



**DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU
SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES
FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

- I. CATECHESIS FOR FIRST HOLY COMMUNION SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATE FROM THAT OF FIRST PENANCE.**

- II. PARENTS HAVE THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO BE INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN PREPARING THEIR CHILDREN FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.**

- III. ORDINARILY, CHILDREN ARE TO BE ENROLLED AND ATTENDING A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM AT LEAST ONE YEAR PRIOR TO ENTRANCE INTO PROXIMATE CATECHESIS.**

- IV. PARENTS, PASTORS AND CATECHISTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DETERMINING WHEN A CHILD IS READY TO RECEIVE FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.**

- V. THE PARISH CHURCH WHICH THE FAMILY ATTENDS IS THE USUAL PLACE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.**

- VI. ORDINARILY, CHILDREN WILL BE PREPARED FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION IN THE SECOND GRADE.**

EXPLANATION OF GUIDELINES

I. CATECHESIS FOR FIRST HOLY COMMUNION SHOULD BE KEPT SEPARATE FROM THAT OF FIRST PENANCE.

- A. This is to be done so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent. The two sacraments should be kept distinct through a clear and unhurried catechesis.
- B. Catechesis for children seeks to strengthen their awareness of the Father's love, of the call to participate in Christ's sacrifice, and of the gift of the Spirit. Children should be taught that the Holy Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ. . . . experiences, coupled with explanations of the Eucharist adapted to their intellectual capacity and with further efforts to familiarize them with the main events of Jesus' life, help them to participate more meaningfully in the action of the Mass and to receive Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion in an informed and reverent manner.
(Sharing the Light of Faith #122)
- C. Continued catechesis on the Holy Eucharist should be given yearly since the sacrament requires lifelong participation and study.
- D. Informal catechesis begins early in the home. Attitudes expressed by parents in the early years of life teach a reverence and appreciation for the sacrament. The parish, through its example and responsibility for community members, also contributes to this Eucharistic faith.
- E. Age, maturity and relevancy to life situations are important factors in the development of Eucharistic catechesis.
- F. Recommended texts are given elsewhere in these guidelines. These contain the following elements:
- By baptism we belong to the family of God.
 - Jesus is God's gift to us.
 - Jesus showed us how to love one another by His words and actions.
 - At the Last Supper, Jesus gave His friends the gift of Himself in Holy Communion.
 - Jesus lived, died, and rose.
 - When we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, we gather as God's family, the Church, to honor, worship, and thank God.
 - Jesus is really present under the appearance of bread and wine.
 - The Mass is a sacred meal and sacrifice.
- G. Special care is to be given to children who are physically handicapped or mentally challenged. Catechesis should meet the needs of each individual.
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II. PARENTS HAVE THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO BE INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN PREPARING THEIR CHILDREN FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.

- A. Parents are the primary educators. Formal programs should be held at the parish level to assist them in preparing their children.
 - B. Formal preparation sessions should be provided for parents, whether their children attend Catholic schools or parish religion programs.
 - C. Parish programs should include the following:
 - Instructions on the Eucharist to renew and deepen the parents' own understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of the sacrament.
 - Overview of children's program
 - Home activities for the family
 - Clarification of roles of parents, catechists, pastor, and others involved in the program.
 - D. Both parents should be encouraged to attend and participate in sessions provided by the parish.
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III. ORDINARILY, CHILDREN ARE TO BE ENROLLED AND ATTENDING A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM AT LEAST ONE YEAR PRIOR TO ENTRANCE INTO PROXIMATE CATECHESIS.

- A. Proximate preparation should not be hurried. Reception of Holy Communion implies a remote catechesis and preparation for fuller understanding and appreciation. Catechesis can be provided by:
 - Parish religious education program
 - Catholic school program
 - Family preparation program
 - B. Materials presented in the remote preparation would include:
 - Major events in the life of Jesus
 - Basic meaning of the Mass and Church
 - Belonging in the family of God
 - Unity in the community
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IV. PARENTS, PASTORS AND CATECHISTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DETERMINING WHEN A CHILD IS READY TO RECEIVE FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.

- A. The pastor has the final responsibility for this decision (Canon 914). Interviews with the children can be appropriate. (Pastors may wish to delegate this task to another priest or director.) When a doubt exists, a consultation should take place among priest/director/catechist and parents.
- B. The reception of First Holy Communion deepens participation in the Christian life which was initiated in Baptism. This “life” matures as the child continues to learn and experience the love of Jesus in her/his life.
- C. Differing situations determine the extent to which priests are involved; their support is essential because of their leadership role.

V. THE PARISH CHURCH WHICH THE FAMILY ATTENDS IS THE USUAL PLACE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION.

- A. The celebration may be individual for each child, small family group, or a class celebration.
 - B. Since the reception of this sacrament initiates the child more fully into the life of Church, it should be celebrated in the parish church.
 - C. Liturgies for First Holy Communion should be planned to include appropriate participation of child(ren) and parents. Celebrations should not be viewed as performances.
 - D. The Easter Season is an appropriate time for the celebration of First Holy Communion. Special liturgical days (i.e., Holy Thursday, etc.) and holidays (i.e. Mother’s Day), should be avoided.
 - E. The significance of the Eucharist is manifested when it is celebrated with faith and devotion by children and parents in the family’s own faith community.
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VI. ORDINARILY, CHILDREN WILL BE PREPARED FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION IN THE SECOND GRADE.

- For the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the Mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion. (Canon 913)
- Children should have reached the use of reason in order to receive Holy Communion.
- Reception of the Sacrament of First Holy Communion **MUST** be preceded by sacramental confession (Canon 914).
- Laws of “fasting” in order to receive Holy Communion, time and place of reception, and other obligations should be thoroughly explained.
- It is recommended that children have an opportunity to taste the bread and wine used for Mass prior to their first reception.
- When older children are prepared for the celebration of the Sacrament of First Holy Communion, they should **NOT** be placed into classes with primary children.
- Where applicable, these guidelines should be followed in preparing older children for the celebration of sacraments.

INTERVIEW FOR FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

Canon Law states that children must have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation to understand the Mystery of Christ according to their capacity in order to receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. They should receive the Body and Blood of the Lord with faith and devotion and be able to distinguish the Body and Blood of Christ from ordinary food and to receive Holy Communion reverently. (Canon 913)

Parents, catechists, and pastors are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Holy Communion (*Sharing the Light of Faith* #122).

Interviews can be held to welcome the child who is ready, to affirm parents in their efforts, to encourage growth in the faith life of their child and to provide an opportunity for the child to verbalize his/her understanding of the Eucharist.

Children may need encouragement to speak. The person doing the interviewing should be familiar to the child. Questions should be open ended. Questions should be formulated from the materials or books used during the preparation.

Children may meet individually with the person doing the interviewing, or parents may also accompany them for this session.

Questions might include some of the following:

- Can you tell me about Jesus? Who is He? What did He do?
- Do you know any miracles that Jesus worked and performed?
- Why did Jesus help other people?
- Who were the friends of Jesus?
- What do we use bread for? How does it help us?
- What is the difference between bread and the special bread that people receive at Mass?
- Can you tell me about this special bread?
- Do you know what happened at the Last Supper? Can you tell me about it?
- Do you know what we read about at Mass?
- Why do people receive Holy Communion?
- How do you receive Holy Communion?
- Do you want to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus? Why?

PARENT MEETING

The agenda for a Parent Meeting might look something like this:

- 5 min. Registration
- 5 min. Prayer
- 5 min. Introductions (if small group, parents might also introduce themselves)
- 15 min. Thank parents for coming/attending - stress importance of their presence
- 15 min. Audio-visual
- 15 min. Large group presentation
- 15 min. Small group discussion

Hand-out sheet with important information

- 5 min. Reminders:
 - Call if you have any questions
 - Next Meeting?
 - Ideas for home/family activities

Remind parents of the important role they play in this time of preparation
(Approximately 1 hour)

PARENT MEETINGS FOR FIRST PENANCE AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

Following are suggestions and ideas which might be presented at parent meetings in preparation for their children celebrating their First Penance and First Holy Communion. The number of meetings and their purpose would determine how much of these materials would be covered. Additional materials can also be found in the parent guides for the specific areas or books used by the children.

I. General Information

- Life is a journey of faith; it is important to have basics for this.
- Religion is “caught” more than “taught”; it is important for parents to be a part of this. Faith is passed on.
- Parents have the primary right and duty to prepare their children for these sacraments. The parish community supplies formal classes to assist parents.
- Children need parental example of living out their faith.
- The home is the “nurturing ground” for faith.
- The world is materialistic. Children need a sense of direction toward the spiritual life. Children tend to take on values and life styles of parents (Television has had a detrimental influence.)
- The “early” years of a child’s life are very important; children are impressionable. Parents should maintain a religious atmosphere in the home. Prayer and Scripture reading should be done as a family. Customs and traditions should be fostered. Love should be manifested.
- It is easier to establish an atmosphere of religion in the home when children are young; it becomes harder as children grow older.
- The year of preparation for sacramental celebrations is very important. Regular attendance at classes is required. It is expected that parents will continue to prepare the child at home and that there will be mutual cooperation in this endeavor.
- The time of preparation can also be a time of study and renewal for the parents.

II. Changes in the Church

- Parents might be asked to recall their own preparation and reception of these sacraments. They might discuss what has changed since then.
- It is not enough just to memorize facts; faith must be lived and experienced.
- Experience and daily living play an important part of our faith life.
- Religious education continues throughout adult life. We cannot be satisfied with a child’s perspective.
- Since many parishes do not have Catholic Schools, it becomes even more important for the parents to be involved with their children to pass on their faith and values.
- The Christian community forms around the local church but is conscious of the Diocesan and Universal Church.

III. Parish Preparation

- Materials used by the children should be presented and explained
- A calendar of dates should be given (classes/practice/sacramental celebrations)
- Parents should feel free to contact the teacher/director/coordinator/principal
- Periodic notes to parents will detail what is happening (Need of memorizing prayers/helping children/etc.)

IV. Sacraments:

A. Introduction to sacraments:

- Spiritual Encounters with the Lord - 7 in number - involved with (God) relationship
- Sacraments of initiation, healing, vocation
- Recall the past, celebrate the present, and point to the future
- Importance of signs and symbols used; sacraments are celebrations

B. Penance

- Give brief history
- Discuss approach today:
 - Not a grocery list of sins
 - Concept of reconciliation
 - Parents need to be involved in the “forming” of a child’s conscience
- Differences between “mistakes/accidents” and sins
 - Need to be able to think and analyze for oneself
 - Need for being able to forgive in the home
- Importance of Ten Commandments as initial guide (Beatitudes and Church Laws)
- Examples in Scripture (Prodigal Son/Zacchaeus/Peter/Judas/Mary Magdalene/paralytic/David/etc.)
- Involves relationships with self, others, and God
- Penance is a celebration
- Need to admit failure and to allow daily renewal and conversion
- Parents should not pass on “hang-ups” concerning this sacrament
- Penance is a sacrament of forgiveness, NOT judgment
- Ways of celebrating this sacrament: Communal and Individual
- Necessity of this sacrament BEFORE receiving First Holy Communion
- Develop concept of bread as food for the body; Eucharist as food for the soul
- Scripture reading and events:
 - Elijah and raven
 - Moses and the Manna
 - Christ feeds 5000
 - Last Supper - institution of this sacrament
- Importance of Mass (a whole session could be devoted to this)
- Sharing in the life of Jesus; one of the Sacraments of Initiation

- Eucharist means “thanksgiving”. It is a celebration of the past, present and future
- Christ is present under the “appearance” of bread and wine; we celebrate the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus in this sacrament and receive a pledge of eternal life
- At Mass, we celebrate in faith that Jesus has died, is risen, and is among us now, nourishing our life with God and one another
- When we approach the Table of the Lord to share in the sacrifice-meal, we nourish the life of friendship into which we have entered into as God’s people
- In the Holy Eucharist, God offers us a “communion of life” in Jesus

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

BASIC FACTS CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW BEFORE RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

- God is our Father who loves us. He wants us to love and obey Him.
- Jesus is God's Son. He teaches us to love and obey His Father.
- Jesus is God.
- Jesus changed bread and wine into Himself at the Last Supper.
- When we receive Holy Communion, we receive Jesus under the "form" of bread and wine. He shares His life with us.
- Jesus helps us to love God and others.

ATTITUDES AND VALUES TO FOSTER IN CHILDREN

- Awareness of God's goodness in events and happenings.
- Sense of gratitude and praise of God.
- A sense of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- A desire to contribute to a happy family life.
- Concern for others.
- Love and reverence for the Church and its members.
- A "sense" of community and unity.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES

- Reading and discussing Scripture together.
- Family prayer.
- Celebration of birthdays, Holy Days, and special events.
- Spontaneous prayer (occasionally) at meal time.
- Family outing.
- Family service projects/works of mercy (help neighbor, visit someone old, sick, etc.).
- Watching TV together and discussing what was viewed.
- Preparing the family meal together.
- Doing chores together as a family (laundry/yard work/clean garage/baking/etc.).
- Set aside one evening a week and gather/celebrate as a family.
- Go to Mass as a family each week.
- Create traditions for "special days".
- Go shopping together.
- Make gifts for each other (instead of buying them).
- Go over a child's religion lessons with him/her.
- Be willing to forgive and ask for forgiveness.
- Share meals together.