

Diocese of Hamilton
SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES
The Initiation of Children

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DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

Following extensive consultation in the Diocese of Hamilton, the **Sacramental Guidelines for the Initiation of Children** were approved by the Presbyteral Council on February 14, 2012. They were promulgated on February 17, 2012. Now, after a period of ten years and having reflected on our experience, these guidelines have been revised and are presented for implementation in the Diocese of Hamilton.

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

Preparations for the Sacraments must be appropriate and never onerous for the children or their families, or for the parish staff. Resources to assist in providing appropriate preparation are available from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.

For First Communion and Confirmation, collaboration between pastors and catechetical personnel in our parishes and principals and staff at our Catholic schools is essential for children to benefit fully from the foundational catechesis provided in our schools and the immediate sacramental/liturgical preparation coordinated in the parish.

Pastors will assure that the spirit and content of these guidelines are embraced and that parish practice will reflect these guidelines.

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,

+Douglas Crosby, OMI

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

Murray J. Kroetsch

Monsignor Murray J. Kroetsch, PH, VG
Chancellor

July 2022

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 the 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 approved by the Diocese.
5. Foundational and on-going preparation includes catechesis for the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. The focus of this preparation is to provide candidates with an understanding of the meaning of the sacrament. This catechesis is usually provided by the Catholic School or may be provided by participation in the Diocesan Catechetical Program.
6. Immediate preparation for sacraments includes specific sacramental/liturgical catechesis prior to the sacrament being celebrated. The focus of this preparation is to ensure that the child and family are able to participate fully, consciously and actively in the liturgical celebration. It may take the form of catechesis on the rite or a short retreat, and possibly a rehearsal. The form of immediate sacramental preparation is determined by the proper parish where the celebration will take place and 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. Models for preparation for these Sacraments are available from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.

7. The immediate preparation 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 parish where the sacrament will be celebrated. 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)
8. The immediate 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 ought not to be onerous for the child, the parents or the parish.
9. Registration for sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the parish where the Sacrament is to be celebrated. This includes the collection of any necessary documentation. It is not the school's responsibility to collect this documentation. For First Eucharist and Confirmation, this includes a valid certificate of Baptism in the Catholic Church. If a child is baptized in an unfamiliar rite or uncertain ecclesial community, pastors are asked to gather any and all available documentation and contact the Chancellor's Office for direction.
10. Documentation attesting to the suitability of godparents and sponsors is not required in the Diocese of Hamilton. Where such documentation for suitability of godparents and sponsors is required by another diocese, the letter in Appendix 1 may be used.
11. 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 for the celebration to the best of their ability. The spiritual welfare of the children and their families will frequently necessitate adjustments in the requirements for preparation established by the parish.

Admission to the sacraments is never to be determined by tests or projects completed or by attendance records. Failure to complete the preparation in its entirety is never to be an obstacle to the celebration of the Sacrament.
12. 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 from the Catholic school community. The liturgical celebration takes place according to the principles outlined in *Gathered into One*. Only ritual books approved for use in Canada are permitted.
13. Further details concerning the celebration of the sacraments are to be found in the Liturgical and Sacramental Guidelines, Diocese of Hamilton (Pastors Handbook).

14. 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. Parents may be asked for a voluntary and reasonable donation to cover the costs of preparatory resources.

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM OF CHILDREN

1. For an infant or child **who has not reached catechetical age**, i.e., not completed grade two, 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 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*).

A well-founded hope may be based on the faith practice of the parent(s) or godparents, or on their expressed intention to provide a Catholic education for their child.

2. Arrangements for a particular Baptism are always to be made by the parents in a personal meeting with the pastor, his associate or a pastoral minister. 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 may be invited to join the parents for these meetings. Models for this preparation are available from the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.
4. When parents are not married, 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 some form of preparation and have a firm intention to raise their child in the Catholic Church to the best of their ability.
5. Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor. There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each (*Canons 872-873*). Godparents must be no 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 is to 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 Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.
8. The baptism of children is to be recorded in the parish Baptismal Register.

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

9. 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 two 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 prepared to celebrate the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist at the same celebration.
10. 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 on-going foundational catechesis that will be helpful in the child's immediate preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.
11. Approved resources suitable for preparation, depending on the age and needs of the child, are available from the Diocesan Liturgy Office and Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.
12. The full initiation of children of catechetical age may take place at any time throughout the year and is to be recorded in the parish Baptismal Register.

RECEPTION OF CHILDREN INTO FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Children in Grade Two who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to receive First Communion may be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, having presented their 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 (i.e., in Grade Seven).
2. Children of catechetical age, that is, children having completed Grade two, or who 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 that provided by the parish for children of catechetical age who are preparing for full Christian Initiation. With the permission and support of their parents, following suitable catechetical formation, these 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 on-going foundational catechesis that will be helpful in the child's immediate preparation for their Reception into Full Communion.
4. Approved resources suitable for preparation, depending on the age and needs of the child, are available from the Diocesan Liturgy Office and Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.
5. The Reception into Full Communion of children of catechetical age may take place at any time throughout the year and is to be recorded in the parish 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 preparing for First Eucharist are to be prepared and have the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Communion.
2. The first celebration 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 during this celebration.
3. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis. Adaptive resources are also available to prepare children with special needs for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. It is not permitted to take attendance or to record the names of 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 Two) and have participated in the immediate sacramental/liturgical preparation for the Sacrament through their parish.
2. The decision concerning a 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. Communion is received while standing. Children may not be prevented from receiving Communion in the hand or on the tongue.
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* and *Gathered into One*.
6. Approved resources suitable for preparation are available from the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis. Adaptive resources are also available to prepare children with special needs for their First Communion.
7. It is possible to celebrate First Eucharist if a child has, for whatever reason, not previously celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
8. The celebration of First Eucharist is to be recorded in the parish First Communion Register.

CONFIRMATION

1. Confirmation is celebrated with children who are in Grade Seven and who have completed the immediate sacramental/liturgical preparation.
2. The purpose of the immediate sacramental/liturgical preparation is to dispose the candidates to receive the grace of the sacrament and to participate fully, consciously and actively in the liturgy of Confirmation. It is not intended to prepare the candidates for a test of their religious knowledge.
3. Confirmation is celebrated without Mass. In the Deaneries where a Bishop is celebrating the Sacrament, the date and time are determined after consultation with the Bishop's Office. In Deaneries where the Pastor has been delegated to celebrate the Sacrament, the Bishop's Office is to be advised of the date and time for the celebration.
4. Children who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination who wish to become Catholic, may be welcomed into full communion by their Profession of Faith, Confirmation and First Communion. This takes place during a Mass celebrated at a time other than the parish Confirmation celebration.
5. A candidate for confirmation 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. Alternatively, they may choose a saint's name (male or female).
7. Approved resources for immediate preparation are available from the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis. Adaptive resources are also available to prepare children with special needs for their Confirmation.
8. The celebration of Confirmation is to be recorded in the parish Confirmation Register and a notice is to be sent to the parish of the child's baptism where due notation is made in the proper Baptismal Register.

PASTORAL REFERENCE

Name & Address of Church

Re: _____

Dear Monsignor/Father:

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

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

He/She:

- wishes to celebrate the Baptism of his/her child(ren) in your parish. Permission is hereby given.
- wishes to celebrate First Communion in your parish. Permission is hereby given.
- wishes to celebrate Confirmation in your parish. Permission is hereby given.
- wishes to be married in your parish. Permission is hereby given.

- 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 above named.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Signature of Pastor

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

I acknowledge that my child _____, upon receiving the
Eucharist in the Catholic Church is being received into the full communion of the Catholic Church
and is therefore no longer a member of another Christian church.

Signature of parent or guardian

Signature of witnessing Priest

Date _____

Place _____

*The reception of the child (including the details of his/her baptism)
is to be entered into the Parish register.*

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