



Diocese of Buffalo

## Department of Lifelong Faith Formation

A member of the Catholic Education Division

### Policy Statement for the Preparation of First Eucharist with Baptized Children

Preparation for the celebration of First Eucharist with children who are baptized is coordinated within the parish. The parish catechetical leader (often referred to as the DRE-director of religious education) coordinates the process of preparation and the celebration under the supervision of the pastor.

#### The policy is the following:

The decision as to when a child is ready to celebrate any sacrament for the first time is a decision which rests primarily with parents in consultation with the catechist and priest who will administer the sacrament (Canon 914) but not before the age of reason (age 7).

Each sacrament deserves its own concentrated preparation period. Formation for First Eucharist is to be conducted separately from preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 135). Therefore, it is the policy of the Diocese of Buffalo that the celebration of First Reconciliation precedes First Eucharist and be at least six months apart. Children are eligible to participate in First Eucharist preparation **beginning in the 3rd grade** or equivalent age.

The Eucharist, as source and summit of Christian life, and the parish as the primary Christian community (outside of the home), should **be celebrated for the first time with the parish faith community**. It is the parish faith community that bears witness to each Christian as they take each step toward full initiation in the faith. Therefore, **all children of the parish are to prepare for the sacrament together**: those enrolled in the parish religious education program, Catholic school, and those who are home-schooled are brought together. Celebrations of First Eucharist are to be within a Sunday (Saturday vigil) mass.

Preparation process for the sacraments of reconciliation, Eucharist, and confirmation is separate and distinct from the regular curriculum for religious education followed in either the parish faith formation program or Catholic school. The preparation process can be implemented simultaneously, however, we recommend, beginning the preparation process after the regular religion program has concluded. Religious instruction serves to enhance the initiation of one into the Christian community and their on-going, lifelong formation in the faith.

All preparations processes should include the following elements:

- Parental catechesis
- Family Retreat
- Attention to learning specifically about the sacrament and its effects.
- Opportunity for Christian service, ideally, as a family.

#### Models for Preparation:

All children of the parish (those in the religious education program, Catholic School, and home-schoolers) should celebrate their First Eucharist together. This may mean, in some cases, inviting parents toward a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to a parish community. Celebrations of first sacraments, especially sacraments of initiation, belong in the parish faith community and are an extension of the household of faith. Catholic schools are encouraged to celebrate this sacramental

moment at a school liturgy once all of their students have celebrated the sacrament at their home parish. Likewise, home-schooling families too are encouraged to participate in the parish celebration.

The Diocese of Buffalo offers the following guidelines for developing and strengthening the parish-based sacramental preparation process. Attention must always be given to faith formation beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament with a focus on the development of the young person as a lifelong disciple.

1. **Home-Based.** The Diocese of Buffalo recommends the Home-Based model for sacramental preparation. A well-organized program can serve to support parents in their role as first teachers and Christian role models. Home-based catechesis provides families with the tools to help develop good religious habits in the home and to give the proper emphasis on the priorities and benefits of the Christian life.

Parents have a right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Eucharist. Catechesis aims to help parents grow in understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist and participate readily in catechizing their children. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 127).

Parents control the development of faith practices of their household, including regular reception of the sacraments. The household of faith (domestic church) is the primary building block upon which our Church is built. Consideration should be given to the following elements when developing a home-based sacramental preparation process:

- One or more gatherings with parents to provide formation/instruction about the sacrament and catechetical materials to be used.
  - One or more gatherings with parents and children to support/enhance the work being done at home (eg. Advent or Lenten program for families to come together).
  - One or more gatherings designed to deepen the faith and relationships of parents with one another in the parish (eg. Strong Catholic Families-Strong Catholic Youth or other parent faith sharing session).
  - Opportunities for families to become active in the liturgical life of the parish and engaged in service to the parish and/or community (eg. Involvement in planning a family mass, or service event related to Catholic Charities, etc).
  - A system of communication and clear timeline for families and the coordinator to cultivate conversation and accountability (eg. Calendar, email, social media group).
  - Use of written materials should be balanced with experiences of prayer, service, and community building. Only textbooks found on the USCCB's listing of approved textbooks may be used, however, a parish is not required to use a textbook.
2. **The Age-Specific/Grade Level Formation.** Parishes may wish to use a model for sacramental preparation which gathers the children together in age-specific (or grade level) groups. Please note the following elements should be included:
    - At least one parent-child gathering designed to strengthen the role of parent as leader of faith in their household.
    - Active engagement of parents throughout the preparation period (eg. Take-home materials, social media, classroom involvement, etc)
    - Well-planned catechetical sessions (see content standards below) should be the equivalent of about 8-10 contact hours. **Preparation for a sacrament is not a year-long process.** This is in addition to regular religious instruction provided in the parish religious education program or Catholic school.

- Use of written materials should be balanced with experiences of prayer, service, and community building. Only textbooks found on the USCCB's listing of approved textbooks may be used, however, a parish is not required to use a textbook.

### **Additional Considerations**

Remember no matter which model is used: the celebration of the sacrament is not the end – the preparation process must always have as its goal the development of a positive disposition and religious practices that will grow within the family/household for years to come. Cultivate good relationships with these families and continue to invite their involvement/leadership in the parish throughout the year. Parents must be actively engaged in the process because it is the parents who have the primary responsibility for the faith growth of their children.

Research shows that children whose parents are involved in their faith development and cultivate faith practice in the home (regular prayer, mass attendance, etc) have higher levels of religious practice as adults and report as having happier, healthier lives.

**Readiness:** The decision as to when a child is ready to celebrate any sacrament for the first time is a decision which rests primarily with parents in consultation with the catechist and priest who will administer the sacrament (Canon 914) but not before the age of reason (age 7). A First Eucharist preparation curriculum should have the following **standards/goals** as benchmarks to aid in discerning readiness:

- Willingness to participate in the process of immediate preparation in their parish.
- Capacity to be aware of one's affiliation with the Christian community through baptism.
- Capacity to hear and respond to the Gospel stories of Jesus who loves and cares for us and who invites our friendship.
- Able to distinguish between ordinary bread and Eucharist.
- Ability to express some desire to receive Jesus.
- Desire to participate in the parish community's liturgy and receive Eucharist regularly.
- Ability to understand the Mass as well as on the various concepts implied in celebration of the Eucharist commensurate with age/ability.
- Ability to participate in Eucharistic celebration (e.g. responses, reverence, attention, etc.).
- Individuals with disabilities are to be given special consideration. (See U.S. Bishops' *Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments With Persons With Disabilities*, Section II #19-21, or contact the Dept. of Lifelong Faith Formation for more info 716-847-5501)

**Unbaptized children, over the age of reason** (7), are to become part of the parish-based Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) with adaptations for children. Children who have reached the age of reason are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults (Canon 852:1). Their formation should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate as far as possible. They should receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the older catechumens.