
Policy of the Diocese of San José Preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation

EUCCHARIST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. These guidelines apply to baptized adults and baptized children who have reached the age of reason.
- B. All unbaptized children who have reached the age of reason and unbaptized adults are to be prepared and celebrate all three sacraments of initiation according to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.¹
- C. It is primarily the responsibility of parents to see that their children who have reached the age of reason are prepared for and enabled to celebrate the sacrament of First Communion.
- D. High schools in the diocese that are preparing baptized students for full initiation must:
- Seek permission of the students' pastors before they prepare them for the celebration of First Communion.
 - Verify baptismal information directly from a baptismal certificate.
- E. Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to celebrate First Communion and to participate in the preparation for the sacrament according to this policy, insofar as they are able (cf. *Reception of Sacraments for People with Disabilities*). For specific guidelines see: *For the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, NCCB 1995.
- F. This policy is based on the *Norms of the Roman Missal for the Celebration of Eucharist*, *The General Directory for Catechesis*, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *The Code of Canon Law*, *The National Directory for Catechesis*, *The Directory for Masses with Children*, *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*, *Dies Domini-On Keeping the Lord's Day*, *Directory for the Celebration and Reception of Communion Under Both Kinds*, *The Real Presence* (U.S. Bishops Pastoral), *The Body of Christ* (Pastoral Statement of the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy) and

1. *RCIA #305* - At the third step of their Christian initiation, the children will receive the sacrament of baptism, the bishop or priest who baptizes them will also confer confirmation, and the children will for the first time participate in the liturgy of the eucharist.

the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. All norms in this policy are to be interpreted in the light of these sources.

II. PREREQUISITES FOR CANDIDACY

Those who request First Communion:

- A. Must provide a copy of their baptismal certificate. Baptismal certificates of adults must have been issued within the last six months.
- B. Must have attained the use of reason.²
- C. Have heard the proclamation of God's love, mercy and forgiveness in the midst of the community and have the desire to respond to Christ through an on-going life of conversion.
- D. Are expected to participate in the weekly Sunday liturgy.
- E. Must be participating in a program of systematic catechesis either in the parish, the Catholic School or the home.
- F. Must have sufficient knowledge to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity.
- G. Must have been thoroughly prepared for and celebrate the sacrament of Penance, unless some serious pastoral reason suggests otherwise in a particular case.³
 1. For adults entering into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church the sacrament of Penance should be encouraged and made available.⁴

² *CCL #97.2* – Before the completion of the seventh year a minor is called an infant and is to be held incompetent (non sui compos); with the completion of the seventh year one is presumed to have the use of reason.

³ *Response to question about Canon 914*: That children should be prepared to celebrate First Confession before First Communion. “The basis for this observation, for children, is not so much the state of sin in which they may be, as the formative and pastoral aim; that is, to educate them, from a tender age, to the true Christian spirit of penance and conversion, to the necessity of asking pardon of God and above all to a loving and confident abandonment to the mercy of the Lord. (*LETTER FROM THE CONGREGATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS TO THE NCCB ON THE SACRAMENTS OF RECONCILIATION, HOLY ORDERS AND MARRIAGE, Rome, December 20, 1986*)

⁴ *RCIA: Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church #482*. If the profession of faith and reception take place within Mass, the candidate, according to his or her own conscience, should make a confession of sins beforehand, first informing the confessor that he or she is about to be received into full communion. Any confessor who is lawfully approved may hear the candidate's confession

2. For adults completing the sacraments of initiation see *Rite of Christian Initiation* # 461-463.⁵

H. Adaptations for Children

1. Children should be enrolled in a parish process of preparation for First Communion in which children from the Catholic school and the catechetical ministry program are united.
2. Children who are home schooled should be enrolled in the parish sacramental preparation program and participate in all its dimensions: catechesis, ritual, service, spiritual (retreats, etc.) and any other requirements determined by the parish.
3. Parents/guardians of all children should participate in adult faith formation parent sessions offered by the parish to help them grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the sacrament of Eucharist and to assist them in catechizing their children. These sessions should be sensitive to the cultural experiences of those involved.⁶
4. Any decision to celebrate First Communion with children before sacramental confession should be discussed, understood, and agreed upon by the pastor.

⁵ *RCIA: Penitential Rite # 461-3*. Along with the candidates, their sponsors and the larger liturgical assembly also participate in the celebration of the penitential rite. Therefore, the rite is to be adapted in such a way that it benefits all the participants. This penitential rite may also help to prepare the candidates to celebrate the sacrament of penance.

This penitential rite may be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Lent or on a Lenten weekday, if the candidates are to receive the sacraments of confirmation and eucharist and/or be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church at Easter, if not, at the most suitable time.

This penitential rite is intended solely for celebrations with baptized adults preparing for confirmation and eucharist or reception into the full communion of the Catholic church....

⁶ *CCL #914.1* – It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as of 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 confessions.

GDC #258 – In order that the parish may succeed in activating effectively the mission of evangelization, some conditions must be fulfilled: a) Adult catechesis must be given priority. This involves “a post baptismal catechesis...” b) With renewed courage, the proclamation of the Gospel to those alienated or who live in religious indifference must be planned. In this task, pre-sacramental meetings (preparation for Marriage, Baptism and First Holy Communion of children) can be fundamental. c) As a solid reference point for parochial catechesis it is necessary to have a nucleus of mature Christians, initiated into the faith, to whom different pastoral concerns can be entrusted... d) While the preceding points refer mainly to adults, at the same time catechesis for children, adolescents, and young people- which is always indispensable- will also benefit greatly.

III. CATECHESIS

- A. Catechesis is to be based on the rite, be attentive to the experiences of the participants, be sensitive to cultural and family considerations, and foster active involvement in the liturgical celebrations.⁷
- B. Catechesis for the celebration of First Communion should:
 1. Familiarize candidates with the major events in Christ's life as proclaimed in the Gospels. Special attention should be given to the Last Supper, the Jewish roots of this covenant meal, and the Paschal Mystery.⁸
 2. Familiarize the candidates with the Mass and encourage their full, active, and conscious participation.
 3. Help the candidates become aware of the presence of Christ in the assembly, in the presider, in the Word, and in a special way, in the Eucharistic elements.⁹

⁷ *DMC #12-13*. Even in the case of children, the liturgy itself always exerts its own proper didactic force. Yet within programs of catechetical, scholastic, and parochial formation, the necessary importance should be given to catechesis on the Mass. This catechesis should be directed to the child's active, conscious, and authentic participation.

Special mention should be made of the catechesis through which children are prepared for first communion. Not only should they learn the truths of faith concerning the Eucharist, but they should also understand how from first communion on - prepared by penance according to their need and fully initiated into the body of Christ - they may actively participate in the Eucharist with the people of God and have their places at the Lord's table and in the community of their brothers and sisters.

By the very fact of celebration children easily come to appreciate some liturgical elements, for example, greetings, silence, and common praise (especially when this is sung in common).

⁸ *NCD #121* - Catechesis recognizes the Eucharist as the heart of Christian life. Reflecting upon Christ's life as proclaimed in the Gospels, catechesis considers the Last Supper and the Jewish roots of this covenant meal. It expresses the Church's faith that Christ is present, not only in the Christian assembly and in the reading of his word, but in a unique and most excellent way in this sacrament; that the bread and wine are changed, a change traditionally and appropriately expressed by the word transubstantiation, so that while the appearance of bread and wine remain, the reality is the body and blood of Christ.

⁹ *GIRM #7*. ...For at the celebration of Mass, which perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross, Christ is really present to the assembly gathered in his name; he is present in the person of the minister, in his own word, and indeed substantially and permanently under the eucharistic elements.
The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist p. 7-9. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the glorified Christ becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine in a way that is unique, a way that is uniquely suited to the Eucharist. In the Church's traditional theological language, in the act of consecration during the Eucharist the "substance" of the bread and wine is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the "substance" of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. ...Christ's presence in the Eucharist is unique in that, even though the consecrated bread and wine truly are a substance the Body and Blood of Christ, they have none of the accidents or characteristics of a human body, but only those of bread and wine.... Jesus Christ gives himself to us in a form that employs the symbolism inherent in eating bread and drinking wine. Furthermore, being present under the appearances of bread and wine, Christ gives

4. Present the Holy Eucharist as
 - the “sacrament of sacraments” (*GDC* #115)
 - a sacrament of initiation that is the culmination of Baptism and Confirmation (*RCIA* #217)
 - a sign of communion with God and the Catholic community.

5. Help candidates understand the celebration of Eucharist as
 - a living sacrifice and a sacred meal
 - thanksgiving
 - nourishment for the Christian life (*GDC* #70)
 - the source and summit of the Christian life
 - a call to works of charity, service, missionary activity and witness to the faith.^{10.}

6. Instruct the candidates on
 - the reception of Christ’s Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner
 - the reception of the Body of Christ either in the hand or on the tongue
 - the reception of the Blood of Christ from the cup^{11.}
 - the Eucharistic fast
 - the obligation to be free from serious sin before sharing in Holy Communion¹²
 - the obligation to share in Holy Communion at least during the Easter Season^{13.}

himself to us in a form that is appropriate for human eating and drinking. Also, this kind of presence corresponds to the virtue of faith, for the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ cannot be detected or discerned by any way other than faith.

^{10.} *GDC* #70. In the Christian community the disciples of Jesus Christ are nourished at a twofold table: “that of the word of God and that of the Body of Christ.” The Gospel and the Eucharist are the constant food for the journey to the Father’s House. The action of the Holy Spirit operates so that the gift of “communion” and the task of “mission” are deepened and lived in an increasingly intense way. *CCC* #2044-6. The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church’s mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians.... By living with the mind of Christ, Christians hasten the coming of the Reign of God, “a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.”

^{11.} *GIRM* # 240. Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom.

¹² *CCL* #989. After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.

7. Help candidates know the prayers and responses used during the Eucharistic celebration.
 8. Encourage the candidates to celebrate the sacrament of Eucharist regularly after their First Communion.
- C. Adaptation for children
1. Catechesis in preparation for First Communion should be a separate program, distinct from the preparation for the sacrament of Penance.
 2. Catechesis must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of development.
- D. Adaptation must be made for persons with disabilities according to their ability.¹⁴

IV. DISCERNMENT OF READINESS

- A. Adults are expected to have developed a sufficient understanding of Catholic teaching about the sacrament of the Eucharist as well as to undergo continuing conversion in mind and in action as their faith takes root and grows.¹⁵
- B. Parents/guardians and the catechist are expected to foster children's desire and readiness to celebrate the sacrament.¹⁶

¹³ *CCL #920*. All the faithful, after they have been initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist, are bound by the obligation to receiving Communion at least once a year. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at some other time during the year.

¹⁴ *CCL # 777.4*. ... Catechetical formation is to be given to those handicapped in mind or body insofar as their conditions permits." Therefore, realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to be confirmed and to participate in the preparation for the sacrament according to this policy insofar as they are able.

¹⁵ *RCIA #120*. Before the rite of election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and in action and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity. With deliberate will and an enlightened faith they must have the intention to receive the sacraments of the Church, a resolve they will express publicly in the actual celebration of the rite.

RCIA #452. Then the celebrant addresses the assembly. If he has taken part in the earlier deliberation on the candidates' suitability (see no. 122), he may use either Option A or option B or similar words...

¹⁶ *CCL # 914, part 1*. It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as the pastor to see the children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession.

- C. Children should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between the consecrated bread and wine (The Body and Blood of Christ) and ordinary bread and wine.
- D. It is ultimately the responsibility of the pastor, in collaboration with the catechist and parents/guardians entrusted with the task of preparation, to ensure that those presented for First Communion have reached the use of reason and are properly disposed.¹⁷

V. MINISTRIES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

- A. The catechist is the minister for the preparation for the sacrament. The following ministers work collaboratively to support the catechist: the pastor, the director of catechetical ministry, the Catholic school principal, the director for liturgy, the religion coordinator in the school, and the director of the catechumenate.
- B. The parish community should be an active participant in the process of initiation.
- C. Parents/guardians have a special responsibility to educate their children in the faith and to be involved in preparing them for their First Communion.
- D. Different persons should exercise the variety of ministries which are encouraged in the celebration of the First Communion Mass.
 - 1. The minister for the celebration of First Communion at Eucharist is the pastor of the parish, or a priest assigned by him.
 - 2. Trained parish ministers who are fully initiated into the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist and properly prepared should be assigned. Ministers should be chosen for their qualifications and ability, not as means of recognition.
 - 3. Candidates for First Communion may not exercise the ministry of cantor, lector, server, or communion minister at the celebration.

¹⁷ *CCL #914, part 2.* It is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.

VI. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

- A. The celebration of First Communion should normally take place at a regularly scheduled Sunday Eucharist.¹⁸
- B. Because of the paschal character of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the Easter season is the appropriate time for the celebration of First Communion. Sunday, the Lord's Day, is to be preferred over any other day, so that the Christian community may exhibit their responsibility for the Christian formation of baptized children and give witness to the faith in which the children are more fully initiated.¹⁹
- C. The place for the celebration of First Communion at Eucharist is the parish church. Only in extraordinary circumstances would this eucharistic liturgy be celebrated outside a sacred place.²⁰
- D. The candidates should be carefully prepared for the celebration beforehand, especially with regard to the readings, songs and prayers for the Mass.
- E. Sensitivity to cultural experiences of those involved should be considered in the preparation of the celebration of the sacrament.
- F. Accommodations should be made for candidates with special needs. Interpreters of sign language for deaf and hearing-impaired candidates should be provided.
- G. Adaptation for children
 - 1. When the number of children who are to celebrate First Communion is very large, smaller groups should be formed in order to insure attentive and

¹⁸ *DD #36*. For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their "ministry" as "domestic churches," when parents share with their children at the one table of the word and of the bread of life. We do well to recall in this regard that it is first of all the parents who must teach their children to participate in Sunday Mass; they are assisted in this by catechists, who are to see to it that initiation into the Mass is made a part of the formation imparted to the children entrusted to their care...

¹⁹ *RCIA # 304*. In order to bring out the paschal character of baptism, celebration of the sacrament of initiation should preferably take place at the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday, the day the Church devotes to the remembrance of the Lord's resurrection.

²⁰ *DMC #25*. The primary place for the eucharistic celebration for children is the church.

conscious participation during the celebration. These groups should celebrate First Communion at different masses, preferably on Sundays.²¹

2. Children in parish catechetical programs, Catholic schools, and children schooled in the home should be integrated in each celebration. No group should have a private or separate celebration.
3. The preparation of the liturgical celebration should involve the director of catechetical ministry, the Catholic school principal, the director for liturgy, the director of the catechumenate, the religion coordinator in the school, the catechist, and the pastor.
4. It is the responsibility of the presiding minister to adapt the celebration to the children.²²
5. With the consent of the pastor, a catechist may speak to the children/assembly after the Gospel.²³

H. Preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of First Communion

1. Dress: The candidates for First Communion should be dressed in their “Sunday best” for the celebration; that is, in attire appropriate to the dignity and simplicity of the eucharistic assembly which gathers each Sunday. Attire that calls undue attention to the candidates and distracts from the sacramental action in which they, their families, and the community of faith are engaged, is inappropriate.²⁴

²¹ · *DMC #28*. When the number of children who celebrate the Eucharist together is very great, attentive and conscious participation becomes more difficult. Therefore, if possible, several groups should be formed.

²² · *DMC #23*. It is the responsibility of the priest who celebrates with children to make the celebration festive, fraternal, meditative.... It will depend upon his personal preparation and his manner of acting and speaking with others.

Above all the priest should be concerned about the dignity, clarity, and simplicity of his actions and gestures. In speaking to the children he should express himself so that he will be easily understood, while avoiding any childish type of speech.

It will help in reaching the hearts of the children if the priest sometimes uses his own words when he gives invitations, for example, at the penitential rite, the prayers over the gifts, the Lord's Prayer, the sign of peace, and communion.

²³ · *DMC #24*. With the consent of the pastor... one of the adults may speak to the children after the gospel, especially if the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of the children.

²⁴ · *GIRM #62*. In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood...

Any appearance of individualism or division among the faithful should be avoided, since they are all brothers and sisters in the sight of the one Father

2. Photography and Video: During the liturgy, photography and videos may be used unobtrusively and at a distance without flash or special lighting so as not to distract the candidates and those participating.

VII. POST-COMMUNION MYSTAGOGY

- A. Those who have celebrated First Communion should gather afterward to reflect on their experience of coming to the table.
- B. Catechesis toward lifelong conversion should continue after the celebration of First Communion through parish catechetical programs for adults, youth and children.²⁵
- C. For particular cultures whose practice is to be involved only in the preparation for the sacraments, the need for on-going catechesis needs to be reinforced.

VIII. RECORDS

- A. The names of those candidates who celebrated First Communion, the minister, the place and date of the ceremony, and the place and date of Baptism are to be recorded in the parish Communion register.
- B. The celebration of First Communion that takes place at a high school or college is to be recorded in the parish were the celebration takes place.

Environment and Art in Catholic Worship #99. In a period of Church and liturgical renewal, the attempt to recover a solid grasp of Church and faith and rites involves the rejection of certain embellishments, which have in the course of history become hindrances. In many areas of religious practice, this means a simplifying and a refocusing on primary symbols.

²⁵ · *GDC #69.* Continuing or ongoing education in the faith follows upon basic education and presupposes it. Both fulfill two distinct but complementary functions of the ministry of the word while serving the process of continuing conversion. Initiatory catechesis lays the basis for the Christian life of the followers of Jesus. The process of continuing conversion goes beyond what is provided by basic catechesis.

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us #13. Such lifelong formation is always needed and must be a priority in the Church's catechetical ministry; moreover, it must "be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it.