

**CRITERIA FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF  
THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION, FIRST  
PENANCE AND MARRIAGE**

**JANUARY 2014**

“The sacraments are not an instrument of discipline, but a help for people in their journey and in the weakness of their life.”

Cardinal Carlo Martini (1927-2012)

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last number of years, my office has received telephone calls and letters from families across the diocese. Many of the letters have dealt with the poor treatment that they received when approaching one of our parishes to celebrate sacraments. Others have expressed concern with needing to perform tasks deemed to be onerous, and, sadly, others have spoken about compensation required before sacraments will be celebrated.

Of Jesus, St. Matthew, citing the prophet Isaiah, writes in his Gospel: “He will not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoldering wick” (Matthew 12:20). These words should be embodied by all in the Diocese of London who minister in Christ Jesus’ name and, in particular, those who are priests with the oversight of parish communities.

In this document, we recognize that the administration of the sacraments is a vital part of the work of evangelization. In requesting the sacraments, people are manifesting a desire for God. Even though the flame of desire may be very weak in some individuals, we need to treat these requests as moments of grace. We should be warm and hospitable to all those who come to us, so that the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit may grow and develop.

From the initial welcome that people receive upon contacting the parish, to our willingness to stand for photos after the celebration of the sacraments, hospitality is perhaps the greatest charity which we extend to those who approach us.

We all realize that in the last twenty-five years, our communities have undergone major shifts. Parishes have been amalgamated. Others have been closed. This reality, with breakdowns in communication between parishes and parish schools, have left many families unsure about who is responsible for preparing children for sacraments and who is setting policy and directives.

Our parishes and our diocese are in the midst of what many have described a seismic shift. Yet even in the midst of uncertainty, we can be confident that we move forward with a future filled with hope.

The current state of family life in Canada is an enormous challenge for us. We know that nearly half of marriages celebrated in our country end in divorce. Issues connected to shared custody, parental access, commitments in the community and to sporting events, or simply one parent assuming full responsibility for custody and the support of their children, often make regular or weekly attendance at Sunday Mass difficult for some if not nearly impossible.

These cultural shifts, largely beyond our control, are difficult for the members of our communities and for we who serve them. Sacramental preparation, for many of us, provides countless challenges and gives rise to a whole host of emotions. Some of us are already feeling tired and overwhelmed by the many expectations which are before us. Some of us feel that people with no connection to the Church are using us to celebrate “rights of passage”, which seem a mere shadow of the rich grace that God wants us to know in the sacraments. Some of us who are coming from different countries and language groups where the practice and custom around sacramental preparation vary, experience our own unique challenges.

We must not confuse the lack of traditional faith practice with a lack of faith. God alone judges the human heart. Recognizing human frailty, the Church, for example, has indicated that those involved in sacramental preparation need only the reasonable assurance that the candidate for baptism will be raised in the practice to the faith (see canon 868). This mentoring in the life of the Gospel should come from a parent, but, increasingly in our day, we see that ministry being supported by grandparents, relatives, educators and parish ministers. Building on this experience of contemporary family, we need to give careful consideration to how we prepare for baptism, first penance, first communion, confirmation and marriage.

We must presume that if people are coming to us asking to celebrate the sacraments, that their requests are sincere and good. I ask that you take what may be a small flame and that you do what you are able to fan the flame of faith, so it may shine for all the world to see.

We are all aware of how people have left the practice of the faith because of what is spoken of as our lack of charity. We should all be hearing more stories of doors that were opened for those who are spiritually hungry and longing for the grace, which only the Church can offer. These sacraments are not ours to control. Rather, they are entrusted to the ordained in the Church so that all the faithful might be led deeper into the heart of God.

Sacraments are ecclesial. Whenever possible, sacraments should be celebrated with members of the parish family. It is here that those receiving the sacraments come to know in a deeper way the parish whose life they share. It is here that parishioners are invited to reflect on the way in which God is already active in their lives and how God invites them to share this ministry. Never underestimate the power or the witness of a community gathered in prayer around those in need.

While sacraments may be delayed for period of time, they may never be denied if there is not a canonical impediment. Delays must be understood reasonably and generally should not be any longer than three months from the date of request, unless the proper dispositions are lacking. This should give adequate time for priests, deacons and pastoral ministers to work with the family or a couple, building them up in faith and encouraging a return to the sacraments. Turning to the example of Good Shepherd, we should in our programs of preparation reach out to and seek out the lost, rejoicing in the one who has been saved.

The directives in this document, which is being provided to all clergy and lay ecclesial ministers, have been issued with my approval and are to be observed in the Diocese of London. If there are any questions as to how these norms are to be implemented, queries are to be directed to the Chancellor or to the Director of Liturgy. I ask that our Episcopal Vicars model these practices for those entrusted to their care.

Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.  
Bishop of London

## **PREAMBLE**

### **The Paschal Mystery**

At the heart of the Christian life is the Paschal Mystery, wherein the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord is professed and celebrated. This Mystery extends, as it were, in both directions, calling us to remember that the sanctification and reordering of creation began with the Incarnation of the Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary, with the merits of this mystery enfolding to this day, through the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

As the rising and the setting of the sun gives rhythm to our day<sup>1</sup>, so also does the Paschal Mystery shape our Christian identity and mission.

This reality is expressed most clearly whenever the community gathers to celebrate the Church's liturgies. It is important to remember that our worship of the Triune God is an obligation due God as the one who has created, redeemed and continues to sanctify us. It adds nothing to God's greatness but rather helps us to grow in grace. Indeed, the desire to offer praise and thanks to God is itself God's gift to us.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Liturgy and the Seven Sacraments**

The liturgy as the sacred action par excellence is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and it is likewise the font from which all her power flows.<sup>3</sup> Through the liturgy Christ continues the work of our redemption, with and through his Church.<sup>4</sup> The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments through the ministers of his Church.<sup>5</sup>

In the words of St. Leo the Great: "What was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries." (*Sermo*. 74, 2:PL 54,398).

The sacraments of the Church are baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, marriage, orders, and the anointing of the sick. The liturgy of the Church includes the sacraments and the liturgy of the hours.

Liturgical prayer is a celebration of the whole Church. It is Christ who is the primary actor, with his Body in heaven and on earth praising God in one outpouring of love and devotion. Though it is normally the ordained members of the Church who preside at the sacraments, by virtue of their baptism, all people share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry of Christ.

### **The Sacraments as Privilege, Right and Responsibility**

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<sup>1</sup> See Eucharistic Prayer III.

<sup>2</sup> See Preface for Ordinary Time II.

<sup>3</sup> See *Lumen Gentium*, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 11.

<sup>4</sup> See *Sacrosanctum Consilium*, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 2

<sup>5</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1114-1116.

The sacraments are a gift from the Church to those reborn through baptism, and they are also a gift to sustain her children. While no one is deserving of baptism, the baptized have a right to celebrate the other sacraments;<sup>6</sup> indeed the right of the baptized to receive the sacraments is so fundamental that it is enumerated specifically in the canonical rights and duties pertaining to all the faithful.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the faithful also have the right to be adequately prepared for the sacraments.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with the Church's jurisprudence, rights are to be interpreted broadly and their restriction is to be interpreted strictly. *Therefore, priests and those engaged in pastoral ministry are to ask nothing more than what is required by law of those requesting the sacraments.*

### **Sacramental Preparation and Evangelization**

The sacraments build up and strengthen the members of Christ's Body.<sup>9</sup> The preparation for the sacraments serve the task of evangelization. It is beneficial not only to those being prepared but to the community engaged in the preparation. In the *Rite of Baptism of Children*, the post-baptismal anointing reminds us that as the baptized, we become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly functions. In this we find our common privilege and obligation to ready the hearts of those preparing for sacramental reception.

The sacraments not only presuppose faith but through words and ritual elements, faith is nourished, strengthened and expressed. By celebrating the sacraments, the Church professes the faith that comes from the apostles. This explains the origin of the ancient saying: "lex orandi, lex credendi," that is, the Church believes as she prays.<sup>10</sup> If in our celebration, the sacraments articulate our theology, by extension, so too should our preparation for the sacraments. Both our preparation and our celebration proclaim that in Christ Jesus, justice and mercy have met and been made complete.

The sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato* ("by the very fact that the sacramental action is performed") because it is Christ who acts in the sacraments and communicates the grace they signify. The efficacy of the sacraments does not depend upon the personal holiness of the minister. However, the fruits of the sacraments do depend on the dispositions of the one who receives them.<sup>11</sup> It is for this reason that the Church is obligated to engage in the pastoral formation of those preparing for the sacraments so that the rich life which God wished to share in the sacraments is received readily to the fullest extent possible.

### **Faith and the Reception of the Sacraments**

One can safely presume, that when the Church is approached to minister and provide one of the sacraments, it is the Holy Spirit who has impelled that person forward in grace.

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<sup>6</sup> See canon 843, §1.

<sup>7</sup> See canon 213.

<sup>8</sup> See canon 842, §2.

<sup>9</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1117-1119.

<sup>10</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1122-1126, 1113.

<sup>11</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1127-1131.

Good will is presumed and that some degree of faith is present in those who present themselves for the sacraments.

It is important that parish leaders have a clear idea of what constitutes this expected faith. While many theologians have attempted to define the virtue of faith over the centuries, two of our recent popes have made admirable contributions towards articulating the nature and essence of the gift of faith, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

In his 1986 Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem, Lord and Giver of Life*, Pope John Paul II wrote: “(F)aith, in its deepest sense is the openness of the human heart to the gift; to God’s self-communication in the Holy Spirit.” More recently, in his Wednesday General Audience of October 24, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI said: “Faith is not a mere intellectual assent to the special truths of God; it is an act by which I entrust myself freely to a God who is our Father and loves me.” In light of these two statements, what then, is the priest or ecclesial minister looking for in a candidate for the sacraments?

It is clear that the two above descriptions of faith are referring to inner movements of the heart, an ‘openness’ to God’s self-gift, and an ‘entrusting of oneself to’ God the Father. Neither of these responses demand that a person be able to articulate their faith clearly in words. It is fully conceivable that a person who is not able to express their faith in clear concepts, still might possess a deep faith. Given the nature of faith, the priest or ecclesial minister necessarily lacks the tools to make an accurate judgment about the degree or depth of faith of a particular individual. A reliable pastoral criterion for admittance to the sacraments, therefore, is that, unless the person clearly states that they have no faith, the parish leader is to presume that the very act of requesting the sacraments is an indicator on some level of faith, even if it may be a weak faith.

“The concern to encourage in every way the administration of baptism and the other sacraments involves the whole Church. If the Church follows its Lord, it comes out of itself, with courage and compassion: it doesn’t remain locked in its own self. The Lord works a change in those who are faithful to Him, makes them look up away from themselves. That is the mission, that is the witness.”

Pope Francis

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES<sup>12</sup>

1. Sacraments are, first and foremost, actions of Christ and his Church.<sup>13</sup> The Church is, therefore, responsible for determining the specifics of sacramental preparation and celebration.
2. Those engaged in pastoral ministry *may not deny the sacraments* to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.<sup>14</sup>
3. Sacramental preparation in the Diocese of London is rooted in the following four principles:
  - a) All sacraments are ecclesial celebrations;
  - b) In regard to the sacraments of initiation, parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of the faith;<sup>15</sup>
  - c) Catholic schools are an integral part of the ongoing religious education of children and provide valuable assistance in the foundational preparation for the sacraments following baptism; and<sup>16</sup>
  - d) Preparation for the sacraments of healing and mission acknowledges and flows from the grace of dignity conferred in the sacrament of baptism.<sup>17</sup>
4. Foundational and ongoing preparation for the sacraments should include the following:
  - a) Regular participation in the Sunday Eucharist;
  - b) Prayer in the family or in one's individual life; and
  - c) Daily living in a Catholic manner of life appropriate to one's age and spiritual development.
5. Immediate preparation for sacraments includes specific sacramental catechesis prior to the sacrament being celebrated. This is the responsibility of the *proper parish*, that is, the geographical parish where the child, its family or the adult actually resides, or the *legitimate parish*, the non-geographical parish in which the child, its family or the adult is registered. Registration in one's proper parish is not a requirement for seeking to celebrate a sacrament in that parish.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The norms in this section are based upon the sacramental guidelines created by the Diocese of Hamilton (Ontario) and published in *Sacramental Guidelines, The Initiation of Children*.

<sup>13</sup> See canon 840.

<sup>14</sup> See canon 843, §1.

<sup>15</sup> See canons 226, §1, 793, §1 and 1136.

<sup>16</sup> See canon 796, §1.

<sup>17</sup> See canon 849.

<sup>18</sup> See canon 843, §2.

6. It does not belong to the parish secretary or administrative assistant to determine who is eligible or suitable to receive the sacraments in a particular parish. Rather it belongs to him or her simply to receive the request and to forward it on to the pastor or a member of the pastoral team.
7. Registration for sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the parish where the sacrament is to be celebrated. This includes the collection of any necessary canonical documentation. For the celebration of first communion, confirmation and marriage this includes a certificate of baptism in the Catholic Church, where such can be readily obtained; if a certificate of baptism cannot be gotten, an affidavit attesting to Catholic baptism will suffice. Documentation attesting to the suitability of sponsors is not required and is not to be sought.<sup>19</sup>
8. Should a child or an adult not be fully disposed or completely prepared to celebrate the sacrament requested, celebration of the sacrament may be *deferred* until such time they are disposed. The further preparation needed is the responsibility of the parish that was approached. *Sacraments are never to be denied* except in cases where the Catholic faith regarding the particular sacrament is explicitly denied or rejected.
9. Admission to the sacraments is based on the desire of the child, its family and/or of the individual to celebrate the sacrament and their presumed good will in participating in the preparation program to the best of their ability.
10. The form of immediate sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the parish where the sacrament will be celebrated. For first communion, first penance and confirmation, this preparation will generally involve the child's Catholic school community. Meetings between the pastor, the pastoral team and members of the staff of the Catholic school to coordinate the preparation of children are beneficial and contribute to the promotion of a positive experience for all involved. For marriage, preparation should be in the context of the parish, involving married couples in the community and, when appropriate, others in the region who could contribute to the practical formation of the couple to be married.
11. Immediate sacramental preparation is to be appropriate to the age, spiritual development and condition of the child or adult and needs to take into account the individual's abilities and circumstances. The preparation program for any of the sacraments ought not to be burdensome in terms of time or demand.
12. The spiritual welfare of children, their families or of individuals and their particular circumstances will frequently require adjustments in the requirements for preparation which are established by the parish. Not every sacramental preparation program will meet the needs of every child, its family or an individual. Failure to complete the preparation program in its entirety is never to be an obstacle to the celebration of the particular sacrament.

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<sup>19</sup> See Diocese of London, *Directive on the Requirements Sought from Sponsors for Baptism and Confirmation*, March 19, 2007.

13. The liturgical celebration of the sacraments is the responsibility of the pastor and those who collaborate with him in the preparation for the specific sacrament. This may include the involvement of the lay ecclesial minister(s), the parish Liturgy Committee, parents and representatives of the Catholic school community or the couple to be married. The liturgical celebration takes place in accordance with the approved ritual books for the Catholic Church in Canada.<sup>20</sup>
14. Fees for sacramental preparation should be kept to a minimum and should only be required to purchase materials and resources not otherwise available in the parish. Pastors are to ensure that no one is prevented from participation in sacramental preparation due to financial hardship.
15. In the administration of the sacraments, the minister may not ask for anything beyond the offerings which have been determined by the competent authority.<sup>21</sup> In the Diocese of London there are no fees for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation. In the case of marriage, the stipend to be paid to the parish is determined from time to time by diocesan policy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See canon 846, §1.

<sup>21</sup> See canon 848.

<sup>22</sup> See Diocese of London, *Diocesan Policy Regarding the Offerings to be Made on the Celebration of the Sacraments, Funerals or the Imparting of Blessings*, February 15, 2011.

## THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN

1. For an infant or child who has not reached catechetical age to be baptized lawfully, it is required that:
  - a) the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent; and
  - b) there *be a well-founded hope*<sup>23</sup> that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Church. If such a hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provision of particular law, to be deferred, and the parents advised of the reason for this.<sup>24</sup>
2. Arrangements for a particular baptism are always made by the parents or legal guardians in a personal meeting with the pastor, or a member of the pastoral team, or a member of the sacramental preparation team. Preparation for infant baptism is to be understood in the context of a relationship, as an encounter between the parents, the family and the parish. Arrangements are never to be made by e-mail, over the telephone, or by simply completing a form.
3. It belongs to each parish to determine the suitable sacramental preparation required prior to the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. Whatever process of sacramental preparation is determined; such programs should not be excessive or overly demanding, providing simply for the need for sacramental catechesis for those presenting the child for baptism. Allowance should be made in terms of participation in sacramental preparation for parents presenting a second or third child for baptism.
4. If they are not already doing so, parents or legal guardians are to be invited and urged to return to a regular participation in the Sunday Eucharist<sup>25</sup> and to attend whatever sacramental preparation the parish may have determined. Depending on their availability, godparents may be invited to join the parents or legal guardians in the preparation program.
5. Under no circumstances is the marital status of the parents to preclude the baptism of their child, provided that they are receptive to the invitation to attend the preparation program and have a firm intention to raise their child in the Catholic Church to the best of their ability. When parents are not married, or are in an irregular marital situation, or not practicing their faith, it is advisable to encourage them to take the first steps in re-establishing a relationship with their parish community.
6. Godparents for infant baptism must be:

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>24</sup> See canon 868, §1, 1°-2°.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix II.

- a) appointed by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the pastor or the minister of the sacrament; to be appointed the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it;
- b) not be less than sixteen years of age, unless the pastor or the minister of the sacrament considers that there is a just reason for an exception to be made;
- c) be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken;
- d) not labour under a canonical penalty; and
- e) not be either the father or the mother of the child to be baptized.<sup>26</sup>

Based on these criteria, parents select the godparents for their child. A baptized person who belongs to another Christian denomination may be admitted, together with a Catholic godparent, as a Christian Witness.<sup>27</sup> The appropriate notation of this fact should be made in the register of baptism.

- 7. Baptism is normally celebrated on Sunday.<sup>28</sup> It is strongly recommended that it be celebrated during Mass; however, for pastoral reasons, it may be celebrated at another suitable time.<sup>29</sup> As Lent is a season of penance and purification, the celebration of infant baptism is actively discouraged during this time; however, once again, particular circumstances may require or recommend that it take place during this season.<sup>30</sup>
- 8. For pastoral reasons, a child from outside the parish may be baptized by the pastor if the proper or legitimate pastor of the child has given his consent in writing. Such written consent presumes that suitable sacramental preparation has been provided.
- 9. Celebrants of baptism from outside the Diocese of London must comply with the screening protocols established for all priests and deacons seeking to minister in the diocese on occasional basis.

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<sup>26</sup> See canon 874, §1, 1°-5°.

<sup>27</sup> See canon 874, §2. While the *Code of Canon Law* does not mention a separated Eastern Christian (i.e., Orthodox Christian) serving as a sponsor and not merely as a Christian witness, the 1967 *Ecumenical Directory*, whose provisions are still in force, allows a separated Eastern Christian to undertake the role of sponsor (see no. 48.)

<sup>28</sup> See *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 9; also canon 856.

<sup>29</sup> See *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Baptism should be provided immediately if the infant is in danger of death. Additionally, it is the practice of those who

adhere to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite to seek baptism after the child is born regardless of the liturgical season; see also canon 867, §1.

## THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM OF CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

1. According to the general law of the Church, a child who has reached the age of reason and is of catechetical age,<sup>31</sup> and whose parents or legal guardians desire he/she be baptized is to be prepared through their participation in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.<sup>32</sup> In keeping with this rite, they are to be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and first communion, which are conferred at one and the same celebration.<sup>33</sup> *Under no circumstances may the sacraments of initiation be divided or separated when celebrated with a child of catechetical age.*
2. A child of catechetical age may request baptism of its own initiative; however, the pastor must always seek the consent of the parents or legal guardians before acceding to this request. Consideration needs to be given as to how the child may be supported in living out the Catholic faith by the parish, family, Catholic school, godparents and other mentors.<sup>34</sup>
3. A suitable preparation program in the parish would ideally involve the child's parents or legal guardians. Where applicable, members of the child's Catholic school community may also provide support. Pastors and parish pastoral teams will recognize that children in the Catholic school system will have the benefit of ongoing foundational catechesis that will be helpful in their immediate preparation.
4. The full initiation of a child of catechetical age is to be recorded in the parish's register of baptism.

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<sup>31</sup> "Catechetical age" is presumed to be seven (7) years of age. As canon 97, §2 states: "A minor who has not completed the seventh year of age is called an infant and is considered incapable of personal responsibility; on completion of the seventh year, however, the minor is presumed to have the use of reason."

<sup>32</sup> See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 242; also canon 852, §1.

<sup>33</sup> See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 281; also canon 842, §1.

<sup>34</sup> See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 244; §2.

## **THE RECEPTION OF CHILDREN INTO FULL COMMUNION WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

1. Children who have been validly baptized in another Church or Christian ecclesial community, who desire to receive either first communion or confirmation, must first be received into full communion with the Catholic Church. Before acceding to such a request, the pastor must always seek the consent of the child's parents or legal guardians. Consideration needs to be given as to how the child may be supported in living out the Catholic faith by the parish, family, Catholic school, godparents and other mentors.
2. A document attesting to a valid baptism in another Church or Christian ecclesial community must be presented on behalf of a child seeking to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church.
3. Children of catechetical age who wish to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church are to participate in a program similar to that provided by the parish for children of catechetical age preparing for full initiation. Following such catechetical formation, the child makes a Profession of Faith and then celebrates confirmation and first communion at one and the same celebration.
4. Children from the separated Eastern Churches (i.e., Orthodox Churches) are fully initiated at the time of baptism; that is, they receive baptism, chrismation and Eucharist in one ceremony. Since these sacraments are valid, they are not repeated when a child from such a Church comes into full communion with the Catholic Church. Therefore in these instances no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith.<sup>35</sup>
5. A suitable preparation program in the parish may involve the child's parents or legal guardians. Where applicable, members of the child's Catholic school community may also provide support. Parishes will recognize that children in the Catholic school system will have the benefit of ongoing foundational catechesis that will be helpful in their immediate preparation.
6. The reception of children into full communion with the Catholic Church is to be recorded in the parish's register of baptism.

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<sup>35</sup> See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 388.

## CONFIRMATION

1. Confirmation is ordinarily celebrated with children who are in Grade 7 or 8, who have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.<sup>36</sup>
2. The purpose of the immediate sacramental preparation program is to dispose the candidate to receive the grace of the sacrament and to participate fully in the liturgy of confirmation. It is not intended to prepare candidates for a test of their religious knowledge.<sup>37</sup>
3. Confirmation is always celebrated during Mass.<sup>38</sup>
4. Children who have been baptized in another Christian denomination are not candidates for the sacrament of confirmation. If they wish to enter into a full communion with the Catholic Church, then after consultation with their parents or legal guardians and their consent having been obtained, they are to be given appropriate catechetical preparation; once they are prepared, they are to make a Profession of Faith, receive confirmation and their first communion in one celebration. This may take place during the parish confirmation liturgy or at another suitable time.
5. Children who are members of one of the Eastern-rite Catholic Churches, having received all the sacraments of initiation at the time of baptism, are not to be “re-confirmed” nor is confirmation to be simulated. Rather they are to be invited to participate in the liturgy of confirmation by taking an appropriate ministerial role in the celebration.
6. Candidates are confirmed utilizing their baptismal name so as to demonstrate the essential unity between the sacraments of initiation.<sup>39</sup>
7. The celebration of confirmation is to be recorded in the parish’s register of confirmation and notification is to be sent to the parish of the child’s baptism where due notation is to be made in the register of baptism.

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<sup>36</sup> While confirmation may be celebrated anytime after the age of reason and in danger of death, following baptism, confirmation in the Diocese of London is normally celebrated in grade 7 or 8; see also canon 889, §1-2.

<sup>37</sup> “Preparation for confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church, as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1309)

<sup>38</sup> See *Rite of Confirmation*, no. 13; also canon 881.

<sup>39</sup> See Diocese of London, *Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration of Confirmation*, November 1, 1996, no. 5 c).

## FIRST COMMUNION

1. First communion is normally celebrated with children who have reached the age of reason, and have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.<sup>40</sup> A child younger than seven years of age may be presented for first communion if the parents or legal guardians believe he/she is ready and capable of receiving the sacrament.
2. The decision concerning the individual child's readiness to receive first communion rests with the child's parents or legal guardians in consultation with the pastor.<sup>41</sup> This is particularly the case for parents or legal guardians of children with special needs. In the case of children who are developmentally challenged, the requirement for their reception should be no more onerous than that required of other children, namely, the ability to differentiate between ordinary bread and eucharistic bread.<sup>42</sup>
3. It is preferable to celebrate first communion at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass during the Easter season. However, if there are large numbers that cannot be accommodated in the parish church at one time, the celebration of first communion may take place over the course of several Sundays during the Easter season.
4. The discipline of the Church regarding the reception of Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue applies to the celebration of first communion.<sup>43</sup> Children may not be

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<sup>40</sup> See canon 914.

<sup>41</sup> See canon 914.

<sup>42</sup> According to the article on "Communion of Children" in the 1913 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "In the best-supported view of theologians, this phrase means, not the attainment of a definite number of years, but rather the arrival at a certain stage in mental development when children become able to discern the Eucharist from ordinary bread, to realize in some measure the dignity and excellence of the Sacrament of the Altar, to believe in the Real Presence and adore Christ under the sacramental veil." *The Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1995 state: "The criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for person 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 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." See also canon 913.

<sup>43</sup> "The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and approaches the communicants, who usually come up in procession. It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them on from one to another among themselves. In the Dioceses of Canada, Holy Communion is to be received standing, though individual members of the faithful may choose to receive Communion while kneeling. When standing before the minister to receive Holy Communion, the faithful should make a simple bow of the head. When receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, they reverently join their hands; when receiving Holy Communion in the hand, they reverently open their hands placing one beneath the other, and they consume the host immediately upon receiving it." (*General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 160.)

prevented from receiving communion in the hand or on the tongue. Preference is not to be given to either manner and preparation for first communion ought to provide for both.

5. The liturgical celebration of first communion is the responsibility of the pastor and those who collaborate with him in the preparation, and takes place according to the norms found in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.
6. In the Diocese of London it is not required that the reception of first communion be recorded in a separate register designated for that purpose.

## FIRST PENANCE<sup>44</sup>

1. The immediate catechetical preparation for first penance is the responsibility of the parish where the sacrament is celebrated. The involvement of the parents or legal guardians and the child's Catholic school community is highly desirable.
2. In accordance with the general law of the Church<sup>45</sup> and stated diocesan policy,<sup>46</sup> all children who are to receive first communion are to be prepared and to have the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of penance prior to their first communion.
3. The sacrament of penance always takes place in the parish church.<sup>47</sup> The *Rite of Penance* provides a variety of options for the liturgical celebration of the sacrament.<sup>48</sup> Wherever possible, provision ought to be made allowing for parents and family members to celebrate the sacrament at the same time as the child.
4. In keeping with the norm of canon law allowing every individual a choice of confessor, it is *strongly recommended* that several priests should be made available at the celebration of first penance for the hearing of confessions.<sup>49</sup>
5. It is not permissible to take attendance or to record in any form those who celebrate the sacrament of penance.

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<sup>44</sup> This sacrament is also known as the sacrament of reconciliation and the sacrament of confession. The designation "sacrament of penance" is used in this document as it is the name used in the specific ritual for this sacrament, as well as in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Code of Canon Law*.

<sup>45</sup> See canon 914.

<sup>46</sup> See Diocese of London, *Decree on the Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by Children*, April 4, 2002; also *Directive Urging the Reception of First Confession Before First Eucharist*, March 22, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> See canon 946, §1.

<sup>48</sup> The *Rite of Penance* provides for three forms for the celebration of the sacrament. It is strongly recommended that communal celebrations during the seasons of Advent and Lent, which welcome groups of children and their families, be celebrated, following the proclamation of the Word of God, intercessory prayer and appropriate hymnody. The readings from Scripture, the hymnody and prayers ought to be adapted as needed, keeping in mind the age and ability of those gathered.

<sup>49</sup> See canon 991.

## MARRIAGE

1. Since marriage is a natural right, all Catholics who are eligible are free to approach their parish to celebrate marriage in accordance with the norms of the Church. Arbitrary categories of persons are not to be established by a parish restricting who may request marriage. No more may be asked of persons requesting marriage than is required by the law of the Church.
2. A request for marriage should be made at least six months<sup>50</sup> in advance of the date of the proposed wedding.
3. As with all sacraments, preparation for marriage is a value and to be strongly recommended.<sup>51</sup> However, this recommendation needs to be accommodated to the circumstances of the particular couple; it may not be possible for them to participate in the marriage preparation program provided or suggested by the parish. In such cases adjustments ought to be made.
4. The canonical investigation into the freedom of the parties and the testimonial of their intentions needs to be completed for every marriage celebrated in the parish.<sup>52</sup> This requirement should be completed as soon as possible or at the very least within the first month after the wedding has been accepted by the pastor, assisting priest or deacon in order to assure that there is no canonical impediment preventing the celebration of the marriage.
5. No marriage may be celebrated by a priest or deacon which cannot be recognized by Catholic law.
6. In the ordinary case, the marriage of Catholics or of a Catholic with a non-Catholic is to take place in the parish church.<sup>53</sup> In certain circumstances, this requirement may be dispensed, in accordance with the norms of canon law.<sup>54</sup>
7. The marriage of two Catholics normally takes place during Mass<sup>55</sup> regardless of the frequency of their participation in the Sunday Eucharist.

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<sup>50</sup> The period of six months is a long-standing norm in the Diocese of London, as noted in *the Pastoral Notes for Prenuptial Investigation and Inquiry (Form I)* (page 1). It is considered the minimum amount of time needed to complete the required canonical preparation.

<sup>51</sup> See canon 1063, 2°.

<sup>52</sup> See canon 1066.

<sup>53</sup> See canon 1118, §1; also Diocese of London, *Directive on Weddings Outside of Parish Churches*, March 1, 2004.

<sup>54</sup> See canon law 1118, §2-3.

<sup>55</sup> See *Rite of Marriage*, no. 6.

8. Weddings on Sunday are discouraged. If they are celebrated on Sunday, the appropriate liturgical norms are to be observed.<sup>56</sup>
9. Wedding planners engaged by the couple to be married have no role in either the canonical preparation for or the liturgical celebration of the marriage.
10. The ordering of the liturgical celebration of marriage is the responsibility of the pastor, the assisting priest or deacon, and takes place according to the norms prescribed in the *Rite of Marriage*. The planning of the wedding ceremony is to take place in consultation with the couple.
11. Since it constitutes the form of the sacrament, the couple is not free to draft the vows used in the exchange of consent. Only the vows given in the *Rite of Marriage* may be used.<sup>57</sup>
12. Celebrants of weddings from outside the Diocese of London must comply with the screening protocols established for all priests and deacons seeking to minister in the diocese on an occasional basis.
13. The celebration of marriage is to be recorded in the parish's register of marriage and notification is to be sent to the parishes of baptism of the two parties, where due notation is to be made in the register of baptism. Similarly, the marriage is to be recorded in the parish copy of the civil register and the appropriate civil marriage are to be sent to the Office of the Registrar General of Ontario.

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<sup>56</sup> Sunday is the Lord's Day. As such, the primary focus of the day is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. In Canada, weddings on Sunday are strongly discouraged in order to avoid a conflict between the needs of community worship and the interests of particular families (*Rite of Marriage*, no. 23).

<sup>57</sup> "In response to repeated requests for clarification, it must be stated that only those formulas for the declaration of consent approved for use by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, confirmed by the Apostolic See, and included in the approved ritual, may be used in the Rite of Marriage. A couple is not free to compose their own declaration of consent. While a couple may well find language of their own to express very profoundly the consent and covenant which they undertake, this is a central, ritual and ecclesial act, and they have a responsibility to the community of believers assembled, that is, the Church before which they manifest their consent to use language clearly and certainly conformable to the Church's faith and understanding of the sacrament." (BCL Newsletter, August – September 1981, page 36.)

“The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is a house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 47

## APPENDIX I

### THE MEANING OF “A WELL-FOUNDED HOPE”<sup>31</sup>

In reference to the baptism of infants, canon 868, §1, 2° directs that “for an infant to be baptized lawfully it is required [ ... ] that there be a *well-founded hope* that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion [ ... ].” The canon goes on to state that if such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is to be *deferred* and the parents advised of the reason for this action.

What actually constitutes a “well-founded hope” has been the cause of much debate. It has led to problems and misunderstandings concerning the delaying and refusing of infant baptism. It is important, therefore, that those in pastoral ministry, particularly pastors, have a correct understanding of this elemental criteria or condition for the lawful administration of infant baptism.

Is this “well-founded hope” absolute certainty in which all possible doubt as to the truth of the fact and the unreality of the contrary is entirely excluded? Or is it moral certitude, which bases its conclusion concerning the matter at hand only on the verifiable facts that are immediately available? In effect it is neither. To suggest that a “well-founded hope” means absolute certainty is too demanding an interpretation, going beyond the intention of the law as expressed in the wording of the canon; and even moral certitude is far more demanding than the minimum requirement of a “well-founded hope”, a hope with a sound basis in reality.

The most exact interpretation of this phrase is given in the 1980 Instruction on Infant Baptism, *Pastoralis Actio*, wherein it is stated that it is “*any assurance* giving a founded hope that the children will be brought up in the Christian religion *is considered sufficient*” (no. 31; italics added). The offering of such assurances is, according to the Instruction, one of the two principles governing pastoral action regarding infant baptism.

Assurances must be given that this gift will be able to grow through a genuine education in faith and in Christian living, that the sacrament may attain its full “truth”. As a rule, these assurances are given within the Christian community. If, on the other hand, these assurances are not in reality serious, that fact can be reason for postponing the sacrament (no. 28).

Since the gift of the blessings of baptism for infants must not be put off, it is essential that those responsible for meeting and preparing parents for the baptism of their child be aware of what particular circumstances would positively exclude the assurance of a “well-founded hope”. Not all or even most of the situations and circumstances encountered in those parents presenting a child for baptism would necessarily negate the requirement of a “well-founded hope” needed for

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<sup>31</sup> Materials in this section were drawn from the following sources: **ASSEMBLY OF QUEBEC CATHOLIC BISHOPS**, *Canonical and Pastoral Guide for Parishes*; Brendan **DALY**, “Canonical Requirements of Parents in Cases of Infant Baptism According to 1983 Code”; and John **HUELS**, *The Pastoral Companion*, Fourth Updated Edition.

infant baptism. Realities such as the fact that the parents are non-practicing believers does not as a general rule constitute a reason for refusing baptism. Nor does the fact that parents are in an irregular marriage situation authorize an automatic refusal of baptism. And even less does the fact that parents are not “registered” in the parish create a ground for denying the baptism of their child. Baptism may be delayed only when there is no “well-founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith. For example, both parents are non-Catholics and they want the child baptized merely for later enrollment in the Catholic school where the education is thought to be superior. Or again where the parents are non-practicing Catholics and will not in any way guarantee that they will raise the child in the Catholic faith but intend to let the child make up his or her own mind later, and they are seeking to have the child baptized now merely to please their own parents; in such a case, baptism should be delayed until at least one parent will agree to the child’s Catholic upbringing, or at least until the parents agree to allow someone else to assume this responsibility.

It may happen that godparents, or a grandparent, or another person will see to the child’s Catholic upbringing, and the parents do not object. In such a case there is a “well-founded hope”, a hope based on a reasonable assurance that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith.

Because of the necessity of baptism for salvation,<sup>58</sup> the Church’s legislation favours baptizing an infant rather than refusing the sacrament; for this reason, in cases of doubt as to the sufficiency of the required “well-founded hope”, infants should always be baptized. Consequently, the consistent deferral of baptism by those engaged in pastoral ministry should not be the norm, and where it is done, pastoral support and formation should be offered to the parents in order that, in time, they will be able to supply the assurance called for in the law and proceed to the celebration of their child’s baptism. The outright denial of baptism to an infant must be understood as an *exception* and prescribed only for the gravest of reasons.

In order to provide a useable and practical resource for those engaged in pastoral ministry, the following notes on particular cases in reference to infant baptism and the necessity of a “well-founded hope” are offered as a guideline.

- **If the parents are non-believers**, the pastor is to persuade them not to have their child baptized by pointing out that their request is not logical and not consistent with their own consciences.
- **If the parents have but a minimal faith**, and there is hope that with dialogue, instruction and pastoral support one, if not both, of the parents’ faith will grow, the pastor should baptize the child. If this does not happen, or there is even no willingness to enter into any process of faith development, then the pastor will persuade them to delay their child’s baptism by appealing to their sincerity of motive and search for the truth. In all cases, the pastor should discuss the situation with others on the pastoral team, where this is applicable, or some other diocesan authority such as the Episcopal Vicar, the Chancellor or Vicar General.

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<sup>58</sup> See further *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 846 and canon 849.

- **If the parents are believers but non-practicing Catholics**, the pastor cannot deny the sacrament for the sole reason of their not attending Mass on Sunday. If the parents do not accept an individual or group preparation for baptism, the pastor should suggest that their child's baptism be postponed. However, he should not oppose their request unless he has serious doubts about the existence of their faith or about their child being raised in the practice of the Catholic faith.
- **If the parents are living in an irregular marriage situation** (common law, or civil marriage after divorce, or same sex couple, etc), the pastor cannot automatically refuse the child's baptism. If at least one parent is a believer, the request cannot be denied even though neither of them attends Sunday Mass or if both of them have seemingly become indifferent to the Christian faith. The pastor will seek guidance from others on the pastoral team, where this is applicable, or some outside diocesan authority, while paying particular attention to the parents' situation. Parents who are living in an irregular situation, such as common law, and are free to marry should be encouraged to regularize their situation if possible. However, this should not be a pre-condition for the baptism of the child.
- **If neither parent can vouch for their Christian faith**, it is then possible that the godparents or some other person connected to the parents can compensate for their lack of faith. If the parents accept to entrust their child's Christian education to the godparents or some other person and if this endeavor has a good chance to succeed, the pastor cannot deny baptism. The godparents or others who are accepting to supply for the faith of the parents and offer the "well-founded hope" of a Catholic upbringing for the child would then participate in the preparation for the sacrament.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **MASS ATTENDANCE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS**

It is quite common that those who present themselves for the reception of various sacraments, do not have the habit of the practice of regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist. How are parish ministers to respond to this challenge?

It can usually be presumed that those who present themselves for sacraments, are by that very fact manifesting at the least a minimum of faith, even if it is not yet a faith that expresses itself in regular Eucharistic participation. The role of parish ministers is to ensure that the faith present, even if minimal, is fostered and nourished, rather than squashed.

In this light, when a person who does not practice his or her faith regularly presents themselves for the reception of a sacrament, two extreme responses are to be avoided. The first extreme response would be to make no mention of the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist as an important part of Catholic life. This kind of pastoral encounter provides an opportunity for parish ministers to catechize on the meaning of the celebration of Eucharist, and why it is important for the life of every Catholic. As a result of the encouragement and catechesis, it is to be expected that there will be some who will be willing either to begin, or return to Eucharistic worship.

The other extreme would be to insist on regular Eucharistic participation as an absolute prerequisite for the reception of a sacrament. Every flicker of authentic faith, however small, is the expression of at least an implicit hunger for God, and therefore a hunger for an encounter with the Risen Christ in his eucharistic presence. Parish ministers can build on this faith, however minimal, with a warm, hospitable approach that is willing to challenge and invite, but also not to make absolute demands that people are not yet ready to embrace fully. Pastoral patience often bears more fruit in the long term than does demands for immediate adherence.

## APPENDIX III

### POPE BENEDICT XVI SPEAKS ABOUT SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

**Rev. Paolo Rizzi, parish priest and lecturer in theology at the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences:**

Holy Father, I am parish priest and lecturer in theology at the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences. We would like to hear your pastoral opinion about the situation concerning the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation. Always more often the children, boys and girls, who receive these sacraments prepare themselves with commitment to the catechetical meetings but do not take part in the Sunday Eucharist, and then one wonders: what is the point of all this? At times we might feel like saying: ‘Then just stay at home’. Instead, we continue as always to accept them, believing that in any case it is better not to extinguish the wick of the little flickering flame. We think, that is, that in any case, the gift of the Spirit can have an effect beyond what we can see, and that in an epoch of transition like this one it is more prudent not to make drastic decisions. More generally, 35 years ago I thought that we were beginning to be a little flock, a minority community, more or less everywhere in Europe; that we should therefore administer the sacraments only to those who are truly committed to Christian life. Then, partly because of the style of John Paul II’s pontificate, I thought things through again. If it is possible to make predictions for the future, what do you think? What pastoral approaches can you suggest to us? Thank you.

**Pope Benedict XVI:**

Well, I cannot give an infallible answer here; I can only seek to respond according to what I see. I must say that I took a similar route to yours. When I was younger, I was rather severe. I said: the sacraments are sacraments of faith, and where faith does not exist, where the practice of faith does not exist, the sacrament cannot be conferred either. And then I always used to talk to my parish priests when I was Archbishop of Munich: here too there were two factions, one severe and one broad-minded. Then I too, with time, came to realize that we must follow, rather, the example of the Lord, who was very open even with people on the margins of Israel of that time. He was Lord of mercy, too, open — according to many official authorities — with sinners, welcoming them or letting them invite him to their dinners, drawing them to him in his communion.

Therefore, I would say substantially that the sacraments are naturally sacraments of faith: when there is no element of faith, when First Communion is no more than a great lunch with beautiful clothes and beautiful gifts, it can no longer be a sacrament of faith. Yet, on the other hand, if we can still see a little flame of desire for communion in the faith, a desire even in these children who want to enter into communion with Jesus, it seems to me that it is right to be rather broad-minded. Naturally, of course, one purpose of our catechesis must be to make children understand that Communion, First Communion, is not a ‘fixed’ event, but requires a continuity

of friendship with Jesus, a journey with Jesus. I know that children often have the intention and desire to go to Sunday Mass, but their parents do not make this desire possible. If we see that children want it, that they have the desire to go, this seems to me almost a sacrament of desire, the ‘will’ to participate in Sunday Mass. In this sense, we naturally must do our best in the context of preparation for the sacraments to reach the parents as well, and thus to — let us say — awaken in them, too, a sensitivity to the process in which their child is involved. They should help their children to follow their own desire to enter into friendship with Jesus, which is a form of life, of the future. If parents want their children to be able to make their First Communion, this somewhat social desire must be extended into a religious one, to make a journey with Jesus possible.

I would say, therefore, that in the context of the catechesis of children, that work with parents is very important. And this is precisely one of the opportunities to meet with parents, making the life of faith also present to the adults, because, it seems to me, they themselves can relearn the faith from the children and understand that this great solemnity is only meaningful, true and authentic if it is celebrated in the context of a journey with Jesus, in the context of a life of faith. Thus, one should endeavor to convince parents, through their children, of the need for a preparatory journey that is expressed in participation in the mysteries and that begins to make these mysteries loved. I would say that this is definitely an inadequate answer, but the pedagogy of faith is always a journey, and we must accept today’s situations. Yet, we must also open them more to each person, so that the result is not only an external memory of things that endures but that their hearts that have truly been touched. The moment when we are convinced the heart is touched — it has felt a little of Jesus’ love, it has felt a little the desire to more along these lines and in this direction. That is the moment when, it seems to me, we can say that we have made a true catechesis. The proper meaning of catechesis, in fact, must be this: to bring the flame of Jesus’ love, even if it is a small one, to the hearts of children, and through the children to their parents, thus reopening the places of faith of our time.

August 19, 2008

## APPENDIX IV

### PASTORAL CARE OF COHABITING COUPLES PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

#### General Considerations

Many, if not even a majority of couples presenting themselves today for marriage in the Catholic Church, are cohabitating. Cohabitation, as defined in these guidelines, means living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Many priests and pastoral ministers identify this phenomenon as the most difficult issue they deal with in marriage preparation. While each couple's pastoral needs and circumstances will be unique, the following are some guidelines for offering a fruitful pastoral response to cohabiting couples who present themselves for marriage.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II urges pastors and pastoral ministers attending to cohabiting couples to consider the following: "The pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation".<sup>59</sup> The Holy Father carefully avoids extremes in dealing with couples in this situation. Two extremes which would not be pastorally helpful are the following: (1) immediately confronting the couple and condemning their behaviour, and (2) ignoring the cohabitation aspect of their relationship.

The first extreme, immediately confronting the couple and condemning their behaviour, carries with it the risk of turning young couples away from the Church. It is in the context of marriage preparation that the Church connects with more young adults than at any other time outside Sunday Mass. For some, marriage preparation will be their first step back into Church life. This unique opportunity can be seen by priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers as a 'teachable moment', a time where the ecclesial community should be cautious lest it alienate the couple from the Church community. This is a time to offer pastoral support of the couple's plans for the future rather than chastising them for the past.

The second extreme, the ignoring of the cohabitation of the couple, is adopted by some priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers due either to the awkwardness of dealing with the situation, or out of fear of alienating the couple from the Church. Since cohabitation violates the Church's teaching about sexual love and marriage, Church ministers must speak and teach about it. Given the abundant statistics which point to the dangers of cohabitation for the success of the future marriage, this challenge is an act of love for the couple who are being called to further growth.

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<sup>59</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio*, no. 81.

A middle way between the two extremes is ideal, one that integrates understanding and compassion with gentle correction. Couples need to be welcomed with the Gospel values of love and acceptance, as well as challenged by the Catholic vision of marriage, and helped to see why cohabitation is not a moral or acceptable way to prepare for the sacrament of marriage.

### **Specific Issues of Concern for Pastoral Teams**

#### **1. Can a couple be refused marriage due to cohabitation?**

Since cohabitation is not in itself a canonical impediment to marriage, the couple may not be refused marriage solely on the basis of cohabitation. Marriage preparation may continue even if the couple refuses to separate. Priests and lay ecclesial ministers can be assured that proceeding to assist cohabiting couples in marriage preparation is not understood as an approval of the cohabitation.

In certain circumstances a postponement of the wedding might be in order. In these cases additional time might be needed to address the issues raised by cohabitation. For example a concern for the impact of cohabitation on the couple's freedom to marry could be a reason to delay the marriage until this issue is sufficiently explored as part of marriage preparation. Cohabitation may prolong the marriage preparation process because of the need to evaluate the couple's attitudes and understanding of the Church's teachings on marriage and sexuality.

However, since couples have a natural and canonical right to marriage, any delay beyond the normal waiting period for all couples is a serious matter. Care must be taken to ensure that delay is not used as a punishment for a couple's continued cohabitation.

#### **2. Should the couple be asked to separate? If so, at what point in the process?**

Ideally, the priest or lay ecclesial minister would not address the question of separation immediately after meeting the couple. First, a relationship of hospitality and trust should be built, so that the couple is at ease. Only then the couple should be encouraged to reflect on their situation and why they decided to cohabit. In addition, they should be provided with insights into possible negative consequences of their cohabitation, factors that may present special challenges to them or put them at risk for later marital disruption. Positive reasons for separation should also be presented to them. Opportunities for sacramental reconciliation are also fittingly offered at this time. The best time for the posing of this challenge to separate is at the end of a process in which the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality is carefully explained. The decision has to ultimately be left to the couple.

If the couple chooses not to separate before marriage, they can be encouraged to live chastely before marriage. “They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship of fidelity and the hope of receiving one another from God”.<sup>60</sup>

A unique pastoral situation presents itself when the couple are living together, and have already brought forth children from the relationship prior to marriage. In this case, for the good of the children, it would not be advisable to recommend separation. However, the call to appropriate chastity before marriage applies here as well.

### **3. Should there be a small wedding in the case of couples who refuse to separate?**

By acting as if they are married when they are not, the couple living together risk scandalizing the believing community. To minimize the impact of the scandal, in cases where couples refuse to separate, a small wedding may be recommended, consisting of close family members and witnesses. The pastoral wisdom of such a choice will have to be determined on a case by case basis. The recommendation for a small wedding should never, however, be motivated by a desire to punish a couple for their refusal to separate.

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<sup>60</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2350.

## APPENDIX V

### LOCUS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS: PARISH OR SCHOOL COMMUNITY?

Because parish boundaries often do not correspond to Catholic school boundaries, particularly in urban areas, two or more parishes may be engaged with a school in the sacramental preparation of children for first communion, first penance and confirmation. Adding to the problem is the fact that, at times, children may be registered in a school that is not in any way connected to the parish where they reside or are registered.

These circumstances can often lead to confusion and contention as to where these sacraments ought to be celebrated: in the child's proper or legitimate parish or with the child's class in a parish where his or her family does not practice regularly. On the one hand, parents who see these sacraments as "school events" insist that their child not be "left out" or separated from the class. Parish personnel, on the other hand, find this practice divisive, counterproductive, removing some children from celebrating in their proper parish and eroding the parish's overall efforts in the preparation for the celebration of these sacraments. From the perspective of the parish's pastoral leadership, sacraments celebrated with the school class in another parish relegates the proper or legitimate parish to a secondary position in the faith life of the families concerned and elevates the Catholic school to the status of the primary faith community — a role that is not within its character or mandate.

The resolution of this vexing and often emotional pastoral problem is not to be had in determining whether the Catholic school or the parish has the stronger claim. Rather the question of where these sacraments should be celebrated is best addressed by determining who has the responsibility of preparing children for the sacraments? That being the case, the answer to this pivotal question is stated quite clearly in the *Rite of Baptism for Children*:

[The celebrant speaking to the parents of the child to be baptized]

You have asked to have your child baptized. *In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith.* It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 122; italics added.

And again later in this same rite:

Dear parents and godparents: You have come to present this child for baptism. [...] *On your part, you must make it your constant care to bring him (her) up in the practice of the faith.* See that the divine life which God gives him (her) is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in his (he) heart. [...] <sup>62</sup>

The rite underscores a fundamental principle of Catholic teaching in reference to the vocation of parents, namely, it is they who have the primary, God-given right to educate their children and thus the responsibility of preparing them for the sacraments.<sup>63</sup> The parish and the school serve the parents in exercising their fundamental right.<sup>64</sup> Since parents practice their faith in a parish and not in a Catholic school community, it is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the celebrations of faith in the life of their children should be in the same locus.

*The Code of Canon Law* does not prescribe directly in this regard. However, some conclusions may be drawn by inference.

In reference to each of the sacraments in question, the canons speak of the pastor of the parish assuring that the child is ready to celebrate the particular sacrament.<sup>65</sup> It can be presumed that this responsibility is seen as being exercised in regard to sacraments that are to be celebrated in the community of faith entrusted to his care and for which he has authority. Furthermore, the canons understand that all sacraments are normally celebrated in a person's proper or legitimate parish since the pastor is charged to provide the sacraments for all those in the parish and he is given authority to do so.<sup>66</sup> In the universal law, it is the exception that sacraments are not celebrated in a person's proper or legitimate parish.

On the basis of these principles and directives drawn from the Church's teaching and sacramental discipline, it can be stated that children should normally celebrate the sacraments of first communion, first penance and confirmation in their own parish. The pastor of the parish may allow an exemption from this pastoral norm but only when genuine need warrants it or suggests it benefit in the particular case.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 138; italics added.

<sup>63</sup> See *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education*, no. 3; also canons 226 §2, 793 §1 and 1136.

<sup>64</sup> See canons 793, §2, 794, §2, 796, §1 and 798.

<sup>65</sup> See canons 890 and 914.

<sup>66</sup> See canon 582, §2.

<sup>67</sup> See Deanery of London, *Guidelines for the Preparation and Celebration of First Communion, First Penance and Confirmation*, May 20, 1989.

## APPENDIX VI

### MATTER AND FORM

The celebration of each of the sacraments entails the use of both the specified matter and prescribed form.<sup>68</sup>

Sacramental matter consists of material elements or sensibly perceptible human actions that are necessary for the reception of a sacrament. They receive their significance from the accompanying ritual words. Valid matter must be used and is necessary for a valid sacrament. The form is the sacramental sign or the words that specify the function of the matter and confer on it the power of sanctifying.

Without the correct matter and the corresponding form, the sacrament is not affected. It is considered invalid.

#### **Baptism**

Baptism is conferred by the triple immersion of the person to be baptized in water, or at least the pouring of water over the head of the one receiving the sacrament, while reciting the Trinitarian formula: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup>

#### **Confirmation**

The sacrament of confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of hands, and through the words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” The laying on of hands with the accompanying prayer does not pertain to the valid giving of the sacrament. But it is still to be regarded as very important: it contributes to the complete perfection of the rite and to a more thorough understanding of the sacrament.<sup>70</sup>

The sacred oil used in the celebration of confirmation, chrism, must be consecrated by a bishop, even if a presbyter is celebrating the sacrament.<sup>71</sup>

#### **Eucharist**

Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine, to which a small amount of water is added, to celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>72</sup> The bread must be wheaten only, and recently made so that there is no danger of corruption<sup>73</sup> and, in accordance with the tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened.<sup>74</sup> The wine must be natural made from grapes of the vine

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<sup>68</sup> See canon 841.

<sup>69</sup> “Christian Initiation: General Introduction” in *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 22-23.

<sup>70</sup> Rite of Confirmation, no. 9.

<sup>71</sup> See canon 880, §2.

<sup>72</sup> See *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 319; also canon 924, §1.

<sup>73</sup> See canon 924, §2.

<sup>74</sup> See *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 320; also canon 926.

and not corrupt.<sup>75</sup> These elements are consecrated by a presbyter in the course of the celebration of Mass using the form as prescribed in the *Roman Missal*. It is absolutely wrong, even in extreme and urgent necessity, to consecrate one element without the other, or even to consecrate both outside the Eucharistic celebration.<sup>76</sup>

## **Penance**

Individual confession by a penitent to a canonically-authorized priest, involving the integral naming of all grave sins of which he or she is conscious, is the sole ordinary means whereby by a member of the faithful is sacramentally reconciled with God and the Church.<sup>77</sup> The required acts of the penitent are contrition, confession and the willingness to make satisfaction for the wrongs committed. These acts are the matter of the sacrament. The absolution by the priest, as prescribed in the *Rite of Penance*,<sup>78</sup> is the form.

## **Marriage**

The sacrament of marriage is had when a man and a woman give and receive consent according to the formula prescribed in the *Rite of Marriage*<sup>79</sup> before a bishop, the proper pastor or a duly-delegated priest or deacon, who asks for and receives this consent in the name of the Church. The Catholic minister receiving the consent of the couple is to be the one conducting the wedding in accordance with the ritual of the Latin rite; this elemental part of the rite of marriage is not to be given over to another assisting minister.

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<sup>75</sup> See *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 322; also canon 924, §3.

<sup>76</sup> See canon 927.

<sup>77</sup> See canon 960.

<sup>78</sup> See *Rite of Penance*, no. 46; canon 987 states: "In order that the faithful may receive the saving remedy of the sacrament of penance, they must be so disposed that, repudiating their sins they have committed and having the purpose of amending their lives, they turn back to God.

<sup>79</sup> See *Rite of Marriage*, no. 52.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS \*

Age of Reason:	The age identified with obtaining the ability to make judgments about right or wrong, presumed to be the age of seven.
Canon Law:	The official body of laws of the Roman Catholic Church. A systematic arrangement of the laws of the Church occurred during the pontificate of Pope Pius X, resulting in the <i>Code of Canon Law</i> . Pope John Paul II promulgated a new Code in 1983. In 1990 John Paul issued the <i>Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches</i> .
Canonical Penalty:	A punishment that is placed on a person in accordance with law, for some violation of Church law.
Catechumenate:	A spiritual and catechetical formation process in several stages that leads to initiation in the Church.
Censure:	The canonical penalty of excommunication, interdict or suspension.
Chancellor:	An official, who is appointed in the diocesan curia to see to it that the documents and records of the diocese are properly gathered, arranged and safeguarded. In many dioceses, the chancellor is given additional responsibilities, particularly in the administration of canon law.
Chrism:	A sacred oil, blessed by the bishop and used for anointing at baptism, confirmation, ordination, the blessing of an altar, the dedication of a church, the consecration of kings and queens, and the consecration of bells.
Christian Faithful :	Those incorporated in Christ through baptism, constituted as the people of God, sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal offices.
Dispensation:	The relaxation of an ecclesiastical law in a particular case by the competent authority.
Domicile:	The place where a person lives for an indefinite time. In law it is acquired by residence within the territory of a certain parish or at least of a diocese, which is joined either with the intention of remaining there permanently unless called away or when the person has actually lived there for five complete years.

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\* This glossary is taken largely from Kevin **McKENNA**, *A Concise Guide to Canon Law. A Practical Handbook for Pastoral Ministers*, Notre Dame, Indiana, Ave Maria Press, 2000, pages 112-125.

Ecclesiastical Laws:	As opposed to divine law from God, those laws that are the creation of the appropriate Church authority.
Episcopal Vicar:	A priest who possesses the same ordinary power that universal law gives the vicar general, either in a determined section of the diocese (i.e., deanery), over the faithful of a determined rite, over certain groups of persons, or on a certain subject matter.
Licit (Lawful):	A canonical description of an act that has followed the prescriptions of law.
Ordinary Power:	That power which is joined to a certain office by the law itself.
Parish:	A definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular Church (i.e., diocese) whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop.
Particular Law:	A law that is promulgated in a specific territory (i.e., diocese) by the appropriate authority.
Pastor:	A priest who serves as the proper pastor of a parish, exercising pastoral care under the authority of the diocesan bishop.
Quasi-Domicile:	Residency within the territory of a certain parish or at least of a diocese that is acquired by the intention of remaining there at least three months unless called away or by actual residency in the territory.
Rite:	The Latin word means religious custom, usage or ceremony. The origins of the various rites lie largely in the geographical, cultural and political diversity that accompanied the spread and development of the Church. In the Catholic Church there are nine rites: Latin (Roman), Byzantine, Armenian, Chaldean, Coptic, Ethiopian, Malabar, Maronite and Syrian. The sense the word “rite” is often considered synonymous with “liturgy”. But in Church law, baptism initiates not only into the Church but also into a specific rite.
Ritual:	A book of prayers and ceremonies used in the administration of the sacraments and other ceremonial functions.
Universal Law:	Those laws that are established for the entire universal Church, or for specific individuals within the entire Church. The bulk of the Church’s universal law is found in the <i>Code of Canon Law</i> and the <i>Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches</i> .

Valid: A canonical description that signifies that a particular act has its intended consequences due to the fulfillment of the requirements of law.

Vicar General: The priest who assists the diocesan bishop in the governance of the entire diocese and who is endowed with ordinary power.

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