



Fall 2018

Dear Parents,

I greet you with tremendous joy and gratitude. Thank you for all that you do, each and every day, as you lay down your lives for one another and for your children. Your witness of love lays a foundation for your children truly to flourish, in so many ways. And with God's grace, it will also place both you and them on the path to Heaven!

It is in my own capacity as father and teacher that I write to you today, wishing to speak with you about preparing your children to receive the sacraments of the Church, through which God's grace is so generously poured out upon His beloved children. You and I together, each in our own way, have a shared responsibility for ensuring the Christian education and formation of children and for preparing them to receive the sacraments in a worthy and grace-filled way.

As parents, you are the first educators of your children. In receiving your children as gifts from God you have also received from Him the right and the duty to raise them in the knowledge and practice of our Catholic faith. This is what you promised when you got married. On that beautiful day of your wedding, one of the questions the priest or the deacon asked of you in the name of the Church was this: "Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?" And you answered, "Yes!" And when you brought your children to the saving waters of Baptism, the priest or deacon said to you: "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (or her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (or her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?" And again, you answered, "Yes!"

Dear parents, I thank you for this "Yes!" Thank you for your faith in Jesus Christ, and for your trust that He will help you to fulfill your mission as Christian parents. To bring up your children according to the law of Christ and His Church and to train them in the practice of the Catholic faith is no small task, especially in our times. It requires much prayer, work, and sacrifice.

But you are not alone! Christ is with you, and so is His Church. For just as parents have a natural right and a grave responsibility to educate their children, so too does the Church, as a spiritual mother, have a supernatural right and duty to educate the children to whom she gave new life and new birth through the waters of Baptism. And so I also have a grave responsibility, as the spiritual father of the Diocese of Madison, to watch over and provide for the religious education of Christian children.

Together then, we must work to prepare children to receive the sacraments as fruitfully as possible. In considering the preparation for reception of the sacraments, the Church has long identified three stages of preparation: remote, proximate, and immediate.

**Remote and proximate preparation** refer to all the years of your child's lifetime leading up to (remote) and including (proximate) his or her reception of a sacrament. In this area, you, as parents, have an especially important and truly indispensable role! In order to prepare your children to receive the sacraments fruitfully, you must teach them the faith both by word and by example. If you don't set the first example for them of truly living the Catholic faith, there is very little that anyone else can do. Your living example has a more direct and more powerful influence on your children than anything I or any pastor, teacher, or catechist can possibly say or do. We are here to aid and support you, but not to replace you!

Therefore I want to thank you for all that you already do for your children and I want to urge you to do everything you can to raise them in the practice of the faith, for the sake of their salvation and your own.

Concretely, this means, first of all, regular participation in the sacraments and daily prayer. How can you teach your children the importance of the Mass and the Eucharist if you do not set the example of attending Mass every Sunday and holy day? How can you teach your children about sorrow for sin and reliance on God's mercy if you do not set the example by frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How can you teach them the vital importance of prayer if they do not see you praying with them and for them on a daily basis? If you don't know where to begin, the family rosary is always a good place to start! In addition to all of this, you must talk with your children about Jesus Christ, about His life, death, and resurrection. You must model for them a life lived according to Christ's teaching through the power of the Holy Spirit: a life of moral virtue, of love and mercy, and of obedience to the commandments of God.

**Immediate preparation** refers to the time, usually several months, just prior to reception of a sacrament. And it is at this stage that your pastor should play a more direct role in providing vigorous and robust catechetical instruction and formation at the parish, aimed at fostering a deeply-rooted and living faith in Jesus Christ. It must be made clear that participation in the parish program of sacramental preparation is not absolutely required in order for your children to receive the sacraments. All the Christian faithful have a right to the sacraments, and so cannot be refused or denied the sacraments as long as they fulfill the minimum requirements of canon law. But none of us should be content with merely fulfilling minimum requirements in a matter as important as the sacramental preparation of our children. And so in my capacity as spiritual father and teacher of the Diocese of Madison, I do most earnestly exhort you, for the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, and for the common good of your own parish communities, to make every effort to participate in your parish's program of immediate sacramental formation. This will enable all families (whether Catholic school families, religious education families, or homeschool families) to come together as a parish community for the building up of the body of Christ.

To parents of **Catholic school** children, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude. Thank you for entrusting your children to our wonderful Catholic schools. I am very proud of our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Madison and very humbled by the confidence you place in our parish priests and schools when you allow them to participate in this way in the work of educating your children. If your children attend a Catholic school at a parish different from your own, I ask that you also be in annual communication with your own pastor so that he is able to know that all the children of his parish are being provided for. May God bless you and your children and all our Catholic schools.

To parents who bring their children to **parish religious education** programs: thank you as well for the extra efforts you make to ensure the Catholic formation of your children. I know it is a sacrifice to give up those extra hours each week to bring your children to religious education classes, but by doing so you offer your children an invaluable witness to the importance of putting God first in your lives in a very practical way in your daily and weekly schedule. I ask that you always remember to prioritize the more fundamental obligation of attending Sunday Mass. There is no point in bringing your children to religious education if you do not first of all bring them to Mass. Thank you and may God bless you and your children.

And to parents in particular who **homeschool** their children, I want to offer a word of affirmation and gratitude. It is a beautiful thing that you do, pouring out so much of your time and your energy into the education of your children; thank you for taking such a direct and active role. Your example is an extremely valuable witness for our whole society of the primary rights of parents over the education of their children. In the years of your children's formation leading up to reception of the sacrament (remote and proximate preparation), I ask that you be in communication at least once per year with your pastor in order to enable him to fulfill his responsibilities for ensuring the religious education of every child in his parish. May God bless you and your children and may all your efforts prosper.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



The Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino  
Bishop of Madison

**O F F I C E   O F   T H E   B I S H O P**

Diocese of Madison · 702 S. High Point Road · Suite 225 · Madison, WI 53719  
Phone: 608-821-3002 · Fax: 608-440-2809 · Email: [Officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org](mailto:Officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org)