

Diocese of Fall River Guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation

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Introduction

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist constitute the sacraments of Christian initiation whose unity must be safeguarded. Through these sacraments a person is incorporated into the Church, is strengthened for participation into the Church's mission, and is welcomed to partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.¹

A sacrament involves an encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ and presumes faith on the part of the individual. Readiness for a sacrament is determined by an individual's desire for a relationship with Christ. The sacraments of initiation bring the individual into the worship life of the Church and the faith community who should be visibly involved in the individual's preparation. When a person comes to the sacraments of initiation it is both a product of evangelization and an opportunity to evangelize the Christian community.

According to the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "The family is, so to speak, the domestic church." (*Lumen Gentium* #11) This means that it is in the context of the family that we first learn who God is and to prayerfully seek His will for us. Since many who come to the sacraments of initiation are children, the family has an essential role in the preparation for the celebration of the sacraments. Parents in particular should be involved in the catechesis and preparation for the sacraments, and should be encouraged and guided to build a Domestic Church.²

It is important that proper records are kept of each of the sacraments of initiation. Please refer to Appendix 2 for guidelines on proper record keeping.

¹ National Directory for Catechesis, No. 36; CIC 842, §2

² USCCB.org, "Tools for Building a Domestic Church."

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The RCIA is more than a process for bringing a person into the Church, but is the result of an encounter between the individual and Jesus Christ. The person who begins to inquire about becoming a Catholic must be accompanied on the journey, just as Jesus walked beside the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The entire parish community has an important role in the journey that an individual makes toward full initiation into the Church. The Rites catechize the entire parish community for they teach as they celebrate each step of the journey.

Full initiation into the Church occurs in stages. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides appropriate attention to catechesis and sets forth the essential liturgical practices to be celebrated in the parish. The intimate relationship between the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist should be emphasized in the catechesis of both adults and children.

The RCIA Process

Becoming Catholic- An Overview of the RCIA

Parishes welcome new members into the Roman Catholic Church through a process of formation, faith sharing, and rituals known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). This process includes several stages marked by prayer, study, and discussion.

The RCIA is structured over a series of ceremonial steps and periods of learning, the timing of which may vary for each individual. One may take as much time as he or she needs in the initiation process before entering into full initiation into the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

The RCIA process should be adapted to meet the specific needs of children and youth.

Who is welcome to begin the RCIA Journey?³

All who are open to discerning their personal experience of faith and learning more about the Catholic Church are welcome to begin the RCIA process. All that is truly required is a sincere desire to learn, to grow, and to develop one's relationship with God. It is important that prior to beginning the RCIA process a meeting take place to go over the necessary steps and to determine if the individual is canonically free to receive the sacraments of initiation.

The following are welcomed into the RCIA:

- **Unbaptized:** persons who have never been baptized and who need a process to help them grow in awareness of God's call to conversion as well as ways to respond to that call. They are considered "catechumens."

³ CIC 851.1; 852, §1

- Baptized in Another Christian Church: those who were validly baptized into another Christian denomination and wish to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. They are considered "candidates."
- Baptized but Un-catechized Catholic Adults: those who were baptized Catholic as infants and have little or no formation in the faith who are seeking to complete their initiation. These adults will be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of reconciliation, confirmation and Eucharist. They are also considered "candidates."

The Four Stages of the RCIA

I. Period of Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate

This first stage is called the period of inquiry. This is when an individual first expresses interest in becoming a Catholic and begins to explore the teachings of the Catholic faith. With the help of the parish community, the person is encouraged to discern his or her relationship with Christ and how this can be deepened by joining the Catholic Church.

II. Period of Catechumenate

This second stage is an extended period which normally lasts approximately one year. This is a time of formation and education based on Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

III. Period of Purification and Enlightenment

This stage coincides with the liturgical season of Lent. It is a time of reflection, prayer, and intense spiritual preparation rather than a time of catechetical instruction. A Lenten retreat is offered during this period preparing one to complete initiation at the Easter Vigil.

IV. Period of Mystagogy

At this time the newly initiated reflect upon their experience of becoming full members of the Church at the Easter Vigil. The period is marked by participation in the Sunday Eucharist and actively living a life of charity, service and love. Mystagogy is a lifelong process, one that all Christians are engaged in, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to be a Christian.

The Liturgical Rites of the RCIA

I. Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

This is a liturgical rite in which the inquirer states publicly that he or she wants to become a baptized member of the Catholic Church. The Church, through the local parish community, affirms this desire to

follow God's call. For candidates who have already been baptized and are seeking full communion in the Catholic Church, this step is called the Rite of Welcoming the Candidate.

II. Rite of Election

The Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names coincides with the beginning of Lent and is celebrated by the Bishop at the cathedral church of the Diocese. The Rite includes the official enrollment of names of all those seeking baptism at the Easter Vigil. At this Rite the catechumens publicly request baptism and declare their desire to make a faith commitment to Jesus in the Catholic Church.

III. The Scrutinies

The Scrutinies are three public celebrations during the Period of Purification in which the elect are invited to progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation.

IV. The Presentations

The Presentations take place after the celebration of the Scrutinies during which the Church lovingly entrusts to the elect the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.

V. The Sacraments of Initiation

The final step in the RCIA is the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Through this step the elect are fully initiated into the Catholic Church.

The reception of candidates into full communion with the Catholic Church should ordinarily take place at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season. If pastoral reasons necessitate, and with the permission of the Bishop, candidates may be received into the Church at the Sunday Eucharist of the parish community. Candidates for full communion into the Catholic Church celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation prior to reception of the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist.

Catechumenate

Adults who are not baptized and wish to become members of the Roman Catholic Church should follow the complete process of Christian Initiation as outlined in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops March 13, 1988.

They are to:

- Participate in the pre-catechumenate.
- Be chosen for entrance into the catechumenate in the Rite of Acceptance.
- Participate in the catechumenate for a suitable period of time.
- Participate in the Rite of Election.

- Observe Lent as the time of purification and enlightenment.
- Participate in the Scrutinies and Presentations.
- Receive the Sacraments of Initiation (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil.
- Observe the season of Easter as the time of post- baptismal catechesis and reflection (i.e. mystagogy).

The Diocesan Bishop is the proper minister for the initiation of adults, including children of catechetical age. He will celebrate the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names for all catechumens and the Call to Continuing Conversion for candidates at the Cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent.⁴

- Pastors, with the help of deacons and catechists, are to provide instruction for the catechumens. They are to approve the choice of godparents and be diligent in the celebration and adaptation of the rites throughout the entire course of Christian initiation.⁵
- Catechists should have an active part in the instruction of the candidates as well as participate in the rites when possible. They should not perform the minor exorcisms and blessings contained in the rites.
- The parish priest or deacon is to preside over the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.
- Any priest in good standing who presides at the Easter Vigil may administer the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist to a catechumen of the age of reason or older. Delegation is given by law and no further permission is required.⁶

Christians Baptized in a Non-Catholic Church

Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church

Christians validly baptized in a non-Catholic Church who wish to become members of the Roman Catholic Church should follow a process that leads to the celebration of confirmation and Eucharist according to the norms of the “Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.”⁷

They are to:

- Receive suitable catechesis and spiritual formation.
 - As in the case of catechumens, the preparation of these adults requires a considerable time of discernment and formation.

⁴ National Statutes for the Catechumenate, United States Catholic Conference, 1988, No. 11

⁵ Christian Initiation, General Introduction, 13. V.35

⁶ CIC 866

⁷ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Part II, Rites for Particular Circumstances, 5

- Provide contact with the community of the faithful
- Participate in certain liturgical rites as prescribed in the RCIA.
- For the most part a plan of catechesis corresponds to the formation of catechumens. In the process of catechesis, the priest, deacon, catechist, and RCIA team should keep in mind that these adults have a different status than the catechumens by virtue of their baptism.
- Participate in the “Call to Continuing Conversion” in the Cathedral on the First Sunday of Lent.
- Celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation during Lent prior to reception into Full Communion in the Catholic Church.
- It is preferable that reception into full communion not take place at the Easter Vigil but at a Sunday during the Easter Season by making a profession of faith. If there are both catechumens to be baptized and baptized Christians to be received into full communion at the Vigil, for pastoral reasons the combined rite is to be followed.⁸
- Observe the season of Easter as a time of post-baptismal catechesis (i.e. mystagogy).
- Those baptized in other Christian faith traditions should participate in the RCIA process for candidates and **should not be sent to the Cathedral for Adult Confirmation.**
- Any priest in good standing who presides at the Easter Vigil or at a Sunday Mass during the Easter season may administer the sacraments of confirmation and first Eucharist. Delegation is given by law and no further permission is required. Outside of the Easter season permission must be granted by the Bishop.
- At the Easter Vigil only the presiding priest should administer the sacraments of initiation.
- The sacraments should be recorded in the proper registers. See Appendix 2.

Un-Catechized Adult Baptized Catholics Completing Initiation Seeking Confirmation and Eucharist

Adult Catholics baptized as infants in the Roman Catholic Church who have not received the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist should participate in a period of catechesis leading to the celebration of the sacraments.

Pastors must request and be granted delegation from the Bishop when a baptized Catholic is completing initiation into the Church.

They are to:

- Participate regularly in the Sunday Mass to the extent possible.

⁸ NSC 33-34.

- Receive suitable catechesis and spiritual formation. As in the case of catechumens, the preparation of these adults requires a considerable amount of time. Preparation of these adults should consist of catechesis suited to their needs, and contact with the community of the faithful.
- Participate in the “Call to Continuing Conversion” at the Cathedral on the First Sunday of Lent.
- Celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation prior to the reception of the sacraments of initiation.
- Baptized Catholics should ordinarily complete initiation at a Sunday Mass during the Easter season. When pastoral considerations warrant, an un-catechized baptized Catholic who has participated in the RCIA process may be confirmed and receive first Eucharist at the Easter Vigil **with delegation from the Bishop**.
- These candidates may be sent to the Cathedral for the Adult Confirmation, and if so, the Bishop needs to be notified in advance that they are also receiving first Eucharist.

Children of Catechetical Age

Catechumens and Candidates

An un-baptized child who has not yet entered the first grade should follow the norms for the baptism of infants. A child that is in the first grade or older who wishes to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church should enter a two-year formation process and may receive the sacraments of baptism and first Eucharist when this is completed. The child should be placed in age appropriate formation classes and will receive the sacrament of confirmation with his or her peers. They seek initiation at the direction of their parents or legal guardians, or on their own initiative with their parents’ permission.⁹

- The Christian initiation of these children requires a conversion that is both personal and developed in proportion to their age.
- Children of catechetical age are considered to be at the age of reason and therefore must be given adequate time to develop spiritually. For this reason they should receive a minimum of two years of formation prior to receiving the sacraments of baptism and first Eucharist.
- The process of initiation should include the parents or guardians and be given adequate time to allow for their spiritual progress.
- They may receive age appropriate catechetical instruction with their peers in addition to remedial formation with a trained catechist.
- **Children who have been baptized in another Christian faith tradition should receive the same formation as those who are un-baptized.** They should make a formal Profession of Faith and it should be recorded in the proper register. See Appendix 2.

⁹ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Part II Rites for Particular Circumstances, 1; CIC 852,

Adult Confirmation

Adult Catholics baptized as infants in the Roman Catholic Church and received Eucharist but who have not received the sacrament of confirmation should participate in a period of catechesis leading to the celebration of confirmation.

They are to:

- Participate regularly in the Sunday Mass.
- Formation of the candidate should take place in the parish for a period of time that allows for the spiritual growth and conversion of the individual
- The parish should provide formation, which includes discernment, catechesis in the Catholic faith, instruction on the sacrament of confirmation, and a retreat experience. Parishes may collaborate with other parishes to provide this formation, or send the candidate to the Diocesan formation program for Adult Confirmation. The required retreat is included in this program.
- Receive the sacrament of reconciliation prior to being confirmed.
- Receive the sacrament of confirmation at the Cathedral which is celebrated in the fall and during the Easter season. If pastoral considerations warrant, an adult may be confirmed at their parish confirmation.

USCCB Guidelines for the Sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation for People with Developmental Disabilities

By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community.¹⁰ Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them.¹¹

Baptism

Because it is the sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it. Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion.¹² Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one parent or guardian consents to it.¹³

Confirmation

All baptized, unconfirmed Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the sacrament of confirmation if they are suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew their baptismal promises.¹⁴ Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time.

Eucharist

Parents, those who take the place of parents, and pastors are to see to it that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed.¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the

¹⁰ CIC 213

¹¹ CIC 843,1

¹² CIC 868, §1, 2°

¹³ CIC 868, §1, 1° and 852

¹⁴ CIC 889

¹⁵ CIC 914

baptized person to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist.

Reconciliation

Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability.

Infant Baptism

Infant baptism is a time-honored tradition in the Church. Its firm practice “manifests Christ’s sheer gift of salvation and grace which is extended to all,”¹⁶ including infants. Parents who present their children for baptism profess and promise to raise them up in the practice of the faith. Godparents are to be firm believers and willing to assist the parents in the child’s formation. The Christian community is also responsible to help develop the gift of God’s life in the Church. It is also a concern of the Church that the effects of baptism do not always take root in the infant because of the inability of the family to nurture them in their faith. The more the parish focuses on the faith of the family, the more likely that a child will be raised with faith.

Parents/guardians and godparents of infants and small children are to be welcomed and offered every opportunity to grow in faith through the preparation for the sacrament of baptism. They should be introduced to the educational and spiritual life of the parish and should participate in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Preparation for the baptism of their child should include an expectation for them to grow spiritually and to become active members of the parish community. “The parish should give attention to the families of these children through pastoral outreach and evangelization.”¹⁷

For an infant to be baptized validly it is necessary that at least one of the parents’ consents to it or a person who lawfully takes their place consents. There should be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If this hope is utterly lacking the baptism may be delayed, but not denied, with explanation to the parents.¹⁸

The ordinary minister of the sacrament of baptism is a Bishop, Priest or Deacon.¹⁹

Preparation:

The formation of parents and godparents of the child to be baptized is essential in the preparation for the sacrament. Parents should receive spiritual and catechetical instruction prior to the child’s baptism and if possible, the godparents should be encouraged to take part in this process.

Baptismal catechesis should include the following:

- Meeting with the priest, deacon, or pastoral associate to congratulate and welcome them as new parents.
 - This meeting is also an opportunity to join the parish if necessary.
 - Complete and explain the request for the sacrament of baptism.
 - Discuss their own faith journeys.

¹⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Faith 1250

¹⁷ NDC, p.121

¹⁸ CIC 868, §1

¹⁹ CIC 861, §1

- Review the qualifications for godparents before they are chosen. See Appendix 1 Godparents/Sponsors.
- There should be at least one catechetical session required for parents and godparents. If the parent or godparent is not able to take part in the parish baptismal preparation program, they may attend at another parish or diocese.
- The catechetical session may consist of the following
 - The theology of sacraments in general and baptism in particular.
 - Teaching on the history of the sacrament of baptism.
 - Explanation of the expectation that there must be a “well-founded hope” that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith.
 - The implications and responsibility of parents and godparents.
 - Membership in the faith community and need for regular attendance at Sunday Mass.
 - A personal witness and reflection by parents who have had their children baptized and the significance this has made in their lives.
 - An overview of the ritual of infant baptism with particular emphasis on the promises made by the parents and godparents.

Conditional Baptism

If there is a serious doubt whether someone was baptized or whether baptism was conferred validly, the baptism should be administered conditionally.

Those baptized in other Christian traditions are *not* to be baptized conditionally unless there is serious doubt of its validity after examining the matter and form of the baptism in question, witness etc.²⁰ It may also be necessary to consult with others who may have witnessed the baptism.

Baptism of Adopted Children

- Children who have been adopted according to the norm of civil law are considered as being the children of the person or persons who have adopted them.²¹
- For recording and preparation of certificates for the baptism of adopted children see Appendix 3.

²⁰ CIC 869, §1-2

²¹ CIC 110

Time and Place of the Celebration of Baptism

- Although baptism can be celebrated on any day, it is nevertheless recommended that it be celebrated ordinarily on Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil if no adult is to be initiated into the Church.²²
- If there is pastoral need the baptism may take place during Lent and should not be denied.
- Outside a case of necessity or pastoral need the proper place is the parish church of the parents.

Baptism of the Children of Same Sex Couples

Consult with the Bishop.

²² CIC 856

First Eucharist and Reconciliation

Catechesis for first Eucharist should be conducted separately from catechesis for reconciliation so that each sacrament receives its own concentrated preparation. Preparation for both sacraments is a two-year process that includes a year of remote preparation that takes place either in the parish or Catholic school religious education program.

Children being prepared to receive the sacrament of Eucharist must have sufficient knowledge and be prepared so that they can receive the Body of Christ with faith and devotion. Children demonstrate readiness to receive the sacrament by their willingness to receive the Eucharist with reverence appropriate to their age. Children should be able to distinguish between ordinary bread and consecrated Eucharist.²³

First Reconciliation

- During the second year of their formal religious education the child will begin immediate preparation for the sacraments of reconciliation and first Eucharist.
- Immediate preparation for reconciliation should precede immediate preparation for Eucharist and be given adequate separation to emphasize both sacraments.
- Immediate preparation for first reconciliation should emphasize the following concepts:
 - The need for forgiveness and the forgiving love of Jesus
 - The difference between accidental and deliberate wrong
 - Ability to express wrongdoing and sorrow in his/her own words

First Eucharist

- Preparation for first Eucharist begins when the child begins formal schooling in the first grade at which time the child should be enrolled in religious education at the parish or in a Catholic school.
- All children should have two years of catechetical instruction prior to the reception of first Eucharist.
- Immediate preparation for Eucharist is the responsibility of the parish and is separate and distinct from any grade level in the parish or Catholic school religious education program.
- Immediate preparation for the sacraments must be done in and by the parish in which they are to be celebrated.
 - Children enrolled in Catholic schools are to make their first reconciliation and Eucharist in their home parishes.

²³ CIC 913

- Permission must be received from the pastor of their home parish and the pastor of the school if there is to be an exception to this rule.
- Immediate preparation includes but is not limited to the following:
 - Retreats, workshops, rites, parent meetings, sacramental preparation sessions and rehearsals.
- Immediate preparation may include the following doctrinal elements regarding the Eucharist:
 - Source and summit of our Christian faith.
 - Memorial of the Lord's passion, death and Resurrection.
 - Based on Jewish roots and is a covenant meal.
 - Memorial of the Last Supper.
 - A sign of unity with Christ and one another.
 - Real presence of Christ.

Role of Parents/Guardians

Parents are essential to the spiritual formation of their children. Parishes should ensure that parent sessions are included in the preparation for sacraments. These sessions should be catechetical in nature and also invite them into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church.

- Parents should be made aware of the expectations for the family and the child and the catechetical themes for the sacraments.
- A personal witness and reflection by parents who have raised their children in the practice of the Catholic faith.
- Participation in the weekly celebration of the Eucharist.

Celebration of the Sacrament

- The celebration of First Eucharist is encouraged to take place at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass involving the parish community, preferably during the Easter season. It may take place outside of the parish Sunday worship if necessary.
- Communicants should be instructed in the practice of fasting from any food or drink for at least one hour before receiving the Eucharist.²⁴
- If it is the custom of the parish to administer the Eucharist under both species then the first communicants should be given the opportunity to receive from the sacred cup with the permission of the parents. Children should receive proper instruction on how to receive the sacred cup with reverence.

²⁴ CIC 919

Adolescent Confirmation

Confirmation is only given once and imprints an indelible spiritual character signifying that Christ has marked the Christian with the seal of the Holy Spirit for the sake of Christian witness and perfecting the common priesthood received in baptism.²⁵

A brief history

In the early Church incorporation into the life of Christ was accomplished through the celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. The unity of these three sacraments is preserved and emphasized when welcoming an adult into the Church. Throughout the long history of the Church various changes and adaptation to the demands of the culture resulted in the practice of infant baptism, but the proper order of the sacraments of initiation was maintained until the twentieth century. In 1910 Pope Pius X was concerned that youth were not nourished by the Eucharist until after they were confirmed in early adolescence. Rather than change the age of confirmation, the order of the sacraments was changed so that children could receive Eucharist at the age of seven, which was determined to be the age of reason.

Age of Confirmation

In the United States the local Ordinary determines the age at which Confirmation will be conferred in his diocese.²⁶ “The practice of delaying Confirmation until older adolescence allows the parish to bolster the pastoral care that the Church offers to its youth through community, catechesis and the sacraments.”²⁷

In the Diocese of Fall River the time for the administration of the sacrament of confirmation is in the Easter season of ninth or tenth grade.

Catechesis with Adolescents Preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation

Preparation for the sacrament of confirmation is a unique opportunity in a parish to evangelize adolescent youth who are on the threshold of adulthood. Emphasis should be placed on the need for conversion to Jesus Christ and the decision to walk in His footsteps.²⁸ Catechesis should empower the

²⁵ CCC No. 1304-1305

²⁶ The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of CIC 891, hereby decrees that the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop and with regard for the legitimate exceptions given in CIC 891

²⁷ *Receive the Gift*, USCCB Publishing, 19

²⁸ General Directory for Catechesis, No. 54

youth to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, to draw them into responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church, and to foster their personal and spiritual growth.²⁹

Preparation for Confirmation is a two-year process that is distinct and separate from any catechetical program in the parish or Catholic school. Sacraments are parish celebrations and while Catholic school communities are important in the daily sharing of faith and values, it is also necessary for young people to stay connected to their parish communities through the celebration of Sunday Eucharist and other parish activities. Catholic school students are to take part in both years of preparation in their parish so that they are included in all retreats, parent meetings, liturgies and service opportunities.

In order to offer the opportunity for youth to grow in discipleship, preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation should include doctrine, worship, community and service.

Essential Doctrinal Elements

- Understand the meaning of confirmation as a sacrament of initiation and its relationship to baptism and Eucharist.
- Understanding of the sacramental life of the Church and the importance of the Eucharist as source and summit of the Catholic faith.
- Familiarity with Scripture as the inspired Word of God and to use the Bible for study and prayer.
- Acceptance of the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as foundations of the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
 - Specific instruction on the Church's teaching on human sexuality.
- Promotion of justice and service as a response to the Scriptural principle of the preferential option for the poor and the tenets of the Beatitudes.
- Understanding the elements of the Creed as the Church's profession of faith.
- Emphasis on the need for faith as a human response to God's free offer of grace.
- Awareness that the response to God's offer of grace is a life expressed through prayer and personal and social moral living.
- Vocation
 - Discernment of God's call to the ordained or religious life
 - The vocation of marriage

Worship Experiences

- Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist.
- At least one retreat or day of recollection per year.
 - Overnight retreats can be an excellent experience for a young person; however, under no circumstance should a child be forced to stay overnight as a condition of fulfilling the

²⁹ NDC, p.11

- retreat requirement. Arrangements should be made in advance to accommodate the needs of the child while at the same time fulfilling the obligation.
- Retreats offered in the Catholic schools are not a substitution for the parish Confirmation retreat.
 - Participation in various forms of prayer, i.e. Adoration, Communal, *Lectio Divina*, etc.

Building Community

- Engage adolescents in the life and ministries of the parish.
- Provide opportunities for the parish to acknowledge and celebrate the milestones and accomplishments of the youth.
- Participate in Diocesan gatherings and activities for youth.

Service

Service is an essential element of the youth's training in Christian discipleship and should never be reduced to the fulfillment of service hours. The following principles should be incorporated into the service component of the confirmation program:

- Engage the youth in the long tradition of the Catholic Church's charitable outreach and promotion of justice.
 - Expose youth to the work of the Diocesan Catholic Social Service; Catholic Health Facilities; national and international Catholic agencies promoting social justice.
- Teach the youth to discern the difference between charity and justice.
- Provide time for serious reflection on the service performed.
- Incorporate youth into the charitable outreach of the parish.
- Include both group and individual opportunities for service.

Confirmation Names

The candidate may choose a confirmation name. The baptismal name is always an appropriate name for confirmation in order to show the relationship between baptism and confirmation. If a special name is chosen it should be the name of a recognized saint. If the baptismal name is not that of a saint then a name of a saint may be considered for the confirmation name.

Parents and Guardians

Parents or guardians are the primary educators of and witnesses of the faith. They support and encourage their children by regularly participating at Sunday Mass as a family and by loving and nourishing one another in faith, especially through example. Parents and guardians should take an active interest in the parish preparation for the sacrament of confirmation by attending all meetings and other events that may

be scheduled. Parents should be invited to be actively involved as volunteers in the various aspects of the preparation of their children.

Sponsors

To emphasize the unity of baptism and confirmation it is appropriate, where possible, to choose one of the baptismal godparents to again serve as sponsor. Both parents and sponsor should be instructed about their roles early in the two-year preparation for the sacrament. See Appendix 1 Godparents/Sponsors.

Ritual

The bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of confirmation. The Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River may delegate permission to confer the sacrament of confirmation to the pastor.³⁰ Specific instructions for the confirmation ritual will be sent when the bishop is conferring the sacrament.

³⁰ CIC 882; 892; 893

Appendix 1 Godparents/Sponsors

Godparents

- In Infant baptism, the godparent(s), together with parents, present the child for baptism and who will the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with and faithful to the obligations connected to the sacrament.³¹
- The role and qualifications for the sponsor and the godparents are defined in Canon Law.³² The sponsor or godparent should be:
 - A fully initiated Catholic who is living a life in harmony with Church teaching.
 - Not under canonical penalty.
 - Not a parent of the person being baptized.
 - At least 16 years of age or in an exceptional case if the Pastor or minister deems that there is just cause to permit a younger person to serve in the role.
 - Only one godparent is required for baptism that must fulfill the canonical requirements.
 - There can be no more than two godparents, one male and one female.

Christian Witness

- When circumstances warrant it, one of the godparents may be replaced by a baptized non-Catholic Christian as a witness of baptism.

Proxy

- If the godparent cannot be present at the baptism, he or she may appoint another person to serve as proxy. This person should meet the same requirements of any godparent.

³¹ CIC 872

³² CIC 872-874

Appendix 2 Record Keeping

Recording Baptism³³

- The baptismal record must be made with permanent ink in a bound book/volume. Other records whether on computer, disk or external drive cannot substitute for handwritten documentation in the Baptismal Register. The parish Baptismal Register is to be retained in a fireproof and securely locked place, e.g. file or safe.
- The pastor of the parish of baptism should see to it that a record is entered permanently and without delay in the Baptismal Register including all the information required by canon law. The name of the Deacon is to be recorded: “Deacon John J. Smith.”
- Whenever a baptism occurs in a parish church, the proper pastor of that church must be informed so that the baptism will be recorded.
- To record the baptism of a child born to an unwed mother, special care must be taken to verify the identity of the parents before entering the names in the register.

Recording the Administration of Confirmation³⁴

- A permanent record of the administration of confirmation should be made promptly in the parish records in accord with all the requirements of the Code of Canon Law.
- The names of those confirmed with mention made of the minister, the parents, the sponsors, and the place and date of the conferral of confirmation are to be recorded in the Confirmation Register of the parish.
- In the case of group confirmations, the sacrament will be recorded in the place of conferral. Note: parishes should record the names of their parishioners in their Confirmation Register with notation of the place of conferral.
- The pastor must inform the pastor of the place of baptism about the conferral of confirmation so that notation is made in the Baptismal Register.

First Eucharist

Prior to the reception of First Eucharist, the parish should obtain proof of Baptism for all candidates.³⁵

- The names of the children who celebrated First Eucharist, the minister, and the place and date of the ceremony are to be recorded in the parish Communion Register.

³³ CIC877, 878

³⁴ Ibid 895

³⁵ CIC 842, 912, 894.

Appendix 3 Recording the Baptism of Adopted Children

Guidelines for Entering Information in the Baptismal Registry When a Child Is Adopted (Effective December 1, 2000)³⁶

A. For children baptized AFTER their adoption is finalized

DO enter the following information in the baptismal register:

- the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parents;
- the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s);
- the date and place of birth;
- the name(s) of the sponsor(s) selected by the adoptive parent(s)
- the place and date of baptism;
- the name of the minister performing the baptism;
- a notation that the child was legally adopted.

DO NOT enter the names of the natural parents in the baptismal register.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these children will be no different from other baptismal certificates.

DO NOT mention the fact of adoption on the baptismal certificate.

B. For children baptized BEFORE their adoption is finalized After the adoption is finalized according to the civil law of the jurisdiction, DO add the following notations to the baptismal register:

- place parentheses around the names of the natural parents;
- add the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s);
- place parentheses around the child's former surname;
- add the new surname;
- add a notation that the child was legally adopted.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals shall give ONLY:

- the name(s) of the adoptive parents;
- the child's new legal surname;
- the date and place of baptism;
- the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament.

³⁶ Complimentary Norm of the USCCB for Canon 877, §3, October 20, 2001

DO NOT give the name(s) of the sponsor(s) on the baptismal certificate. DO NOT mention the fact of adoption on the baptismal certificate.

NOTE: Parish personnel having access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information which would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that person was adopted.