

Sacramental Guidelines from Church Documents

Sacraments

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1131).

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, 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 (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1123).

Sacraments of Initiation

The sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, lay the foundations of every Christian life. Baptism is the beginning of new life, Confirmation strengthens the life born in Christ; and Eucharist nourishes the disciple with the Body and Blood of Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1212, 1275).

Baptism

Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the way to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.

Catechesis for Baptism

From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages. This journey can be covered rapidly or slowly, but certain essential elements will always have to be present: proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1229).

Where **infant** Baptism is celebrated, it has become a single act of abridging the preparatory stages of Christian initiation. An opportunity for catechesis is to be given to parents in preparation for the celebration of the sacrament.

Children of catechetical age should follow the adult Christian initiation model; that is, catechumenal formation and celebrating the three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil (Canon 852). The Archdiocese of Dubuque encourages the reception of all three sacraments at the Easter Vigil. Even though the person of catechetical age receives all three sacraments at the Easter Vigil, it is assumed they participate in the preparation program offered in their teen years. If, however, parents, in consultation with the pastor on the options available and the rationale, wish to delay their child's reception of the sacrament of Confirmation until after age 15, they need to make that request of the archbishop. The dispensation would be granted on an individual basis (*Handbook*, Archdiocese of Dubuque, #2115).

The Christian initiation for **adults**, and adapted for older children, begins with their entry into the catechumenate and culminates in a single celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The rites for these stages are to be found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (1972, 1988). The catechumenate, or formation of catechumens, is to bring conversion and faith to maturity. The formation in the Christian life initiates the catechumen into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues, as well as the life of faith, liturgy, and charity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1248).

Confirmation

Confirmation, as a sacrament, deepens baptismal grace in us by uniting us more firmly to Christ, increasing the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us, bonding us more fully with the Church, and strengthens us by the Holy Spirit to live the faith by word and action.

Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once.

Catechesis for Confirmation

Catechetical preparation is to lead the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and bonding with the Holy Spirit in order to assume the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. Catechesis is to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church as well as the parish community. The parish/system community has the special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.

The Confirmation process has three phases: preparation, celebration, and mystagogy. Program planning should approach these distinct phases as an integrated whole.

To receive the sacrament of Confirmation, the ordinary norm is the minimum age of 15 in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

Candidates for Confirmation are to have a sponsor. To emphasize the unity of Baptism and Confirmation as initiation sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents. Sponsors must be at least 16 years old, already confirmed, and a practicing Catholic. The role of the sponsor is to assist in the catechetical and liturgical preparation for the sacrament, witness the celebration of the sacrament, support the candidate to fulfill the baptismal promises (*Handbook*, Archdiocese of Dubuque, #2150).

Holy Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of communion in the divine life and the unity of the People of God as Church. It is the culmination of the act of God sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship offered to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1322,1325).

Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having receiving absolution in the sacrament of Reconciliation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1415).

Catechesis for Holy Eucharist

Children must have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation to receive the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. They are to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion. Children must be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and to receive communion reverently (Canon 913).

It is the responsibility of parents/guardians as well as the pastor to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession (Canon 914).

Sacrament of Healing

Reconciliation

In the sacrament of Reconciliation, also referred to as the sacrament of conversion, confession and penance, sins committed after Baptism are forgiven. The penitent reconciles with God in grace, reconciles with the Church, receives a penance for their sins, receives an inner peace and spiritual strength to live the Christian life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1496).

The penitent asks forgiveness, confesses sins to the priest, and makes the intention to do reparation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1491).

Catechesis for Reconciliation

The decision as to when the child will receive the sacrament of Reconciliation is to be made by the child and his or her parents/guardians, in consultation with the priest who knows the child and the catechist who has helped prepare the child. In all cases the rights of the child must be respected.

Catechesis for the sacrament of Reconciliation is to be separated from catechesis for the sacrament of Eucharist so that the child will come to understand Reconciliation as a distinct sacrament.

A child is to receive instruction on the sacrament of Reconciliation before his or her first Communion.

It is the uniform practice in the Archdiocese of Dubuque that sacramental confession precede the reception of first Holy Communion. In those parishes where this is not the case, the practice should be brought into conformity with the Church's law as quickly as prudently possible (*Handbook*, Archdiocese of Dubuque, #2219).

Parental Involvement in Sacramental Preparation

Parents/guardians are to be involved in the preparation of their children for the celebration of the sacraments. Therefore, parishes/systems are to plan and implement programs following the directives of the archdiocese for the reception of the sacraments. These directives are designed to prepare and involve parents/guardians, sponsors, and the parish community in the preparation for sacraments, in particular with regard to Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation.

Parent meetings/parish involvement should jointly involve individuals from all programs offered (ABE Policy #6150.4).