



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

Models for Immediate Sacramental Preparation in the Parish – Diocese of Hamilton Revised, 2024

FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST COMMUNION

Two to four sessions of preparation may be offered in the parish including some or all of the following elements. It is noted that such sessions are most helpful for children enrolled in Catholic school receiving ongoing Sacramental Catechesis through their religion program, *Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ*. For children who are homeschooled or receiving public education, it is essential for them to be connected to a catechetical support for more comprehensive preparations (i.e. the Catechetical Correspondence Program). Children who are coming forward for First Reconciliation and First Communion who have yet to be baptized ought to receive a thorough preparation for Baptism and be received to the sacrament in a timely manner.

The Office for Evangelization and Catechesis can provide assistance in choosing materials and in training parish volunteers/catechists, if needed. For more information, please contact us at: catechesis@hamiltondiocese.com .

Children with special needs may require adapted resources in preparation for the Sacraments. Please reach out to the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis for suggestions of appropriate materials.

Three Session Options for First Reconciliation/Communion Preparation:

1. *Informational session for families*

- This is an opportunity to welcome, encourage, organize and catechize.
- This session may take place with parents only or alongside the children.
- This is most often a larger group gathering including the support of the local Catholic Schools.
- This is a time to gather necessary information for the sacraments, including baptismal certificates. Important dates and necessary materials for ongoing communication can be distributed.
- The pastor and other parish staff should lead this session.

**Diocesan resource for those children not yet Baptized can be found [HERE](#).
Diocesan Guidelines for First Reconciliation/Eucharist can be found [HERE](#).**

2. *Group catechetical session*

- This meeting is an opportunity to prepare the child to celebrate the sacraments.
- This gathering may include catechesis about the Mass, rehearsal of the liturgy, a digital resource highlighting the rites and their symbols, as well as a review of print resource and literature.
- Parents are encouraged to be a part of these gatherings, having independent time to reflect on their role in the faith life of their child.

Sample outlines of these meetings are found on pages 5-7.

3. *Retreat day*

- This gathering provides 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, organized well in advance with school administration.
- This gathering is to be prepared by the pastor alongside a parish team, and can incorporate resource and support from the local Catholic school community.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION

Please note, resources for First Reconciliation Preparation can be sourced independently, or through the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis. Often there are discounts associated with purchasing from the Chancery as purchases are made in bulk. Please reach out to the Diocesan Office to place an order: catechesis@hamiltondiocese.com.

Print Materials for Parents:

Catholic Parent Know How Series – A booklet is available, “Preparing Your Child for First Reconciliation”. An 8-page full colour magazine with Scripture, catechesis, and tips to help parents in their support of their children preparing for the sacrament.

Preparing for First Confession: Simple Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers – A short leaflet to encourage parents and caregivers to help meaningfully in the preparation process. This pamphlet supports parents in their teaching about sin, confession and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These brochures are available for purchase in full-colour, print from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.

Witness of Faith in the Home, Connie Clark – A free digital resource to support families who are unsure of their role in preparing their children for the Sacraments. This booklet provides tangible suggestions for enliven the sense of God and a healthy prayer life in the home. Further supplemental reading recommendations are provided. This booklet is available for free download from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis webpage.

Print Materials for Children:

We Prepare for Reconciliation: Berube, Novalis – a full colour preparation guide including five chapters, with four-six themes or short lessons per chapter. This resource provides a good parent information section that separates from the text, encouraging parents active participation in the preparation process. A leader's guide is available for group study.

My Own Reconciliation – A keepsake booklet that provides an opportunity for children and parents to grow in prayer and in knowledge of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Using their own words and drawings, children can express their feelings about God's love and care.

Print Materials for Older Children:

Examination of Conscience and the Sacrament of Reconciliation – in 2019, the Diocesan Pastoral Offices produced a resource for teens to help in their preparation for a good confession. These foldout brochures are available for purchase from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, or can be downloaded free from the [Diocesan Website](#). A catechist guide is available for leaders. This tool would also be helpful for any older children preparing for First Confession (i.e. grades 8 and up).

Digital Content for Parents:

Please note, these resources can be used for an in-person or virtual preparation session.

Catechesis on Confession – The Diocese of Hamilton has produced a 7-video series in partnership with priests and catechists to better understand the sacrament of reconciliation and the nature of sin. All the videos are five minutes in length or shorter, and are free and accessible on the [Diocesan Website](#).

Real+True – A series produced by Our Sunday Visitor in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization. Short, accessible videos explaining sin, the importance of an Examination of Conscience, and absolution. Each video is 5-8 minutes and is designed for parents only. These videos would serve as excellent follow up to a group catechetical session, or food for thought after an initial meeting with the pastor.

Digital Content for Children:

Please note, these resources can be used for an in-person or virtual preparation session.

Signs of Grace: You are Forgiven – For those parishes that have access to FORMED, the Augustine Institute has produced a series of short videos for preparation of children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These engaging videos span between three to five minutes in length, and provide a great overview of important ideas of sin, mercy and the endless love of God. Although the complete *Signs of Grace* curriculum does not suit the Sacramental Guidelines for the Diocese of Hamilton, it would be beneficial to provide these short videos as a supplement. A sample of the videos can be found [HERE](#).

Steps of Confession Song – “Christine in Action” has produced a short two-minute song to help children better understand the steps of Confession. This video is free and accessible from YouTube.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR FIRST COMMUNION

Please note, resources for First Communion Preparation can be sourced independently, or through the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis. Often there are discounts associated with purchasing from the Chancery as purchases are made in bulk. Please reach out to the Diocesan Office to place an order: catechesis@hamiltondiocese.com.

Print Materials for Parents:

Catholic Parent Know How Series – A booklet is available, *“Preparing Your Child for First Communion”*. An 8-page full colour magazine with Scripture, catechesis, and tips to help parents in their support of their children preparing for the sacrament.

Preparing for First Communion: Simple Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers – A short leaflet to encourage parents and caregivers to help meaningfully in the preparation process. This pamphlet supports parents in their teaching about thanksgiving, community and the celebration of Holy Mass. These brochures are available for purchase in full-colour, print from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis.

Witness of Faith in the Home, Connie Clark – A free digital resource to support families who are unsure of their role in preparing their children for the Sacraments. This booklet provides tangible suggestions for enliven the sense of God and a healthy prayer life in the home. Further supplemental reading recommendations are provided. This booklet is available for free download from the Diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechesis webpage.

Print Materials for Children:

We Share in the Eucharist: Berube, Novalis– a full colour preparation guide including five chapters, with four-six themes or short lessons per chapter. This resource provides a good parent information section that separates from the text, encouraging parents active participation in the preparation process. A leader’s guide is available for group study.

My Own Mass Booklet – A keepsake booklet that provides an opportunity for children and parents to grow in prayer and in knowledge of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Using their own words and drawings, children can express their feelings about God’s love and care.

Celebrating Eucharist: A Mass Book for Children – A guided full-colour missal to help children understand the parts of the Mass and all responses. **Please note**, as this is an American resource, the Nicene Creed is used rather than the Apostles’ Creed. It is recommended that an insert with the text of the Apostles’ Creed be provided.

Sunday Missal for Young Catholics – An annual resource produced by Living with Christ to introduce young people to the Sunday Scriptures. This book includes a full Mass outline, including explanations of gestures. This booklet would be most helpful for older children preparing for First Eucharist (i.e. grades 4-8).

Digital Content for Parents:

Please note, these resources can be used for an in-person or virtual preparation session.

Real+True – A series produced by Our Sunday Visitor in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization. Short, accessible videos explaining the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life. Each video is 5-8 minutes and is designed for parents only. These videos would serve as excellent follow up to a group catechetical session, or food for thought after an initial meeting with the pastor.

Support for Mass Attendance - There is no denying that it is no small feat to bring children to Mass on Sunday. Parents can benefit from encouragement and strategies to help prepare their children for the experience of the Eucharist, and tools to support full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. Jackie Angel, in this brief video for Ascension Press, provides strategies born from her own experience as a mother and catechist. You can access the video for free from YouTube [HERE](#).

Digital Content for Children:

Please note, these resources can be used for an in-person or virtual preparation session.

Signs of Grace: You are Loved – For those parishes that have access to FORMED, the Augustine Institute has produced a series of short videos for preparation of children for First Communion preparation. These engaging videos span between three to five minutes in length, and provide a great overview of **the Last Supper, thanksgiving, and Jesus’ real presence in the Eucharist, food for the journey**. Although the complete *Signs of Grace* curriculum does not suit the Sacramental Guidelines for the Diocese of Hamilton, it would be beneficial to provide these short videos as a supplement. A sample of the videos can be found [HERE](#).

Brother Francis, “The Bread of Life” – The Brother Francis Series has a 26-minute episode on the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. The Diocese of Hamilton has partnered with the Brother Francis producers to make this video available to our Diocesan community via an annual license. We encourage you to share the log-in information with families of children preparing for First Communion. Please reach out to the Office for Evangelization and Catechesis for the log-in details.

OUTLINE OF A GROUP CATECHETICAL SESSION FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION AND/OR FIRST COMMUNION PREPARATION

After an initial meeting between parish staff and the family, a group session may be offered that combines catechetical elements as well as a practical rehearsal in preparation for First Reconciliation and/or First Communion. **For children enrolled in the Catholic Schools affiliated with the parish, it may be beneficial to host this gathering during the school day, with the support of the school staff. It is the parish's responsibility to liaise with the school administration about this possibility and ensure that scheduling is received early in the academic year. It is the full responsibility of the parish to organize all programming, supplies and lead these activities.**

If this session takes place outside of school hours, it is encouraged that parents are given the opportunity to participate in the session as well.

Your meeting can be structured as a 75 – 90 minute session including the following priorities:

- 10 – 15 minutes:** Welcome and opening prayer
- 20 - 30 minutes:** Catechesis and liturgical preparation
- 10 - 15 minutes:** Reflection and prayer
- 20 - 30 minutes:** Rehearsal and important information for the celebration of the Sacrament
- 15 – 20 minutes:** Questions, announcements and closing prayer

Please note, it is recommended to share as much literature as possible with families and the parish school ahead of this gathering, so that all participants may come prepared with their questions.

Welcome and Opening Prayer	Choose a welcoming and inviting environment for this gathering. Consider preparation that is necessary for any handouts, AV equipment and training for volunteer leaders. Send regular reminders and updates to families and the parish school about meeting days and times. Prepare an opening prayer to gather the group and set the tone for the conversation.
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<p>Catechesis on the Sacrament using printed or digital resource</p>	<p>Ensure that each participant has a copy of the materials you will be referring to. Be sure that all content is age appropriate and that accommodations are made for children with needs for adaptive catechesis. If you are utilizing digital content, sending the links along via email to the families or the classroom teachers ahead of time is helpful for follow-up.</p> <p>If you are preparing for First Reconciliation, this is a good time to review about forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and mercy. This is a good time to talk about the stories of forgiveness in the Bible, and the steps involved in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This may also be a good time to review important prayers such as the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.</p> <p>If you are preparing for First Communion, this is a good time to review the parts of the Mass, the responses of the congregation at Mass, stories from the Bible that highlight the elements of Eucharist and teaching about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. A Church tour may be appropriate here as well to identify important signs, symbols and items present in our worship space.</p> <p>The goal of this presentation is to ensure that the children feel confident about this important milestone in their faith life, and they know of the support of the parish that accompanies them.</p>
<p>Reflection and prayer</p>	<p>Take time for conversation with the children and their teachers/parents. Encourage the children to reflect on a question of importance together, sharing their collective wisdom.</p> <p>Questions for consideration may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I make my heart ready to welcome Jesus in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist? • Who helps me learn more about God’s love for me? • How can I share the love of God with others? • How might I pray for others?

<p>Rehearsal and important information for First Reconciliation/First Communion day</p>	<p>Ideally, bring the children right into the Church and take time to walk through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and/or how to receive First Holy Communion.</p> <p>This is an excellent time to practice responses, gestures, and participation required from the children.</p> <p>Be sure to clearly express your expectations for arrival, seating, and any other important procedures for the celebration day so there is no confusion. A handout with these details is helpful, particularly if parents are not present for this rehearsal.</p>
<p>Questions, announcements and Closing Prayer</p>	<p>Gathering the group back together, take time for questions or concerns for the group, make any necessary announcements and close with prayer.</p> <p>At dismissal, ensure all parents, teachers and children have any necessary brochures or handouts to takeaway for future reference.</p>

A Note about Volunteers:

It is helpful to have the involvement of lay volunteers to support these group sessions. Preparation Teams should have the inclusion of the parish staff, trained screened volunteers, the parish catechist and/or children’s ministry leaders. If this gathering takes place during the school day, it is essential to have the presence and full participation of the classroom teacher as well.