ Invite parishioners to be hospitality ministers at parent information meetings;
- ❖ Have parishioners provide treats (baking, drinks, even a meal) for the confirmation retreat(s) or family gatherings;
- ❖ Put a note of congratulations in the bulletin after the Rite of Enrolment, as well as after the celebration of the sacraments;

- ❖ Have a bulletin board or a banner at the back of the church showing the names of the children and young people preparing for the sacraments;
- ❖ Have the parish pray for those preparing to celebrate a sacrament. You may want to have parishioners make up individual prayer cards.

## **The School**

We are privileged in our Archdiocese to have a Catholic school system which supports and supplements the work done in families and parishes to pass on our religious heritage to the next generation. In the past, schools have often been expected to provide the sacramental preparation for the parish. At this time in history, however, and for a variety of reasons, we understand that this model is inadequate because it diminishes, and sometimes even neglects, the role of the parish in the faith formation of our children.

The Archdiocesan Resources for *immediate preparation* underline the important role of the schools in providing part of the initial preparation for the sacraments (the other parts being provided by parish and family life). This includes the teaching of the *Born of the Spirit* and *We Are Strong Together* Religious Education programs, as well as the atmosphere of Catholic living in the context of the learning environment of the school. The *immediate* or direct preparation for the celebration of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation takes place in the parish.

The following are ways in which the parish/school links may be kept strong and vital:

- ❖ Parish staff meet with the school principals on a yearly basis, preferably in late spring, to prepare for the following school year;
- ❖ Parish staff meet with the teachers of children in the grades in which large numbers of children and young people will be celebrating the sacraments (usually grades 2 and 8);
- ❖ Include teachers and principals in emails and communications with families;
- ❖ Acknowledge the important role teachers have as faith leaders in the lives of parish children. Thank them for their assistance at the end of the year. Hand out prayer cards to teachers at the beginning and end of the year or at important liturgical feasts;
- ❖ Encourage and nurture faith committees on School Councils;
- ❖ Keep schools informed of dates of important events in sacramental preparation. Better still, plan these together at a spring meeting for the following school year;
- ❖ Create a parish newsletter which is sent to schools;
- ❖ Ask the schools to send their newsletters to the parish;
- ❖ Have the weekly parish bulletin posted on the school bulletin boards.

## FAMILY/PARISH/SCHOOL COOPERATION

### Introduction

Parents, parishes and schools are called to work closely together to ensure a worthy, solid preparation for both Religious Education and sacramental preparation for our young people.

Parents, as the primary educators of their children, are called to be attentive, active, and cooperative in guiding their children in “the ways of faith.” This obviously calls for personal involvement in their parish of worship and the life of their child’s school.

Catholic schools are responsible for ongoing Religious Education. The Canadian catechetical series *Born of the Spirit* and *We are Strong Together* provides a comprehensive approach to Religious Education. The series offers a progressive and systematic presentation of the basic content of the faith for children and young people while integrating the teachings found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The ongoing Religious Education is often referred to as *initial* or *indirect* preparation for the sacraments. Parishes have as an essential responsibility to offer public worship of God and the celebration of the Church’s sacraments, including suitable preparation for them. When children and young people are ready to celebrate a sacrament, the parish provides the resources for the *immediate* or *direct* preparation, leading to celebration of Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation.

### Suggestions:

❖ **Pastors** are called to provide:

- A clear explanation of the Archdiocesan documents on preparation for and celebration of the sacraments with children: “Adequate preparation is to be understood as the successful completion of the *initial* preparation (either in a Catholic school or in a parish) and of the *immediate* preparation provided by the parish.” Therefore, the school takes on the role of *initial* preparation through daily prayer, modelling a Catholic way of life and teaching the *Born of the Spirit* and *We Are Strong Together* catechetical programs;
- An explanation to principals, teachers and parents that children should be celebrating the sacraments in the parish where they worship. This may not necessarily be the parish where they attend school. For a listing of the geographical boundaries of parishes within the Archdiocese of Toronto, go to [www.archtoronto.org/parishes/index.html](http://www.archtoronto.org/parishes/index.html)

- A meeting with school principals in May or June of the preceding year to review the process and set dates together for the coming year, which will ensure that parents and/or children are not expected to be at the parish and the school at the same time;
  - A meeting with grade 2 teachers in September to review the parish programs for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist;
  - A meeting with grade 8 teachers in September to review the parish program for Confirmation;
  - A request to teachers and school secretaries that, if they receive any questions from parents concerning the sacraments, they direct these to the parish.
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- ❖ Pastors and Principals communicate regularly to let each other know what is currently happening regarding sacramental preparation in both parish and school.
  - ❖ Parishes and Principals cooperate in placing notices for all parent/family meetings in the parish bulletin, the school newsletters and on the parish website.
  - ❖ Parishes inform School Councils (through the parish representative) of all dates and happenings in the parish.
  - ❖ Both Pastors and Educators speak positively with parents about the importance of the *initial* preparation for the sacraments provided by the Catholic schools and stress the importance of home, parish and school working together in the faith development of our children.

## PARISHES OF WORSHIP

For a variety of reasons, children may attend a school which is attached to a parish other than the one their family regularly attends. This reality points to the need for a clear understanding that together with the family, the school participates in the *initial* preparation of children for sacraments, and the parish of worship provides the *immediate* preparation for the celebration of the sacraments. (See *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines*, nos. 5 and 6). It also calls for continued catechesis and communication among all three [parish, school, family] to ensure that children are not prevented from celebrating a sacrament.

### Suggestions:

- ❖ Include a notice in both the parish bulletin and the school newsletter indicating the details of the Information Meetings leading up to the preparation for and celebration of the sacraments;
- ❖ Periodically print a notice in the parish bulletin that the sacraments are celebrated in the parish where we normally worship;
- ❖ Make resources such as the brochure, *Celebrating Sacraments with Children in the Catholic Church: A Parent's Guide to the Sacraments of Initiation*, available not only to new parents, but to new parishioners with children. It communicates and highlights the relationship between parish and family in the sacramental preparation process (See pp. 20-21).

# A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CELEBRATING SACRAMENTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

## Dear Parents,

Congratulations! We join with you in thanking God for the gift of your child.

Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation. It is the entry-way into the life of the Catholic faith and the future celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist when your child has reached the appropriate age.

Sacraments are always celebrated in the Church and our parish community wants to share in your joy.

If you have been away from the weekly Sunday Eucharist, this is a wonderful time for you to reconnect to your parish's faith community each Sunday. We pray that God will bless you and your family as you continue to grow in faith.



Catholic Office of  
Religious Education  
and Liturgy

Archdiocese of Toronto  
1155 Yonge St., Ste. 500  
Toronto, ON M4T 1W2  
Phone: 416-934-0606  
Fax: 416-934-3444

Celebrating  
Sacraments  
with Children  
in the Catholic  
Church



A Parent's Guide to  
the Sacraments  
of Initiation

Archdiocese of Toronto

## Sacrament of Baptism



Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation and the foundation for all other sacraments. **"2156 The sacrament of Baptism is conferred in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Your child will be welcomed into the Catholic community as a valued member. As the first and best teachers of your child, the way that you approach Church membership and participation will have a significant impact on your child's faith life.

To plan your child's Baptism you will need to meet with a parish priest or member of the pastoral team. Attendance at a preparation session will be arranged during your meeting with a parish representative. After your initial contact with the parish, the date for Baptism will be set.

If your child is age 7 or older, he/she should participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children, in order to be baptized, confirmed and to receive the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

## Sacrament of Eucharist

**"1359 The Eucharist, the sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation."** (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Children, who have been baptized as infants, celebrate the reception of Eucharist at age 7 or older. Those children who are not attending a Catholic school will require some catechetical formation through the parish or a home study program.

Parishes will hold information meetings for parents, usually in the fall, after school has begun. Be sure to check your parish bulletin for meeting notices.

The parish will need a copy of your child's Baptismal certificate for registration purposes. Depending on your parish's circumstances, after the parent meeting, you can expect to receive a sacramental preparation book for you and your child to work through. There will likely be at least one or more meetings to attend to assist you and your child in preparing for this wonderful sacrament. Regular church attendance is essential to support and enhance all your child will learn during this preparation process.



## Sacrament of Confirmation

**"1316 Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds."** (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

In the Archdiocese of Toronto, children are usually confirmed between the ages of 12 and 15. Again, your parish bulletin will advertise parents and children information evenings or you can call the parish office for information. At the registration meeting, a copy of your child's Baptismal certificate will be required.

Preparation sessions for your child will usually be held at the parish over a number of weeks or months. Your child will be asked to choose a sponsor – someone who will encourage and support his/her faith development now and in the future. A sponsor must be at least 16 years old and a fully initiated member of the Catholic faith (Baptized, Confirmed and having received First Eucharist).

Confirmation dates will vary from parish to parish. Many will take place on Pentecost Sunday, with the parish priests conferring Confirmation as delegated by the Archbishop of Toronto. If an Auxiliary Bishop for your region has arranged to visit your parish, Confirmation dates may be arranged to coincide with the Bishop's visit.

## **AN OUTLINE OF IMMEDIATE SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION IN A PARISH**

The immediate preparation for the sacraments usually begins in September or October. In many parishes the parents are notified via the parish bulletin and school newsletter of an initial information meeting.

The first meeting, often referred to as a Parent Information Meeting, would include details around formal registration in the preparation process and the need for the parents to provide the parish with a copy of their child's baptismal certificate.

It is important to remember that as Catholics we are called by God to participate each Sunday in the celebration of Mass. All of the baptized are called to prayer and to live a Catholic way of life. Parents are reminded of this when they seek to prepare their child to celebrate a sacrament.

The Archdiocesan Resources for immediate sacramental preparation include specific catechetical opportunities for the parents. The catechesis for the parents is focused on the sacrament being anticipated, the importance of Sunday liturgy, and ways to nurture and foster a Catholic way of life. *See Part I: Pastoral Guidelines: Archdiocesan Resources*, page 12.

Although the preparation for each of the sacraments may begin in September, there is no expectation or intention that there will be weekly classes for children and/or parents. The immediate preparation to celebrate First Reconciliation, First Eucharist or Confirmation may span a period of seven to nine months. It would not be appropriate to establish a preparation process that extends over one or two years.

### **First Reconciliation**

The immediate preparation for First Reconciliation includes:

- ❖ Parent Information Meeting in the child's parish of worship (sometimes in conjunction with the First Eucharist Information Meeting);
- ❖ Registration for First Reconciliation in the child's parish of worship (may occur at the same time as registration for First Eucharist);
- ❖ Parent Catechetical Meeting;
- ❖ Parents working with child on a preparation book;
- ❖ A Parent and Child (Family) Gathering in the parish of worship (optional);
- ❖ Celebration of the Sacrament in the parish of worship during an evening or on a Saturday (outside of regular school hours).

The parent and child may require five to eight weeks to complete the resource. The size of the parish will determine how many Parent and Child (Family) gatherings are required so it may take from one to four weeks to complete the gatherings.

## **First Eucharist**

The immediate preparation for First Eucharist includes:

- ❖ Parent Information Meeting in the child's parish of worship;
- ❖ Registration for First Eucharist in the child's parish of worship;
- ❖ Enrolment ceremony during a Sunday liturgy;
- ❖ Parent Catechetical Meeting;
- ❖ Parents working with child on a preparation book;
- ❖ A Parent and Child (Family) Gathering (optional);
- ❖ Celebration of the Sacrament in the parish of worship, normally during a regularly scheduled Sunday liturgy.

The parent and child may require five to eight weeks to complete the resource. The size of the parish will determine how many Parent and Child (Family) gatherings are required so it may take from one to four weeks to complete the gatherings.

## **Confirmation**

The immediate preparation for Confirmation includes:

- ❖ Parent Information Meeting in the candidate's parish of worship;
- ❖ Registration for Confirmation in the parish of worship;
- ❖ Enrolment ceremony during a Sunday liturgy;
- ❖ Four group sessions for the candidates with the small group Facilitators;
- ❖ Retreat day or evening provided by the parish of worship;
- ❖ Celebration of the Sacrament;
- ❖ A fifth session following the celebration of Confirmation.

The size of the parish will determine if the group sessions are held weekly or every other week. The catechetical sessions may be completed in as little as five weeks or it may take up to ten weeks for everyone to attend the four sessions and retreat.

## **CONTACTING PARENTS REGARDING THE SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION PROCESS**

Communicating important information about the sacramental preparation process to the parents or guardians is an ongoing process in a parish. There are several ways to keep in contact and maintain clear communication.

### **Suggestions:**

- ❖ Include notices of upcoming meetings in the parish bulletin well in advance of the date. A notice that runs for two or three weeks will alert the community of the dates;
- ❖ Notify parents of children attending Catholic schools of upcoming preparation for and celebration of the sacraments via the school newsletter;
- ❖ Send a letter to all parents at the beginning of the school year notifying them of the dates and format for preparation for and celebration of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation. This is the time of year when children are most likely to pass such a letter on to their parents;
- ❖ Include the times of Sunday liturgy and the parish address, telephone number and website address in the letter sent home via the school;
- ❖ Use visits to the school by Pastoral Team members (Pastor, Associate Pastor, Lay Pastoral Associates) as an opportunity to remind the children of upcoming meetings and dates for the celebration of the sacraments;
- ❖ Include the above information on the parish website – again, well in advance of the meeting and celebration dates.

Following the notifications and letters that have been sent to the parents and once the process of preparation has begun, if the parents and the children miss a disappropriate portion of the process, then the sacrament may be delayed.

## **PREPARING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENTS**

When working with children who have special needs it is important to remember that the parents are the first and primary educators of their children. As such, the parents are most aware of the needs and challenges faced by their child.

### **First Reconciliation**

#### *Overview of Catechesis*

Reconciliation is a sacrament to celebrate God's forgiveness and healing. When we choose to do an action that we know is hurtful to others or ourselves, this action is called a sin. When we recognize the hurtfulness of our action and we are willing to say, "I am sorry, please forgive me," we ask to be reconciled. God is always ready to forgive us when we choose to ask forgiveness.

In the case of children with special needs, if the person is capable of recognizing and acknowledging that an action he/she has chosen to do is hurtful and is willing to ask forgiveness, then he/she would have the ability to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Someone who is not capable of understanding the hurtfulness of his/her action would not need to formally celebrate Reconciliation. They can be reminded frequently of God's great love for them.

#### *Possible Topics:*

- ❖ We are loved by God (parables of the Lost Sheep, the Forgiving Father);
- ❖ God asks us to be loving (simple wording of Commandments);
- ❖ We make choices;
- ❖ Hurtful choices will always be forgiven when we are sorry;
- ❖ What does it mean to say "I'm sorry?";
- ❖ A simple Act of Contrition;
- ❖ Jesus is always ready to welcome us;
- ❖ Visiting a reconciliation room;
- ❖ Talking with a priest/celebrating Reconciliation.

### **First Eucharist**

The criterion for reception of Holy Communion "is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture or reverential silence rather than verbally." (Guidelines of *Celebrations of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, Washington: USCCB, 1995). Insofar as possible, children with

special needs should be prepared for First Eucharist with other children of the same age. This would mean taking part in the parish preparation as much as they are able. The family books and other resources (printed or video) used by the parish may be adapted by the parents and/or the catechist for the individual child's needs or learning style.

Parents often need support and encouragement from parish catechists when they are preparing their child to receive Communion. It is important that the parents be comfortable with the preparation process and know that their child will not be expected to "pass a test" to prove that he or she is ready to receive First Eucharist. A child who has expressed a desire or hunger to receive Communion and who is present at the weekly Sunday Eucharist is usually able to distinguish the difference between ordinary food and the body of Christ.

### *Overview of Catechesis*

Eucharist is a time to gather as a parish family/community and share in a special holy meal. We listen to stories of God's great love for us. We say thank you to God and we bring gifts of bread, wine, and ourselves. We remember Jesus' Last Supper and we receive Jesus in a special way in the holy bread and wine of Eucharist (Holy Communion). We go out to bring God's love to others.

### *Possible Topics:*

- ❖ Belonging to our parish family/community;
- ❖ Listening to stories of Jesus and his friends and of God's great love for us;
- ❖ Sharing of gifts;
- ❖ Remembering the story of the Last Supper;
- ❖ Learning the Lord's Prayer (to the degree the student is capable);
- ❖ Sharing food as a sign of friendship;
- ❖ Jesus comes to us in the special food of holy bread and wine;
- ❖ We give thanks to Jesus;
- ❖ A visit to the church.

## **Confirmation**

### *Overview of Catechesis*

Confirmation is the sacrament of initiation that celebrates God's gift of the seal of the Holy Spirit. This sacrament marks our total belonging to Christ and expresses our commitment in God's service forever. The anointing with the Spirit highlights the name "Christian" which means "anointed." Under the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit we can become active followers of Jesus. Confirmation can be seen as an extension of Pentecost and, therefore, completes our Baptism.

“Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities, and shepherds of souls – especially pastors – are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized are properly instructed to receive the sacrament of Confirmation and to approach it at the opportune time” (Canon 890). Persons who may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged and given support to celebrate the sacrament.

*Possible Topics:*

- ❖ By Baptism we belong to God’s family;
- ❖ The story of Pentecost;
- ❖ Jesus calls us to love one another;
- ❖ The Holy Spirit helps us to do loving actions;
- ❖ We receive special gifts from the Holy Spirit (Wisdom, Understanding, Good Judgment, Courage, Knowledge, Reverence, Wonder/Awe: re-worded as required);
- ❖ Blessings are holy signs and actions that we use;
- ❖ Special sign of Confirmation is oil: Chrism;
- ❖ We celebrate being part of the parish community.

**Some Resources**

For products that can assist a child with special needs, such as “Writing with Symbols,” contact:

Mayer Johnson  
 P.O. Box 1579,  
 Solana Beach, CA 92075, USA  
 Phone: 1-800-588-4548 (toll free) or (858)-550-0084  
 Fax: (858)-550-0449  
 Website: [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com)

The Northern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative has produced a resource entitled, *Sacramental Preparation for Students with Developmental Disabilities and An Anthology of Stories of Jesus and His Friends*. (Order number: R1002 Cost: \$45.00) For additional information and other products, contact:

The Northern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative  
 1516 McKeown Avenue  
 North Bay, Ontario P1B 7N1  
 Phone: 1-800- 461- 9355 (toll free) or (705) 840- 2000  
 Fax: (705) 840- 2002  
 Website: [www.noccc.on.ca](http://www.noccc.on.ca)

*Children with Disability and Participation in Sacraments*, Archdiocese of Brisbane, The Liturgical Commission, January 1995. (ISBN: 1-875522-05-0)

“Canonical Rights to the Sacraments” by John M. Huels, pp. 94-115, *Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access*, ed. Edward Foley, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 56321, 1994. (ISBN: 0-8146-2280-1)

*Perfect Praise - Sacramental Preparation for Your Child with Special Needs.* By Bernadette Zambri. Available through Morning Light Ministry, c/o St Mary Star of the Sea Church, 11 Peter St., South, Mississauga, ON, L5H 2G1. Website:  
<http://ca.geocities.com/morninglightministry@rogers.com>

*We Remember: Eucharist: A Sacramental Preparation Program for Students with Developmental Disabilities.* Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario (CARFLEO), 2004. Available online at <http://www.carfleo.org>

*We Celebrate Forgiveness: A Sacramental Preparation Program for Students with Developmental Disabilities.* Catholic Association of Religious and Family Life Educators of Ontario (CARFLEO), 2005. Available online at <http://www.carfleo.org>

## SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION FOR YOUTH AND TEENS

### Introduction

In the Archdiocese of Toronto, the normal time for a child to prepare for and celebrate First Reconciliation and First Eucharist is between 7 and 8 years of age and the normal time for a candidate to prepare for and celebrate Confirmation is between the ages of 12 and 15 (See *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines*, no. 15). It is common to meet families with children who wish to prepare for and celebrate one or more of the sacraments outside of these times. As a response to this pastoral reality, the Office of Religious Education and Liturgy (now a part of the Office of Formation for Discipleship), in conjunction with the Archdiocesan Religious Education Resource Committee, has compiled a resource for parishes.

This resource is intended for youth and teens who are **baptized** members of the **Roman Catholic Church** and seek to celebrate Confirmation, First Eucharist and/or First Reconciliation. The *immediate preparation* for the celebration of the sacraments is the responsibility of the parish of worship. The parents will play an integral role in the preparation process.

### Unbaptized

If a child or youth is unbaptized and the family approaches the parish seeking guidance and preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation, his or her initiation process should be shaped by the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* adapted for children of catechetical age. Additional information on this process may be obtained through the Office of Formation for Discipleship.

### Baptized in another Christian Tradition

If a child or youth is baptized in another Christian tradition and seeks to be a fully initiated member of the Roman Catholic Church, his or her preparation should be determined in harmony with the pastoral notes in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Part II, Chapter 5, and Appendix 3. Additional information on this process may be obtained through the Office of Formation for Discipleship.

### Underlying Assumptions and Principles

The Church celebrates the sacraments with a person when he or she is ready. Although there may be normal times for celebrating the sacrament, readiness is determined, in part, by one's relationship with God and with the believing community.

Often, a family that seeks to celebrate one or more of the sacraments with their child who is 'outside the normal age range' is striving to become connected or reconnected to the Church.

This is an opportunity for evangelization and hospitality. The parish staff (i.e., Pastor, Pastoral Team, Secretary), and the local Catholic school are called to be visible signs of God's presence to families. Pastoral Team members are encouraged to be flexible in their approach to sacramental preparation for these families, and to extend a sincere welcome to them when they approach the parish or school seeking information about preparing for and celebrating the sacraments.

The parents are primary educators in the faith for their children. They ought to be integrally involved in the conversation with the Pastoral Team and the sacramental preparation process. If it is appropriate, the family may be invited to commit or recommit to weekly participation in the Sunday Mass.

The catechesis for a particular sacrament is the same, regardless of the age of the candidate. The presentation of the catechesis will differ according to his or her needs and capacity for learning.

Youth and teens may be *catechized* or *uncatechized*. Through conversation and dialogue, the Pastoral Team or Catechist will be able to discern the needs of the young people and their families. It is challenging to define in a few words what it means to be "catechized." In the broader context, is important to recall that catechesis is ongoing, and that all are called to be engaged in it. In the context of sacramental preparation for youth and teens, *catechized* is meant to apply to Roman Catholic young people who have experienced

- ❖ Regular participation in Sunday liturgy;
- ❖ Religious Education in a Catholic School or a Parish program, home study or correspondence course.

The term *uncatechized* is meant to apply to Roman Catholic young people who have **not** had such experience.

## First Step

When a family contacts the parish seeking information or guidance in preparing their child to celebrate one or more of the sacraments, the parish's first response should be rooted in a desire to extend God's hospitality. The family may or may not, for example, be aware of the schedule for Sunday liturgies and the location of the church. This information can be shared in a welcoming manner. The family may be invited to meet with a member of the Pastoral Team to discuss the sacramental preparation that would be the most appropriate for their situation.

### **Initial Meeting with the Family**

The Pastor or another member of the Pastoral Team would meet with the parent(s) and child. This first meeting is a time to extend hospitality, to establish the beginnings of a relationship with the family and to hear the reasons or circumstances that have led to the inquiry or desire to celebrate a sacrament.

Although the parent(s) may not have approached the parish at the time when their child was the 'normal age' for celebrating First Communion or Confirmation, their presence now is a time of grace and an opportunity to welcome and evangelize. The reasons for delaying the preparation are not as important as the reasons for choosing to prepare at this time.

During this meeting the Pastoral Team member would attempt to set everyone at ease by engaging them in a conversation about their past experiences with the Church and their hopes or expectations at this time. Although the parent(s) or child may be unfamiliar with the Church, they may have a strong relationship with God. It is important to have a listening ear and pastoral sensitivity as they tell their story and share their expectations.

At this meeting it would be appropriate to provide the name of the parish coordinator or the person who will be calling the family to sort out the specifics around the sacramental preparation process.

### **Archdiocesan Resources**

The Archdiocesan Resources for the immediate preparation for the sacraments provide theological background on the sacrament being anticipated, a summary of essential catechesis, a detailed outline of the preparation and notes for the facilitator. Each resource has a bibliography and helpful sample registration forms, enrolment ceremonies as well as information on preparing for and celebrating the liturgy. For more information about these resources, see *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines: Archdiocesan Resources*, p. 12.

### **Additional Catechetical Resources**

In addition to the Archdiocesan Resources for immediate preparation for the Sacraments of Confirmation, First Eucharist and First Reconciliation, a parish may find it helpful to build a catechetical library.

There are many catechetical programs to choose from; each has strengths and weaknesses. The programs or supplemental material referred to in this resource are listed below (See also *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines: Recommended Bibliography*, page 13, and *Part II: Implementing Pastoral Guidelines: Preparing Children with Special Needs for the Sacraments*, pp. 25-28).

*Confirmation.* Allen, Texas: Resources for Christian Living (RCL), 2007.

*Eucharist, Do this in memory of me.* Program Director's Manual. Allen, Texas: Resources for Christian Living (RCL), 2003

The parish needs to purchase one director's manual. Part 7 presents reproducible materials/black-line masters (family pages, youth's activity pages, and guides notes for parents), and catechetical session plans.

*First Eucharist and Beyond, Ongoing Initiation into Communion with Christ.* Denver, CO: Living the Good News, Inc., 2000.

*First Reconciliation and Beyond, Growing in Friendship with Christ.* Denver, CO: Living the Good News, Inc., 2000.

*God is Calling, Together Time for Families.* Dunlap, Judith and Wlodarski, Mary Cummins. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1998.

*Reconciliation, We are your people, the sheep of your flock.* Program Director's Manual. Allen, Texas: Resources for Christian Living (RCL), 2003.

The parish needs to purchase one director's manual. Part 6 presents reproducible materials/black-line masters (family pages, youth's activity pages, and guides notes for parents), and catechetical session plans.

*Youth Updates* available from St. Anthony Messenger Press. Costs are reduced when you order multiple copies of the same issue. Orders may be placed by calling 1- 800- 488-0488 or online at <http://catalog.americancatholic.org/>

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Baptism

#### **Why is Baptism most often celebrated on a Sunday?**

Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the day the Church gathers to celebrate the memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection. Through the waters of Baptism we are immersed into life in Christ and joined to Jesus in his death and rising. Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation; Confirmation and Eucharist are the other two. Baptism leads the newly-baptized person to the Table of the Lord. Gathering to celebrate Baptism on Sunday reminds us that the Church celebrates this sacrament with the uninitiated because she desires to welcome the newly - baptized to full participation in the weekly celebration of Eucharist.

#### **Can our child be baptized if we're not married? Not married in the Church?**

Your child's Baptism and your marriage are two separate issues. Your marital status may be discussed during your Baptism interview to encourage you to get married (or validate your marriage in the Church) if this is appropriate. However, as long as you are committed to raising your child as a Catholic, he/she may celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism and be welcomed into the Catholic Church.

#### **Can our child be baptized if we're not practicing Catholics?**

Baptism is more than a rite of passage for a child or a washing away of original sin. Baptism is a sharing in the life of the risen Christ. Baptism is also the first step of initiation into the Christian community. During the Rite of Baptism, parents promise to raise their child in the practice of the faith. Parents who are not practicing members of the community may be asked to *delay* the Baptism of their child until they have re-established that connection by participation in Sunday Eucharist.

#### **Who can be godparents?**

Since godparents take on two roles - that of support for the parents in the Catholic upbringing of their child, and that of representing the Christian community into which the child is being initiated - they must be practicing Catholics (fully initiated through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) who are mature enough (usually at least 16 years of age) to undertake this role. (Code of Canon Law, Canon 872)

A godparent does not need to be the same gender as the candidate for Baptism. The godparent assumes no legal responsibility for the child.

A parent may not serve as a godparent because the parent already has a distinct role and relationship with the child. A godparent's role is separate from that of a parent or legal guardian.

A godparent is called to model what it means to live as a Catholic Christian. The godparent is to assist the child in living a Christian life.

For a sample information form to be completed by godparents see *Appendix: Form For Godparents*.

**Can a person of the Orthodox faith be a godparent?**

A member of the Eastern Orthodox Church may be a godparent together with a Catholic. “For a just cause, it is permitted to admit the Christian faithful of another Eastern non-Catholic Church to the function of a sponsor, but always at the same time with a Catholic sponsor.” (Eastern Code of Canon Law, Canon 685 par. 3.) There must be at least one Catholic godparent.

**How many godparents are required?**

The child may have only one or two godparents. If two godparents are chosen, one is to be a man and the other a woman. (Canon 873)

**What if the person I have chosen as godparent is sick or unable to be present at the time of the Baptism?**

In exceptional circumstances, it is possible for the godparent to be represented at the Baptism by a ‘proxy’. The name of the godparent will be entered in the Baptismal Register. The name of the person who has served as proxy is **not** entered in the Baptismal Register.

**What is meant by the term “Christian witness”?**

A Christian witness is a baptized Christian and a member of a non-Catholic ecclesial community. (e.g. Anglican, United, Presbyterian, etc.) A member of the Eastern Orthodox Church may serve as a godparent if there is a Catholic godparent. A Christian witness is a witness to the Baptism, not a godparent.

One Christian witness is allowed only if there is one godparent. (Canon 874)

If there is a Christian witness, when his/her name is entered in the Baptismal Register the term *Christian witness* should be included.

It is not necessary to have a Christian witness.

**Can our child be baptized in a parish if we do not live within the parish boundaries?**

Baptism, like all of the sacraments, is a celebration of a living relationship with God and with the local believing community, the parish. The sacraments are celebrations of our Church and, as such, are normally celebrated in the parish where the family resides or is registered and usually worships.

**How do we arrange to have our child baptized in a parish other than the one where we normally worship?**

If, for a good reason (for example, so extended family may attend), parents wish to have their child baptized in another parish, they need to approach the Pastor of that parish to ask if he is willing to baptize their child.

A letter of permission to have the baby baptized elsewhere must be obtained from the Pastor of the parish where the family usually worships. Normally, Baptism preparation may take place in either of the parishes.

**Does our baby have to be dressed in white? Is a stole appropriate?**

Clothing the child in a white garment has traditionally been a sign of purity in the newly-baptized. However, it is tradition only and parents may choose other garments if they wish. It is suggested that you bring something white (a bib, shawl, blanket) to place on them at the appropriate time during the Rite of Baptism. A stole is not an appropriate symbol for the child to wear since it is a sign of ordination as a Deacon, Priest or Bishop.

**Does our child have to be baptized in order to attend a Catholic school?**

It is important to check with the School Board that has jurisdiction where your child will attend school. The trustees of each Board interpret the admission requirements in their own way. Some School Boards require proof of a *parent's* Catholic Baptism, especially if the child has not been baptized. This establishes their eligibility to direct their taxes to the Catholic Board. This is a government, not a Church stipulation. If the child is not baptized, the parents are usually encouraged to meet with the Pastor of their parish (or his delegate) to discuss this issue. Baptism is never to be seen as a means to enroll in the Catholic school.

**What happens to children who are not baptized if they die?**

God knows and loves us from the moment of conception. We commend these children to God's loving mercy, and remembering Jesus' words, "Let the children come to me," trust that they too will be saved." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1261)

**May a child be "rebaptized" if he/she was baptized in a hospital, etc. in an emergency situation?**

A person may be baptized only once. If a child is baptized in an emergency situation, once the child returns to health the parents may bring the child to their parish to celebrate the further rites as indicated in *Rite of Baptism for Children*. See "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church Outside Mass" [nn. 267-287] or "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church within Mass" [nn. 288-312].

**Who may baptize?**

The ordinary minister of Baptism is a Bishop, priest, or deacon. In the case of an emergency, any person may baptize, even if not baptized him/herself. This person must intend what the Church intends, and baptize the child with water, using the Trinitarian formula: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

**Does my Parish Church keep a record of my Baptism?**

Yes. The basic entry includes: name; date and place of birth of the baptized; minister of the sacrament; parents (including mother's maiden name); godparent(s), sponsor(s), and Christian witness(es); date and place (if outside the parish) of the conferred baptism (Canon 877).

The baptismal register serves as the "master record" for a person's membership in the Church. Notations concerning sacraments received later in life are also entered here. These include: confirmation, marriage(s), reception of Holy Orders, perpetual profession in religious institute, and change of rite (Canon 535/2).

For more information, see Section 2 of *Sacramental Records Policies and Procedures Manual* (Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto: expected distribution date - coming soon.)

You may obtain a copy of the information in the Baptismal Register by contacting the Parish.

### **What happens if the child is adopted?**

See *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Appendix II: "Rite of Welcome for an Adopted Child who is Baptized [nn. 345-363].

The baptismal records of adopted children are subject to both canon and civil law. If persons come to the parish looking for information on their birth name or parents they are to be directed to the Ontario government, which has legislation relating to adoption disclosure. Parish personnel have a legal obligation not to disclose any information that would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted (L&L p. 9, 520, 1523, 1945, 2068, letter dated January 30, 2004).

For children baptized **after** their adoption is finalized, the following information is entered in the register: given name designated by the adopting parent(s); name(s) of the adopting parent(s); date and place of birth; sponsor(s) or godparent(s); minister performing the baptism; a statement that the child is adopted. The baptismal certificate issued for an adopted child is the same as a typical baptismal certificate. However, please note that the notation of adoption is **not** entered on the certificate.

For children baptized **before** their adoption was finalized, the names of the adopting parent(s) and the new names for the child are added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized. A notation is also made, stating that the child was adopted along with the name of the court or agency involved, the date of adoption and the case number.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals give only the name(s) of the adopting parent(s), the child's new legal name, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the priest/deacon who conferred the sacrament. The name(s) of the sponsor(s) are not given unless the adopting parents designated honorary sponsors. The notation of adoption in the register is **not** entered on the certificate.

For more information, see Section 2.4 of *Sacramental Records Policies and Procedures Manual* (Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto: expected distribution date - coming soon).

### **In the future, may I change the Baptismal sponsors?**

On occasion, one or both of the people who served as godparents are no longer a part of the child's life or they have moved a great distance and the possibility of an ongoing relationship is compromised. In this type of a situation, parents may wish to change the Baptismal record and add the name of a new godparent.

Although a new person may now hold a place of prominence in the faith life of the child it is not possible to alter the Baptismal register. The register is a legal record and the original godparents were a witness to the event. It would be untruthful to remove the name of the original witness and replace it with a new name, perhaps someone who was not even present at the Baptism.

### **Is there a fee for sacramental preparation sessions?**

In some parishes a fee is charged to cover the costs of the preparation process and material used. This fee goes to the parish, not the priest. It is understood that regardless of their financial situation the preparation process is available to all members of the parish.

## **First Reconciliation**

### **What is the usual age and time for celebrating First Reconciliation?**

The usual age and time for celebrating First Reconciliation coincides with the time for First Eucharist. Children preparing for First Eucharist are to be prepared to celebrate First Reconciliation prior to First Eucharist. (Canon 914)

The universal law of the Church applies to children who have reached the age of reason, also referred to as the age of discretion. The faithful are to confess, in kind and number all grave sins committed after Baptism, which have not yet been directly pardoned and which have not been confessed in an individual confession. The faithful are also recommended to confess sins of a less serious nature, often referred to as venial sins. (Canon 988) The faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound to confess their grave sins at least once a year. (Canon 989)

### **Does my Parish Church keep a record of my First Reconciliation?**

The Parish does not and may not keep a record of those who celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The parish does not take attendance or any record of those who celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### **If my child is not ready to celebrate individual confession what should I do?**

After completing the preparation process some parents may discern that, at this time, their child is not ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The parent will continue to pray with the child, worship together and strive to live a Catholic way of life. Although the child may not be ready for confession, the family is encouraged to participate in the communal celebration at the parish. It is understood that the parents will review the resource with their child in a few months and when s/he is ready they will set time aside so that their child may experience the mercy and love of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

**Is there a fee for sacramental preparation sessions?**

In some parishes a fee is charged to cover the costs of the preparation process and material used. This fee goes to the parish, not the priest. It is understood that regardless of their financial situation the preparation process is available to all members of the parish.

**First Eucharist****What is required before a person celebrates First Eucharist?**

“Any baptized person who is not forbidden by law may and must be admitted to Holy Communion.” (Canon 912) If a child is baptized in another Christian tradition, he/she must be prepared for and celebrate Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church prior to receiving First Holy Communion. (See *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines*, no. 44.)

In order, for children to receive Holy Communion they are required to have sufficient knowledge and be prepared so that, according to their capacity, they understand what the mystery of Christ means and are able to receive Communion with faith and devotion. (Canon 913)

“The blessed Eucharist may, however, be administered to children in danger of death if they can distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and receive communion with reverence.” (Canon 913 § 2)

**What is required before a child with special needs or developmental disabilities celebrates First Eucharist?**

Insofar as possible children with special needs should be prepared for First Eucharist with other children the same age. The criterion for children with special needs or developmental disabilities is no greater than the requirement for all persons. The person is to be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food (See *Part I: Pastoral Guidelines*, no.53).

**Why does my parish ask for a copy of my child’s baptismal certificate?**

Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation and it leads to the celebration of all the other sacraments. Before we celebrate Confirmation or First Eucharist with someone, the Church must determine that the person is in fact a baptized member of the Roman Catholic Church. The sacraments are celebrations of the Church or ecclesial in nature; therefore, it is the role of the parish to request and collect the Baptismal certificates. You may receive a copy of your Baptismal certificate by contacting the parish where the Baptism took place.

**Who prepares a child to celebrate First Eucharist?**

It is primarily the duty of parents and the Pastor to ensure that children who have reached the age of reason are prepared to celebrate First Eucharist. (Canon 914)

**Is it customary to wear white clothing for First Eucharist?**

On her/his day of Baptism, a child receives the light, the life of the risen Christ. An outward sign of this gift is found in the white Baptismal garment that the child wears.

Prayer and a life lived in the love of the Good Shepherd keeps that light bright. This relationship with Jesus, which we see that the child experiences with joy, has been developing toward a new moment of radiance and splendour. First Eucharist is a celebration of that relationship – a moment of fullness.

As a child begins direct (immediate) preparation for First Eucharist, we understand that a great deal of indirect (initial) preparation has already taken place – in the home, in the Church community and in the school. It is really a process that began at Baptism, the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation. And so, there is time for opportunities that will assist the child to come gradually to appreciate the beauty and meaning of the white garment and its link with the gifts of Baptism.

Often, children receiving First Eucharist wear white dresses, suits or other appropriate Sunday attire of their choice. In some parish communities, it is the custom for children to wear a white garment for First Eucharist. It is a simple long white robe worn over the child's clothing of choice, which is hemmed to the size of the individual child and worn by both boys and girls. It can be for these children a tangible sign of the link between their being called into relationship with the Risen Christ in Baptism and the new fullness of this relationship that they will enjoy in the Eucharist.

(Based on the article “The White Garment worn for Eucharist, also” by Tina Lillig, *Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* Spring 1994. LTP. Used with permission of the Author.)

#### **Where can parishes rent white garments?**

In the Archdiocese of Toronto, individually hemmed white garments are available for rental from the Liturgical Apostolate Centre, 5 Pine Street, Unit #1, North York, M9N 2Z1, 416-247-522, Fax: 416-247-5526.

#### **Does my Parish Church keep a record of my First Eucharist?**

Yes. The parish records the following information: name of the first communicant; parents as identified on the baptismal certificate; place and date of baptism; date of First Communion (*Acta et Decreta Concilii Provincialis Torontini Secundi*, Decretum 83.3).

For more information, see Section 6, *Sacramental Records Policies and Procedures Manual* (Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto: expected distribution date – coming soon.)

#### **Is there a fee for sacramental preparation sessions?**

In some parishes a fee is charged to cover the costs of the preparation process and material used. This fee goes to the parish, not the priest. It is understood that regardless of their financial situation the preparation process is available to all members of the parish.

## **Confirmation**

### **Why does my parish ask for a copy of my child's Baptismal certificate before the celebration of Confirmation?**

Baptism is the first Sacrament of Initiation and it leads to the celebration of all the other sacraments. Before we celebrate Confirmation or First Eucharist with someone, the Church must determine that the person is, in fact, a baptized member of the Roman Catholic Church. The sacraments are celebrations of the Church or ecclesial in nature; therefore, it is the role of the parish to request and collect the Baptismal certificates. You may receive a copy of your Baptismal certificate by contacting the parish where your Baptism took place.

### **Who may be a sponsor for Confirmation?**

A sponsor is to be at least 16 years of age and have celebrated the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) in the Catholic Church.

The sponsor is to be able and willing to profess enthusiastically his or her faith during the rite of Confirmation and be ready to model a Catholic Christian lifestyle. Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is a hallmark of a Catholic Christian life.

A sponsor does not need to be the same gender as the Confirmation candidate. It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at Baptism. (Canon 893 § 2)

A parent may not serve as a sponsor because the parent already has a distinct role and relationship with the child. A sponsor's role is separate from that of a parent or legal guardian. The sponsor is to support the newly-confirmed in living as a true witness of Christ.

For a sample information form to be completed by sponsors see *Appendix: Form for Sponsors*.

### **How many sponsors are required?**

Only one sponsor is required for Confirmation.

### **Is it necessary to choose a Confirmation name?**

"Nowhere in the new rite is mention made of choosing a special name for confirmation. It is recommended that the baptismal name be used, emphasizing once more the important link between baptism and confirmation along the path of Christian initiation."

"The importance of choosing a saint's name or one with a Christian meaning at baptism is reinforced by use of this name in confirmation." (*Rite of Confirmation: Ritual and Pastoral Notes*, copyright © Concacan, Inc., 1987, p. 109).

### **Do candidates for Confirmation wear stoles?**

A stole is a symbol of ordination and is worn by a deacon, priest or Bishop. It is not an appropriate symbol for Confirmation candidates.

Some parishes provide materials for the candidates to make a crest which may include their Baptismal name. The kits may be ordered from Gaspard and Sons Ltd. ([www.gaspard.ca](http://www.gaspard.ca)) Phone 1-800-380-8214 Fax 204-947-0024 Email: [gaspard@gaspard.ca](mailto:gaspard@gaspard.ca)

### **Who is the usual minister of Confirmation?**

The Bishop is the usual minister of Confirmation. The Bishop may delegate the Pastor or Administrator of the local parish to confirm the candidates.

### **Is a retreat an essential part of the immediate preparation for Confirmation?**

*Anointed for Mission*, the Archdiocesan program for immediate preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation includes a retreat for the candidates. If a parish is using a resource other than the Archdiocesan one, a retreat is still considered to be a valuable component.

The retreat is a time for the candidates to gather with one another and spend time in prayer, reflection and completing one or more activities. Providing the time and space for the candidates to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the retreat is not only appropriate but highly desirable.

When the retreat is scheduled outside of regular school hours, it allows for all candidates to participate without concern about school assignments or classes being missed. The preparation for the sacraments is the same for all candidates regardless of where they attend school; therefore, it is most appropriate to hold the retreat either during the evening or on a Saturday. With sufficient planning the conflicts with personal schedules can be kept to a minimum.

The facilitators for a retreat need to be “high energy people” who are comfortable working with youth. If the parish is following *Anointed for Mission*, then generally one or two of the small group facilitators would be ideal retreat facilitators. The chaplaincy team leader at the local Catholic high school may be available to assist with the facilitation. In many Catholic high schools, there is a ministry team who likewise may be free to assist the parish leaders with the preparation and facilitation.

The National Evangelization Team (NET) has a team of young people who travel across the country. They may be available to the parish as facilitators for the retreat. NET Ministries of Canada may be contacted at 1-877-521-4426 or online at [www.netcanada.ca](http://www.netcanada.ca).

The cost associated with planning and hosting the retreat is absorbed by the parish.

### **Do candidates for Confirmation complete a service project?**

As fully initiated Catholics, we are called to live an apostolic life which includes acts of charity and service. Through the sacrament of Confirmation the candidates are more perfectly bound to the Church and enriched with the special strength of the Holy Spirit (CCC, no. 1285). The newly confirmed are invited to reflect on their own gifts and to determine how they shall live out the weekly Sunday dismissal, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

We are confirmed for service; therefore, including a service project as part of the preparation process conveys a notion that once we have completed the service hours and been confirmed the call to service or mission is finished. This misunderstanding may lead to a falling away from weekly participation in Sunday Eucharist. It is desirable that those who have prepared the candidates gather with the young people after Confirmation and provide them with guidance and practical suggestions for living as a fully-initiated member of the parish. The final session in *Anointed for Mission* offers the confirmandi an opportunity to reflect once again on their gifts and the call to love and serve the Lord.

**Does my Parish Church keep a record of my Confirmation?**

Yes. The following information is recorded: name of the confirmed; parents and sponsor(s); minister; place and date of the conferral of confirmation; place and date of baptism; any pertinent notation (Canon 895). A notice is also sent to the church of baptism indicating the name of the recipient, the date and place of Confirmation, and the name of the conferring bishop or pastor so that a notation may be made in the baptismal register (Canons 535/2, 895).

For more information, see Section 3, *Sacramental Records Policies and Procedures Manual* (Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto: expected distribution date – coming soon).

**Is there a fee for sacramental preparation sessions?**

In some parishes a fee is charged to cover the costs of the preparation process and material used. This fee goes to the parish, not the priest. It is understood that regardless of their financial situation the preparation process is available to all members of the parish.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Appreciation to all the Priests, Lay Pastoral Associates, School Board Personnel, Principals, Teachers and Parents who provided us with feedback on implementing the Archdiocesan Norms for sacramental preparation. It was used extensively as the basis for revising the former norms and creating the new Pastoral Guide.

To Mary Ann Takacs, York Catholic District School Board, for the new material on Children with Special Needs.

To Father Brian Clough, Pastor, St. Anselm's Parish, for assistance with Canon Law issues.

To Father Damian MacPherson, S.A., for assistance with Inter-Church and Inter-Faith issues.

To Father Vincent Nguyen, Vice-Chancellor for Spiritual Affairs, for obtaining the most up-to-date and comprehensive list of Baptism Churches.

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**At the request of Archbishop Collins for a revision of the former norms, the following committee was formed for the reviewing and compiling of the new Pastoral Guide:**

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*If you have any questions or need any assistance, please contact one of us.*

## AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

*Preparing for and Celebrating Sacraments with Children in the Archdiocese of Toronto* is available in print in two formats.

To obtain a copy in print contact:

Office of Formation for Discipleship  
Archdiocese of Toronto  
1155 Yonge Street  
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1W2  
416-934-0606, extension 523

To view the document online (PDF format) go to:

[www.archtoronto.org/CORE](http://www.archtoronto.org/CORE)

*Appendix to Preparing for and Celebrating Sacraments with Children in the Archdiocese of Toronto* is available online in PDF format. To view the document, go to:

[www.archtoronto.org/CORE](http://www.archtoronto.org/CORE)

For further information, please contact the Office of Formation for Discipleship.