

## **PASTOR'S NOTES: Sacramental Formation for Sacraments of Initiation: Part II**

**As discussed in last week's Pastor's notes, all sacramental formation for children is founded upon the spiritual formation they receive at home from the example set by their parents.** Spiritual and Catechetical Formation for the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation) and First Reconciliation is extremely important. Parental example is the first phase.

The second phase of Formation for Sacraments of Initiation and First Reconciliation is determined by the age of the child and the amount of formal catechesis the child has already received.

**Parents are encouraged to have their children baptized *within a few weeks* of their birth.** To baptize a baby, its parents must give assurance to the priest or deacon that they will raise and catechize the child; so that the child will know and live the Catholic Faith for their lifetime.

**If the child has not been baptized and is under the age of reason (almost 7),** the parents may choose to have that child baptized as an infant. Some pastoral judgment may be exercised for such a child who is almost seven years old. For example, parents may enroll the child in formation as a catechumen (RCIA), but extend their formation until the child is well past their seventh birthday.

**If a child was not baptized before the age of reason (around 7), the rules of the Church require that they enter the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: adapted for children (RCIA).** This decision must be a free choice made by the child (no one with the use of reason may be baptized against their free will.) This process lasts a year before Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. For Mystagogia such a child participates in formation programs. Parents may choose to insist on an even longer period of formation, like two years, but not a shorter one. At the end of this 12 month process (or longer) the child at the age of seven or above is to be Baptized, Confirmed, and receive First Holy Eucharist. (The National Statutes for the Catechumenate #14 states "adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration...")

**If a child has been baptized in infancy, the child is to be prepared for First Reconciliation before being prepared for First Holy Eucharist.** In our parish, all children preparing for First Reconciliation are to participate in a parish-based process, which includes (6) catechetical sessions for the child and sessions for their Catholic parent(s). Children enrolled in Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary Catholic School or Catholic Home School will receive the benefit of being catechized in school during the First Grade, in addition to the 6 session Parish Sacramental Formation Process for First Reconciliation on Sunday Morning. Children who attend non-catholic schools are expected to attend the Sunday Formation program all year.

**After a child has received First Reconciliation, their parents may enroll that child in our parish-based process for preparation for First Holy Eucharist.** Children enrolled in Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary Catholic School or Catholic Home School will receive the benefit of being catechized in school for the reception of Holy Eucharist during the second semester of second grade as well as in the (7) session Parish Sacramental Formation Process on Sunday Morning for First Holy Eucharist. Note: There should be a distinct separation between preparation for First Reconciliation and First Holy Eucharist.

*Questions have been raised:*

- 1. Why can't the catechesis in school be enough for the Sacraments of Initiation?**

**Reply:** Sacraments of Initiation belong in a parish setting. The RCIA is the model for the Sacraments of Initiation Formation Process. The catechesis should teach the child to connect with the everyday life of their parish community, not just school setting. Since they will not be in grade school as adults, they need to learn the connection between the sacraments and their home life. Sacraments of Initiation are for the purpose of Initiating into a community. Why would we prepare someone to enter into the Catholic Church in isolation from Sunday Mass within their proper parish? Canon Law requires the permission of the proper pastor for a child to receive First Eucharist outside of their proper parish. In addition, the Bishop of our Diocese has a strong preference for children to be prepared for the sacraments at a parish level. I feel obliged to accept his preference.

## **2. Why do parents have to attend classes?**

**Reply:** By attending the catechetical experiences for parents, the parent teaches the child, by example, that formation is a life-long journey of faith. Secondly, it reinforces the concepts the child is learning so that the parents can have the tools necessary to reinforce, at home, the formation their child is receiving. The National Directory for Catechesis states in its General Principles, preparation for the Sacraments should be done within the community, involving the community and involving the parents. We do formation on Sunday so that Sunday Mass will easily be included in the experience of formation for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation.

***Please Note: Catechetical materials now refer to First Communion as First Eucharist because that is the proper name of the ultimate Sacrament of Initiation.***