



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO **Office of Family and Faith Formation**

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Recommendations: First Holy Communion

The bishops in the United States have expressed concern about the “religious illiteracy” level of the Catholic faithful. They are concerned not only about gaps in intellectual formation but also gaps in spiritual formation. They have been working to address these concerns, which impact Catholics’ understanding and practice of their faith. This includes an understanding and commitment to an active sacramental life.

Children’s preparation for the First Holy Communion begins in the home. The family has the most important role in communicating the Christian and human values that form the foundation of a child’s understanding of the Eucharist. Children who participate with their family in the Mass experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer.

Parents and the parish Faith Formation Director and/or Coordinator, catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. Because reception of the Lords Body, especially for the first time, is integral to the child’s full incorporation into the ecclesial community, the pastor has a responsibility in determining every child’s readiness to receive First Communion. Parents have the right and duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion. ***Catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.*** An initial meeting for parents and first communicants is held to inform them of the plans and expectations of the preparation process. (Cf. NDC 126-127)

Parent Formation Sessions

“A family is our first community and the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.” (Follow the Way of Love, A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Bishops to Families on the occasion of the United Nations 1994 International Year of the Family).

Parishes should ensure welcome families into a closer relationship with God and the Church. Parents/guardians should be made aware of expectations for the family and child and the catechetical themes for this sacrament. Parents should be integrated into the preparation process as much as possible. In partnership with parents in the home, parishes and Catholic schools in our Diocese of Sacramento must provide holistic faith formation.

Catechesis

Parish Faith Formation Programs should offer at least 8 sessions of immediate preparation for the First Holy Communion. Parents have the right and duty to be involved in preparing their children for

First Holy Communion. ***Catechesis offered should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.*** Meetings for parents must be held to inform them of the plans and expectations of the preparation process. (NDC 126-127)

Catechesis on the Mass provided in systematic parish catechetical programs is an indispensable part of the preparation of children for their first reception of the First Communion. Suited to the children's age and abilities, catechesis should help children participate actively and consciously in the Mass. During planning, it is essential to remember that children around the age of reason ordinarily think concretely.

Catechesis in preparation for the first reception of the First Communion should:

§ Teach that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.

§ Teach not only "the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on...they can as full members of Christ's Body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters".

§ Ensure that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Eucharist.

§ Develop in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

§ Teach that "the Holy Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ" and that "what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living body".

§ Teach the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.

§ Teach the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine.

§ Help them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass.

§ Help children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner. (National Directory of Catechesis 126-127)

The catechesis for First Communion should prepare each child to...

§ Have sufficient knowledge to understand the mystery of Christ according to his/her capacity (Canon 913 §1).

§ Be able to distinguish the Body and Blood of Christ from ordinary food (Canon 913).

§ Have a desire to receive the Lord Jesus reverently in Holy Communion with faith and devotion (Canon 913 §1).

§ Have at least two years of catechesis prior to the reception of First Communion.

Pastoral considerations:

- The celebration of First Communion is an opportunity to catechize the whole community on the sacrament and to invite all to regular reception of the Eucharist. “The criterion for the 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 for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, no. 20

-The Diocese recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their child(ren), and that some parents choose to live out their role of primary educators by providing formal catechesis at home. The parish pastor and his delegates also have the responsibility to provide catechetical instruction for the children. The rights and responsibilities of parents and the parish call for collaboration between the two. The same prerequisites for candidacy apply to children who are homeschooled for faith formation as are required for children in parish programs and Catholic schools.