

BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, FIRST COMMUNION FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

1. Infants are baptised at the request of their parents, usually in the first year of life and in their home parish. At least one parent should be Catholic.
2. In the year when the children turn eight (Year Three), they are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation administered by the Bishop or his delegate.
3. In the year when the children turn nine (Year Four), they are welcomed to the Lord's Table and receive Holy Communion for the first time. This is the climax of their Christian initiation.

CHRISTIAN INITIATION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

4. Once children have turned eight (Year Three), they are no longer candidates for infant Baptism. If they have not been baptised, they are enrolled in a modified catechumenate leading to the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion at Easter. (See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Christian Initiation of Children who have reached Catechetical Age.) However, because of the importance of the peer group in the catechumenate process for children, the celebration of their Christian Initiation may also be aligned with the parish celebration of Confirmation and first Holy Communion.

PENANCE

5. Introducing children to the greatness of God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance is a

two-step process. A simple celebration of the second rite of the Sacrament of Penance is included as part of the preparation for First Communion.

6. In the year when the children turn ten (Year Five), they are prepared to celebrate more fully the Sacrament of Penance with individual confession and absolution (the first rite). This builds on the work of the previous year as they take the second step and learn in greater detail what it means to examine their conscience.

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR THE SACRAMENTS

7. Celebrations of the Sacraments are not isolated events. They take their place within a process of growth in faith from birth to adolescence. Discernment of a child's readiness for the Sacraments by parents and pastor is more important than the child's age or year level and might mean that the Sacraments are celebrated earlier or later than the norm.
8. Like the catechumenate for adults, the process of sacramental preparation is marked by prayer and ritual, catechesis and learning, conversion of life and a developing sense of mission. It is a collaborative process: parish-based, family-centred and school-supported.

- The PARISH is responsible for establishing and running programs for sacramental preparation and for the celebration of the Sacraments.
- The FAMILY is where the faith is learned and lived. Parents, the first educators of their children, share with them the Catholic faith and the experience of belonging to the

Church. They are best placed to discern readiness for the Sacraments and make the formal request of the parish for their child's admission to sacramental preparation.

- The Catholic SCHOOL provides both education about the Sacraments through the classroom teaching of religion and also experience of the faith through its own religious life. These occur at each year level, before, during and after the periods of sacramental preparation.

PARISH

9. Each parish should form a Sacramental Preparation Team comprising, where possible, the parish priest, assistant pastor, pastoral associate, sacramental coordinator, experienced parents and those with training in theology (for example, the school APRE). This parish team will establish and resource the process and attend to the pastoral care of the families.

10. In the sacramental preparation for the Baptism of infants, the parish focusses on the gift of God's grace and the Church's welcome of the child into life in the Spirit. It responds to the parents' request for Baptism and offers them support in raising their child within the family of the Church.

11. Where possible, the parish will schedule preparation for Confirmation in the Easter season, though this will depend on the availability of a Bishop or his delegate. It formally begins with a rite of enrolment. Preparation involves prayer, discussion and activity in the home, supported by parish events and rituals.

The purpose of the Sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the Body of Christ, and to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct.

They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called 'SACRAMENTS OF FAITH'.

(Vatican II, SC 59)

12. Ideally, the parish will schedule preparation for First Communion in the Easter season, with First Communion occurring at a parish Sunday Mass. Preparation formally begins with a rite of enrolment and involves prayer, discussion and activity in the home, supported by parish events and rituals (including the celebration of the second rite of the Sacrament of Penance).

13. After First Communion, the parish will offer a fuller preparation for the Sacrament of Penance to bring the children to a better understanding of God's mercy, so that they may confess their sins and receive forgiveness in the first rite of reconciliation. Lent would be a good time for this to take place.

14. A parish program of sacramental preparation should provide opportunities for prayer and reflection, activities and discussion. It may, for example, take place over a four-

week period within the family or in parish groups, though the time could be longer. It will need to be preceded by some support and resourcing of the parents.

FAMILY

15. Sacramental preparation should be sensitive to the busyness of family life and the reality of blended families, single parents, children in shared custody arrangements, and so on. The faith and practice of some families will need further development, occasionally requiring a delay in the celebration of the Sacraments; a decision to delay will always be accompanied by an offer to assist the family towards a fuller faith and practice. The pastoral tone of all sacramental preparation is one of welcome.

16. Greater flexibility will be required to cater for those who have particular intellectual, emotional or physical needs. The Archdiocese has a separate policy for including those with an intellectual disability in the celebration of the Sacraments.

PARISH SCHOOL

17. Collaboration between the parish and the school will ensure that the sacramental material in the RE curriculum complements sacramental preparation in the parish. The parish process will give particular attention to the inclusion of children who are not at the parish primary school and access to catechetical resources should be provided for these families.



CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The Sacraments are before all else the action of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and alive in his Body the Church. They are celebrated communally with the active participation of the parish under the oversight of the Bishop whose responsibility it is to control, promote and protect the entire liturgical life of the Church entrusted to [him] (Vatican II, CD 15).

Christian Initiation incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. In Baptism, God adopts us as children and makes us a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. As we are signed with the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation, God brings us to the full stature of the Lord Jesus to continue his mission in the world. At the table of the Eucharist, we are fed on the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood, and, with the whole Church, take part in the saving offering of Christ on the cross. In the Sunday Mass, those who have been initiated are continually formed by the word of God and affirmed in their belonging to the Church, the Body of Christ.