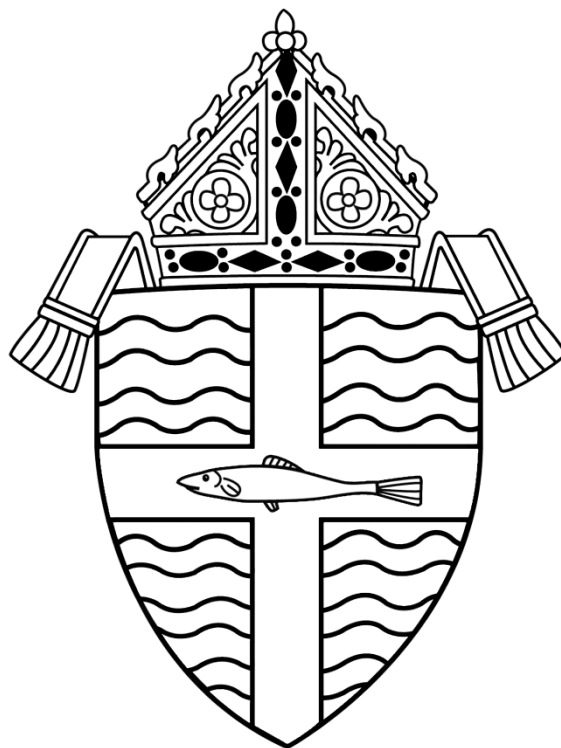


# First Holy Communion

*Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation Programs in the  
Diocese of Madison*



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# First Holy Communion

## *Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation Programs in the Diocese of Madison*

### **I. Catechetical Summary**

- “Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.”
- “The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.... For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”<sup>1</sup>
- “At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’”<sup>2</sup>
- In the Latin rite, as children reach the age of reason (around 7 years of age), the Church extends to them an invitation to join their parish community in sharing the Eucharist – the Bread of Life. The initiation into the Christian community that took place at Baptism now continues as these young Christians are invited to enter fully into the heart of our Christian faith through participation in the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is at the center of Christian life, its source and its summit. It is the focal point where Christians come together out of love for the Lord to experience the mystery of his presence, and then to carry his presence out to all those they meet.
- It is the duty of the pastors to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it.”
- “In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain.... [It is the duty of pastors] to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.”<sup>3</sup>

### **II. Cooperation between Parents and Pastors**

The preparation of children for the reception of the sacraments is a work of cooperation between pastors and parents, each of whom has, in his own way, both the right and the duty of educating Christian

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<sup>1</sup> CCC 1324.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 1323.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 11.

children. The Church joyfully affirms that parents are the “principal and first educators of their children”<sup>4</sup> and the “first heralds” for them of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Yet this primary right of parents to educate their children is not absolute. In matters of faith and morals, it is subordinate to the authority of the Church. For Christian education “belongs preeminently to the Church,” both because of the authority given to her by Christ to teach all nations,<sup>6</sup> and because she is the spiritual mother of all those who are born of the waters of Baptism. Just as parents have a natural right and duty to educate the children born to them by nature, so also the Church has a supernatural right and duty to educate all the children born to her by grace.<sup>7</sup>

The primary aim of sacramental preparation is to ensure that those approaching the sacraments are suitably instructed and properly disposed. Parents and pastors are called to work harmoniously together in fulfilling the evangelizing mission of the Church by taking joint responsibility for ensuring that children receive suitable instruction prior to reception of the sacraments. It is for the pastor to judge that the children are properly disposed and suitably instructed before allowing them to receive the sacraments. However, this judgment must be made in light of the minimum requirements of canon law,<sup>8</sup> for we cannot require more for the reception of the sacraments than the universal law of the Church requires.

### **III. Canonical Requirements for the Reception of the Sacrament**

The Christian faithful have the right to receive the sacraments.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the sacraments cannot be denied to those who fulfill the basic canonical requirements for receiving them.<sup>10</sup> In the case of First Holy Communion, these basic requirements are that one must:

- be a baptized Catholic,
- have made a prior confession,
- have attained the use of reason,
- be in a state of grace,
- be suitably instructed and properly disposed,
- and have abstained from food or drink for at least one hour prior to reception.<sup>11</sup>

In order to be considered as suitably instructed and properly disposed, children must “understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and be able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion.”<sup>12</sup>

“It is for the pastor to exercise vigilance so that children who have not attained the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed do not approach Holy Communion.”<sup>13</sup> But this judgment must be made according to canonical norms. Hence, if a member of the Christian faithful meets the basic canonical requirements for the reception of a sacrament, even if he/she has not fulfilled the requirements

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<sup>4</sup> CCC 1653.

<sup>5</sup> CCC 2225.

<sup>6</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Pius XI, *On Christian Education*, 15-17.

<sup>8</sup> See Section III: Canonical Requirements for the Reception of the Sacrament.

<sup>9</sup> CIC, c. 213.

<sup>10</sup> CIC, c. 843, §1.

<sup>11</sup> CIC, c. 912-919.

<sup>12</sup> CIC, c. 913, §1.

<sup>13</sup> CIC, c. 914.

of a given parish catechetical program or the diocesan expectations outlined below, he/she cannot be refused the sacrament.

#### **IV. Instructions for Catechetical Programs in Catholic Parishes and Schools**

“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.”<sup>14</sup>

Sacramental preparation programs, whether in parishes or in schools, must not be content with merely fulfilling the minimum canonical requirements for reception of the sacraments, but must seek to provide vigorous and robust catechesis aimed at a deeply rooted and living faith. Sacramental preparation programs must provide doctrinally sound catechesis for sacramental formation. “The disciple of Christ has the right to receive the ‘Word of Faith’ not in mutilated, falsified or in diminished form, but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor.”<sup>15</sup> Catechetical formation should be robust and reflect the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It should include personal testimony that gives witness to the Christian life. And it should adhere to diocesan curriculum standards for immediate preparation for the sacrament.<sup>16</sup>

##### **A. Remote and Proximate Preparation**

**Parish faith formation** programs and **Catholic schools** should offer approximately 30 hours of catechetical formation for children in the year prior to their reception of the sacrament (remote preparation), and approximately 30 hours of catechetical formation in the year concurrent with their reception of the sacrament (proximate preparation).

Parents who **homeschool** their children should be affirmed and encouraged as the primary educators of their children. They should be in yearly communication with their pastor so that he is able to ensure the religious education of every child in his parish.<sup>17</sup>

##### **B. Immediate Preparation**

The **baptismal certificate** should be requested at the beginning of immediate preparation. This is very important because the preparation for and the reception of the sacraments is different for children who have not been baptized and for children who have been baptized outside the Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup>

Parish catechetical leaders should offer 8-10 hours of immediate preparation for the sacrament, in addition to and distinct from the approximately 30 hours of annual catechetical formation (and distinct from the immediate preparation for First Reconciliation). These 8-10 hours may include a combination of time spent together at the parish and time spent on projects to be completed in the home.

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<sup>14</sup> CIC, c. 843, §2.

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Catechesis in our Time*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> See attached Curriculum Guidelines.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop Morlino, *Letter to Parents*.

<sup>18</sup> See Section VII: Pastoral Considerations.

All children should be invited and encouraged to participate in the immediate preparation for the sacrament--not only those enrolled in parish faith formation, but also those enrolled in Catholic schools and those who are homeschooled. This is to enable all families to come together as a parish community for the building up of the body of Christ and for the common good of the parish.

- Parish catechetical leaders should consider the possibility of offering monthly sessions, in the months immediately prior to the reception of the sacrament, to prepare students who have received catechetical formation in various venues prior to this immediate preparation.
- Pastors and parish catechetical leaders should encourage parents to participate in the immediate sacramental preparation of their children (e.g. by attending sacramental preparation sessions and/or by completing assignments prepared by the parish catechetical leader with their children at home).
- Parish catechetical leaders should consider the possibility of offering family faith formation sessions, which includes adult faith formation for parents.
- Parish catechetical leaders should communicate to the families of the parish all of the information necessary for enrollment in sacramental preparation prior to the beginning of immediate preparation. This allows families the opportunity to register for formation and be informed of all necessary expectations.
- A sacramental assessment or interview should be given by the pastor or his appointed catechetical leader to determine readiness, in accord with canonical norms, respecting the age and intellectual capability of each of the faithful.
- Parish catechetical leaders should provide a time to rehearse and practice prior to the reception of the sacrament.

## **V. Expectations for Participation in Parish Sacramental Preparation Programs**

Parish catechetical leaders should maintain a high standard of expectations for participation in parish sacramental preparation programs. Regular attendance at parish sacramental preparation classes and/or events should be expected as well as attendance at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Those who are unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of a parish catechetical program may be denied participation in the parish sacramental preparation program, but they cannot be denied reception of the sacrament as long as they fulfill the minimum canonical requirements. Parents who are not prepared to comply with a reasonably high standard of expectations for participation in the parish program of sacramental preparation should be prepared to take on the full responsibility of preparing their children for the sacrament at home.<sup>19</sup>

## **VI. Materials for Catechetical Formation**

- Diocese of Madison Catechetical Standards & Benchmarks
- Approved Texts from the Diocese of Madison, Primary Textbook List

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<sup>19</sup> See the third case discussed in Section VII: Pastoral Considerations.

- Curriculum Guidelines for First Eucharist (attached)
- Approved USCCB materials for immediate preparation of the sacrament (preferably materials that include parental involvement in instruction)
- The text/materials used for immediate preparation should be distinct from the second grade text/materials.

## VII. Pastoral Considerations

- ***Cases where unbaptized children seek First Holy Communion.*** If the child has attained the use of reason, he/she is to be referred to the RCIA process. He/she is to be prepared as a catechumen for full initiation into the Church through Baptism followed immediately by Confirmation and First Communion.<sup>20</sup>
- ***Cases where children baptized in non-Catholic ecclesial communities seek First Holy Communion.*** If the child has attained the use of reason, he/she should be referred to the RCIA process. He/she is to be prepared as a candidate for Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church of a baptized Christian adult. This includes a formal profession of faith and reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.<sup>21</sup> N.B., mere First Communion and private Profession of Faith isn't sufficient; a formal reception by a mandated priest is required for validity of becoming Catholic. The priest should then record this in the Baptism register or the Reception register along with baptismal information and he should keep original baptismal documentation.
- ***Cases where parents desire to complete the immediate preparation for the sacrament at home.*** Parents who do not desire for their children to participate in any of the formal preparation (including the immediate preparation) that takes place in the parish catechetical program should fill out the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form and submit it to the pastor of their parish. After being signed by the pastor, a copy should be kept by all interested parties. Upon the completion of preparation and prior to the reception of the sacrament, the pastor should interview the child in order to determine his/her readiness in accord with canonical norms, respecting the age and intellectual capability of each of the faithful.
- ***Cases where parents desire for their children to receive the sacrament in a place other than in his/her own parish church.*** If a family desires that a child receive the sacrament in a place other than his or her own parish church, they should use the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form. This form will facilitate communication between the pastor, the parents, the child, and the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament will take place. A copy of the form, signed by the parents and the pastor, should be presented to the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament is to take place. The rector of the church or oratory is to request a copy of this form.

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<sup>20</sup> CIC, c. 883, §2; c. 885, §2.

<sup>21</sup> CIC, c. 883, §2; c. 885, §2.

- ***Cases where parents desire for their children to receive the sacrament in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.*** With a large and growing community attached to the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite in the Diocese of Madison, it will not be uncommon to encounter a parish family who desires for their child to receive the sacraments in the extraordinary form. However, not every parish regularly celebrates the sacraments in the extraordinary form; thus, if a family desires that a child receive the sacrament in the extraordinary form at an alternate location (e.g., a different parish church, a shrine, etc.), they should fill out the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form and submit it to their pastor. This form will facilitate communication between the pastor, the parents, the child, and the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament will take place. A copy of this form should be presented to the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament is to take place. Pastors hosting sacramental liturgies in the extraordinary form should request a signed copy of this form from those who are coming from other parishes.
- ***Cases where children with special needs seek reception of the sacrament.*** Special care should be given to those with special needs in the formation process. It is important to note that the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to “distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food,” even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the Catholic to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving Holy Communion.<sup>22</sup> Helpful materials and resources are available in the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis as well as the Apostolate for Persons with Disabilities at the curial offices of the Diocese of Madison.
- ***Cases where children older than the normative age seek reception of the sacrament.*** An older child should not simply be placed into group formation with younger children, but should receive age-appropriate formation that also takes into account his/her previous catechetical formation. For example, the pastoral needs of a child who has been attending Mass regularly and has been receiving catechetical instruction will differ from the pastoral needs of a child who has not been attending Mass or receiving catechetical instruction, since special care must be given to those who are returning to the Church after being away from the practice of the faith.
- ***Cases where children younger than the normative age seek reception of the sacrament.*** Some children attain the use of reason prior to their 7<sup>th</sup> year. A child who desires to receive the sacrament earlier than usual should obtain approval from the pastor. The child must have attained the use of reason and must fulfill the basic canonical requirements outlined in section 3. The pastor’s approval should not be refused unless he has clear evidence that the child is not sufficiently disposed and/or has not been suitably instructed.

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<sup>22</sup> USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, rev. ed. (June 15, 2017), 22.

- *Cases where children living in potentially scandalous family situations seek reception of the sacrament.* Careful consideration and care must be given and appropriate decisions made on a case by case basis. Assistance should be sought from the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis and from the Office of the Vicar General.

### **VIII. Liturgical Instructions & the Rites**

- The liturgical rite used in the reception of the sacrament is determined by individual pastors in accord with liturgical law and universal law.
- The details of the times and dates along with the arrangement of communicants and their families will be left to the discretion of each pastor for his own parish.
- Children being prepared for First Communion should be taught how to receive both in the hand and on the tongue.<sup>23</sup>
- It is the request of Bishop Robert Morlino that children receive kneeling and on the tongue for the reception of their first Holy Communion.<sup>24</sup>

### **IN BRIEF:**

- Pastors are obliged by the law of the Church “to take care that the faithful are properly instructed.”<sup>25</sup>
- Parishes must offer opportunities for formation that provides suitable instruction and fosters proper disposition to receive the sacraments at the appropriate time.
- Parishes must provide 30 hours of formation/catechetical instruction in the year prior to the sacramental year, 30 hours of formation/catechetical instruction simultaneous to the sacramental year, and 8-10 hours of immediate preparation for the sacrament.
- This formation must follow diocesan curriculum standards for the respective grade levels as well as curriculum guidelines for immediate preparation for each sacrament.
- All formation must reflect the teachings of the Church found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Parishes must provide formation that is robust and rich in content, that includes the personal testimony of catechists, and which in turn gives witness to the Christian life.
- Parishes must provide opportunities and invite parents to engage in the sacramental preparation process in order to facilitate better instruction in the home.
- Parishes must communicate with the faithful about the expectations of the sacramental formation process prior to the proximate preparation years so that they are informed of all necessary expectations of the formation process.

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<sup>23</sup> Bishop Morlino, Letter of July 15, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Bishop Morlino, Letter of July 15, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> CIC, c. 890.



- Pastors must be in yearly communication with families who do sacramental preparation at home.
- Pastors must communicate with and come to agreement with families whose situations are in need of particular pastoral consideration (see the Sacramental Agreement forms).
- Pastors must require Sacramental Agreement forms from non-parishioners who seek formation or reception of the sacrament in another parish.
- Pastors must interview all the faithful who are seeking the sacrament prior to reception of the sacrament in order to ensure that they have been suitably instructed and are properly disposed.

# Curriculum Guidelines for First Eucharist

## God's Plan to love us and be one with us

- God existed from all time as a communion of Persons: this is the Trinity.
- God wants us to know him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to share in the life of the Trinity: eternal love.
- The Father's Plan (God had a plan to share his life with us – the Story of Salvation learned at First Reconciliation Prep).
- He created us to be in relationship with him and invites us to belong to the Church.
- In the Church we become his adopted children and part of the Body of Christ.
- When we gather together at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we offer praise and sacrifice to God, we celebrate that Christ died to save us and rose from the dead, we give thanks for his mercy and love, and we pray for his grace and blessings.
- At Mass we are one with the Lord and with one another by prayer and receiving the Eucharist.
- The Seven Sacraments were instituted by Christ to give grace & sanctify us.
- Review the names and purposes of the Sacraments & the Church in the economy of Salvation.
  - Teach that there are seven sacraments
  - Teach the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist
  - Teach sacraments of healing: Reconciliation, Anointing of the sick
  - Teach sacraments that build the body of Christ: Marriage, Holy Orders
- Every sacrament must have FORM and MATTER
  - **Form:** the words of Consecration that are said at Mass
  - **Matter:** the bread and the wine that will become the Body and the Blood of Jesus

## The Body of Christ: Our Holy Mother Church

- God taught his followers in the Bible to keep holy the Lord's Day and Jesus reminded them of the importance of following all His commands.
- Jesus taught his apostles about celebrating the Mass at the Last Supper. He instructed them to go forth and celebrate with others. It was their responsibility to build up the Body of Christ.
- Jesus left his apostles on earth as the first bishops who would lead the Church.
- He left Peter as the head of the apostles: our current day Peter is called the Pope.
- Our current Pope is Pope Francis
- Bishops are the successors of the apostles.
- Our current Bishop is Robert Morlino.
- Bishops have priests who live and work and minister to the parishes providing the Mass and other sacraments for all the faithful in the diocese.

## The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

- When we attend Mass we are offering praise, sacrifice, prayers, and thanks to God, remembering the great sacrifice he made for us on the Cross.
- The Mass is divided into 4 major parts: Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites.
- God gives us his Holy Word at Mass: This is the Liturgy of the Word.
- When we are at Mass it is as if time stands still and we are at the original sacrifice at Calvary, witnessing God's great love of dying on the Cross.

- The Eucharist is the only repeatable Sacrament of Initiation.
- As Catholics we are required to go to Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days.
- It is a serious sin not to attend Mass on Sunday or on Holy Days.
- Participate in a tour of the Church and the sacristy: learn all the sacred vessels and essential items used in the Mass.

### Sacramental details

- Essential elements of the Sacrament
  - Know that a priest must celebrate Mass in order for it to be the Body and Blood of Christ. He stands in the person of Christ – in persona Christi.
  - It is the Holy Spirit who changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ through the priest who calls upon him. This change is called Transubstantiation.
  - When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine we are receiving Jesus’ real body and blood, not just a symbol of it.
  - In order to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, you have to have made your First Confession and received your First Communion.
- Essential elements by the Communicant
  - Know how and when to genuflect and what it means (honoring Christ’s presence in the Tabernacle)
  - Know how to bless yourself with holy water upon entering the Church and what it means (symbol of Baptism and source of grace)
  - Learn reverence during Mass and during the Communion procession
  - Know what to say: Respond “Amen” to “the Body of Christ.”
  - Know how to receive: In the hand (placed as a throne) or on the tongue.
    - **\*\*At Bishop’s request, children should be taught both ways of reception**
      - If receiving in the throne of the hand, a deep bow or sign of reverence to be made just prior to reception.
  - Steps of the sacrament
    - **Be sure that your heart and soul are prepared for receiving Communion (all serious sin should be confessed prior to going to Communion)**
    - **Abstain from food and drink other than water for 1 hour prior to receiving Communion**
    - **Be in attendance at Mass**
    - **Receive the Body and Blood of Jesus**
    - **Pray in thanksgiving for this great gift**
- Effects of the sacrament
  - We are brought into union with Christ
  - We are brought into union with one another
  - Less serious sin is wiped from our souls
  - The Eucharist gives us grace and strength to be holy in our everyday lives
  - We have a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
- Being Sent Forth to Share Christ & Ongoing Conversion

- We are sent forth from Mass to take Jesus to all that we meet
- Jesus taught his followers that they are to serve others and we are to do so as well
- We are called to go to Mass weekly and even daily if possible
  
- The Gift of Everlasting Life
  - Everything we do as Catholics should keep in mind our ultimate goal: Heaven
  - Going to Mass helps us to live lives that are worthy of Heaven
  - There is only ONE mass: we go to Mass on earth and are ONE with those who are celebrating in heaven

**Key Words**

Sacrament, Consecrate, Mystery, In Persona Christi, Grace, Transubstantiation, Sacrifice, Mass, Thanksgiving, Eucharist, Amen

**Prayers**

Mass Responses, Prayers & Prayer Postures from the Diocese of Madison Second Grade Catechetical Standards and Benchmarks