

## First Communion and First Reconciliation

The Sacramental Guidelines suggest four to six sessions of preparation within the parish.

These sessions would be of three main types:

- 1. Information sessions – initial meetings and rehearsals**
- 2. Catechetical sessions – for teaching the faith**
- 3. Rite of Enrollment, the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Most likely, one or two information sessions, one rehearsal session, and two to four catechetical sessions would suffice.

An outline of the three kinds of sessions follows. Staff from the Catholic School and parents may be invited to be involved in any of these sessions as they are invited to share their gifts and to witness to the continuity of care in the Church between home, parish, and Catholic School.

- 1. Information Sessions** – to welcome, encourage, organize, and catechize

### **An initial information session:**

- may take place with parents only or parents and their children
- could include a DVD (some excellent resources available through the diocesan library) or personal presentation such as a witness talk from other parents
- should lay out the dates and times of future meetings, and the purpose of these meetings
- could be a time of gathering the necessary information, such as baptismal certificates

### **A rehearsal session**

- to prepare for the liturgy itself
- may include reading practise or organization of seating or any other details which could be practised
- may include practise of responses or songs
- parishes may choose to have a separate information/rehearsal session just prior to the celebration of Reconciliation

2. **Catechetical Sessions** – to teach directly regarding the sacrament to be received or some aspect of the faith related specifically to that sacrament; to give children the information necessary to increase their understanding of the sacrament they are to receive, to help them to participate fully in the celebration, and to allow them to be open to the fullness of God’s grace

- **catechesis in these sessions could include:**

- i. teaching about the Mass, ie. the parts of the Mass
- ii. the meaning of the congregation’s responses, such as: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed
- iii. the meaning of the bread and wine
- iv. stories from the Bible that highlight elements of Eucharist and forgiveness (the Wedding at Cana, Feeding the Five Thousand, a miracle of healing story, etc.)
- v. teaching about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist
- vi. review of important prayers, such as Our Father, Hail Mary

- catechesis may also include activities other than “classes” such as:

- i. a **church tour** to familiarize children and/or families with the symbols, art, and architecture of their parish and their meaning
- ii. a **retreat** to provide a time and space for reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist. This retreat may include parents and children or children only and may take place within a regular school day (as a class trip organized with the school in advance) or in an evening or weekend.

Parishes may also have parents and children come together for one or more catechetical sessions but provide separate catechesis to each group by having children attend a church tour, for example, while parents have time on their own to reflect on their role in the faith life of their child.

3. **Rite of Enrollment, a Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation** – It is possible to include a Rite of Enrollment. The Sacrament of Reconciliation provides the opportunity to children (and their families) to receive this Sacrament as part of their formation and preparation

For information on resources available or to find out how to host an intergenerational session, or how to plan a parish retreat for children, please contact Anne Jamieson in the Catechesis Office 905-528-7988, ext. 2251.

## Recommended Resources:

### Print:

*“We Prepare for Reconciliation”* – Berube, Novalis – has a good parent information section that separates from the text. Divided into 5 chapters with a section of questions called “What have you learned?” at the end of each chapter. A leader’s guide is available.

*“We Share in the Eucharist”* – Berube, Novalis – from the same series as the reconciliation book. Again, has a parent section and a child section. Divided into 6 chapters. Has a “Prayers to Remember” section that can become a booklet. A leader’s guide is available.

Catholic Parent Know How Series – *“Preparing Your Child for ... First Reconciliation”* – an 8-page colour magazine with Scripture, FAQ, and tips to help parents be the teachers of faith for their children

Catholic Parent Know How Series – *“Preparing Your Child for ... First Communion”* – an 8-page colour magazine with Scripture, FAQ, and tips to help parents be the teachers of faith for their children

### DVD (The following are all available through our diocesan library):

*“Come and See”* – Loyola Press – “Ritual Matters”, “Church Tour”, and “Your Role at Mass” – Suitable for parents alone or parents and children 10 to 40 min. depending on sections used

*“Call to Celebrate First Communion”* – suitable for parents alone or parents and children – 30 min. – personal witness of parents mixed with pastoral reflection of priest and then further theological reflection and answering FAQ’s with Fr. Paul Turner

*“Call to Celebrate Reconciliation”* – suitable for parents alone or parents and children – 30 min. – personal witness of parents mixed with pastoral reflection of priest and then further theological reflection and answering FAQ’s with Fr. Paul Turner

**Three options for Sacramental Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Communion follow depending on the various circumstances of the Parish:**

**A – Parish with no Catholic School**

**B – Parish with a single Catholic School**

**C – Parish with multiple Catholic Schools**

**Option A**

**Parish Situation:** No Catholic School or majority of children not in Catholic School

**Implications:**

Contact of children needs to happen primarily through parish communications – bulletin/website – could happen with assistance of public school – ie. Announcement on their bulletin board

Foundational catechesis is not supported through school so parish offerings and/or support in and through the home becomes that much more important

**Options for foundational, ongoing catechesis:**

Catechetical Correspondence Courses – can have a parish-based catechist or a more traditional Canada Post correspondence catechist – orientation and training available through the Catechesis Office

Some parishes offer ongoing classes – where parishes use the Catechetical Correspondence Course materials the Catechesis Office can provide resources and training for recommended use and inter-generational catechetical sessions

**Immediate Prep through the Parish - Practical matters:**

Initial parish meeting may be offered as a choice of two or three sessions and parents sign up for one

**Session 1 – Preliminary Information meeting with parents**

Information/form gathering – always provide a second chance for this to be handed in

Catechetical component – especially to encourage parents to take part in the faith development of their children

Possible components:

- a church tour – gets people up and moving and allows them to rediscover their church
- a DVD – something brief to encourage parents
- a witness talk – a parent who can speak to the experience of journeying with their own children
- the introduction of a preparation resource – always presented as a gift to help parents
- written outline of the upcoming sessions – their purpose, content, timing, etc.

**Optional Session**

Continued catechesis with parents and children together or separate or children alone – eg. Dropped off at the parish for a 2 hour session on a Saturday – helps to provide choice to parents so may be offered on two different days

Always include parents for some portion if you can. Have them come for closing prayer, for example. Use it as an opportunity to take in any late paperwork or to give out some further instruction.

An Enrollment could take place within a Sunday Mass. Helps to involve the whole parish in the catechetical mission. Children and families are given the opportunity to publicly commit themselves to preparing and they receive the visible support of the entire parish in that journey.

**Session 2 – “Rehearsal” for Reconciliation**

This can be much more than just a rehearsal.

- begins with catechesis on reconciliation – may use a print resource or DVD
- include a “how-to” portion – followed by a seating plan or instructions
- help parents understand how to practise at home – mommy and daddy can pretend to be the priest ☺ - gives parents a sense of ownership – tells children they should turn to their parents for this kind of learning – parish gives the parents the tools to prepare them and time right then and there to practise the skill
- may choose children to be readers for your communal celebration of Reconciliation

**Session 3 – Reconciliation**

**Session 4 – “Rehearsal” for First Communion**

Again, this can be much more than a rehearsal. Be sure to have parents present for some of it, if not all. Show parents how you are teaching the children. For instance, show children how to hold their hands while their parents are present. Then parents know how to help their children.

Give the practical information about seating, photographs, etc.

**Optional Session**

First Communion Retreat

**Option B**

**Parish Situation:** Single Catholic School associated with the parish

**Implications:**

Contact of children is probably easily done through parish bulletin/website and may include a letter sent through the school

Foundational catechesis is supported through school - Catechetical Correspondence Courses still available if there are some children in public school

**Immediate Prep through the Parish - Practical matters:**

Initial parish meeting may be offered as a choice of sessions and parents sign up for one

May invite school staff to participate in some parish sessions – they may assist in many ways, as catechetical volunteers, as help for collection of paperwork, to speak to parents about the school program of catechesis and how it relates to the parish supports, as ushers or other helpers on the day of First Eucharist, etc.

**Session 1 – Preliminary Information meeting with parents**

Information/form gathering – always provide a second chance for this to be handed in

Catechetical component –to encourage parents to take part in the faith development of their children – to help parents see their child’s education in the Catholic school as a support to parents in their role as first educators of the faith

Possible components:

- a church tour – gets people up and moving and allows them to rediscover their church
- a DVD – something brief to encourage parents
- a witness talk – a parent who can speak to the experience of journeying with their own children
- the introduction of a preparation resource – whether parents pay for it or not always presented as a gift to help parents
- written outline of the upcoming sessions – their purpose, content, timing, etc.

**Optional Session – at the parish or in the classroom itself**

**At the parish:** Continued catechesis with parents and children together or separate or children alone – eg. Dropped off at the parish for a 2 hour session on a Saturday – helps to provide choice to parents so may be offered on two different days

An Enrollment could take place within a Sunday Mass. Helps to involve the whole parish in the catechetical mission. Children and families are given the opportunity to

publicly commit themselves to preparing and they receive the visible support of the entire parish in that journey.

**In the classroom:** Any visit to the children in their classroom by the priest, deacon or parish minister can be a great opportunity to continue your preparation with children. You could model how to receive Reconciliation or how the children can hold their hands for communion. Let them know that their religion lessons at school are helping them to be ready for their Sacraments too so they can see the links in what they are learning. You can check with a teacher about what she has been teaching lately or what she knows about her own students. Is there something they need particularly? You can also just let her know what you would like to focus on in your visit. For example, you might like to tell the children how important the Our Father is as a prayer and practise praying it with them.

### **Session 2 – “Rehearsal” for Reconciliation**

This can be much more than just a rehearsal.

- begins with catechesis on reconciliation – may use a print resource or DVD
- include a “how-to” portion – followed by a seating plan or instructions
- help parents understand how to practise at home – mommy and daddy can pretend to be the priest ☺ - gives parents a sense of ownership – tells children they should turn to their parents for this kind of learning – parish gives the parents the tools to prepare them and time right then and there to practise
- let parents know about your classroom visits, if applicable
- may choose children to be readers for your communal celebration of Reconciliation – a teacher in the school may be able to help by identifying strong readers or you may have a sense from the family’s participation at Mass

### **Session 3 – Reconciliation**

### **Session 4 – “Rehearsal” for First Communion**

Again, this can be much more than a rehearsal. Be sure to have parents present for some of it, if not all. Show parents how you are teaching the children. For instance, show children how to hold their hands while their parents are present. Then parents know how to help their children.

Give the practical information about seating, photographs, etc.

### **Optional Session**

First Communion Retreat – some schools may traditionally have a retreat or activity day at the school prior to First Communion. The outline of the day may or may not suit parish needs. If the school is planning their own activity day at the school, parish staff may visit at the school. If the retreat is happening at the parish, there may be supports you could have from the school. If a parish offers a retreat during school hours, it becomes an invitation of the parish to the school for a class trip. Communication with school staff early in the year or in June of the previous year will help make these kinds of plans come together.

### Option C

**Parish Situation:** Multiple Catholic Schools associated with the parish

#### **Implications:**

Contact of children is done through parish bulletin/website and may include a letter sent through the schools – tracking of families and dates and sessions becomes important for the parish

Foundational catechesis is supported through schools - Catechetical Correspondence Courses still available if there are some children in public school

#### **Immediate Prep through the Parish – Practical matters:**

Initial parish meeting may be offered as a choice of sessions and parents sign up for one.

Sacraments may be offered in the same way – that is, you may have parents sign up for a particular weekend for the celebration of First Eucharist.

May invite school staff to participate in some parish prep sessions – they may assist in many ways, as catechetical volunteers, as help for collection of paperwork, to speak to parents about the school program of catechesis and how it relates to the parish supports, as ushers or other helpers on the day of First Eucharist, etc.

#### **Session 1 – Preliminary Information meeting with parents**

Information/form gathering – always provide a second chance for this to be handed in

Catechetical component –to encourage parents to take part in the faith development of their children – to help parents see their child’s education in the Catholic school as a support to parents in their role as first educators of the faith

Possible components:

- a church tour – gets people up and moving and allows them to rediscover their church
- a DVD – something brief to encourage parents
- a witness talk – a parent who can speak to the experience of journeying with their own children
- the introduction of a preparation resource – whether parents pay for it or not always presented as a gift to help parents
- written outline of the upcoming sessions – their purpose, content, timing, etc.

#### **Optional Session – at the parish or in the classroom itself**

**At the parish:** Continued catechesis with parents and children together or separate or children alone – eg. Dropped off at the parish for a 2 hour session on a Saturday – helps to provide choice to parents so may be offered on two different days

An Enrollment could take place within a Sunday Mass. Helps to involve the whole parish in the catechetical mission. Children and families are given the opportunity to publicly commit themselves to preparing and they receive the visible support of the entire parish in that journey.

**In the classroom:** Any visit to the children in their classroom by the priest, deacon or parish minister can be a great opportunity to continue your preparation with children. You could model how to receive Reconciliation or how the children can hold their hands for communion. Let them know that their religion lessons at school are helping them to be ready for their Sacraments too so they can see the links in what they are learning. You can check with a teacher about what she has been teaching lately or what she knows about her own students. Is there something they need particularly? You can also just let her know what you would like to focus on in your visit. For example, you might like to tell the children how important the Our Father is as a prayer and practise praying it with them.

**Session 2 – “Rehearsal” for Reconciliation**

This can be much more than just a rehearsal.

- begins with catechesis on reconciliation – may use a print resource or DVD
- include a “how-to” portion – followed by a seating plan or instructions
- help parents understand how to practise at home – mommy or daddy can pretend to be the priest ☺ - gives parents a sense of ownership – tells children they should turn to their parents for this kind of learning – parish gives the parents the tools to prepare them and time right then and there to practise
- let parents know about your classroom visits, if applicable
- may choose children to be readers for your communal celebration of Reconciliation – a teacher in the school may be able to help by identifying strong readers or you may have a sense from the family’s participation at Mass

**Session 3 – Reconciliation** – you will most likely have to offer more than one communal celebration to accommodate all children – need not be school-based groupings – could just be parent choice of date of celebration

**Session 4 – “Rehearsal” for First Communion**

Again, this can be much more than a rehearsal. Be sure to have parents present for some of it, if not all. Show parents how you are teaching the children. For instance, show children how to hold their hands while their parents are present. Then parents know how to help their children. Give practical info about seating, photographs, etc.

**Optional Session**

First Communion Retreat – some schools may traditionally have a retreat or activity day at the school prior to First Communion. The outline of the day may or may not suit parish needs. If the school is planning their own activity day at the school, parish staff may visit at the school. If the retreat is happening at the parish, there may be supports you could have from the school. If a parish offers a retreat during school hours, it becomes an invitation of the parish to the school for a class trip. Communication with school staff early in the year or in June of the previous year will help make these kinds of plans come together.