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SACRAMENTAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR THOSE WHO HOME SCHOOL

The preparation for a sacrament is a very special time in the life of the Church. In the *Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee Year 2000*, our Holy Father states that "Revelation also teaches that the Christian is not alone on the path of conversion. In Christ and through Christ, his life is linked by a mysterious bond to the lives of all other Christians in the supernatural union of the Mystical Body. This establishes among the faithful a marvelous exchange of spiritual gifts, in virtue of which the holiness of one benefits others. . . ." Thus the time of sacramental catechesis provides the entire parish community with the opportunity to deepen their spirituality in the sacramental life of the Church while at the same time lead others to receive a sacrament for the first time. As such, sacramental catechesis [the immediate preparation for a sacrament] is an activity distinct from religious education.

The interaction between the parish community and those preparing for a sacrament gives credibility to the belief that catechesis is the "responsibility of the entire Christian community" [GDC, #220] and therefore "is not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative." [GDC, 219.b]. For this reason the *Code of Canon Law* requires the diocesan bishop and pastor to ensure that appropriate catechesis is provided to all those preparing to receive a sacrament.

Canon 777 - Attentive to the norms established by the diocesan bishop, a pastor is to take care in a special way:

1. *That suitable catechesis is imparted for the celebration of the sacraments;*
2. *That through catechetical instruction imparted for an appropriate period of time children are prepared properly for the first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Most Holy Eucharist and for the Sacrament of Confirmation;*
3. *That having received first communion, these children are enriched more fully and deeply through catechetical formation;*
4. *That catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits;*
5. *That the faith of youth and adults is strengthened, enlightened, and developed through various means and endeavors.*

There are situations where some families choose to "home school" their children / youth. In this setting they choose to provide secular and / or religious education in the home. These policies and guidelines provide direction for sacramental catechesis for those who home school their children / youth.

Policies and Guidelines

- 1) The proper context for the celebration of the sacraments is the parish community. "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity'" [CSL, #26].
 - > Children / youth who are home schooled are to celebrate the sacraments in the parish and at the time determined by the pastor for all those in the parish-based program.
- 2) Sacramental catechesis "is an essentially ecclesial act" [GDC, #78] and therefore "not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative" [GDC, #219.b]. Sacramental catechesis, therefore, takes place in a parish based-program.
 - > Those who home school their children are required to contact the pastor, or the one delegated by him to be in charge of the parish sacramental program for approval, prior to beginning any sacramental preparation program;
 - > Those who choose to home school their children are to fully participate in the parish based program for sacramental catechesis;
 - > Parents / guardians who home school, are to register their children for sacramental catechesis according to the regulations established by the parish;
 - > Parents / guardians who home school, together with their children, are to participate in all dimensions of the parish program for sacramental catechesis: catechetical, ritual, service, spiritual [retreats, etc.] and any other requirements for sacramental preparation as determined by the parish;
 - > Parents / guardians who home school, together with their children, will use the catechetical text and supplementary catechetical resources established by the parish program;
- 3) Liturgical celebrations have an integral role in sacramental catechesis since "catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action" [GDC, 30]. Thus, the liturgy "is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God" [CCC, #1074]. Through the prayers, symbols, gestures, music and actions of the liturgical prayer, the faithful receive formation intimately connected to the catechesis which follows.
 - > Parents/guardians and their children/youth are to fully participate in all of the liturgical prayers scheduled in the parish based program for sacramental preparation.
 - > As parishioners of the parish, families who home school are expected to participate weekly in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist in the parish.
- 4) All parish-based programs for sacramental catechesis include formation of adults in the parish, especially those whose children / youth are preparing to receive a sacrament. The catechesis of children / youth and the catechesis of adults "should not be separate watertight compartments" [GDC, #72]. This structure promotes unity of vision within the parish and fosters harmony among the people of God.
 - > Parents / guardians and sponsors [where applicable] of home schoolers will fully participate in all adult catechetical formation programs related to sacramental preparation of children/youth in the parish-based program.

- > Parents / guardians and sponsors [where applicable] are expected to participate in all other activities as required in the program, i.e., interviews, etc.
- 5) Children not baptized as infants and who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age are to be prepared for the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist according to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* [RCIA, #252].
- > Parents / guardians who home school children who are not baptized and are of catechetical age and have attained the use of reason, are to enroll their children in the parish catechumenate program.
 - > These children / youth are to receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist in that order in one single ceremony preferably at the Easter Vigil together with the older catechumens [RCIA, National Statutes, 18].
- 6) The diocesan bishop has the responsibility "to issue norms concerning catechetics" [CL, #775.1] and to ensure that all who exercise this ministry are in communion with him.
- > The policies, guidelines and directives developed by the diocese for sacramental catechesis are applicable to all those who home school their children / youth.

These policies and guidelines are meant to promote the evangelizing potential of sacramental catechesis in the life of the Church. We pray that our Catholic people will be set ablaze with a desire to live their sacramental life fully and share it freely with others. May their eagerness to live the sacramental life bring transformation to the whole world.

***Approved by the Bishops of Florida
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