

## **Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana Guidelines for the First Reception of Eucharist (Youth)**

### **Preamble**

Jesus “called the children to himself and said, ‘Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” (*Luke 18:16, NABRE*)

This policy is an aid to discipleship and glad friendship with Jesus whom we know in the Holy Bible and the Sacraments. Conformity of programs is not the first purpose of what follows, but activity that expresses and builds communion with the Church. In order to help our children draw ever closer to Christ, and in keeping with the spirit of the universal teaching of the Church, the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has established the following guidelines so that children who have reached the use of reason (7 years old) may be prepared as early as possible to receive their First Communion, after their reception of first reconciliation. (*CIC 914*)

### **Introduction**

“Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.’” (*John 6:53-54, NABRE*)

Recognizing that the Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life,’ catechesis should be comprehensive and systematic, integrating knowledge of the faith with the living faith. Catechesis should be Trinitarian in nature, appropriate to the age level, maturity, and circumstances of those being catechized, while also presenting the Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit. (*NDC, 35, B*)

Preparation for this sacrament of initiation should also involve the parents; reinforcing the unique role they have in teaching and forming their children. These guidelines are not a program in and of themselves, but they are recommendations that are meant to establish uniformity to the individual catechetical programs throughout the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana.

These guidelines for the First Reception of Eucharist are for validly baptized young people, who have reached the age of reason (7 years old), and who are being prepared outside the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Children*.

### **Norms**

#### **Child**

“Children who participate with their family in the Mass experience the Eucharistic mystery in an initial way and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer.” (*NDC, 36, A, 3, 3a*)

1. The child who is a candidate for the sacrament will be baptized and present proof of baptism.
2. The child, at a minimum, will have celebrated their seventh birthday. (*CIC* 11)
3. The child will complete at least one (school) year of formal catechesis either in a parish religious education program, Catholic home school, or parish school prior to the time of the preparation of the sacrament.
4. The child must understand that there is a difference between ordinary bread and wine and the Body and Blood of Christ prior to the reception of First Communion.
5. The child must be formed in such a way that they understand the Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation and as the central act of worship of the Catholic Church.
6. The child should participate at Mass each Sunday and Holy Day and participate in the Mass by being attentive to the action of the Mass and by engaging in responding with the assembly.
7. The child will attend catechetical instruction as set forth in these guidelines and as implemented by their parish.
8. The child must celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their first reception of Eucharist.

## Parents

“The Christian family is ordinarily the first experience of the Christian community and the primary environment for growth in faith. Because it is ‘the Church of the home,’ the family provides a unique *locus* [setting] for catechesis. It is a place in which the word of God is received and from which it is extended. Within the Christian family, parents are the primary educators in the faith and ‘the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.’” (*NDC* 29, D)

“Children’s preparation for first reception of the Eucharist begins in the home. The family has the most important role in communicating the Christian and human values that form the foundation for a child’s understanding of the Eucharist.” (*NDC*, 36, A, 3, 3a)

1. Parents are welcome to participate in the sacramental life of the Church insofar as they are able.
2. Parents (or guardians) accompany their children to Mass each Sunday and Holy Day and encourage them to participate in the Mass.
3. Parents understand the importance of helping to instruct their children in accordance with these guidelines and in cooperation with their pastor and parish catechetical leader.
4. Parents are expected to participate in the sacramental formation offered for them as set forth in these guidelines and provided by their parish.

## Pastor

“Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority.” (*CIC* 890)

1. It is expected that the pastor and the parish catechetical leader work together in developing and implementing a comprehensive program for the parish.
2. A priestly presence is valued throughout the formation. It is particularly encouraged that the priest be involved in catechesis in the following areas:
  - a. The meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, scriptures, and other elements of the Mass; and
  - b. How to receive Eucharist.

### **Parish Catechetical Leader**

“Only fully initiated, practicing Catholics who fully adhere to the Church’s teaching in faith and morals and who are models of Christian virtue and courageous witnesses to the Catholic faith should be designated as parish catechetical leaders. Preparation for service as a parish catechetical leader should include advanced studies in Theology, Scripture, Liturgy, catechesis and catechetical methodology, educational psychology and theory, and administration, as well as practical catechetical experience with adults, youth, and children.” (NDC 54, B, 5)

1. The parish catechetical leader shall work together with the pastor in developing and implementing a comprehensive program for the parish.
2. The parish catechetical leader will be present throughout formation so that they are recognizable to the children and parents as someone who is integral in their formation for the sacraments.
3. The parish catechetical leader collaborates with other parish staff and programs responsible for the formation of children and the celebration of liturgy.
4. The parish catechetical leader recruits, forms, and trains those who serve in the ministry of catechist.

### **Catechist**

“The apostolic work of the catechist springs from the Sacrament of Baptism through which all believers come to share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and the evangelizing mission of the Church...Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training.” (NDC 54, B, 8)

1. Catechists will participate in the sacramental life of the Church, and attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.
2. Catechists will present the sacraments of the Church in a positive and encouraging manner, leading the children to appreciate the sacramental life for themselves.
3. Catechists will teach the basic doctrines of the sacraments in a sound and age-appropriate manner.
4. A catechist’s work takes its tone and direction from the parish catechetical leader and the pastor. The catechist will need to be aware of the parents’ special interest in helping to prepare the children to celebrate the sacrament and in forming them in the faith.

## Formation

“Parents and the parish catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. Because reception of Eucharist, especially for the first time is integral to the child’s full incorporation into the ecclesial community the pastor has a responsibility in determining every child’s readiness to receive First Communion. Parents also have the right and the duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion.” (NDC 36, A, 3, 3a)

1. Catechesis for First Communion must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of the child.
2. The parish “should present catechesis in preparation for the first reception of Eucharist that:
  - Teaches that the Eucharist 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;’
  - 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 appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body;’
  - Teaches [in broad terms that there is a] the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread;
  - Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine [also teaching the acceptability of receiving under one kind, i.e. form of bread, form of wine];
  - Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass; and
  - Helps children to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner.” (NDC 36, A, 3, 3a)
3. Parent sessions are an integral part of sacramental preparation.
4. Appropriate catechesis for parents should be provided as part of the preparation process for the reception of the sacrament. Sufficient catechesis should be provided to parents to cover the content of the sacrament. This catechesis “should help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciate of the Eucharist and enable them to catechize their children more effectively.” (NDC 36, A, 3, 3a)
5. The pastor, along with the parents and catechist(s) of the child, are to determine when the child is ready to celebrate this sacrament.
6. The Catholic school, religious education, and home-schooled child must participate in a parish sacramental preparation program. The program may include parent meetings, a rehearsal, a daytime retreat, and catechetical instruction.
7. All catechetical materials and textbooks must be approved by the USCCB. These materials are found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

## **Mystagogy**

“...Eucharistic catechesis ordinarily follows reception of the sacrament and supports the young Christian’s growth into the mystery of the Eucharist and the life of the Church.” (NDC 36, A, 3, 3a)

1. Children are expected to continue their faith formation by participation in parish religious education programs, Catholic home schools, or Catholic schools after First Communion.
2. Regular celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist are necessary to grow ever more deeply in the mysteries of God’s love and mercy within a communal environment.

## **Pastoral Notes**

1. The USCCB statement issued in 1995 that is “entitled *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* stresses the need to include persons with disabilities in the celebration of all sacraments and provides general catechetical guidelines for celebrating the sacraments with persons with a variety of disabilities.” (NDC, 35, C)
2. If someone else is acting in place of the parents such as non-custodial parents, grandparents, or godparents the same norms for parents apply. These persons must have the written consent of the custodial parent.
3. If the Catholic School principal is responsible for preparation for First Communion, the norms for the parish catechetical leader apply.
4. If the Catholic School teacher is responsible for preparation for First Communion, the norms for the catechist apply.
5. Sacramental preparation should consider the language and ethnic culture of the child’s family.
6. Sacramental preparation and celebration should consider the involvement of the entire parish community.
7. At the pastor’s discretion, sacramental preparation may occur at another parish or Catholic school.
8. Refer to Canon 914 when seeking verification of the celebration of First Reconciliation.
9. These *Guidelines for the Reception of First Eucharist (Youth)* are effective August 1, 2013.

## **References Cited**

CIC – *Code of Canon Law*

NDC – *National Directory for Catechesis*

NABRE – *New American Bible, Revised Edition*