



Guidelines for the Reception of First Eucharist

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread,
and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,
"Take and eat; this is my body." Matthew 25:26*

The reception of Holy Communion only happens in conjunction with the family. We, as Catholics, have two families that support us in preparation for the reception of Eucharist, our human family and the family of the church community. Both groups need to be involved in supporting preparation for the sacrament and the ongoing reception of the Holy Eucharist throughout our lives.

"Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues." (CCC 2223)

"Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents." (CCC 2226)

Preparation for First Eucharist is much more than a school subject. It is a way of living. It is life-long and a deepening of one's heart, mind and spirit into the working of grace and presence of Jesus. Parents/guardians must then be involved in the sacramental preparation of their children. Parents are the first educators and their role is vital. This commitment not only means a practice of the faith but an understanding of how to share this with their child.

Parents/ guardians and the parish catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when the child has attained the age of reason and is ready to prepare for reception of First Eucharist. The age of reason is seven years old or older.

Children for Full Initiation

Children who have reached the age of reason and need Baptism and Eucharist need to follow the norms established for the *Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age*. This means a reception of all three initiation sacraments – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

“This form of the rite of Christian initiation is intended for children not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. They seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation of conscience.” (RCIA #252)

“The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. The process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to be children’s growth in faith, and the catechetical instruction they receive. Accordingly, as with adults, their initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments (RCIA, #253)

Catechetical Responsibilities

In the Archdiocese of San Francisco a minimum of two consecutive years of catechetical formation is required. Time then is given to integration into the faith community of the parish and the understanding of a reception of the sacrament. The call of the Holy Spirit in the life of our candidates for First Eucharist is around readiness and not chronological age or school grade. The decision is a joint venture between parents and the child in dialogue with the catechist, the parish priest and the parish catechetical leadership. This process built on the catechumenal model, affirms that fact that the candidate celebrating the sacrament is involved communally and individually. Reception of the sacrament can happen at any time of the liturgical year except Lent.

It is the responsibility of the Archdiocese of San Francisco to see that in each parish program will help parents/guardians in their own understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist. In this way they can participate readily in the catechesis of their children. This preparation is given through parent/guardian meetings, readings, online materials, retreat experiences and family catechesis. Two or more sessions, in addition to the mandated family session, for the parents are required.

Preparation requires that parishes use the approved textbooks of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The following areas are of special importance to build into the curriculum. (From the *National Directory for Catechesis* # 36:3a) These topic areas can be an excellent resource for the parent meetings and educational materials.

- *Teaches that the Eucharist the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine of communion, is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.*
- *Teaches not only "the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how from First Communion on ...they can as full members of Christ's body take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters. (Directory of Masses with Children, n. 12)*
- *Ensures that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion.*
- *Develops in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
- *Teaches that "the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ" and that "what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living Body". (NCD #122)*
- *Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.*
- *Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine.*
- *Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass. This means that the young person and family attend regularly throughout the 2 year period. This allows the family to gradually help the candidate learn to join with the assembly in prayer.*
- *Helps children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner.*

The privilege in bringing the whole family to Church every Sunday, in addition to being an occasion to be renewed by the Gospel and the reception of Jesus, communicates to children that life is more than work or sports, important as both activities are. The liturgy communicates the message that we are worth more than what we do. Jesus desires to come to us and give us something we can get nowhere else: grace for our life in faith and eternal life. Thus parents should be encouraged to take their children to Mass as part of their preparation.

The responsibility of parents/guardians to take their child to mass is also part of the Baptismal Commitment. The great importance of attendance at Mass, beyond the obligations of the Church is the desire for Worship of God and living in community fostering among those who belong to Christ.

Those in difficult family situations need to be accounted for, accompanied and pastorally taken care of in all regards, but especially in attendance at Eucharist. The role of

godparents, other family members and parish sponsors can help fulfill this requirement if individual parents are unable to do so.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

Parishes in the archdiocese need to see that candidates for First Eucharist be prepared with an understanding that they will eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ (the Real Presence of Jesus) under the forms of bread and wine. Pastors are encouraged to take seriously the directives of the United State Conference of Bishops and offer the cup regularly on Sundays. Thus, all reception of communion under both species will be offered at First Eucharist. Parents/guardians must decide with the child if they want to receive the precious blood. At this time, if the child is not going to receive from the cup the child should simply bow to the real presence in the cup and return to their seat.

Persons with Disabilities

Person with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacramental life of the Church as full functioning members. All forms of the liturgy should be completely accessible to person with disabilities, since these forms are essentially ties that binds the Christian community together. (NCD 3b-3) Pastors and lay leaders have a responsibility to make sure that the Church is always open for persons with disabilities.

Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Person with Disabilities provides general catechetical guidelines for the celebration of the sacraments, including Eucharist. Inclusion within the larger community is always preferred. The Church “must recognize and appreciate the contributions that person with disabilities can make to the Church’s spiritual life and encourage them to do the Lord’s work in the world according to their God-given talents and capacity.” (Welcome and Justice for Person with Disabilities, no. 7)

Any program or family needing help in adaptations of curriculum or reception of the sacrament can contact the Office of Faith Formation for help. Some families would like inclusion into a faith formation program while others would like a separate program. The Knights of Columbus, in conjunction with the Office of Faith Formation, provides materials and programs to support the special needs of the family.

Parish programs should ensure that parents are integrated into the preparation process as much as possible. Besides these guidelines the pastor and parish catechetical leaders may require more preparation and parent gatherings if deemed necessary for the readiness of the child and family.

Retreat

The retreat time calls the parents and their children to prepare for the reception of the Eucharist. It is usually held shortly before First Communion is received. It takes into account the attention span of the children preparing. The archdiocese suggests three to four hours. At this time a review of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist is done at a developmentally appropriate level. The themes of fasting, love, reverence and real presence can be incorporated, as appropriate.

Parent/guardian Requirements

Parent/guardian engagement with the children around preparation of the sacrament requires more than seeing to the readiness of the child. Parents/guardians need to:

- Attend an initial interview with the child and parents/guardian to share the faith life of the family and readiness for preparation and one interview before the reception of the sacrament to assess readiness for the reception of the sacrament:
- Participate in a minimum of two parish meetings and receive materials regarding what the children are learning, how they can participate in the sharing of faith and how they can deepen their own understanding of the Eucharist:
- Bring children to the Saturday Vigil/Sunday Mass on a regular basis to help the children understand the importance of Eucharist in the life of the Church community:
- Participate in at least one family catechesis event provided by the parish in preparation for the sacrament:
- See that candidates for First Eucharist participate fully and regularly in the catechetical program of the parish:
- Attend with the child a parish retreat in preparation for the sacrament:
- See that their child attends practices for reception of the sacrament.

Parish Requirements

- In order to enhance the experience of accompanying the journey of faith within the candidate and the family, interviews with the family and candidate are very important. This is a time for pastoral care and encouragement in the spiritual life

of the individual and the family. (If parents/guardians for whatever reason are not able to participate, then the interview should be done with the child and an adult who is assisting the child in faith development.) This should be done at the beginning the first year of preparation and once again in the 2nd year prior to reception of First Eucharist.

- Provide trained catechists who have received their Basic Catechist Certification through the California Catholic Bishops Guidelines and are up to date in that certificate.
- Provide a comprehensive program for families and their children in preparation for the sacrament through multiple avenues.
- Engage the parish community in praying for and welcoming these candidates and their families.
- Have at least one family catechesis event for children and families together to deepen their faith.
- Provide a retreat time for parents/guardians and children to deepen their understanding of the sacrament.
- Take care with divorced/separated families that all those who have custody of the children give consent to reception of the sacrament(s).
- In many parishes, students are being concurrently prepared for First Eucharist in a parish school, in a parish school of religion (faith formation program) and through home schooling. Please remember that in all cases sacramental requirements for preparation are a parish responsibility and that reception of First Eucharist is a Parish and not an individual school event. Therefore, while there will be differing classroom approaches in each of these separate educational cases, the guidelines addressing parental participation/education, catechesis, retreats and family participation at Mass and other Parish activities apply to all. As such, these requirements and events should be conducted together on a parish wide basis, not in separate units for separate academic programs. It should be emphasized that parish school children and families, school of religion children and families and home schooling children and families are all members of the same parish community and subject to the same requirements of sacramental preparation. Combined liturgies, programs and sacramental requirements are all a clear sign of the value and importance of participation in the common life of the parish together. The goal is growth in individual holiness and participation for the First Eucharist candidate and family and participation for all members of the parish community.
- Liturgy for First Communion Mass is not normally celebrated during the Lenten Season.
- It is important that all sacramental information is gathered and accurately recorded in the proper parish registry.

Family- Culture Perspective

*Pope Francis reminds us,
“Every culture offers values and positive ways
to enrich the way we proclaim, understand and live the Gospel.”^[iv]*

“Culture” connects us to the essence of who we are whether it includes music, food, tradition, language, customs, etc. In the Archdiocese of San Francisco we are blessed with many cultures and language groups. Care needs to be given to support families in the sharing of their church traditions and faith language.

In our Hispanic culture the term “Family” includes a deep connection with extended family members: grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, godparents, etc. A child’s First Communion is a very significant moment in the life of a Hispanic family to celebrate the blessing that the extended family gives through their presence at the Mass and/or festivity. Such a gathering in a Hispanic family most often includes members who speak Spanish and who, through their presence, offer the profound gift of connection to family roots. The First Communion child might not speak Spanish, but he/she is gifted and blessed by the extended family on this special day. This is what the good news of the Gospel is about: the festive banquet table as an expression of the Kingdom of God.

Our children need to be offered the opportunity to receive their faith formation in the family language or in a Bi-lingual program that will “enrich the way we proclaim, understand and live the Gospel.” In this way families are able to support the preparation of the sacraments and share the faith.

Some cultures have the practice of the godparents standing beside the child in receiving the Eucharist for the first time. It ties the reception of Eucharist to their Baptism. It is suggested that the parents and godparents/sponsors come up to communion with their child. The child receives first and then the others.

Celebration of the Sacrament

This celebration should be family centered so children can be with their families during the liturgy. It should also take place at a Mass that the family usually attends. Because of the paschal character of the sacrament the Easter season is the most appropriate time and should be celebrated by the pastor. If a group celebration is desired then this is done at another time after First Eucharist and does not have to be at a Sunday liturgy.

The music should not differ much from the regular Sunday celebrations. If the music is different from the usual music this can deprive the parish community from full participation.

Renewal of the candidate's baptismal promises helps to emphasize the connection of the initiation sacraments. This puts a greater emphasis on the whole assembly as the Body of Christ.

The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* should not be used. A balance should always be kept between the entire assembly and those receiving the sacrament for the first time.

The assembly should be those ministering to the candidates for the sacrament. Therefore, the children should not be serving as liturgical ministers. It is the whole community that welcomes the children to the Lord's Table and the regular ministers of the community best symbolizes that welcome.

At the offertory only bread and wine should be offered. No other objects should be used. The main focus of the bread and wine that is through this Eucharist becomes the focus of the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus.

At the time of receiving, the parents should come up with the children. These should be the first to receive the sacrament.

Sensitivity to language issues of those gathered is to be respected and celebrated. Cultural practices as much as possible should also be taken into consideration.

Our children come from catechetical programs, Catholic schools and home schooling. At no time should these groups have separate or private celebrations. As much as possible all should be as integrate as possible.

Record Keeping

Each family, at the beginning of the program, should present proof of the baptism for the child. (Canon 842,912, 894). After the celebration of First Eucharist the names of the children, the minister, place and date of the ceremony are to be recorded in the parish register. This information can also be sent to the candidate's church of baptism.