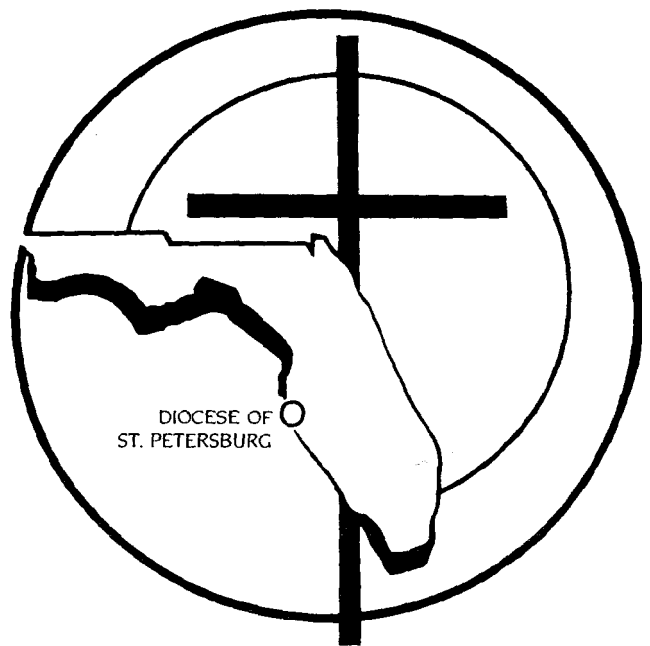


*Catechetical  
Guidelines for the  
Sacraments of Initiation  
and Penance*



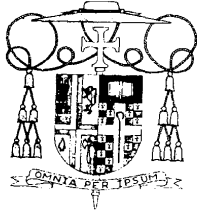
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DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

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PREPARED BY THE  
Office of Religious Education  
Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida  
In collaboration with  
Jaquelyn Mallory and Judith A. McCombs, O.S.F.  
Editors

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**DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG**  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

January 9, 1988

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Dear Friends in Christ,

We are a people called and chosen by God, reflecting the glory of the Father in the community of the Risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This gift of divine life is celebrated in the sacraments of the Church where the most profound moments of our human experience are incorporated into Christ's paschal mystery.

On the first anniversary of the publication of my pastoral, "Reflecting the Glory", I am pleased to approve and promulgate this official document: The Catechetical Guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance for the Diocese of St. Petersburg. I ask that all parishes and schools carefully implement these guidelines in setting policies and procedures for the reception of sacraments. These guidelines may be adapted to meet local needs and circumstances. The Office of Religious Education is ready to assist you in any way possible.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the committee for its work in authoring this document. I also want to thank all of you who carry out the task of sacramental catechesis within the parishes and schools. In the words of St. Paul,

I have never stopped thanking God for you and recommending you in my prayers. May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory grant you a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly. May he enlighten your innermost vision that you may know the great hope to which he has called you, the wealth of his glorious heritage to be distributed among the members of the Church and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe. (Eph. 1:16-19)

Sincerely in Christ

W. Thomas Larkin, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Petersburg

# *Table of Contents*

## **4 INTRODUCTION**

## **5 GUIDELINES SUMMARY**

## **7 CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION AND PENANCE**

Basic Principles

## **8 RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)**

Scripture

National Catechetical Directory

Inquiry and Catechesis

Catechumenate and Catechesis

Purification and Enlightenment and Catechesis

Mystagogia and Catechesis

## **10 BAPTISM**

Scripture

National Catechetical Directory

Code of Canon Law

Reflecting the Glory

Catechetical Guidelines

Remote Catechesis

Immediate Catechesis

Celebration

Continuing Catechesis

## **13 CONFIRMATION**

National Catechetical Directory

Code of Canon Law

Reflecting the Glory

Catechetical Guidelines

Remote Catechesis

Immediate Catechesis

Readiness (Physical/ Psychological, Catechetical, Liturgical)

Celebration

Continuing Catechesis

## **18 EUCHARIST**

Scripture

National Catechetical Directory

Code of Canon Law

Reflecting the Glory

Catechetical Guidelines

Remote Catechesis

Immediate Catechesis

Readiness (Physical/Psychological, Catechetical, Liturgical)

Celebration

Continuing Catechesis

## **22 PENANCE**

Scripture

National Catechetical Directory

Code of Canon Law

Reflecting the Glory

The Rites of the Catholic Church

Catechetical Guidelines

Remote Catechesis

Immediate Catechesis

Readiness (Physical/Psychological, Catechetical, Liturgical)

Celebration

Continuing Catechesis

## **27 CONCLUSION**

## **28 ADDENDUM**

For persons with disabilities

## **30 PASTORAL LETTER**

" Reflecting the Glory"

Introduction

Christ, the Sacrament of God

The Sacraments of the Church

Evangelization

The Initiation of Unbaptized Adults

Completing Initiation of the Baptized

The Sacrament of Baptism

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Sacrament of Penance

Footnotes

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*Special Thanks to the  
Archdiocese of Baltimore for  
Permission to use and adapt portions  
of their guidelines  
“Signs of God’s Love.”*

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# *Introduction*

These Catechetical Guidelines of the Diocese St. Petersburg for the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance draw upon several documents and resources. These documents are quoted directly whenever a footnote is indicated: **The American Bible**, Catholic Publishers, 1971; **The New Testament**, revised edition of the New American Bible, Glencoe Publishing Company, 1988; **National Catechetical Directory, Sharing the Light of Faith**, United States Catholic Conference, 1979; **The Code of Canon Law, A Text and Commentary**, Paulist Press, 1985; Apostolic Exhortation **Catechesi Tradendae** of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, 1979; **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, 1963; "Reflecting the Glory: Pastoral Statement", W. Thomas Larkin, D.D., Bishop of St. Petersburg, (1987); "**Signs of God's Love**", Archdiocese of Baltimore, (1987); (Baltimore Guidelines are quoted or adapted and used with permission). It is hoped that pastors, priests, directors of religious education, principals and liturgists will work in collaboration with other in implementing these guidelines when determining sacrament reception policy and programs of preparation for parishes. It is left to the judgment of the parish pastor to determine the appropriate age for the reception of sacraments. However, it is advisable that each deanery would enter into discussion regarding initiation policy. This would help limit the practice that exists among our people of "shopping around" for sacraments and further help to eliminate the confusion regarding policies of age, degree and type of preparation for the sacraments.

The Random House College dictionary defines guide as "to assist, to accompany as with travelers." That would seem to be an appropriate definition for these catechetical guidelines. It is the prayer and hope of those who prepared this document that the priests, directors of religious education and principals of the St. Petersburg Diocese will find herein some assistance as they accompany the people of God on the journey to the Creator through those graced moments called sacraments. Ultimately the guide is always the Advocate, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# *Guidelines Summary*

## ***BASIC PRINCIPLES***

- A. Sacrament involves relationship with Jesus and presumes faith.
- B. Readiness, not age or grade, is the criterion for reception of a sacrament.
- C. The celebration of sacraments is the action of the community.
- D. The family has an essential role in preparation of celebration of a sacrament.
- E. Catechesis and celebration of the sacraments of initiation are patterned on the principles of the RCIA.
- F. Immediate preparation is done in and by the parish in which the sacraments are to be celebrated since the pastor has the canonical right and obligation to administer sacraments to his parishioners.

## ***RCIA***

### ***Remote***

Catechesis during the inquiry period is a moment of evangelization. It is in the proclamation of the kerygma that the believer's initial faith is matured and informed.

### ***Immediate***

Catechesis during the catechumenal period is formative in intent and three-fold in nature by attending the message prayer and service traditions of the Church.

### ***Readiness***

During the Purification and Enlightenment period, catechesis in reflective and spiritual formation gives way to transformation; the decision to embrace Christian life is scrutinized and enlightened.

### ***Follow-up***

After celebrating the sacraments of initiation at the Easter vigil, the catechesis in the period of Mystagogia helps the neophyte reflect upon the Paschal Mystery.



## ***BAPTISM***

### ***Remote***

Through participation in the liturgical life and adult education of the community, parents/guardians continue to deepen their own Baptism. This is remote preparation for presentation of their child for the sacrament.

### ***Immediate***

The parish program for parents/guardians and godparents invites them to renew and deepen their personal relationship with Jesus and the Church and to become more active members of the parish community.

### ***Readiness***

Having participated in the liturgical life and received some instruction, parents/guardians desire to present their child for Baptism wherein they will join with the community in fostering the faith life given in this sacrament.

### ***Follow-up***

Christian living has to be learned and life needs to be continually nurtured. Family life and systematic catechesis work together to this good.

## ***CONFIRMATION, EUCHARIST, PENANCE***

### ***Remote***

There should be at least a year of systematic education prior to the year of immediate preparation for these sacraments. This guideline is met through participation in the Catholic school or education program.

### ***Immediate***

Immediate preparation is a **freestanding** parish program, which involves the collaborative effort of the parish community and the families of those presented for sacraments.

### ***Readiness***

It rests on the pastor, director of religious education, catechist, and, in the case of 'young people, parents/guardians and candidate, to discern readiness for the reception of the sacraments.

### ***Follow-up***

The purpose of initiation into the sacraments is for a graced relationship with Christ. Participation in the liturgical/sacramental, catechetical and apostolic life of the parish matures and deepens that relationship.

# *Catechetical Guidelines for The Sacraments of Initiation And Penance*

Sacraments happen because God desires to draw us to Himself He desires to become intimate with us through His Son. "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."<sup>1</sup> It happened first in the creation and covenant events. Then, in the Incarnation, Jesus Christ is made the "primordial sacrament", God present, drawing us to Himself.<sup>2</sup> Jesus gives us new life, the divine life, and makes of us adopted children of God. He welcomes us into a life of intimacy with the persons of the Blessed Trinity. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God."<sup>3</sup>

By word and symbol the Church initiates and celebrates the gift of divine life, incorporating the most profound moments of our human experience into Christ's paschal mystery. We know this by faith, since the celebration of the Sacraments is a profession of the faith of the whole Church as well as the Faith of each individual.<sup>4</sup>

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES**

There are several principles, which provide the basis for an understanding of, and catechesis for, sacraments. These principles are:

- A. A sacrament involves a covenant relationship with Jesus and, therefore, presumes faith on the part of the individual, the Family, and the community.
- B. Readiness, not just a particular age or grade level, is the fundamental criterion for determining when an individual should participate in the celebration of a sacrament. Not all persons become ready for sacraments at the same time, nor do they grow in faith at the same rate. Those who implement the various phases of sacramental catechesis strive to integrate these principles in their planning and implementation of sacramental preparation programs and celebrations.

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<sup>1</sup> John 12: 32.

<sup>2</sup> Richard McBrien, **Catholicism**: Minneapolis, MN, (1980); Winston Press, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 3:1.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop W. Thomas Larkin, "Reflecting the Glory: Pastoral Statement", Diocese of St. Petersburg, (1987), (hereafter, **RTG**).

- C. Involvement in the celebration of sacraments is a further initiation into the worship life of the Church. The celebration of sacraments is the action of the community where the Lord becomes present in a deeper way. The preparation should lead the individual to greater involvement with the community, and the community should be visibly involved in the individual's preparation.
- D. The family has an essential role in preparation for the celebration of a sacrament. A families' attitude, actions, values and experiences of prayer and worship constantly teach, both positively and negatively, about sacraments. Therefore, families need to be involved in the catechesis, preparation and celebration of sacraments.
- E. With respect to the sacraments of Initiation, i.e., Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides both principles and patterns for developing catechetical programs and liturgical celebrations.
- F. As the leader of the community, it is the canonical right and obligation of pastors to administer the sacraments to their parishioners. Further it is the right and obligation of the pastor to insure that those who seek the community's sacraments be instructed in such a manner that they may be properly disposed to celebrate the rites. Thus, immediate preparation for the sacraments is done in and by the parish in which they are to be celebrated.<sup>5</sup>

## *Rite of Christian Initiation Of Adults (RCIA)*

### SCRIPTURE

"Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world."<sup>6</sup>

### NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY

Full initiation into the Church occurs by stages. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (Roman rite) provides a norm for catechetical as well as liturgical practice in this regard. The intimate relationship of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation (Chrismation) and Eucharist should be emphasized in the catechesis of both adults and children. Such catechesis will involve many members of the parish community who support and pray with the catechized, besides instructing them so that they may grow in understanding of the Christian message.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> **Signs of God's Love, Regulations and Guidelines for Catechesis and Celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance**, Archdiocese of Baltimore, (1987), (hereafter **Baltimore**). (*Used with permission*).

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28: 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> **Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory**, (9179), United States Catholic Conference, Department of Education, (hereafter, **NCD**).

The sacraments Baptism, Confirmation and the Most Holy Eucharist are so interrelated that they are required for full Christian initiation.<sup>8</sup>

During the inquiry period of the **RCIA**, catechesis is kerygmatic in nature, and its objective is to educate and bring to maturation the believers' initial faith in Jesus Christ. "We must therefore say that in catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught - and everything else is taught in reference to Him."<sup>9</sup> As a moment in evangelization, it is to be known in these guidelines as **remote preparation for the sacraments**. Those to whom we direct this catechetical effort are: 1) unbaptized adults; 2) unbaptized children of catechetical age (approximately seven years old); and 3) adults and children of catechetical age who have been baptized in other Christian churches and seek to complete initiation into the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. A fourth group should complete its initiation via the RCIA: namely, those who were baptized as infants, are of catechetical age and have not been nurtured by the community catechetically or liturgically.

Catechesis during the Catechumenate, the period which follows inquiry, remains kerygmatic in nature and formational in intent. It is here named **the immediate preparation for the sacraments**. During this period a revealing of what the life in Christ is like, both its advantages and its demands, is explored. It is a conversion process whereby the candidates are formed in the community whose Spirit gives life. Because the catechumenate is a catechesis of and by the whole community, the Word of God to the community (the readings of the lectionary, especially the Gospel proclamation,) provides the basis for instruction. "Thus through catechesis the Gospel kerygma is gradually deepened, developed in its implicit consequences, explained in language that includes an appeal to reason and channeled towards Christian practice in the Church and the world."<sup>10</sup>

Catechesis during the Purification and Enlightenment period is reflective and spiritual in nature and commitment making in intent. During this period, formation can give way to Transformation. Reflections on the Gospels of the Lenten period are instructive of the Baptism which the candidates anticipate. In these guidelines this process is called judging **the readiness for reception of the sacraments**.

Catechesis during the post baptismal period of the Mystagogia seeks to help the neophyte mature in and reflect on the mysteries of the Easier sacraments. The Sunday readings provide the most appropriate basis for catechesis since they are, for the most part, from the Acts of the Apostles. This period is called ongoing catechesis.

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<sup>8</sup> **The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary**, (1985), the Canon Law Society of America, #842.2, (hereafter, **Canon**).

<sup>9</sup> Apostolic Exhortation, **Catechesi Tradendae** of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, #6, (hereafter **CT**).

# *Baptism*

The baptismal liturgy, with its symbols of water, oil, light and garment, recalls into the present the reality of Christ's redeeming work: His dying and rising, His ministry, and the meaning of this for us as members of His Church. Our very use of the word "baptism", which in Greek means "immersion", has become metaphor for our belief that we, by dying in Christ, are immersed into the life of Christ who is the Resurrection and the Life.

## **SCRIPTURE**

Their answer (to the jailer) was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, and all your household." They proceeded to announce the word of God to him and to everyone in his house. At that late hour of the night he took them in and bathed their wounds; then he and his whole household were baptized. He led them up into his house, spread a table before them and joyfully celebrated with his whole family newfound faith in God.<sup>11</sup>

## **NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY**

Catechesis for Baptism is directed primarily to adults – adult candidates for Baptism and the parents and godparents of infants who are to be baptized. According to the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**, catechumens proceed through the stages of evangelization, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment and post-baptismal catechesis. This process also provides helpful guidelines for the catechesis of parents and godparents. Authentic understanding of the significance of Baptism naturally leads to continuing catechesis.<sup>12</sup>

## **CODE OF CANON LAW**

In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision that suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments. insofar as possible one to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who is to assist an adult in Christian initiation, or, together with the parents, to present an infant at the baptism, and who will help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism, and to Fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it.

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 16: 31-34.

<sup>12</sup> NCD #117.

To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:

1. be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intentions of performing this role;
2. have completed the sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop, or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause;
3. be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the Faith and the role to be undertaken;
4. not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
5. not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.

A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be admitted except as a witness to Baptism and together with a Catholic sponsor.<sup>13</sup>

## **REFLECTING THE GLORY**

The Church entrusts parents with the privilege of bestowing on their children the first knowledge of God. It is through their faith and example that the Holy Spirit teaches a child God's love revealed in Christ and forms the young heart in the ways of righteousness. Parents have an enormous task in countering the influence of a secularized society whose values are often impressed on the young in elusive but forceful ways. To accomplish this parents are strengthened by the grace of their own Baptism and Confirmation and exercise their prophetic office: speaking for God in the concrete situations of their child's daily life. They are aided in their task by many members of the community, among whom are the child's baptismal sponsors, grandparents, educators and the pastoral ministers of the Church. Nonetheless, the primary responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the child is held by the parents. If they do not have a personal relationship with the Lord, if their faith has become dormant or if they have cut themselves off from the fellowship of other Christians, their child will be defenseless to the false promises of the world and not grow in the image of Christ. In such instances the Church wisely counsels that Baptism be delayed until the parents are better able to fulfill their sacred ministry.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Canon #7772.1, #872, #874.1-2.

<sup>14</sup> RTG #35.

## CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES FOR BAPTISM

For the parents/guardians and godparents of infants and small children being presented for Baptism, the following will be of assistance:

### A. Remote Catechesis

Parents/guardians and godparents make efforts to grow in faith through attending adult education sessions offered by the local parish, by regularly participating in parish worship services and by assisting in social justice programs sponsored by the parish. Remote catechesis in its broadest sense includes good liturgical experiences with the parish community.

A helpful element in remote catechesis is periodic instruction of the entire parish community on the meaning of Baptism; this can be done in homilies, bulletins, newsletters, etc.

### B. Immediate Catechesis

The parish program for parents/guardians and godparents is an opportunity to invite them to a renewed or deepened relationship with Jesus and the Church, and to become more active members of the parish community. The sessions may address elements such as:

1. the faith of the parents and godparents themselves;
2. the parents' hopes for their children as persons of faith;
3. the responsibility parents undertake in bringing their children For Baptism;
4. opportunities For parents to create vital faith Families and households;
5. Baptism as a sacrament of initiation which celebrates
  - a) rebirth as children of God and sharers in God's own life,
  - b) incorporation into the Church,
  - c) cleansing From original sin,
  - d) being sanctified with the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
  - e) participation in the roles of Christ as priest, prophet and shepherd/ruler, etc.;
6. Baptism as establishment of a permanent relationship with the persons of the Trinity;
7. Baptism as a call to share actively in the mission of Christ;
8. the rites and symbols of Baptism.

The program of immediate catechesis is only a step in the process which leads to an understanding of the significance of Baptism as well as to lifelong catechesis in faith. It also provides an opportunity to assist couples of interfaith marriages in appreciating and enhancing their religious relationship.

### C. Celebration

Because Baptism incorporates a person into the Church, a representative community should be present. When Baptism occurs at a Sunday Eucharist, it can be an encouragement for growth and renewed faith for the whole congregation.

The rite is filled with symbols which express the richness of the reality of Baptism. Careful attention to these symbols will enable the meaning of the rite to be made evident to all who are gathered in celebration. Parents are invited to help plan the celebration of the Baptism of their children.

### D. Continuing Catechesis

The rites remind us that the journey begun at Baptism is a new beginning. Christian living has to be learned and a child's religious life needs to be continually nurtured. Family life, parish life and systematic catechetical programs all work together to help provide such nurture.

Celebrating religious traditions and beliefs provides good opportunities for growth in faith. It also enables the baptized to become aware of and to acknowledge the goodness of God and God's presence in their lives. Indeed, effective celebration of Baptism can itself become an important element of continuing catechesis. In addition, specific spiritual, social service and educational opportunities are offered to provide opportunities for the family to continue to grow,<sup>15</sup>

## *Confirmation*

In the Eastern Churches, Baptism and Chrismation are celebrated together in infancy and their intimate relationship is apparent. Though the Western Church for many centuries has generally separated the celebration of Baptism from Confirmation, it also recognized that they are intimately related. By emphasizing this relationship in the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**, the Western Church has once again made clear how these two sacramental moments are parts of a unified process of initiation.

Catechesis for adults preparing for Confirmation follows the pattern recommended in the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**.

The revised Rite of Confirmation says episcopal conferences may designate the appropriate age for Confirmation. Practice in this matter now varies so much among the dioceses of the United States, that it is very difficult at this time to prescribe a single catechesis for this sacrament.

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<sup>15</sup> **Baltimore**, pp. 18-20. (*Adapted and used with permission*).



## **SCRIPTURE**

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice, peace and joy that is given by the Holy Spirit, Whoever serves Christ in this way pleases God and wins the esteem of all, Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another.<sup>16</sup>

## **NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY**

As with Baptism, catechesis for this sacrament takes place within the parish community, which has an obligation to participate in the catechetical preparation of those to be confirmed. The parish is the faith community into whose life of prayer and worship they will be more fully initiated. It also embodies the message to which they are to respond and gives witness, in service, to the faith they profess. The parish should strive to catechize on behalf of "obedience to Christ" and "loyal testimony to him" through the power of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

## **REFLECTING THE GLORY**

Modern pastoral practice reflects two separate, though interrelated, ways of determining when a young person's response to the Holy Spirit should be celebrated in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Many communities require that an individual display a mature understanding of the Faith and a willingness to witness to Christ as the prerequisite for reception of the Sacrament. Since this response is similar to the conversion of life and profession of Faith required of an adult seeking Baptism, Confirmation retains its initiatory characteristics. Others hold that the ancient order of the reception of the Sacraments, as well as the revised Rite of Initiation of Adults, enforces an understanding that Confirmation is the link between Baptism and the Eucharist. As such, no one would be admitted to Holy Communion without first being confirmed. In this way, the desire to be united with the person and mission of Jesus, whom the Eucharist makes present, is the response to the work of the Holy Spirit necessary for confirmation."<sup>18</sup>

## **CODE OF CANON LAW**

The Sacrament of Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

As far as possible a sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present; it is for the sponsor to see that the confirmed person acts as the true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament.

To perform the role of sponsor, it is necessary that a person fulfill the conditions mentioned in Canons 872 and 874 (cf. #13). It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at baptism be sponsor for confirmation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Romans 14: 17-19

<sup>17</sup> NCD #119.

<sup>18</sup> RTG #41.

<sup>19</sup> Canon #891, 892, 893, 1-2.

## **CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION**

Sacraments are signs that cause what they signify. That they are signs is primary. They point to a reality and are received with the expressed intent of the Church that this reality be celebrated. Water and signing point to initiation, which is the intent of the Church at Baptism. Laying on of hands and sealing/anointing point to commissioning and consecrating for ministry, and that is what the Church intends through Confirmation.

Whether these signs are connected one to the other immediately at the Easter Vigil initiation rite for adults and children of catechetical age, or connected one to the other as moments in the initiation process of infants growing in wisdom and grace, the Church intends membership and participation in her mission.

### **A. Remote Catechesis**

Remote preparation for Confirmation is ordinarily a part of the regular curriculum in the religious education program of the parish or school, information may be mailed to parents about six months before the immediate preparation to help them become aware of the parish process of preparation. This information should also contain questions for family discussion which will help the family make a decision about the willingness and readiness of the child to prepare for this sacrament.

Sessions for parents include:

1. understanding of faith development;
2. understanding of the dynamics of conversion;
3. understanding of the sacraments;
4. understanding of the Church and her mission;
5. awareness of the decision to be made regarding participation in the program For immediate catechesis and celebration of the sacrament;
6. schedule of sessions for immediate preparation, as well as supporting events such as retreats and service projects.

### **B. Immediate Catechesis**

The process of immediate catechesis for Confirmation is a responsibility of the parish and is a free standing program apart from any grade in the parish or school religious education program in which the child may continue.

The parish provides sessions for parents/guardians and sponsors as an integral part of this immediate catechesis either prior to, or simultaneous with, the candidates' immediate preparation for Confirmation. These sessions should be mindful of the principles of good adult learning. Sessions for parents/guardians and sponsors are to include the following concepts about Confirmation and the criteria for readiness to be used by the parents/guardians, sponsors, priests and catechists in assessing the readiness of the candidate for Confirmation.

## Concepts:

1. a sacrament of initiation with its intimate relationship to Baptism and Eucharist;
2. the experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and subsequently in the lives of those baptized and confirmed Christians;
3. the gifts of the Spirit given for the building up of the Church;
4. the gifts of the Spirit given for the transformation of the world;
5. confirming Baptism and renewing commitment to the Eucharist;
6. the symbols of laying on of hands and anointing with oil used in the Confirmation rite;
7. understanding the process of discernment as guided by the Spirit;
8. the role of the laity in the Church and the world.

## Criteria for Readiness -

### 1. Physical/Psychological Readiness is shown by

- a. **willingness to receive the sacrament** - This involves a desire on the part of the candidate to fully participate in the preparation, and to receive the sacrament with a reverence and appreciation appropriate to his/her age.
- b. **ability to attentively participate in the liturgy** - This involves the capacity to be attentive and reverent, and to participate in the ritual by responding with understanding and reverence according to his/her age and ability.

### 2. Catechetical Readiness is shown by

- a. **ability to understand church affiliation** - This involves being aware of one's belonging to the Catholic community through Baptism, and participating in the prayer life of the community.
- b. **ability to relate to Jesus as one who does the will of the Father** - This involves the capacity to reflect on the Gospel stories of Jesus as one who teaches and invites us to the life of discipleship. The focus of this invitation is on the experience of the Holy Spirit to teach and guide the life of the Christian (e.g., Sermon on the Mount, Mission as revealed in Luke 4 and Matthew 25, parables of discipleship parable and miracles of the reign of God).
- c. **ability to participate in the mission of the Church** - This involves the capacity to act with compassion, justice and mercy, according to his/her ability.

3. Liturgical Readiness is shown by

- a. **attending the Eucharistic liturgy regularly** - This involves a Familiarity with the worship life of the parish community and participation in the Mass with regularity. (Minimally this includes Holy Days of Obligation as well as Sunday liturgy.)
- b. **ability to participate in the Eucharistic and reconciling life of the parish community** - This involves the ability to participate in ritual celebration of Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation, in a way according to his/her age, and to understand the requirements for receiving sacraments.

Immediate catechesis for candidates includes:

1. a reflection on Baptism as celebrating the gift of faith which has since matured in the candidate as evidenced by increased knowledge of the Lord and His community;
2. an awareness of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of love who gives a graced life to community, and whose gifts enable members to embark upon an apprenticeship of apostolic action;
3. an understanding of prayer, both formal and informal;
4. an understanding of the sacraments, especially the relationship of the sacraments of initiation, and the rituals of the Mass;
5. an understanding of the symbols of the Confirmation rite and the effect and character they bestow upon the candidate.

### C. Celebration

As a sacrament of initiation, the celebration of Confirmation is always an event of the community. "Because the parish is enthusiastic, it wishes to pass this appreciation on to another generation of the baptized."<sup>20</sup> Each parish will develop appropriate celebrations of Confirmation which will be a sign of the value, reverence and enthusiasm the parish community has for this sacrament. The confirmandi and their sponsors should be encouraged to participate as fully as possible in the rite.

### D. Continuing Catechesis

The life of the Spirit is communal. It is into this Spirit-filled and Spirit-led community that the confirmandi have been initiated. They continue to give witness to this life by their good example of apostolic works and celebration of the Eucharist. Young people continue involvement in parish or

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Kiesling. "Confirmation: The Rite, Not The Age", **Church** 3 (Summer 1987): 27.

school religious education programs to foster a deeper awareness of the life of responsible discipleship. Experiences in this catechetical environment provide encouragement and opportunities to become more involved in the mission of the Church by participation in appropriate ministries, especially those of building up the Family, school and parish communities.

Continuing catechesis encourages mindfulness that all are called and all are sent. All have been baptized into Christ's death, confirmed in His Spirit, thus giving glory to the Father,

## *Eucharist*

### **SCRIPTURE**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.<sup>21</sup>

### **NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY**

Catechesis for First Communion seeks to strengthen the candidates' awareness of God'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 and what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living body.

Catechesis for First Communion is conducted separately from introductory catechesis for the sacrament of Penance, since each sacrament deserves its own concentrated preparation. Continued catechesis is given yearly in all catechetical programs for children, inasmuch as the sacraments require lifelong participation and study.<sup>22</sup>

### **REFLECTING THE GLORY**

In His sacrifice and in the Communion we receive, the Lord's coming and saving presence are sacramentally realized. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to share in the sacrifice of Christ, teaching us to "find ourselves through a gift of ourselves" as we enter into intimate communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. The Eucharist, then, expresses and makes real the union of God's children in truth and charity, a union which reflects the glory of the Trinity's own unity. This is why, from the very beginning, the early Christians "devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread and prayers," forming a community united in the teachings of the apostles. They recognized, as we do today, that the Risen Lord Who has ascended into Heaven comes into our midst anew in the eucharistic community of the Church.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Acts 2: 42.

<sup>22</sup> NCD #122.

<sup>23</sup> RTG #46.

## CODE OF CANON LAW

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.

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 confession; it is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.<sup>24</sup>

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's supper.<sup>25</sup>

### A. Remote Catechesis

Remote catechesis for preparing children to receive Eucharist is ordinarily a part of the regular curriculum of the religious education program in the parish or school. The remote catechesis for Penance is to precede the remote catechesis for Eucharist so that parents/guardians can make an informed decision about their children's readiness for these sacraments. Information may be mailed to the parents/guardians by way of a newsletter a year or so previous to the immediate preparation. One or two parent/guardian sessions may be offered.

The session(s) for parents/guardians include:

1. an understanding of adult faith development and the faith development of children;
2. a concise, current understanding of sacraments;
3. an awareness of the decisions to be made regarding participation in programs for immediate catechesis and the celebration of each sacrament; and
4. the schedule of sessions for immediate catechesis and opportunities for celebration of the sacraments in the parish.

### B. Immediate Catechesis

The program for immediate catechesis for Eucharist is a responsibility of the parish and is a freestanding program apart from any grade in the parish or school religious education program in which the child continues. The immediate catechesis for Eucharist is scheduled in such a way that it can naturally follow the immediate catechesis for Penance. The concept of Eucharist as a sacrament of unity and service should permeate the child's immediate preparation.

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<sup>24</sup> **Canons** #913.1, 914.

<sup>25</sup> **Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy**, Second Vatican Council, (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1963), Chp. 1, #10.

The parish provides sessions for parents/guardians as an integral part of this preparation time prior to the immediate catechesis for children. Sessions for parents/guardians include the following concepts of Eucharist and criteria for readiness to be used by the parents/guardians, priests and catechists in assessing the readiness of the children for the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

#### Concepts:

1. the center and heart of the Christian life;
2. a memorial of the Lord's passion, death, resurrection;
3. the passion, death and resurrection becoming present in every celebration here and now;
4. based on Jewish roots - a covenant meal;
5. a holy meal, a memorial of the Last Supper
  - a. scripture - nourished by the Word,
  - b. body and blood - nourished by the Mystery;
6. a means of reconciliation - reaffirms conversion;
7. leading to the coming of God's kingdom;
8. a sign of unity with Christ and each other;
9. the community sharing in Eucharistic action;
10. symbol, sacrifice, communication and presence.

#### Criteria for Readiness -

##### 1. Physical/Psychological Readiness is shown by

- a. **willingness to receive the sacrament** - This involves a desire on the candidate's part to participate in the preparation and to receive the sacrament with reverence appropriate to his/her age.
- b. **ability to attentively participate in the liturgy** - This involves the capacity to be attentive and reverent, and to participate in the ritual according to his/her ability.

##### 2. Catechetical Readiness is shown by

- a. **ability to understand Church affiliation** - This involves the capacity to be aware of one's belonging to the Catholic community through Baptism.
- b. **ability to relate to Jesus as one who loves and cares for each person** - This involves the capacity to know and reflect on the Gospel stories of Jesus as one who loves and cares for each person and invites friendship. This invitation focuses on the sharing of a meal (e.g. Feeding the Multitude, Sermon on the Living Bread, Vine and Branches).
- c. **ability to distinguish between ordinary bread and Eucharist** - This involves the capacity to know the difference between ordinary bread and the Eucharistic bread, and to recognize the Mass as the sacrificial event in which we receive the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist, in the Word, and in the gathering of the community.

3. Liturgical Readiness is shown by

- a. **attending the Eucharistic liturgy regularly** - This involves a familiarity with the parish community celebration and participation in the Mass.
- b. **ability to participate in the Eucharistic celebration** - This involves the ability to participate, in at least a simple way, in the ritual of the celebration and to understand the requirements of receiving the sacrament (e.g., simple responses, reverence according to age level, Eucharistic fast, etc.).

The Immediate catechesis for children includes the following concepts:

1. an awareness and experience of love of God and belonging to God's family through sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking and celebrating;
2. an awareness of the main events of Jesus' life, the Eucharist as meal, memorial, sacrifice and word of unity;
3. an experience of welcoming and being welcomed by family and parish. An understanding of prayer and an awareness of the rituals of the Mass.

#### C. Celebration

As a Sacrament of Initiation, the celebration of Eucharist is always an event of the community. An awareness of this communal element should permeate all the options for celebrating First Eucharist. The **Directory for Masses with Children** is an especially useful resource for planning these celebrations.

#### D. Continuing Catechesis

A loving family and a caring parish surround the newly initiated person, giving affirmation and good example so that a continued pattern of celebration is encouraged and the relationship with God is fostered. The parish or school religious education program should promote the development of deeper intellectual awareness and provide opportunities for related prayer experiences as the person continues to grow and mature in faith.

To understand the centrality of the Eucharist and to celebrate that fact is to continue to become what we are called to be and to do. The Eucharist sustains us on our way and binds us together as one in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> **Baltimore** pp. 20-22, 24-25, (Adapted and used with permission.)



# *Penance*

## **SCRIPTURE**

This means that if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>27</sup>

## **NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY**

Catechesis for Penance challenges people to acknowledge the difference between good and evil in the social order, to measure their Values and priorities against those of the Gospel and the Church, to accept individual and corporate responsibility for their decisions, and the consequences of those decisions and to repent of their participation in evil.

Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. It seeks, first, to make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the candidate's life; second, to help the candidate recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church; third, to encourage the candidate to see that, in this sacrament, faith is expressed by being forgiven and forgiving; fourth, to encourage the candidate to approach the sacraments freely and regularly.

Because continuing lifelong conversion is part of what it means to grow in faith, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance is ongoing. Young people have a right to a fuller catechesis each year. Adults also have a right to continuing catechesis concerning the sacrament. Lent is an especially appropriate season for this,<sup>28</sup>

## **REFLECTING THE GLORY**

Because God knows our weakness He gave the Sacrament of Penance to His Church so that we might have an accessible means for the forgiveness of our sins and know the peace of His pardon. It is the Holy Spirit Who leads us to see ourselves in the light of God's holiness and causes us to view the way we have been living in contrast to the life to which we have been called. Such self-examination moves us to sorrow for our sins and desire to live as the new person God intended us to be. The Spirit stirs a deep and fearful knowledge that we ourselves cannot bring about this transformation. He reminds us that only the power of Christ can reconcile us to God and to one another. And so we seek the ministry of the Church, Christ in the world. In the sacramental meeting with Jesus, who shed His blood for our forgiveness, the Holy Spirit reconciles us to God and to the Church which we have wounded by our sins and gives us the power to live as we have been called. In no more visible way does the glory of God shine among us than when a repentant sinner once again becomes a disciple of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> NCD #125, 126.

<sup>29</sup> RTG #52.

## CODE OF CANON LAW

In the sacrament of penance the faithful, confessing their sins to a legitimate minister, being sorry for them and at the same time proposing to reform, obtain from God forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism through the absolution imparted by the same minister; and they likewise are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by sinning.

In order to receive the salvific remedy of the sacrament of penance, the Christian faithful ought to be so disposed that, having repudiated the sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, they are converted to God.<sup>30</sup>

### A. Remote Catechesis

Remote preparation for Penance involves both children and parents/guardians. Catechesis for children is an ordinary part of the school or parish religious education program.

Parents/guardians take part in a more focused catechesis for Penance. The remote catechesis for penance is to precede the remote catechesis for Eucharist so that parents/guardians can make an informed decision about their children's readiness for these sacraments. The parish and/or school provides information to enable the parents to decide when a child is ready to participate in immediate catechesis. This information is shared months in advance to allow time for careful consideration. A remote preparation program for parents is offered in advance of the time parents, with the aid of parish personnel, make the decision for the individual to enter the immediate preparation program. The remote preparation makes it clear that one does not automatically enter into the immediate program.

Remote preparation for Penance includes a catechesis about:

1. Jesus' deep love and compassion;
2. sin as a reality;
3. conversion and forgiveness of sin;
4. the content that children need to know about celebrating the sacrament;
5. adult experiences of this sacrament and their impact on children's experiences of reconciliation.

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<sup>30</sup> Canon #959, 987.

## B. Immediate Catechesis

The immediate preparation program for individuals preparing for Penance is **freestanding**; that is, it is separate from and congruent with the regularly scheduled religious education sessions in the parish and/or school. Members of both school and parish religious education programs are prepared together. It is also a time to call Forth those who may have delayed reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

During the immediate preparation phase, a program is offered to parents/guardians to foster growth in faith, to help them to assist their children in learning, and to help them determine the readiness of their children for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance.

Sessions for Penance for parents/guardians include the following concepts and criteria for readiness to be used by parents/guardians, priests, directors of religious education and catechists in determining the readiness of the children for the Sacrament of Penance.

### Concepts -

1. a brief history of the Sacrament of Penance;
2. sin as a reality in human life;
3. sin as alienation from God, others, creation and self
4. the whole meaning and sense that this sacrament derives from Baptism;
5. God mercifully forgiving human sinfulness;
6. Gospel stories such as the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Penitent Woman
7. difference between objective moral wrong and sinfulness;
8. sin (fundamental attitude), sins (individual acts), communal sin;
9. ministering to one another in the healing process (a reconciling assembly);
10. Fidelity to God, others, creation and self (cohesion, identity, relationship);
11. Christian hospitality and communication
12. review of the options for the rite of Penance.

### Criteria for Readiness -

#### 1. Physical/Psychological Readiness is shown by

- a. ability to reflect on his/her attitudes and actions** - This involves the capacity to become calm, to think about one's actions (if only over short periods of time), and to try to determine, as far as possible, why one acted in a certain way.
- b. ability to make appropriate choices** - This involves the capacity to make choices among options in simple matters, to understand when such a deliberate choice has been made, and to distinguish between an intentional action and an accidental one.

- c. **ability to understand the effect of his/her actions on others** - This involves the capacity to realize the impact of one's actions on others and to have at least a realization that one's actions or omissions can have far-reaching effects.
- d. **willingness to receive the sacrament** - This involves a desire on the child's part to participate in the preparation and to receive the sacrament with the reverence appropriate to his/her age.

2. Moral Readiness/Conscience Formation is shown by

- a. **ability to know the difference between right and wrong** - This involves the capacity to discern simple actions or omissions as right or wrong, and to know when one has made a loving or selfish choice.
- b. **ability to take pride in or to regret his/her actions** - This involves the capacity to delight in the gifts and talents God had given one, to use these well, and to express sorrow For actions and omissions which denied these gifts.
- c. **ability to begin to distinguish between "wrong" and "sin."** - This involves the capacity, in at least a rudimentary fashion, to distinguish when something is objectively wrong, but perhaps not sinful and when something is sinful because of the intention of the individual (ignorance or accident vs. knowledge and consent).
- d. **ability to make amends** - This involves the capacity to make up for one's hurtful actions or omissions and to resolve to change one's behavior in the future to avoid repeating such behavior.

3. Catechetical Readiness is shown by

- a. **ability to understand Church affiliation** - This involves the capacity to be aware of one's belonging to the Catholic community through Baptism, and to understand, at least to some degree, that individuals are responsible For the welfare of others.
- b. **ability to relate to Jesus as one who forgives** - This involves the capacity to know and reflect on the Gospel stories of Jesus as one who loves, forgives and teaches how to live in love (e.g., the parables of the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, Unforgiving Servant, Lost Sheep, etc.).

4. Liturgical Readiness is shown by

- a. **ability to pray and worship** - This involves the capacity to respond with praise and thanks to a loving Creator who wants the child to be happy, and the capacity to participate with as much reverence and understanding as possible in the liturgical celebration of the community.

- b. **ability to understand the sacramental rites** – This involves the capacity to understand the rite of the sacrament, the meaning of the event, and to participate in the celebration according to his/her age and ability.

The immediate catechesis for children includes:

1. a sensitivity to the natural disposition, ability and age of the individual;
2. relationship between this sacrament, the child's Baptism and the child's life;
3. a basic ability to recognize moral good and evil;
4. an awareness of the need for repentance and the need for forgiveness;
5. instruction on the rite and its options.

### C. Celebration

It is strongly urged that the first celebration of this sacrament be done within the ordinary pattern of the parish celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. This can be done by offering a variety of options for individuals and families to celebrate this sacrament. These options can include the regularly scheduled weekly times for Penance, as well as the periodic community celebrations of Penance.

### D. Continuing Catechesis

Because the Sacrament of Penance has a vital community dimension, the entire parish is continually catechized about the sacrament. This communal dimension of the sacrament is remembered as families continue to pray together for forgiveness among family members, for forgiveness for everyday hurts, and for the reconciliation of all peoples of the world.

The parish or school religious education program provides opportunities for deepening the participant's understanding of the Sacrament of Penance as an integral element of continuing catechesis for this sacrament.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> **Baltimore**, pp. 25-29, (Adapted and used with permission).

# *Conclusion*

When the Second Vatican Council called for the restoration of the catechumenate and called for this process to be normative for incorporation into the Body of Christ, the contemporary people of God entered into a new Spirit-filled age which challenged them to reflect on the nature of the Church and to respond with charity. They are continually I challenged to enter more deeply into the Paschal Mystery and respond as a people blessed, broken, given and forgiven: blessed in Baptism; broken yet bonded in Eucharistic community; given for the transformation of the world in Confirmation; and forgiven in the sacrament of Penance that they might be "entrusted with the message of reconciliation...ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us in Christ name: be reconciled to God."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 19b-20.

# *Addendum*

Access to the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance for Persons Developmentally Disabled, Deaf or Hearing Impaired, Blind or Sight Impaired.

## **SCRIPTURE**

"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' Let everyone who listens answer, 'Come.' Then let all who are thirsty come; all who want it may have the water of life, and have it free."<sup>33</sup>

## **NATIONAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY**

Children and young people who are physically and mentally handicapped...have a right, like others of their age, to know 'the mystery of faith'. The greater difficulties that they encounter give greater merit to their efforts and to those of their teachers."<sup>34</sup>

## **NCCB Letter on Handicapped People**

"...for most Catholics the community of believers is embodied in the local parish. The parish is the door to participation for handicapped individuals, and it is the responsibility of the pastor and lay leaders to make sure that this door is always open." (November 1978)

## **CODE OF CANON LAW**

In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision that catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits.<sup>35</sup>

## **Introduction**

As members of God's family, people who are disabled are called to union with God through their growing friendship with Christ. They have a potential to grow in faith and have therefore the right to all that will enable them to do so. They can often intuitively grasp their relationship with Christ.

## **Developmentally Disabled Persons**

### **BAPTISM**

Developmentally disabled persons who have been baptized and welcomed into the community of faith through catechesis and liturgy are not passive members of the Church. Even if they are profoundly disabled and cannot speak or move, they can and do contribute to those around them by loving presence. They belong fully to the community and contribute according to their capacity to give and others capacity to receive.

### **CONFIRMATION**

In the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, the person's age is to be respected. Developmentally disabled adults ordinarily should be confirmed with other adults. If they are baptized as adults or received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, they should normally be confirmed at the same time.

Youth who are developmentally disabled should be provided with preparation appropriate to their developmental age so that they too, may receive the sacrament with their peers.

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<sup>33</sup> (Rev. 22:17).

<sup>34</sup> (NCD #41).

<sup>35</sup> Canon #777.4.

## **EUCCHARIST**

The Eucharist is the supreme sign of unity with Christ and His Church, and is a particular means by which an individual grows in holiness. Provided an appropriate faith can be discerned, persons who are developmentally disabled should be admitted to this sacrament.

The discernment of faith belongs first to the parents/guardians, who have the primary responsibility for the preparation of their children for Eucharist. They should be invited to parent/guardian sessions. Priests, catechists, and others should be ready to support and advise parents/guardians in this discernment.

Showing appreciation and reverence for the mystery of the sacrament and the desire to receive are signs of readiness which those who know the disabled person are able to discern. These persons are nourished in a special way by their reception of Eucharist within the loving, praying family of the Church and should be welcomed into this union.

## **PENANCE**

The Eucharist is itself reconciliation and healing and is an opportunity for the developmentally disabled to experience the mercy of God.

In some cases, the Sacrament of Penance can be a very fruitful experience. Often they have the experience of being offended by others or of offending others without knowing exactly how this alienation happened. The sacrament should be available to those who are capable of moral development and desire it. However, it cannot be administered in every case and must not be limited to any specific age.

Conscience formation for those who are disabled developmentally is a slow, care-demanding process. Once it is determined that an individual can distinguish between activities which help that person grow and become more Christ-like and those which are harmful to that person and others, catechists and parents/guardians may be able to convey the concepts of repentance and forgiveness. Once the readiness has been determined, and after consultation with the pastor, parents/guardians may lead the person to seek forgiveness from God through the Sacrament of Penance.

## **Deaf or Hearing-impaired Persons/Blind or Sight-impaired Persons**

In the programs of preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance sponsored by the local parish, much care must be taken to mainstream parents/guardians who are deaf with hearing children or hearing parents/guardians with children who are deaf into the community. Likewise, parents/guardians who are blind with sighted children or sighted parents/guardians with sight-impaired children should also be mainstreamed, as far as possible, into the community.

Parents/guardians who are deaf or blind should be afforded every opportunity to participate in the sacramental preparation of their children. They should be invited to all parent/guardian meetings, and a qualified interpreter should be provided by the parish so that these parents/guardians have full communion with the community.

Children who are deaf or blind should also be invited to participate fully in the parish sacramental programs. These children can be mainstreamed where qualified interpreters are provided for the hearing impaired and when audiotapes of printed materials and texts are provided for the sight impaired.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> **Baltimore**, pp. 29-31, (Adapted and used with permission).



# *Pastoral Letter*

## **"Reflecting the Glory"**

*Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to all who read this Pastoral Letter Which I, W. Thomas Larkin, Bishop of St. Petersburg, address to the faithful of the Diocese.*

Reflecting the glory of God's kingdom, the church ministers to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>i</sup> As a people called and chosen by God, we have been sent to embrace humanity with a mission that touches every aspect of life. It is not ourselves that we proclaim, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants of all for his sake.<sup>ii</sup> God's light shines within us so that we may reveal the face of Jesus for all to see, a face of compassion and mercy, healing and forgiveness, love and truth. The more we are the image of Christ; the more God's glory illumines the world.

This treasure we bear within our fragile human hearts.<sup>iii</sup> We are a saved people who yet need saving, a converted people ever needing conversion. Because we are immersed in the world and tempted by its idols, we know the importance of hearing and deepening our belief in the "mighty works of God"<sup>iv</sup> which first made us Jesus' disciples. Only if we are called anew by Christ will we retain freshness, vigor and strength to announce the good news of salvation to a world desperate for its hope-filled message.<sup>v</sup>

For this reason I write to you, dear sisters and brothers, so that together we may come to a renewed appreciation of the divine life which we share and which we symbolize and celebrate in the sacraments. In particular, I wish to consider the sacraments of initiation - baptism, confirmation and the eucharist - by which we are made God's children, brought into the community of the church, formed in holiness by the Spirit and nourished with the body of Christ.

### **Christ, the Sacrament of God**

God has made us for himself, and our hearts find no rest until they rest in him.<sup>vi</sup> Humanity fervently seeks union with its Creator and that intimacy of his love, which alone gives purpose to our existence. When sin entered the world, the children of Adam lost God's friendship, exchanging immortal glory for empty hopes.<sup>vii</sup> But he whose mercy is without end showed a father's compassion, revealing his will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.<sup>viii</sup>

In ancient days God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in the fullness of time he spoke to us through his own Son<sup>ix</sup> who proclaimed the good news of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>x</sup> God's compassion for us is revealed not only in the words our Savior preached, but in the life he lived and the death he suffered for our sake. For when "the word became flesh and dwelt among us"<sup>xi</sup> the Father established Christ as his "sacrament";<sup>xii</sup> God present among us drawing us to himself.<sup>xiii</sup>

Because Jesus is truly God, we marveled as the Lord of all creation lived among us as a servant<sup>xiv</sup> so that we might know God's yearning to bring us to himself. Because Jesus is truly human - like us in every way but sin - his heart contains all humanity's longing to be one with God. So it is that Jesus Christ, the image of the unseen God and the model through whom all things were made,<sup>xv</sup> is the fullness of divinity and humanity and the focal point of God's desire to save us and our desire to be one with God.<sup>xvi</sup> All who put their faith in his name are empowered to become God's children.<sup>xvii</sup>

By the paschal mystery - that is to say, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - God entered into a new and eternal covenant with us, saving us not only as individuals but as a holy and chosen people.<sup>xviii</sup> This is the message we are privileged to bring to the world, a message that still thrills the heart that will receive it: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life."<sup>xix</sup>

Before he ascended to the Father, Christ poured out his Spirit upon us, enlivening us and transforming us into his very body on earth.<sup>xx</sup> In this way the Lord passed on to us, the church, his own ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness, and commissioned us to make all nations his disciples.<sup>xxi</sup> So we are "ambassadors for Christ, as though God were appealing through us in Christ's name."<sup>xxii</sup> By the gift of the Spirit a Christian's life is never mundane or trivial, but is made noble by the same mission which characterized Christ's earthly life;<sup>xxiii</sup> we are God's children whom he sends to bring all to him. This is why we say that the church is the sacrament of Christ;<sup>xxiv</sup> the community of the Word incarnate in today's world. Whoever encounters the church meets the teaching, saving Lord who invites all to the intimate life of the Trinity.

### **The Sacraments of the Church**

This supernatural life finds its living expression in the seven sacraments of the church.<sup>xxv</sup> By word and symbol, the church initiates and celebrates the gift of divine life, incorporating the most profound moments of our human experience into Christ's paschal mystery. We know this by faith, since the celebration of the sacraments is a profession of the faith of the whole church as well as the faith of each individual.<sup>xxvi</sup> Because of the church's faith in Christ, the sacraments are not empty signs, but actually make present the reality they symbolize. Because of our individual faith, the power of Christ's presence in the sacraments deeply affects our perception of who we are, who we are called to be and how we should live with our neighbor.

In a most profound way, the sacraments celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at special moments in the life of the church, as well as God's intervention in our personal history.<sup>xxvii</sup> As our faith is nourished and deepened, we recognize that our experience of personal salvation is one with the fabric of the church's ministry to the world. In this way we form our identity as members of a saved and saving community, and recognize that Christ's mission, which he has entrusted to the church, must truly be our own.

Becoming "Christ like" in our stance toward life is at the core of what is called *conversion*. The essence of our Lord's preaching is found in the words "repent and believe the Gospel";<sup>xxviii</sup> believe the good news of God's desire to save us. Conversion is the lifelong process of responding to this invitation. The model for our response is the obedience of the crucified Lord, whose complete yes to God's will<sup>xxix</sup> achieved life for all.<sup>xxx</sup> Conversion demands that we take as our own the attitude, outlook and values of Jesus,<sup>xxxi</sup> facing each day with loving obedience to the Father's will.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Following Christ's example manifests itself in the new meaning which we give our lives: living for others<sup>xxxiii</sup> and conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Above all, it requires that we accept the cross as a way of life and live with a willingness to die to our own self-interests.<sup>xxxv</sup> St. Paul described this by writing, "While we live, we are constantly being delivered to death for Jesus' sake."<sup>xxxvi</sup> The continual challenge of the cross is the validation of true conversion and the path to intimacy with God.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In order to emphasize the necessity of our response to the Gospel's call for continual conversion, the sacraments are always celebrated within the rich context of the Word of God. Since faith comes to ever new vitality through hearing the Word preached,<sup>xxxviii</sup> constant evangelization is essential to the sacramental life of the church.

## **Evangelization**

Evangelization is a dynamic reality made up of several elements. One aspect of evangelization is the preaching of the initial conversion-bringing acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord (kerygma). Another aspect, known as catechesis, matures this initial faith and educates the believer by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and message of Christ.<sup>xxxix</sup>

However, it is a sad reality of our age that many of those baptized as infants have never actually developed a personal relationship with the Lord. Here I speak not only of young children, who often are ignorant of the person of Christ, but also adults in whom the conversion-bringing acceptance of the Gospel has never taken root.<sup>xl</sup> Because of this situation, catechesis has become the general term used today to describe the church's efforts to make disciples and to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, our savior and our brother. In a more particular way it means the process of education and formation in the life of grace, which builds up the body of Christ.<sup>xli</sup>

Above all, these efforts come to full strength when they achieve a permanent, unbroken link between the Word and the sacraments. Every Catholic should be so molded in the Word that the sacraments are lived as true sacraments of faith - and not received passively or with casual attention.<sup>xlii</sup> If there is not serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, a knowledge born of the Word and the tradition of the church, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon becomes hollow ritualism. In the same way, catechesis that fails to come alive in sacramental practice is devoid of true content, since it does not lead to the living Christ.<sup>xliii</sup>

## **The Initiation of Unbaptized Adults**

A person is incorporated into the church and shares its mission in the world through the sacraments of initiation. By our baptism and confirmation, we share in Christ's priestly office and so are intimately united with him in offering the sacrifice of the eucharist. The close interrelationship of these three sacraments needs to be emphasized in the formation of both adults and children.<sup>xliv</sup>

For an adult first coming to the faith, the initiation into the body of Christ takes place in stages, which correspond to the deepening conversion commitment the individual is, experiencing and which the church both ratifies and celebrates. This is a journey of faith, and those to be initiated are accompanied by the whole community, which supports them by prayer, instruction and example.<sup>xlv</sup> The structure of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides the norm for both catechetical and liturgical practice during this faith journey,<sup>xlvi</sup> as well as a model for completing the initiation of those baptized as infants or in other Christian communities.

The first stage for those in this process is one of inquiry during which the mystery of Christ is unfolded. Then, if they respond to God's saving invitation, the Holy Spirit opens their hearts, and they knowingly seek the living God.<sup>xlvii</sup> At this point of initial conversion they desire to change their lives. They begin to sense the need for repentance and practice calling on God in prayer to help and guide them.<sup>xlviii</sup>

When they exhibit the desire to be Catholics, they are accepted into the catechumenate, which is a formation in the life of the church. Here their desire for the faith is brought to maturity through catechesis, living the Christian way, praying with the community and participation in the apostolic life of the witnessing church.<sup>xlix</sup>

The length of time that each person will remain a catechumen is determined by the grace of God<sup>i</sup> since, like a true friendship, it depends upon the development of a personal relationship with the Lord. As the desire to be one with Christ matures, the Holy Spirit moves the catechumens to seek an intimate understanding of the mystery of salvation. As they become more familiar with the Christian way of life and learn to pray more easily, they themselves become witnesses to the faith and begin to exercise great charity toward their neighbors.<sup>ii</sup> This remarkable change, which occurs in a person who has accepted Christ as Lord of their life, is a powerful testimony to the glory of God shining through our human weakness!

These steps of their journey are marked by various liturgical rites, especially celebrations of the Word of God,<sup>iii</sup> which both heighten awareness of the dignity to which they have been called and strengthen them to assume their new commitment. When those in charge of their formation judge them ready, the catechumens are "elected," or chosen, to begin the final preparations for initiation. This time of intense spiritual preparation, usually corresponding with Lent, highlights the role, which the entire parish community has exercised during the formation of the catechumens.<sup>liii</sup>

Traditionally it is during Lent that we renew our commitment to Christian discipleship. Through prayer, fasting and generosity to the poor, we strengthen our desire to respond to God's grace by following in the footsteps of Jesus. As we meditate on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we are challenged anew as to conversion and to obedience to the Holy Spirit. In this context those who are to be incorporated into the Catholic Church are inspired by the penitential spirit of the whole community and at the same time inspire the community by the sincerity of their commitment to be one with the Lord.

The Lenten season moves dramatically toward the celebration of the Sacred Triduum - Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday culminating in the celebration of the resurrection and the renewal of our baptismal promises by which we recommit ourselves to reject sin and "to serve God faithfully in his holy Catholic Church."<sup>liv</sup> It is in the midst of this Easter celebration of new life and recommitment to Christ like living that the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and first eucharist are celebrated with the elect.

Filled with the joy of Easter, the church celebrates the resurrection for 50 days, during which time the newly initiated share their personal experience of the sacraments and of the Christian community. They find an ever-greater understanding of the Scriptures through the celebration of the eucharist and come to a deeper sense of the faith, the church and the world.<sup>lv</sup>

### **Completing Initiation of the Baptized**

From what I have already said about our role in God's plan, it becomes apparent that all of us are to be involved with the work of initiating new members; for giving help to those who need Christ is our mission as Christians as well as our joy.<sup>lvi</sup> All of us have been sent by God and anointed by the Spirit to make known to the world the message of Christ through our words and deeds.<sup>lvii</sup>

It follows then, that just as all of us are involved in the initiation of catechumens, so too those being prepared for the sacraments of confirmation and the eucharist should likewise be formed in stages and helped by the ministry of the whole community. In this way the relationship between baptism and these sacraments will be evident as growth in the Christian life is celebrated in a richer way. When the whole parish community supports and prays with those being catechized, they truly grow in understanding the Christian message.<sup>lviii</sup>

Among those waiting to complete their initiation there are three different groups, each with unique needs, to whom the Christian community responds with care and charity. The first includes those adult Catholics who, while baptized as infants, have never been fully catechized and may not have a mature relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. However, by their baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit they have the capacity to believe,<sup>lix</sup> which must be nourished so that they may give their lives generously to Christ. Often, through no fault of their own, they were not given the opportunity to receive confirmation or the eucharist during their youth and now approach these sacraments aware of a new desire to seek the living God.

A second group includes the baptized of other Christian churches whom the Holy Spirit has guided to seek full communion with us. Special care must be taken to respect those valid expressions of Christian faith and life, which these people have already experienced in the communities, which have nurtured their faith.<sup>lx</sup> Building upon these experiences, they are able to be brought to a fuller awareness of their Christian dignity and the apostolic life to which they have been called. Finally, there are children who were baptized as infants and who are continuing their growth in the life of grace.

### **The Sacrament of Baptism**

The richness of baptism is beautifully expressed by the term christening, because it reminds us that we are so joined to Christ that "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."<sup>lxi</sup> Baptism unites us to Jesus by uniting us to his paschal mystery so that we die to sin with him, are buried together with him and with him rise to a new life. When we were baptized we were made completely new persons because Christ is alive in us. Because he who is our life is without sin, all our sins are blotted out. Because he is our brother, so God becomes our Father. As he is the head of the church, so are we joined to that holy nation and royal people who are his body on earth.

Intimately joined to the person of Jesus, we are given his ministry as priest, prophet and king. Of ourselves we can do nothing, but grafted to the Lord as a branch is joined to a vine,<sup>lxii</sup> our every thought, word and action is an act of worship before God. In this way, our vocation is the same as that of Christ: to subject all things to God in the power of the Spirit lavished upon us.

In light of God's plan for us, baptism is only a beginning, a point of departure, wholly directed toward opening our soul to acquire the fullness of life God offers.<sup>lxiii</sup> Since it is a sacrament - that is, it actually causes what it symbolizes - we know that we are immersed in Christ, washed clean of sin, anointed with the Spirit, filled with the light of grace and clothed with the radiance of holiness. We have "put on Christ"<sup>lxiv</sup> and are in reality his body. However, this effect of baptism is not automatic; we must partake of it, for baptism without faith is empty, and without openness to the Holy Spirit, it gains nothing for the soul. For this reason baptism orients us toward a complete profession of faith, lifelong conversion and eucharistic communion.<sup>lxv</sup> We can readily see the transformation, which the Holy Spirit brings about in catechumens as they are embraced and led by the community on the journey to the Easter sacraments. In a more subtle way this same transformation takes place in those baptized as infants. Bathed in the loving faith of believing parents and nurtured by the care of God's family, the church, they grow in their capacity to respond to the Holy Spirit, who urges them to claim the inheritance Christ has won for them.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Infant baptism is a great gift to the church, reminding us that we have been called to new life not by our merits, but by the gratuitous love of our Father. The helplessness of the infant mirrors the helplessness of our human condition without the saving mercy of God, who gave up his Son to ransom sinners.

The church entrusts parents with the privilege of bestowing on their children the first knowledge of God. It is through their faith and example that the Holy Spirit teaches a child God's love revealed in Christ and forms the young heart in the ways of righteousness. Parents have an enormous task in countering the influence of a secularized society whose values are often impressed on the young in elusive but forceful ways. To accomplish this, parents are strengthened by the grace of their own baptism and confirmation, and exercise their prophetic office, speaking for God in the concrete situations of their child's daily life. They are aided in their task by many members of the community, among whom are the child's baptismal sponsors, grandparents, educators and the pastoral ministers of the church, to name but a few. Nonetheless, the primary responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the child is held by the parents. If they do not have a personal relationship with the Lord, if their faith has become dormant or if they have cut themselves off from the fellowship of other Christians, their child will be defenseless to the false promises of the world and not grow in the image of Christ. In such instances the church wisely counsels that baptism be delayed until the parents are better able to fulfill their sacred ministry.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

In the baptismal encounter with the risen Lord, the Holy Spirit comes upon us to cause the change which conforms us to the image of Christ. This imparting of the Spirit is the "stamp" or character, which forever marks us as one of God's own. For this reason, baptism once received is never repeated.<sup>lxxviii</sup> However, an infant is only able to respond to this encounter in a limited way. The child is incapable of welcoming the meeting with the Lord, does not have the ability to express its meaning or the intellectual power to grasp its significance. Nonetheless, throughout infancy and childhood the Holy Spirit is at work preparing the child to respond to God's goodness.<sup>lxxix</sup>

The benefits received in baptism unfold as the child first becomes aware of and then begins to accept and claim the divine goodness, which God extends. Growing in wisdom and age, the child learns to reply to the sound of the parents' voices, to their loving caress and to the care and warmth, which they show. With time, this complex, intimate relationship blossoms as the child matures and responds in a fuller manner to the parents who have patiently and generously given of themselves at every moment of the child's life. So too as the child grows in grace, the Holy Spirit, who is God's love, nurtures and brings to fruition both the desire and the ability to respond to God's invitation to live as a child in his family.<sup>lxxx</sup>

### **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

The action of the Holy Spirit is the key to understanding the beautiful and important sacrament of confirmation. When a person is receptive to the Spirit's urgings to recognize and accept God's love, the community publicly affirms their response and prays in faith that the Holy Spirit will seal it and assure the continued conforming of the person to the image of Christ.<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Because this response is a matter of grace, no predetermined age can be set as the appropriate time to receive confirmation, since by its nature it requires a personal, and therefore individual, reply to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. For those initiated as adults, this response is ordinarily part of the motivation to seek baptism, and so confirmation is received at once.<sup>lxxxii</sup> But in regard to those baptized as infants, let it be enough to say, as does the Code of Canon Law, that the response may occur as young as the age of reason.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

The action of the Spirit is rich and diverse, and so the sacrament of confirmation symbolizes several interrelated motifs. The church prays that those whom the Spirit seals will be so enlightened that they grow in the strength of his love and walk in the unity of faith. They become temples of his glory and witnesses before the world of the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Conformity to the image of Christ is the desire of those wishing to be baptized and the constant goal of those who receive the eucharist. Confirmation is the sacrament, which empowers us to accomplish in lifelong, worship that which we desired by our baptism.

Modern pastoral practice reflects two separate, though interrelated, ways of determining when a young person's response to the Holy Spirit should be celebrated in the sacrament of confirmation. Many communities require that an individual display a mature understanding of the faith and a willingness to witness to Christ as the prerequisite for reception of the sacrament. Since this response is similar to the conversion of life and profession of faith required of an adult seeking baptism, confirmation retains its initiatory characteristics. Others hold that the ancient order of the reception of the sacraments, as well as the revised Rite of Initiation of Adults, enforces an understanding that confirmation is the link between baptism and the eucharist. As such, no one would be admitted to holy communion without first being confirmed. In this way the desire to be united with the person and mission of Jesus, whom the eucharist makes present, is the response to the work of the Holy Spirit necessary for confirmation.

Unfortunately, programs, which prepare the young for this sacrament, have not always stressed an active and individual response to the Holy Spirit as the prime criterion necessary for reception of confirmation. Frequently the parish community has not been involved in preparing the candidates, thus isolating them from the very assembly in which they will be expected to have an active role. It is not my intention to change our current practice at this time but, rather, to ask that we honestly evaluate our present programs for preparing the young to complete their initiation. This will require that we utilize our talents and abilities to focus attention on the seriousness of initiation and so educate parents that they recognize and take up their privileged position within the church. We will also need to improve the education of catechists and other members of the community who aid parents in the formation of children, so that the truths they present will be well founded on the bedrock of Catholic tradition as well as a lived experience of Christian discipleship. In the meantime, parish communities should continue to ensure that the young will be confirmed, urging parents to participate actively in the process of determining their children's readiness to complete their initiation.

### **The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

From the very beginning, the church has expressed and confirmed its identity through the eucharist.<sup>lxxv</sup> In the gospel story of Emmaus, St. Luke relates how the disciples recognized the Lord “in the breaking of the bread.”<sup>lxxvi</sup> So too do we 20th-century disciples recognize Christ truly present in our midst each time we celebrate the Mass.

Our Lord always loved those who were his own in the world,<sup>lxxvii</sup> and when the time came for him to be glorified by the Father - that is, when he laid down his life and took it up again<sup>lxxviii</sup> - he showed the depth of that love. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus told the disciples that he must leave them.<sup>lxxix</sup> He was returning to the Father, departing the world by death on the cross. He promised that he would not leave them orphans; he would come back to them.<sup>lxxx</sup> It would be by his departure from the world that the Father would send the “Spirit of truth” to be with them always.<sup>lxxxii</sup> It would be by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus, no longer visible to us in his humanity, would come, be present and act in the church.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The most complete sacramental expression of this “departure” of Christ through the mystery of the cross and resurrection is the eucharist.<sup>lxxxiiii</sup>

Our Lord instituted the eucharist to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he comes again. He entrusted it to his church as a memorial of his death and resurrection:<sup>lxxxiv</sup> a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity.<sup>lxxxv</sup> In the sacrificial meal, which we celebrate, Christ is consumed, our minds are filled with grace and we are given a pledge of future glory. This is the great mystery of faith, which both announces and prepares for the final return of the Lord and the kingdom to come.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

In his sacrifice and in the communion we receive, the Lord's coming and saving presence are sacramentally realized.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to share in the sacrifice of Christ, teaching us to "find ourselves through a gift of ourselves" as we enter into intimate communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. The eucharist, then, expresses and makes real the union of God's children in truth and charity, a union, which reflects the glory of the Trinity's, own Unity.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> This is why from the very beginning the early Christians "devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread and prayers," forming a community united in the teachings of the apostles. They recognized, as we do today, that the risen Lord who has ascended into heaven comes into our midst anew in the eucharistic community of the Church.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Our adoration "of the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit"<sup>xc</sup> is filled with gratitude for that death by which each one of us has been loved "to the end." Our worship is a response that tries to repay that love that was immolated on the cross; it is our thanksgiving, our praise of him who redeemed us and gave us immortal life.<sup>xcii</sup> It is the unbroken teaching of the church, the understanding of the Catholic people and the very words used by our Lord when he instituted this sacrament<sup>xciii</sup> which compel us to believe and to profess that "the eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins and whom the Father in his loving kindness raised again."<sup>xciiii</sup> The presence of Christ in the eucharistic communion is real; we receive Christ himself.<sup>xcv</sup> Because the eucharist was instituted out of love for us and makes Christ truly present, it is worthy of thanksgiving and worship both in the celebration of the Mass and in our devotion to the blessed sacrament.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Adoration of Christ in the blessed sacrament is the soul of our Christian life.<sup>xcvii</sup> When we approach this sacrament with love for him who loved us unto death, we learn how precious is the divine life he gives us and how valuable is his companionship. Truly, there is nothing more consoling on earth, nothing more sure to advance us on the way of holiness than intimate communion of heart, mind and soul with Christ in the eucharist.<sup>xcviii</sup> For here we find a continual echo of the other sacraments of initiation: baptism and confirmation. Here is expressed the truth of our baptism, that we are not only "called God's children" but are his children as we partake of the body and blood of his Son. Here confirmation's power blossoms as Christ bears witness to us and we to him.<sup>xcix</sup>

Because of the incomparable gift of the eucharist, the center and goal of all sacramental life,<sup>xc</sup> Christ is truly Emmanuel, "God with us," giving his own example to us who come to him that we may learn to be, like himself, meek and humble of heart, seeking not our own interests but those of God.<sup>cx</sup>

## **The Sacrament of Penance**

Conforming to the image of the Savior, desiring that his attitude and mentality permeate our being - this is the essence of the disciple's conversion, to which the Gospel calls and the sacraments realize. It is to this that we pledge ourselves in baptism, it is in this that we are confirmed and it is for this that we are strengthened by the eucharist.<sup>cx</sup> But it would be nonsense to declare that we are always faithful to the way on which we first set our hearts. All too often we turn aside to other roads and paths, foolishly toying with the allurements of a world we have been commissioned to transform. We sin and alienate ourselves from God and from one another;



yet even in our sinfulness the risen Savior asks of us, as he did of Peter long ago, “Do you love me?”<sup>ci</sup> The Good Shepherd seeks us out to bind our wounds and carry us back to his flock.

If we are true disciples who grasp the depth of the conversion we have vowed to live, we are painfully aware of our own personal sinfulness and ever seek God's grace and forgiveness. We know that to forget the reality of our own sinfulness is to forget the holiness of God!<sup>ciii</sup> But if we confess our sins, he is just and may be trusted to forgive our sins.<sup>civ</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, the world wants us to deny the reality of sin lest we turn to God and be healed! The world wants us to deny that we are sinners, lest we seek the grace to be converted anew. Do not be deceived!

Because God knows our weakness, he gave the sacrament of penance to his church so that we might have an accessible means for the forgiveness of our sins and know the peace of his pardon.<sup>cv</sup> It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to see ourselves in the light of God's holiness and causes us to view the way we have been living in contrast to the life to which we have been called.<sup>cvi</sup> Such self-examination moves us to sorrow for our sins and a desire to live as the new person God intended us to be;<sup>cvii</sup> The Spirit stirs a deep and fearful knowledge that we ourselves cannot bring about this transformation. He reminds us that only the power of Christ can reconcile us to God and to one another. And so we seek the ministry of the church, Christ in the World.<sup>cviii</sup> In the sacramental meeting with Jesus, who shed his blood for our forgiveness, the Holy Spirit reconciles us to God and to the church, which we have wounded by our sins, and gives us the power to live as we have been called.<sup>cix</sup> In no more visible way does the glory of God shine among us than when a repentant sinner once again becomes a disciple of Christ.

In concluding these reflections on the sacraments of initiation I thank God our Father for the spiritual blessings he has given us through our union with Christ.<sup>cx</sup> I pray that he will continue to give us the power of his Spirit to strengthen our understanding of Christ's great love for us - a love that fills us with God's own nature and reflects his glory.<sup>cx</sup> To him whose power enables us to do so much more than we can ever ask for or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever!<sup>cxii</sup>

## Footnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> *Guadium et Spes*, 1.  
<sup>ii</sup> 2 Cor. 4: 5.  
<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.* 4: 7.  
<sup>iv</sup> Acts 2: 11.  
<sup>v</sup> *Evangelii Nutiandi* 15.  
<sup>vi</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1, 1.  
<sup>vii</sup> Rom. 1: 23.  
<sup>viii</sup> 1 Tim. 2: 4.  
<sup>ix</sup> Heb. 1: 1-2.  
<sup>x</sup> Mt. 4: 17.  
<sup>xi</sup> Jn. 3: 16.  
<sup>xii</sup> *Dives in Misericordia*, 3.  
<sup>xiii</sup> Jn. 14: 9.  
<sup>xiv</sup> Phil. 2: 6-9.  
<sup>xv</sup> Col. 1: 15-16.  
<sup>xvi</sup> *Dives in Misericordia*, 7.  
<sup>xvii</sup> Jn. 1: 2.  
<sup>xviii</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 9.  
<sup>xix</sup> Jn. 3:16.  
<sup>xx</sup> 1 Cor. 1: 15-16.  
<sup>xxi</sup> Mt. 4: 17.  
<sup>xxii</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 20..  
<sup>xxiii</sup> *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 60.  
<sup>xxiv</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 9.  
<sup>xxv</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 47.  
<sup>xxvi</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 72, V ad 2.  
<sup>xxvii</sup> U.S. National Catechetical Directory, *Sharing the Light of Faith*, 114: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1977.  
<sup>xxviii</sup> Mk. 1: 15.  
<sup>xxix</sup> 2 Cor. 1: 19.  
<sup>xxx</sup> Rom. 5: 18.  
<sup>xxxi</sup> Phil. 2: 5.  
<sup>xxxii</sup> Regis Duffy, "The Praxix of Conversion," *Initiation and Conversion*, Lawrence Johnson, ed., Liturgical Press: 1985, p. 19.  
<sup>xxxiii</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 15.  
<sup>xxxiv</sup> Phil. 1: 27.  
<sup>xxxv</sup> Lk. 9: 23.  
<sup>xxxvi</sup> 2 Cor. 4: 11.  
<sup>xxxvii</sup> Duffy, p.18.  
<sup>xxxviii</sup> Rom. 10: 14-17.  
<sup>xxxix</sup> *Catechesi Trandendae*, 18, 19.  
<sup>xl</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.  
<sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.  
<sup>xlii</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 47.  
<sup>xliiii</sup> *Catechesi Trandendae*.  
<sup>xliv</sup> *Sharing the Light of Faith*, 115.  
<sup>xlv</sup> RCIA, 4.  
<sup>xlvi</sup> *Sharing the Light of Faith*, 115.  
<sup>xlvii</sup> RCIA, 1.  
<sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.  
<sup>xlix</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.  
<sup>l</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.  
<sup>li</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.2.

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- li Ibid., 19.3.
- liii Ibid., 21.
- liv Sacramentary, Renewal of Baptismal Vows, Easter Vigil.
- lv RCIA, 38.
- lvi Ibid., 41.
- lvii *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6.
- lviii *Sharing the Light of Faith*, 115.
- lix Catechesi Tradendae, 19.
- lx *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21-23.
- lxi Gal. 2: 20.
- lxii Jn. 15: 1-6.
- lxiii *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.
- lxiv Gal. 3: 27.
- lxv *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.
- lxvi *For a fuller explanation of this see Donald J. Parsons, "Some Theological and Pastoral Implications of Confirmation," Confirmation Re-Examined, Kendig Cully, ed., Morehouse-Barlow: 1982, pp. 45-50.*
- lxvii Code of Canon Law, Canon 868.2.
- lxviii Christian Initiation, General Introduction, 2.
- lxix Parsons, p.48.
- lxx Ibid., 49.
- lxxi Rite of Confirmation, Introduction, 2.
- lxxii Code of Canon Law, Canon 866.
- lxxiii Ibid., Canon 891.
- lxxiv Rite of Confirmation, Opening Prayers.
- lxxv *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 62.
- lxxvi Lk. 24: 35.
- lxxvii Eucharistic Prayer IV.
- lxxviii Jn. 10: 17.
- lxxix Ibid., 13: 31-48.
- lxxx Ibid., 14: 18.
- lxxxi Ibid., 14: 17.
- lxxxii *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 61.
- lxxxiii Ibid., 62.
- lxxxiv *De Sacra Liturgia*, 47.
- lxxxv St. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 26, Ch. 6, No. 13.
- lxxxvi *Dominicae Cena*, 4.
- lxxxvii *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 62.
- lxxxviii *Gaudium et Spes*, 24, and *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 62.
- lxxxix *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 62.
- xc The Doxology, Eucharistic Prayers.
- xci *Dominicae Cena*, 3.
- xcii Paul IV, *Mysterium Fidei*, 44.
- xciii St. Ignatius, *Ep. Ad Smyrn.*, 7, 1.
- xciv *Dominicae Cena*, 4.
- xcv Ibid., 3.
- xcvi Ibid., 5.
- xcvii *Mysterium Fidei*, 67.
- xcviii *Dominicae Cena*, 7.
- xcix Ibid.
- <sup>c</sup> *Mysterium Fidei*, 67.

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- <sup>ci</sup> *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 27.  
<sup>cii</sup> Jn. 21: 15.  
<sup>ciii</sup> *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 18.  
<sup>civ</sup> 1 Jn. 8-9.  
<sup>cv</sup> *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 31.  
<sup>cvi</sup> *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 42.  
<sup>cvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.  
<sup>cviii</sup> *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 11.  
<sup>cix</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11, and Rite of Penance, Introduction, 6, D.  
<sup>cx</sup> Eph. 1: 3.  
<sup>cx</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 19.  
<sup>cxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 20.