Office for Catechetical Formation

GUIDANCE ON SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

The Office for Catechetical Formation for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, in consultation with the Archdiocesan Office for Divine Worship, as created this document to assist Directors of Religious Education with sacramental preparation. This document notes Canonical requirements, other Church documents, and current practices & policies in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Questions pertaining to sacramental preparation and catechesis may be directed to the Office for Catechetical Formation at phillyocf@archphila.org.

It is the policy of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia that candidates for the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist receive those sacraments in the parish where the family is registered.

Re: Catechetical Instruction for Sacraments

Can. 777 Attentive to the norms established by the diocesan bishop, a pastor is to take care in a special way:

1. that suitable catechesis is imparted for the celebration of the sacraments;
2. that through catechetical instruction imparted for an appropriate period of time children are prepared properly for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and the Most Holy Eucharist and for the sacrament of confirmation;
3. that having received first communion, these children are enriched more fully and deeply through catechetical formation;
4. that catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits;
5. that the faith of youth and adults is strengthened, enlightened, and developed through various means and endeavors.

Can. 843 §1 Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.

Can. 843 §2 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 the competent authority.

NOTES:

There is no fixed or universally required length of time for sacramental preparation. Canon Law requires only that the faithful receive "suitable catechesis" over an "appropriate period of time" (Can. 777) and that this preparation consist of "proper evangelization & catechetical instruction" (Can. 843 §2).

The sacraments are the rights of the faithful provided that the conditions of Can. 843 §1 are fulfilled. A minister may delay the reception of a sacrament ***only*** *when the timing is inappropriate, the person is not properly disposed, or the person is not in a state of grace.*

SPECIAL NOTE:
There is ***NO*** *Archdiocesan Policy stipulating that two consecutive years of sacramental preparation are required for the reception of a sacrament. Any length of time beyond one year should be determined in consultation with the pastor, DRE, and parents.*

Re: Sacramental Preparation for Baptism

Can. 851 The celebration of baptism must be prepared properly; consequently:

1. an adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and is to be led insofar as possible through the various stages to sacramental initiation, according to the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms issued by it;
2. the parents of an infant to be baptized and those who are to undertake the function of sponsor are to be instructed properly on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. The pastor personally or through others is to take care that the parents are properly instructed through both pastoral advice and common prayer, bringing several families together and, where possible, visiting them.

Can. 852 §1. The prescripts of the canons on adult baptism are to be applied to all those who, no longer infants, have attained the use of reason.

NOTES:

Children who have attained the use of reason, which has been determined by the Church to be age seven, are to follow the prescriptions for adults regarding Christian Initiation, namely:

1. *Their formation should follow the general pattern of the ordinary catechumenate set forth in the Order for Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), with the appropriate adaptations permitted by the ritual.*

2. *If aged fourteen or older, they should receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, & Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, together with the adult catechumens.*
3. *If aged 7 – 13, they may receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, & Holy Eucharist at any time during the year once properly disposed for reception.*
4. *The reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are not permitted to be separated for unbaptized children who have reached the age of reason.*

Re: Sacramental Preparation for Penance

Can. 989 After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.

CCC 1457 states: Children must go to the Sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time (cf. Can 914 below).

Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing mortal sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with intellectual disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound intellectual disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability. (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 28)

NOTES:

Children initiated into the Church through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil should receive Penance during the Easter Season.

Children aged 7 – 13 who are initiated into the Church at another time during the year through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, & Holy Eucharist should receive Penance within the first two months following their initiation.

Re: Sacramental Preparation for Holy Eucharist

Can. 913 §1. The administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of

Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion.

Can. 914 It is primarily the duty of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as the duty of pastors, to take care that children who have reached the use of reason are prepared properly and, after they have made sacramental confession, are refreshed with this divine food as soon as possible. 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.

[T]he 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. Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. 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. (GCSPD, 22)

NOTES:

It should never be presumed that lacking the ability to verbally distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food disqualifies a person with special needs from reception of the Eucharist. Other suitable means of recognition should be identified in consultation with the parents, and as noted in GCSPD 22, cases of doubt should always be resolved in favor of the Catholic to receive the sacrament.

Re: Sacramental Preparation for Confirmation

Can. 889 §1. Every baptized person not yet confirmed and only such a person is capable of receiving confirmation.

Can. 889 §2. To receive confirmation licitly outside the danger of death requires that a person who has the use of reason be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises.

Persons who because of intellectual or developmental disabilities may never attain the use of reason can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and should be encouraged either

directly or, if necessary, through their parents, to receive it. It is important that they receive the pastoral guidance needed, along with the welcome and embrace of the whole community of faith. To the degree possible, those with disabilities should be included along with others during the preparation and celebration of the sacrament. At times, pastoral need may necessitate an accommodated setting and a simpler manner. (GCSPD, 18)

Can. 890 The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time. Parents and pastors of souls, especially pastors of parishes, are to take care that the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time.

Can. 891 The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops has determined another age, or there is danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause suggests otherwise.

NOTES:

In the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the established norm for the age of those to be confirmed is 7th grade or above. This norm does not apply to children who have attained the age of reason (age 7 and above) and who are unbaptized or who are baptized in a different ecclesial community. Unbaptized children over the age of reason are to be initiated into the Church through the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, & Holy Eucharist at a single celebration following a suitable catechesis. Children baptized in different ecclesial communities are to be received into the Church through the reception of Confirmation & Holy Eucharist at a single celebration following a profession of faith and suitable catechesis.

*Hours of service and a letter to the bishop are **NOT** required for Confirmation.*

Names chosen for Confirmation should be the name of a Saint, Blessed, biblical figure (e.g., Moses, Isaiah, Judith, etc.), or a Christian virtue. It is preferable that candidates choose their Baptismal name as it shows a clear connection between the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. The name does not need to be gender specific.

A WORD ON GODPARENTS & SPONSORS

The canonical requirements for baptismal godparents and sponsors for Confirmation are the same:

Can. 872 Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it.

Can. 873 There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

Can. 874 §1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

1/ be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
2/ have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
3/ be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
4/ not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
5/ not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

Can. 874 §2. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism.

NOTES:

It is not permitted under any circumstance to have two godfathers or two godmothers for Baptism (see Can. 873).

A baptized non-Catholic may only serve as a witness to baptism if accompanied by a Catholic godparent of the opposite sex (see Can. 873 & 874 §2). The name of the baptized non-Catholic individual must be recorded as a ***witness*** *in the baptismal registry and not as a* ***godparent****.*

Baptized non-Catholics may not serve as sponsors for Confirmation.

A godparent or sponsor for confirmation cannot be the parent, legal guardian, stepparent, or adoptive parent of the candidate, as these individuals already possess the duties of sponsor by virtue of their parental role.

Confirmation sponsors do not need to be the same gender as the candidate.