



Diocese of Saint Augustine & Basilica of the Immaculate Conception Sacramental Guidelines for School-Aged Children For the Reception of the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and Communion

The Diocese of Saint Augustine has established the following requirements for the celebration of the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist for school-aged children and youth:

1. Ongoing remote preparation is essential prior to Sacramental Catechesis.
 - a. Remote preparation involves being enrolled in and consistently engaged in a Parish Religious Education Program, known as PREP or CCD, during the year prior to reception of the Sacraments
 - b. and concurrently with enrollment in immediate preparation in the Parish Sacramental Preparation Program the year during which the Sacrament is expected to be received.

And / Or enrollment

- c. in a Catholic School during the year prior to reception of the Sacraments and concurrently with enrollment in immediate preparation in the Parish Sacramental Preparation Program the year during which the Sacrament is expected to be received.
 - d. In a Home School Program during the year prior to reception of the Sacraments and concurrently with enrollment in immediate preparation in the Parish Sacramental Preparation Program the year during which the Sacrament is expected to be received.
2. Readiness of candidates is determined through consultation with Parents, Candidates, Catechists, Pastor.
3. Remote preparation is facilitated by the parish but is the primary responsibility of the parents.
 - a. All programs proposed by parents for remote preparation, must be pre-approved by the pastor or the Parish Life Coordinator.
 - b. The text chosen must be from the approved United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) list and approved for our diocese by the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation.
4. For immediate preparation to receive the sacraments, all children, (Catholic School Students & Home School Students) are brought together for a minimum of six (6) hours, and a maximum of twelve (12) hours for each sacrament. The schedule and overall approach to the catechetical sessions will be determined on an annual basis, dependent upon parish resources, volunteers and need.
5. Since full initiation is the norm for all Catholics, persons with special needs are to be included within all formation, training and participation of sacraments, according to individual ability.
6. Parents and other role models are encouraged to act as witnesses by their regular participation in church life within the parish.
7. The proper context for the celebration of the Sacraments is within the parish community. A privileged time and place for the Sacrament, namely Confirmation and First Eucharist, is the Sunday assembly.

The Sacrament of First Reconciliation

General Information

What is the sacrament of reconciliation?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an experience of the gift of God's boundless mercy that frees us from our sins and also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church and in the Rite of Penance we read that the Sacrament is a liturgical action. It is the Church's opportunity to celebrate the presence of God in those areas of our lives needing conversion and forgiveness.

Formation for the Sacrament

Formation for the celebration of First Reconciliation involves the cooperative efforts of parents, pastors, catechists and children. It is a time when a person is able to encounter a loving and merciful God. The focus of any formation must be on developing and growing a strong mature conscience.

The candidate should be prepared in such a way that the ritual celebration is a joyful celebration, more than a memorized experience. "Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances." National Directory for Catechesis Chapter 5, section 36, heading B2

Preparation for the Sacrament

Every child who has reached the age of reason (around seven) must be given adequate basic catechesis for the celebration of reconciliation so that participation in the Sacrament may be a free response of faith. No adequately prepared child may be denied the sacrament. On the other hand, no obligation to approach the sacrament may be imposed on the child, other than that which binds all Catholics, namely the consciousness of personal, serious sin.

While catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Eucharist, the principle of individual readiness for the celebration of the Sacrament must be respected. The decision concerning readiness of a particular child rests with the parent and child along with the assistance of the parish pastor and catechetical leadership.

Readiness of the individual child includes:

- The awareness of the need for forgiveness and trust in Jesus' forgiving love.
- The ability of the child to distinguish between right and wrong and to ask for forgiveness.
- The ability to express sorrow and to describe wrongdoing in his or her own words.

Some basic needs of a child who is developing and growing with a mature conscience:

- has a need for love and security
- needs to see his/her parents forgiving and accepting others and needs to experience forgiveness
- needs to understand that there are differences in: what is dangerous, what is improper, what is annoying to others, what is evil
- needs a true understanding of sin
- needs a true understanding of the Law, "LOVE ONE ANOTHER."
- needs to see the Christian life lived
- needs to learn to make choices and experience the consequences of these choices
- needs to learn to reflect on him/herself

The Celebration

There are a variety of ways the sacrament may be celebrated. In all cases, parents as well as children are encouraged to enter fully into the celebration.

One way of preparing for the sacrament is for the family to participate in an examination of conscience together. The ideal would be to have the whole family receive the Sacrament together by attending the First Reconciliation Family Penance Service and receiving the Sacrament individually. This should be considered 'the norm' in our Sacramental Preparation Program. "Parents above all others are obliged to form their children in the faith and practice of Christian life by word and example." Canon 774.2

Continuing Formation

Catechesis for the sacrament of penance must continue throughout one's life in order to develop a fully mature conscience. Participation in the sacrament at frequent and regular opportunities contributes to one's overall growth in discipleship and maturity.

The community of faith has a responsibility for modeling acts of mercy and forgiveness both within its confines, and in the world beyond. "After receiving pardon for sin, the penitent praises the mercy of God and gives him thanks...The penitent continues the conversion thus begun and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God." Rite of Penance #20

The Sacrament of First Reconciliation (1st Semester of First Sacraments Preparation Program)

REGISTRATION: No child will be 'officially' registered for preparation to receive a Sacrament unless the registration package is complete PRIOR to THE START OF THE PROGRAM.

A completed registration packet includes:

- Registration form
- Necessary names with complete home address, email address and phone number
- Baptism certificate
- Program materials fee of \$25.00 (covers the cost of materials and retreat)

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- ***Attends Mass at least weekly***
- Has completed at least one year of RE, successfully, and will be continuing RE at home or, is enrolled in a Catholic School concurrently with Parish Sacramental Preparation.
- Attends each of the Preparation sessions which are held in September – November. Each class is held on Sunday morning after the 10 Mass and lasts for 1 hour. Attendance is necessary at all classes (pastoral discretion in extreme circumstances). Please plan your calendars for the coming year in a manner that recognizes the pre-eminent importance of the Sacrament and the preparation.
- The ongoing faith formation of all family members is important, however, the continuing faith formation of you the parents is of the utmost importance to the health and welfare of your children, the parish community, the local community and society in general.
- Reception of the Sacrament in November (see calendar)

LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

- There will be an Enrollment Liturgy at the beginning of the year. In the enrollment ceremony, which takes place during the 10 am Eucharistic Celebration, you and your family are publicly asking the parish to support your efforts in preparing for the sacraments.
- The parish acknowledges their part in helping you, the catechists, and your children on this journey.
- Check your program calendar for the date of the Enrollment Liturgy

GENERAL DETAILS TO REMEMBER

- The celebration of First Reconciliation will be held during a First Reconciliation Family Penance Service in November.
- Although your child will receive the Sacrament as an individual in confession with the Priest, it is recommended that this be a family event. All Catholics in the family are encouraged to your child to the communal penance service, and to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a strong witness of your faith to your child, and an affirmation of your own understanding of the importance of the Sacrament, and your belief in the graces received in the Sacrament. This is very much a family affair, and not a 'class' or 'school' event.
- Sessions will be held in Leon Hall, unless otherwise notified.

WHAT YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW BEFORE FIRST RECONCILIATION: What kind of preparation does your child need in order to receive First Reconciliation? The Church realizes that children are, well, children! The sense of one's own sins and how they affect that personal relationship with God and others, will be appropriate to an individual child's developmental stage.

The following bears that in mind.

- The Child ought to...

- Know God loves him and be able to tell the difference between right and wrong.
- Understand that sin harms or breaks their relationship with others and with God.
- Understand that everyone sins and so forgiveness is essential in order to heal broken relationships.
- Experience forgiveness as a regular part of family life. This helps him to see that reconciliation is a normal part of every relationship.
- Know that the sacrament offers God's forgiveness and restores our relationship with God.
- Understand that she has to actually be sorry.
- Have some understanding of the difference between venial and mortal sins.
- Know how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation.
- See, by the example of the parents, that the Sacrament is important, respected and frequently received.

The Sacrament of First Eucharist (2nd Semester of First Sacraments Preparation Program)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers...Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.” (Acts 2:42, 46)

From the earliest days the community has gathered around the Eucharistic table. “Initiated into the Christian mystery by baptism and confirmation, Christians are fully joined to the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.” (National Catechetical Directory, #120)

The Eucharist is of such importance in our lives as faithful people that the Second Vatican Council stated that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” (Lumen Gentium, 11)

PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT

Preparation for any sacrament is a journey of the heart that prepares us to meet the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. It involves reflection, prayer, faith sharing and ritual celebration with parents and other candidates. This is not an educational process or a time to “make up or catch up” on catechetical material. In the case of preparation for First Communion, if a child is lacking age appropriate foundational catechesis, the appropriate process is The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for Children of Catechetical Age.

Immediate catechesis for the sacrament of Eucharist is to be short and focused on the preparation for the celebration of the sacrament. The goal of this catechesis is to help children participate in the Mass in a meaningful, reverent manner. The content of the preparation is to have at its core the format/structure of the Eucharistic celebration. Themes should include “sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking and celebrating.” (NCD, #133)

A complete copy of the Sacramental Guidelines of the Diocese of St. Augustine is on the Diocesan Website

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS

Parents are the primary educators of their child/children. In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit to forming their children in the life of faith. Parents are addressed:

“Parents you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring

him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor." (RB #39)

"Parents have a right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Communion. Catechesis aims to help parents grow in their understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and participate readily in the catechizing of their children. (NCD #121)

Parish or school programs of religious formation assist parents in this most important responsibility but never usurp the rightful role of parents.

WHAT IS READINESS?

When speaking of the readiness of a child to celebrate a sacrament, there are three areas to address: the family, the individual and the parish community.

Family: primary place of child's formation

- Has your child received appropriate formation for his/her age?
- Does your family participate in the life of the community in the areas of worship, formation (education), and service?
- Does your family pray together at home?
- As parents are you willing to commit to the continuing formation of your child in worship, formation and service?

The readiness of the individual involves the following:

- Is the child baptized and does he / she have the use of reason (about the age of seven)?
- Does the child express a desire to celebrate Eucharist?
- Does the child participate in the liturgy on a regular basis at the parish?
- Has the child been formed in faith in an age appropriate manner including basic knowledge of who Jesus is and what he has done?
- Can the child distinguish Eucharist from ordinary bread?

REGISTRATION DUE:

Please note, you will have completed this process prior to the 1st Semester of the program

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- **Attends Mass at least weekly**
- Has completed preparation for and reception of the Sacrament of First Reconciliation
- Has completed one year of PREP, successfully, and will be enrolled in religious education concurrently with Sacramental PREP.
- Attends each of the Preparation Classes, the Retreat, and Rehearsal which are held in February – March (6 weeks) Each class is held on Sunday morning after the 10 Mass and lasts for 1 hour. Attendance is necessary at all classes (pastoral discretion in extreme circumstances). Please plan your calendars for the coming year in a manner that recognizes the pre-eminent importance of the Sacrament and the preparation.
- The ongoing faith formation of all family members is important, however, the continuing faith formation of you the parents is of the utmost importance to the health and welfare of your children, the parish community, the local community and society in general.
- Reception of the Sacrament on Easter Sunday
- There will be a retreat at the end of the Sacrament Preparation Program. Parents and children will come together for a review on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. We will also rehearse for the reception of First Eucharist and make sure that everyone is clear as to the procedures.
- The Sacrament of First Eucharist will be received by the entire group during the Easter Sunday Eucharistic Celebration.
- All members of the family should be at least, dressed in their 'Sunday Best'. The Children should not be carrying

anything with them when receiving the Eucharist, and if they wear gloves they must be able to remember to remove them prior to receiving the Eucharist. The boys who will be receiving the Sacrament for the first time can wear suits, however if they are in their less formal 'Sunday Best' we ask that they wear ties with button down shirts.

- If you have members of your family who are of another faith tradition or who have not yet received God's gift of faith, and if they will be attending with you and your child; please take the time to prepare them. It will be important that you explain the Mass to them, possibly give them a small booklet to follow along with us. Help them to understand what we will be doing during each part of the celebration and the reasons why. It is our hope that these family members will be as comfortable and welcome in our community as is possible.

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