

Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany
Policies for Sacraments and Commentaries

First Communion

- a) The pastor is required to insure that the diocesan policies and guidelines are implemented in the parish. Once the parish policy and program of preparation is developed, the pastor approves and provides for its promulgation within the parish being especially concerned that all who may be eligible for preparation are made aware of the program and the necessary dates. (Canon #777)
- b) Preparation of children is the joint responsibility of parents, pastors and catechists. Parents have the privilege, right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Communion. Catechists should provide opportunities for parents to deepen their awareness of the meaning of the Eucharistic liturgy and assist them so that they can readily participate in catechizing their children. It is essential to have sessions (one, at minimum) with parents/guardians in order to aid them in this responsibility. It is recommended that during these sessions parents have the opportunity to:
- Reflect on their own personal attitudes toward their relationship with Christ, the Church, the Eucharist and the Liturgy
 - Express their religious questions and anxieties
 - Gain new insights and information
 - Gain confidence and competency in accompanying their children in faith
 - Learn about the kinds of materials and approaches used by the parish in the preparation
- c) Since each pastor is responsible for providing catechesis and opportunities for reception of the sacraments to parish members, one's own parish is the proper place for sacramental preparation and reception.
- Note: There are children attending Catholic and private schools who are being prepared with their class at school. It is necessary that there be communication between the school and the parishes involved. When sacramental preparation and celebration occurs within the school community, the pastors of the parishes to which the children belong must be notified at the beginning of the school year. If a child receives

First Communion with a school class, opportunity could then be provided within his/her parish to celebrate there with the family and the parish faith community.

- d) A baptized child must receive adequate catechesis according to his or her age level for the Sacrament of Reconciliation before formal catechesis in preparation for First Communion.
- e) Children's catechesis for First Communion must be conducted separately from introductory catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation in order that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent and given its own concentrated preparation. There should be a time lapse of at least two or three months between each catechesis in order to honor the uniqueness of each sacrament.
- f) Catechesis on Eucharist should be consistent with the particular age level of those being catechized.
- g) Parents, child, pastor, catechist and catechetical leader should decide collaboratively when a child is ready for First Communion. *Criteria for discerning readiness for First Communion are these: A developing relationship with Jesus and with the Body of Christ; a desire to receive the Eucharist; a familiarity with the movements, prayers, gestures of the Mass and their connection to life; a sense of "real presence" – that the bread of the Eucharist is not ordinary bread, but Jesus coming to us in a special way.*
- h) After the necessary catechesis and adequate understanding of the Eucharist, no child shall be deprived of the right to receive the Eucharist once s/he expresses a desire for it.
- i) Children with special needs should be prepared to celebrate the Eucharist to the extent of their capabilities.
- j) Catechesis of adults for first reception of Eucharist should follow what is prescribed for the catechumen in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

First Reconciliation

- a) The pastor is required to insure that the diocesan policies and guidelines are implemented in the parish. Once the parish policy and program of preparation is developed, the pastor approves and provides for its promulgation within the parish being especially concerned that all who may be eligible for preparation are made aware of the program and the necessary dates. (Canon #777)
- b) Preparation of children is the joint responsibility of parents, pastors and catechists. Parents have the privilege, right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Reconciliation. Catechists should provide opportunities for parents to deepen their awareness of the meaning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and assist them so that they can readily participate in catechizing their children. It is essential to have sessions (one, at minimum) with parents/guardians in order to aid them in this responsibility. It is recommended that during these sessions parents have the opportunity to:
- Reflect on their own personal attitudes toward their relationship with Christ, the Church, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
 - Express their religious questions and anxieties
 - Gain new insights and information
 - Gain confidence and competency in accompanying their children in faith
 - Learn about the kinds of materials and approaches used by the parish in the preparation
 - Learn about the kinds of materials and approaches used by the parish in the preparation
- c) A child must receive adequate catechesis according to his or her age level on the Sacrament of Reconciliation before formal catechesis in preparation for First Communion.
- d) Children's introductory catechesis for the sacrament of Reconciliation must be conducted separately from catechesis for First Communion in order that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent and given its own concentrated preparation. There should be a lapse of at least two or three months between each catechesis in order to honor the uniqueness of each sacrament. *It is suggested that catechesis for First Reconciliation be conducted in the fall, with the celebration of the sacrament in the*

season of Advent or before. The catechesis for First Communion can be conducted in the winter/spring with the celebration of First Communion in the Easter season.

- e) The catechesis for Reconciliation should be simple and on the level of the child's understanding, respecting the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of each child. *Most catechetical materials for children of age 7 (Grade 2) include an age-appropriate catechesis for First Reconciliation within the Grade 2 syllabus. Others are written for a particular age range (younger children, ages 6 -8, or older, ages 9-11), or family-centered.*

- f) After the necessary catechesis and adequate understanding of Reconciliation, no child shall be deprived of the right to receive Reconciliation once s/he expresses the desire for it.

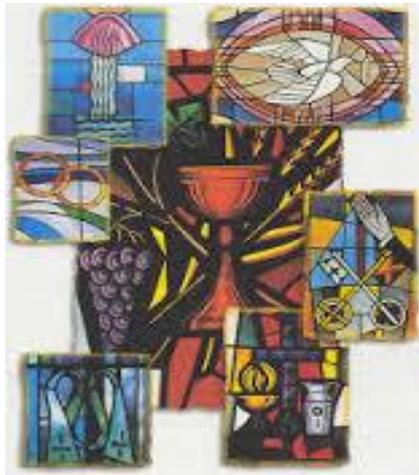
- g) The opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be offered before the reception of First Communion. *However, no child should ever implicitly or explicitly feel coerced into receiving the sacrament before First Communion. A child's reception of First Communion does not depend on his/her having first received the Sacrament of Reconciliation. On the other hand, no child/family should ever be implicitly or explicitly coerced into delaying First Reconciliation.*

- h) The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated with due attention to a personal encounter with the Lord in a friendly, prayerful atmosphere. We recommend a communal celebration with the opportunity for a private reconciliation as the most appropriate celebration at this time. *Some suggested options are the following:*
 - A communal service for all children completing the introductory catechesis for the sacrament – late fall or Advent.
 - A Advent communal service for all children in the entire faith formation program
 - A communal service designed for families, that may be preceded by a family retreat
 - Inclusion of First Reconciliation candidates at the parish's communal Reconciliation service

- i) First Reconciliation should be the beginning of an ongoing catechesis and celebration of this sacrament throughout life. *Ideally, ongoing and developmental catechesis for this sacrament should take place at each grade level and ongoing opportunities for*

celebration presented in special communal celebrations such as grade four, six, eight, ten, if possible.

- j) Children with special needs should be prepared to celebrate Reconciliation to the extent of their capabilities.



Confirmation

- a) The Bishop, as spiritual leader of the diocesan community, is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation. The priest may administer the sacrament to those to be received in full communion with the Church, and those in danger of death. (Canon 883)

- b) The pastor is required to insure that the diocesan policies and guidelines are implemented in the parish. Once the parish policy and program of preparation is developed, the pastor approves and provides for its promulgation within the parish

being especially concerned that all who may be eligible for preparation are made aware of the program and the necessary dates. (Canon 889-890)

- c) The one to be confirmed should be baptized, properly instructed and free to renew baptismal promises.

- d) The candidate must be in tenth grade or at least fifteen years old. *The reason the age is expressed in this manner is to take into account an exception which is not that uncommon. Normally, a 15-year old is in Grade 10. However, if a young person was held back in school in Grade 9, yet would normally be in Grade 10, s/he would be allowed to enter the immediate preparation component if s/he is 15 and all the parish prerequisites have been met. On the other hand, a young person normally in Grade 9, who turns 15 during the year, would not have reached the minimum age for candidacy.*

- e) Retaining the baptismal name at Confirmation witnesses to the intimate relationship between Baptism and Confirmation. However, other Christian names may be chosen at this time. A newly chosen name does not have to be gender consistent. *The preference is for the baptismal name, however, if another name is chosen, you may wish to highlight its significance by asking the candidate to research the life of the person whose name was chosen.*

- f) Each candidate should have a sponsor. The sponsor may be the same as the candidate's baptismal sponsor (Canon 893). The sponsor must have completed the sixteenth year and be fully initiated through the sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. In addition, the sponsor is to have the appropriate qualifications and intention of performing the role through a life of harmony with the faith and must be someone other than the candidate's parents. (Canon 874) *Encourage young people to choose sponsors based on a personal relationship and willingness of the sponsor to deal with matters of faith and life both now and in the future. The sponsor should be a fully initiated, practicing Catholic who models a mature personal and communal faith consciousness. A sponsor is more than an honorary "stand-in", and the parish may wish to highlight their role by involving sponsors in some aspects of the immediate preparation, other than just the rehearsal.*

- g) Young people must be actively participating in faith formation in their parish or Catholic school for at least one full year before they begin the immediate preparation for Confirmation. *Although it is the right of a baptized person to be confirmed, the parish has the obligation to insure the integrity of the sacrament, the faith community and the candidate, by providing the opportunity for at least a minimum catechesis according to the candidate's ability before entering immediate preparation. Often a parish's catechetical prerequisites take more than one year to complete. For a youth who is uncatechized or who has major gaps in his/her faith formation, an individual assessment needs to be made and the program tailored to his/her situation offered wherever possible.*
- h) The decision to seek Confirmation should be based on the person's desire to assume the responsibilities of a confirmed Catholic and willingness to participate in the parish's immediate preparation program. *It is best not to make the assumption that all young people in a particular grade or group are ready to pursue Confirmation preparation. Rather, it is best to invite those eligible to pursue the preparation at their own initiative.*
- i) One program of immediate preparation for Confirmation is to be offered to youth of both parochial and public high schools, as well as home-schooled teens. This program should be structured and explained in such a way that Catholic high school students and their parents clearly understand what responsibilities and events pertain to them. *Sacramental preparation is different than the regular catechetical program of the parish or the school. Youth in both the parish faith formation or youth ministry program and the Catholic School are expected to request Confirmation in the parish when they are ready to do so. Even though they have had their foundational catechesis in different venues, they will be together in the immediate preparation period. It is imperative that the parish be very clear with the Catholic high school students and their parents about the fact that the parish offers the immediate preparation prior to the Sacrament of Confirmation, and the Catholic school does not, and what the immediate preparation entails.*
- j) The immediate preparation for Confirmation is short-term and emphasizes the relationship between Confirmation and Baptism, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in their personal lives, the decision for discipleship as a Catholic Christian, the

meaning of the liturgical symbols, gestures, prayers and scriptures of the Rite of Confirmation, the place of the Eucharist in their lives.

- k) A service project should be seen as an apprenticeship in the ministry of the faith community, and participation in the mission of Christ. Service projects/activities should be planned in such a way that youth are able to understand their value and meaning. *It is strongly encouraged to introduce children and youth to service well before they enter Confirmation preparation, and to take the time during the immediate preparation for Confirmation to reflect on the meaning of service in light of their Christian commitment to discipleship. Avoid requiring "service hours" as a means to fulfill a requirement in order to be confirmed as this negates the significance of service as discipleship.*

- l) A retreat experience is a vital aspect of the immediate preparation program for the sacrament of Confirmation. *Although an expected part of the immediate preparation program, parishes need to offer alternative experience for those who cannot participate in the parish's scheduled retreat: an alternate retreat on another date within the vicariate, a virtual/interactive experience, a written reflection, etc.*

- m) *Although the role of the sponsor is highlighted in Confirmation, the parental role is still important. It is the right of parents to be informed about diocesan policies, parish requirements and expectations surrounding the immediate preparation component. In any encounter with parents, explaining the positive reason behind the parish expectations, and having an open, listening stance, as well as inviting parents to be an integral part of the immediate preparation, will be more effective than simply giving them information.*