

Sacramental Policies for the Reception of the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation by School Age Children in the Diocese of St. Augustine

Requirements for Preparation. The Diocese of St. Augustine establishes the following requirements for the celebration of the sacraments of confirmation, first reconciliation, and First Eucharist for school aged children as follows.

Remote and Immediate Preparation. Ongoing remote preparation is essential prior to sacramental catechesis. In the Diocese of St. Augustine, it is expected that a minimum of consecutive two years of documented remote preparation would precede the reception of the above mentioned sacraments.

Remote Preparation is provided through the parish Religious Education Program, Catholic School Program or home school programs during their regular classroom instructional times. All programs mentioned will utilize the same text selected by the Director of Religious Education and the school principal for consistency and continuity. This text will be chosen from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops list of texts found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. All preparation materials must follow the universal curriculum of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Immediate Preparation for the sacraments involves Religious Education programs, Catholic School programs and those who home school joining together for a minimum of six (6) hours, and a maximum of twelve (12) hours for each sacrament. Sacramental catechesis takes place during parent meetings, family gatherings, specific classroom instruction, and/or retreat time. An additional six (6) hours may be added to the immediate preparation for the sacrament of confirmation to allow time for a solid retreat experience. Materials will be chosen from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops list of texts found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. All preparation materials must follow the universal curriculum of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Determination of Readiness. Readiness of candidates is determined by parents, pastor, Director of Religious Education, catechists, and candidates in conversation with one another.

Considerations for Reception of these Sacraments. The following circumstances relating to the planning for, and celebration of the sacraments of initiation should be considered.

Special Needs Candidates. Since full initiation is the norm for all Catholics, persons with special needs (families with unique needs, including physical, emotional and mental disabilities but not limited to these circumstances) are to be included within all aspects of the preparation process (see also, *Diocese of St. Augustine Ministry for Persons with Disabilities: Parish Ministry Guide*).

Multicultural Celebrations. Efforts should be made in multicultural parishes to be inclusive particularly in regards to the language utilized in the liturgies. An excellent resource from the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) is *Multicultural Celebrations: A Guide* by Mark Francis. This book is published in Spanish and English and available for purchase through the Office of Christian Formation.

Parents and Sponsors. Parents, sponsors and other role models are encouraged to act as witnesses by their regular participation in church life within the parish.

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. A privileged time and place for the sacraments of confirmation and First Eucharist is within the Sunday assembly.

The proper context for the celebration of the sacraments is the parish community. Therefore, it is always best that these sacraments be celebrated in the parish where the candidate regularly attends Sunday Mass with his/her family. Since a primary role of a pastor is to ascertain proper catechesis for the reception of the sacraments of the faithful of his parish (Canon 777) as well as to celebrate these sacraments with his parishioners (Canon 528) it is expected that the sacraments of initiation will be celebrated in the child's home parish. Exceptions on a case by case basis should involve dialogue between the two pastors.

Suggestions for Continuing and Enhancing the Celebration of these Sacraments.

For Children who Receive First Holy Communion:

- (1) Since the celebration of First Holy Communion generally takes place during the Easter season, parishes may wish to consider asking the First Communicants to wear their First Communion attire on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. If the parish does a Eucharistic Procession the children could be in the procession. In some places, the children could carry flower bouquets in front of the Blessed Sacrament or, as is traditional in Europe, could drop rose petals along the ground in front of the Blessed Sacrament.
- (2) If a parish does not have a Eucharistic Procession on this Solemnity, the First Communicants could still be asked to wear their First Communion attire in attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion. They could also be asked to present the gifts of bread and wine for the Mass.
- (3) Parishes that have "May Processions" or "May Crownings" may want to ask the First Communicants and their families to take a role similar to number 1 (above).

For Those who Receive the Sacrament of Confirmation:

- On the Solemnity of Pentecost, parishes may wish to consider having a teen who was confirmed earlier in the year (or who may be preparing to receive the sacrament in the very near future), give a short "witness talk" following the Prayer after Communion. The talk could center on how the teen prepared for Confirmation and what it means to practice the Catholic faith now as a witness to Christ.
- If suitably ready and prepared, those confirmed may be asked to serve as lectors and ushers/ministers of hospitality at all the Masses for the Pentecost celebration.
- They could also join with those who received the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil in some kind of service project that would be celebrated and acknowledged as part of the parish's Pentecost celebrations.

Approved by Bishop Victor Galeone January 22, 2010, confirmed by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez on August 21, 2011.