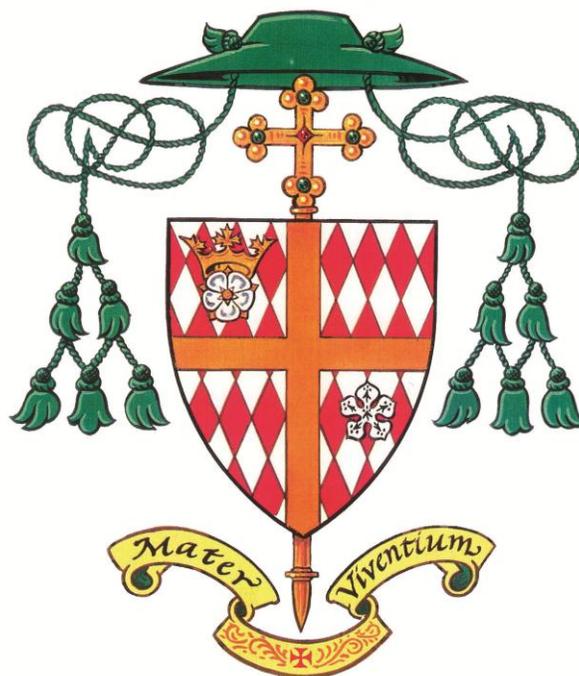


Diocese of Hamilton

# SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES

The Initiation of Children



Approved by  
The Most Reverend Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton

**Diocese of Hamilton**  
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## BISHOP OF HAMILTON

The **Sacramental Guidelines for the Initiation of Children** in the Diocese of Hamilton are the result of months of wide consultation with all priests of the diocese, parish ministers, Directors of Education, principals and consultants in our Catholic school boards, and others. I thank everyone for their candid and careful reviews.

These Sacramental Guidelines were approved at the February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012 meeting of the Presbyteral Council.

The guidelines will provide direction to the pastors and catechetical personnel in the Diocese of Hamilton regarding the expectations for Sacramental preparation in this diocese. They will also serve to standardize the preparation practices in parishes throughout the diocese.

Preparation for Sacraments must be appropriate and never onerous to children or families. Resources to assist in providing appropriate preparation are available through the Diocesan Office for Catechesis.

For first Eucharist and Confirmation, collaboration between pastors and catechetical personnel in our parishes and principals and staff at our Catholic schools will be essential for children to benefit fully from the foundational catechesis provided in our schools and the immediate preparation coordinated in the parish. With such collaboration, the transition time will be relatively smooth.

Pastors will assure that the spirit and content of these guidelines are embraced and that parish practice will reflect these guidelines as quickly as possible. By September 2012, discussions with Catholic school personnel should have begun and the guidelines fully implemented by June 2013.

May our united efforts help children be welcomed to the Sacraments with the preparation necessary for them to feel the fullness of joy that comes with God's grace!

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton

Rev. Monsignor Vincent Kerr, P.H.Chancellor

February 17, 2012

## INTRODUCTION

1. Sacraments are, first and foremost, actions of Christ and his Church. The Church is, therefore, responsible for determining the specifics of sacramental preparation and celebration.
2. Sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them. (*Canon 843.1*)
3. Sacramental preparation in the Diocese of Hamilton is rooted in the following three principles:
  - a. All sacraments are ecclesial celebrations, i.e., celebrations of the Church.
  - b. Parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith.
  - c. Catholic schools are an integral part of the on-going religious education of children and provide valuable assistance in the foundational preparation for the sacraments following Baptism.
4. Foundational and on-going preparation for sacraments ideally includes:
  - a. Participation in the Sunday Eucharist;
  - b. Prayer in the family;
  - c. Daily living of a Catholic manner of life appropriate to one's age and spiritual development;
  - d. Religious education in a Catholic School (or by means of a correspondence program).
5. Immediate preparation for sacraments includes specific sacramental catechesis prior to the sacrament being celebrated. This is the responsibility of the parish in which the child's family is registered or in which they regularly worship. In the case of a child whose family is not registered in a particular parish, or whose family does not worship regularly, it is the responsibility of the proper geographical parish to facilitate the sacramental preparation. For First Eucharist and Confirmation, this involves the participation of the parents and generally takes place in collaboration with the Catholic School. If, for pastoral reasons, it is desirable to celebrate in another church, a letter of permission may be provided by the proper pastor. (See Appendix 1).
6. Registration for sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the proper parish where the sacrament is to be celebrated. This includes the collection of any necessary documentation. For First Eucharist and Confirmation, this includes a valid certificate of Baptism in the Catholic Church. Documentation attesting to the suitability of godparents and sponsors is not required. (Please note: Where such documentation for suitability of godparents or sponsors is required by another diocese, the letter provided as Appendix 1 may be used.)

7. The form of immediate sacramental preparation is determined by the proper parish where the celebration will take place. For First Eucharist, First Reconciliation, and Confirmation, this preparation will generally involve the child's Catholic School community.

Meetings between the parish priest or his delegate and members of the staff of the Catholic school to coordinate the preparation of children will be beneficial and will promote a positive experience for all involved.

8. Immediate sacramental preparation is to be appropriate to the age and spiritual development of the child and ought to take into consideration the child's abilities and family circumstances. The preparation program ought not to be onerous. In general, four to six meetings including meetings with parents only, or with parents and children together, are adequate. Models for preparation for these sacraments are available from the Diocesan Catechesis Office.
9. Admission to the sacraments is based on the desire of the child and his/her family to celebrate the sacrament and their good will in participating in the preparation program to the best of their ability. Admission to the sacraments is never to be determined by tests or completed projects or by attendance records.
10. The spiritual welfare of the children and their families and particular circumstances will frequently require adjustments in the requirements for preparation which are established by the parish. Failure to complete the preparation program in its entirety is never to be an obstacle to the celebration of the sacrament.
11. The liturgical celebration of the sacraments is the responsibility of the parish priest and those who collaborate with him in the preparation. This may include the involvement of the parish minister, the parish liturgy committee, parents, and representatives of the Catholic School community. The liturgical celebration takes place according to the approved ritual books for the Catholic Church in Canada.
12. Further details concerning the celebration of the sacraments are to be found in the Liturgical and Sacramental Guidelines, Diocese of Hamilton.
13. For the administration of the sacraments the minister may not ask for anything beyond the offerings which are determined by the competent authority. (*Canon 848*) In the Diocese of Hamilton there are no fees for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation.

## CELEBRATION OF 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;
  - b. there be a *well-founded hope* 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. (*Canon 868*)
2. Arrangements for a particular Baptism are always to be made by the parents in a personal meeting with the pastor or one of his associates. Arrangements are never to be made by phone, email, or by simply completing a form.
3. Each parish determines the suitable sacramental preparation required prior to the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism. In addition to participation in the Sunday Eucharist, one or two catechetical meetings may take place, especially for parents who are presenting their first child for Baptism. Depending on their availability, godparents ought to be invited to join the parents for these meetings. Models for this preparation are available from the Catechesis Office.
4. When parents are not married or are in an irregular situation, or are not practicing their faith, it is advisable to encourage them to take the first steps in re-establishing a relationship with their parish community. In this case, the Baptism may be delayed; it is never denied. Under no circumstances is the marital status of the parents to preclude the baptism of their child, provided they are receptive to participating in the preparation program and have a firm intention to raise their child in the Catholic Church to the best of their ability.
5. Godparents must be not less than sixteen years of age. They must be fully initiated in the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), and must be living a life of faith which befits the responsibility to be undertaken. (*Canon 874*) Based on these criteria, parents select 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. The appropriate notation should be made in the Baptismal Register.
6. Baptism is normally celebrated on Sunday. It may be celebrated during Mass or at another suitable time. Though it is discouraged during Lent, special circumstances may recommend that Baptism take place during this season.
7. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Catechesis Office.

## CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

1. According to the law of the Church (*Canon 852.1*), children who have reached the age of reason and are of catechetical age (that is, children who have completed grade 2 or are older) who desire to celebrate Baptism are prepared through their participation in the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (Part II, Chapter 1). In keeping with this rite, they are to be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist at the same celebration.
2. A suitable preparation program in the parish would ideally involve the child's parents. Where possible, 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.
3. Approved resources suitable for preparation, depending on the age and needs of the child, are available from the Diocesan Liturgy Office and Catechesis Office.
4. The full initiation of children of catechetical age is to be recorded in the parish's Baptismal Register.

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

1. Children in grade 2 who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to receive their First Communion may be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, having presented the baptismal certificate, through a profession of faith made by their parents or guardians. See Appendix 2. For these children, the sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated at a later date (ie. in grade 7).
2. Children of catechetical age (that is, children who have completed grade 2 or are older) who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church are to participate in a program similar to the program provided by the parish for children of catechetical age preparing for full initiation. With the permission and support of their parents, following suitable catechetical formation, the children make a profession of faith and celebrate Confirmation and First Eucharist at the same celebration.
3. A suitable preparation program in the parish would ideally involve the child's parents. Where possible, 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.
4. Approved resources suitable for preparation, depending on the age and needs of the child, are available from the Diocesan Liturgy Office and Catechesis Office.
5. The reception of children into full communion with the Church is to be recorded in the parish's Baptismal Register.

## FIRST RECONCILIATION

1. The immediate preparation for First Reconciliation is the responsibility of the proper parish where the sacrament is to be celebrated. The involvement of parents and the child's Catholic School community is desirable. All children who are to receive First Eucharist are to be prepared and have the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Communion.
2. The sacrament of Reconciliation always takes place in the church. The second form of the sacrament (communal celebration with individual confession and absolution) is preferred. Wherever possible, provision ought to be made for parents and family members to celebrate the sacrament at the same time.
3. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Catechesis Office.
4. It is not permissible to take attendance or to record those who celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation.

## FIRST EUCHARIST

1. First Eucharist is celebrated with children who have reached the age of reason (usually in Grade 2) and have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.
2. The decision concerning the individual child's readiness to receive First Eucharist rests with the child's parents in consultation with the parish priest. This is particularly the case for parents of children with special needs.
3. It is preferable to celebrate First Eucharist at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. However, if there are large numbers that cannot be accommodated in the parish church at Sunday Mass, the celebration may take place at another time.
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 Eucharist. Children may not be prevented from receiving Communion in the hand.
5. The liturgical celebration of First Eucharist is the responsibility of the parish priest 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. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Catechesis Office.
7. The celebration of First Eucharist is to be recorded in the parish's First Communion Register.

## CONFIRMATION

1. Confirmation is celebrated with children who are in Grade 7 and who have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.
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.
3. Confirmation is always celebrated during Mass at a time determined in consultation with the Bishop's Office.
4. Children who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination are received into full communion by their Profession of Faith, Confirmation and First Communion which all take place during the Confirmation liturgy. Appropriate catechesis precedes the celebration.
5. A person being confirmed is to have one sponsor who fulfills the same requirements as a baptismal sponsor (that is, a godparent). The sponsor may be male or female and may be one of the child's godparents. A parent cannot be a sponsor. (*Canon 893*)
6. Candidates are confirmed with their baptismal name. However, they may, alternatively, choose a saint's name.
7. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Catechesis Office.
8. The celebration of Confirmation is to be recorded in the parish's Confirmation Register and notice is to be sent to the parish of the child's baptism where due notation is made in the proper Baptismal Register.

## NOTE

Where you are approached by the family of a child baptized  
in an unfamiliar rite or of uncertain rite,  
please, having gathered any and all available documentation,  
contact the Chancellor's Office for direction.

PASTORAL REFERENCE

Name and Address of Church

Re: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Monsignor/Father:

The bearer of this letter is a Baptized Roman Catholic who:

- resides in N. Parish.
- is a registered member of N. Parish.
- regularly participates in the Sunday Eucharist at N. Parish.

He/She:

- wishes to celebrate the baptism of his/her child(ren) in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to celebrate First Communion in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to celebrate Confirmation in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to be married in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
  
- fulfills the canonical requirements to be a godparent for Baptism.
- fulfills the canonical requirements to be a sponsor for Confirmation.

Thank you for your kindness to the bearer of this letter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Reverend N.  
Pastor

Date this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_.

**Diocese of Hamilton**  
IN ONTARIO

*DECLARATION OF FAITH  
IN PREPARATION FOR THE PRESENTATION  
OF A BAPTIZED CHILD  
FOR RECEPTION  
INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ.  
name of parent or guardian

I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God. I further promise to continue living this faith and to support my child in this faith.

I acknowledge that in my child's reception of First Communion in the Catholic Church, he/she is being received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church and is therefore no longer a member of another Christian church.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witnessing priest

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Place

This declaration is to be kept on file in the parish church.

## NOTES