



FIRST PENANCE

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Validly baptized Catholic.
 - For individuals who are not baptized or are baptized non-Catholic, please refer to the policies and procedures for Initiation Ministry (OCIA).
- Child has reached the age of reason, generally around the age of seven.

REMOTE PREPARATION:

- This regular and on-going catechesis, provided through the parish school or religious education, together with the formation parents provide in the home, forms the foundation upon which the immediate catechesis for the first penance can be built.
 - See *Parish and School Policy Manual* 6130.1 for more guidance on home-based catechesis.
- Children commonly participate in remote preparation for at least one year prior to entrance into immediate preparation.

IMMEDIATE PREPARATION:

- Must take place in the context of the parish community.
- Normally should last no longer than 1 year.
- Catechesis for the sacrament of Penance is to precede First Communion and is to be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to ensure that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent.
- **Catechesis for First Penance should help children to¹:**
 - Acknowledge God's unconditional love for us.
 - Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their capacity for both.
 - Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them, but from God.
 - Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Order of Penance.
 - Understand how to celebrate the Order of Penance.
 - Understand that sacramental Confession is a means offered to children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore, that is even necessary *per se* if one has fallen into serious sin.
- **Preparation of the parents**
 - Parents are to teach their children at an early age what the meaning of forgiveness is and offer forgiveness to them throughout their lives.
 - Parents have a right and a responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for first penance.
 - Parent programs are to be offered by all parishes to help parents grow in their own understanding and appreciation of reconciliation, as well as enable them to participate readily in catechizing their children.
 - It is recommended that parishes offer three parent meetings in the course of the preparation period and no less than one.
 - Witnessing family participation in the sacrament of Penance and awareness of forgiveness in the Eucharist are critical parts of the preparation process.

¹ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 135-136

- Parent programs are to also include:
 - Opportunities to grow in their own understanding and appreciation of Reconciliation and enable them to participate in catechizing their child.
 - An adult presentation on the theology and experience of Reconciliation.
 - An understanding and appreciation of grace, sin and conversion.
 - Some understanding of faith and moral development.
 - An understanding of the historical development of the sacrament in the life of the Church and the Rites that exist today.
 - An explanation of how parents will assist in the preparation of their children for Reconciliation.

READINESS FOR FIRST PENANCE:

- Parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance.²
- Readiness for First Penance is evidenced by:
 - Knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness.
 - Knowledge of sin and its effects.
 - Understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.
- **Delaying First Penance:**
 - If it is determined by the parents that a child is not ready to celebrate the sacrament of Penance before the first reception of the Eucharist, this should be an informed decision made only after the parents and child have participated in the preparation program for reconciliation and have consulted with pastor or parish catechetical leader.

CELEBRATION OF PENANCE:

- It is especially important that children be provided with an opportunity to establish a warm rapport with the priest(s) of the parish, so that they will be able to talk with the priest about their actions and possible wrongdoings in a manner appropriate to their ages.
- Generally, the preferred rite is *Rite II – Rite of Reconciliation for Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution*.
 - The celebration of the sacrament should be adapted to the needs and age levels of the child and be in accord with the spirit and pastoral theology reflected in the *Order of Penance*. A communal setting with family and friends helps provide a rich experience of the sacrament.

RECORD KEEPING OF THE SACRAMENT

- Parishes should not provide certificates of receiving the sacrament of First Penance; however, certificates of the child's sacramental preparation may be provided.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Special sensitivity is to be shown to single parents, those in interdenominational or interfaith marriages, those who have participated in similar programs recently, those parents of children with special needs and those who exercise the role of legal guardian.
- **Children with disabilities**
 - Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing mortal sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with 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

² National Directory for Catechesis, 135

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. In the case of individuals who are nonverbal or have minimal verbal communication ability, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally.³

³ USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 27-31



SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION GUIDELINES OVERVIEW

FIRST EUCHARIST

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Validly baptized Catholic.
 - For individuals who are not baptized or are baptized non-Catholic, please refer to the policies and procedures for Initiation Ministry (OCIA).
- Child who has reached the use of reason, generally around age seven.

REMOTE PREPARATION:

- Regular and on-going catechesis, provided through a Catholic school, parish religious education program, or a home-based study program, together with the formation parents provide in the home, forms the foundation upon which immediate catechesis for the sacraments is built.
 - See *Parish and School Policy Manual* 6130.1 for more guidance on home-based catechesis.
- Children commonly participate in remote preparation for at least one year prior to entrance into immediate preparation.

IMMEDIATE PREPARATION:

- **Catechesis in preparation for First Communion should⁴:**
 - Teach that the Eucharist is the living memorial of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of all and the commemoration of his last meal with his disciples.
 - Teach not only "the truths of faith regarding the Eucharist but also how, from First Communion on, ... they can as full members of Christ's Body, take part actively with the People of God in the Eucharist, sharing in the Lord's table and the community of their brothers and sisters."
 - Ensure that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Eucharist.
 - Develop in children an understanding of the Father's love, of their participation in the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - Teach that "the Holy Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Christ" and that "what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living body."
 - Teach the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
 - Teach the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine.
 - Help them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass by teaching the meaning of the ritual, symbols and parts of the Mass.
 - Help children to receive Christ's Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner.
 - Teach the Eucharist as the sign of the Lord's abiding presence, which assists in the development of a true Eucharistic devotion.
 - Instruct that at the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood.
 - Teach appropriate instruction on the Eucharistic fast.
- **Preparation of the Parents**
 - Parents have a right and a responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Communion.
 - Parent programs are to be offered by all parishes to assist parents in carrying out this right and responsibility. Such programs help parents grow in their own understanding and

⁴ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 127-128

appreciation of the Eucharist, as well as enable them to participate readily in catechizing their child.

- It is recommended that parishes offer three parent meetings in the course of the preparation period and no less than one.
- Parents' regular participation at Sunday Eucharist is an important aspect of their preparation of their children for the sacrament.
- Effective parent programs include:
 - An adult understanding of the theology and experience of Eucharist in their lives.
 - An adult appreciation for Sunday as the day of the Lord.
 - An explanation of how to assist in the preparation of their children for Eucharist.
 - Assistance in understanding that Christian family living is part of the catechetical preparation of children for First Communion.

READINESS FOR FIRST EUCHARIST:

- The responsibility to determine an individual child's readiness to receive Communion for the first time belongs to the parents, catechists and parish priest or parish director. If time and availability of personnel permit, parish priests, parish directors and/or pastoral staff members are encouraged to conduct a brief interview with each child and his/her parent(s), prior to reception of First Communion.
- Readiness for First Communion is evidenced by:
 - The child's desire to receive Communion.
 - The ability to distinguish ordinary bread and wine from the Eucharist.
 - An understanding of the mystery of Christ.
 - An ability to receive Communion with faith and devotion.
 - A familiarity with and basic understanding of the Eucharistic liturgy and recognize the communal nature of the sacrament.
- Children who have not reached the use of reason, and/or are judged to be insufficiently disposed, are not to receive Eucharist.
- An explicit invitation by the parish is to be made annually for anyone who may decide to delay First Communion beyond the usual age and readiness. Suitable preparation is to be provided.

CELEBRATION OF FIRST EUCHARIST:

- Within the community setting, a variety of options can be provided by each parish. Common options include:
 - Family-centered celebrations at a Sunday liturgy which helps emphasize that it is in the family that children find nourishment in Christian Life.
 - Parish group celebrations at a Sunday liturgy which witness to the communal nature of the Eucharist.
- First Communion celebrations should be prayerful and simple.
- The focus is welcoming children to the Lord's Table.
- Excessive attention to external elements such as clothes, decorations and material gifts is to be de-emphasized.
- Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest.
- The sign of Communion is more complete when given under both species, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly. At the time of First Communion, ordinarily both species are to be provided.

RECORD KEEPING:

- It is not required to keep a sacramental record of a child's First Eucharist

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Special sensitivity is to be shown to single parents, those in interdenominational or interfaith marriages, those who have participated in similar programs recently, those parents of children with special needs and those who exercise the role of legal guardian.
- **Children with disabilities**
 - 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. Pastors should consult with parents, religious educators, personnel involved with disability issues, and other experts in making their judgement. 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 the 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.⁵

⁵ USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 21-26



CONFIRMATION

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Validly baptized Catholic.
 - For individuals who are not baptized, are baptized non-Catholic, or have not received First Eucharist, please refer to the policies and procedures for Initiation Ministry (OCIA).
- Individuals must be 16 years of age OR in 11th grade on the date of Confirmation.
 - For adult Confirmation candidates, please see separate policies and procedures in the Sacramental Guidelines.

REMOTE PREPARATION:

- Regular and on-going catechesis, provided through a Catholic school, a parish religious education program, or a home-based study program, together with the formation parents provide in the home, forms the foundation upon which immediate catechesis for the Sacraments is built.
 - See *Parish and School Policy Manual* 6130.1 for more guidance on home-based catechesis.
- For those without participation in regular and on-going catechesis, it is the responsibility of the parish and the parents to provide any remedial preparation and formation that is needed on an individual (or group) basis.

IMMEDIATE PREPARATION:

- Must take place in the context of the parish community (i.e. not a Catholic High School).
- Normally should last no longer than 1 year.
- Should include the involvement of parents and sponsors.
- **Catechesis for Confirmation should⁶:**
 - Teach that Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character on the soul.
 - Teach that Confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to:
 - Incorporate them more firmly with Christ.
 - Strengthen their bond with the Church.
 - Associate them more closely with the Church's mission.
 - Increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 - Help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deed.
 - Teach about the role of the Holy Spirit, his gifts, and his fruits.
 - Include instructions on the *Order of Confirmation* and its basic symbols: the imposition of hands, the anointing with Sacred Chrism, the words of the sacramental formula, and the bishop as the ordinary minister of the sacrament.
- **Retreat:** Each parish is to include a retreat in its Confirmation formation to connect to the faith community and reflect on important questions of religion and faith. Alternatives should be offered if it is impossible for a teen to participate in the parish retreat, but attending a retreat should not be seen as an obstacle to Confirmation.
- **Service:** Involvement in service to the community is critical to preparation for Confirmation. To live as Christ lived is to live a life that responds to the needs of others: at home, at school, within the parish, the community, etc.
 - While service is an essential component of Confirmation preparation, it should be seen more as constitutive of the gospel than as a project to be completed or hours to be counted.

⁶ *National Directory for Catechesis*, 122-123

- **Interviews:** Personal interviews are conducted by the pastor, parish director, confirmation coordinator, or catechist to assist the candidate in determining his or her readiness to receive the sacrament.
- **Sponsors:** Candidates must designate a Sponsor who is to be involved in the catechetical preparation.
 - **Role of Sponsor:** The Sponsor assists parents in passing on the faith. It is for the Sponsor to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament.
 - **Sponsors Requirements:**
 - Be at least 16 years old,
 - Be a fully-initiated Catholic who leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken,
 - Not be bound by any canonical penalty, and
 - Not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed
 - Priests, women and men religious may be Sponsors.
 - Candidates may have more than one Sponsor; however, only one should be designated as the liturgical Sponsor who will present the candidate for Confirmation.
 - A proxy may fill in for a Sponsor who is unable to attend Confirmation.
- **Confirmation Name**
 - In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, it is customary for candidates to choose the name of a saint or blessed to “adopt” for Confirmation. As part of their preparation, each candidate should research the life and virtues of a particular saint or blessed.
 - This saint may be chosen from the candidate’s baptismal (first or middle) name, the derivative of a name (e.g. Kelly for Catherine), or an Old Testament hero.
- **Candidate Questionnaire**
 - Each candidate should complete the *Candidate Questionnaire*, in which they share with their confirming bishop the reasons they wish to be confirmed and attest to their desire to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.
 - This form can be found on the Archdiocese Confirmation webpage
 - Confirmation coordinators should collect all questionnaires and send them in one package to the (arch)bishop’s office at least 30 days prior to the Confirmation Mass.
 - **Before sending**, coordinators must read each questionnaire. If any serious issues are disclosed in the questionnaire (e.g. mental health struggles, abuse, or resistance to Confirmation), the coordinator and pastor must address these with the candidate and his/her family immediately.
 - The questionnaire should still be submitted to the bishop with the rest of the group, with a notation that the issues disclosed are being addressed.

READINESS FOR CONFIRMATION:

- Primary responsibility for determining when a candidate is ready for the sacrament lies within the individual candidate themselves. The decision is to be made in dialogue with the representatives of the parish community. Factors to consider include:
 - Maturity of the candidate.
 - Depth of their faith development.
 - Degree of their commitment to Christ and the faith-community.
 - Extent of their involvement in community worship and service.
 - Knowledge and understanding of the basic teachings of the Church.

- **Delaying Confirmation:**

- The decision to be confirmed rests with the young person; therefore, an individual may feel they are not ready to be confirmed. It is important that the candidate does not feel somehow ostracized by the community or forgotten. It is important that other catechetical opportunities be available to them.

CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION:

- The sacrament of Confirmation is ideally celebrated during the Easter season and by a bishop. Priests can receive delegation from the archbishop to confirm in special circumstances.
- A liturgy planning guide (found on the Archdiocese Confirmation webpage) should be emailed to the (arch)bishop's office at least 30 days before the Confirmation ceremony.
- If a candidate is unable to attend their parish's Confirmation, he/she may join another parish's ceremony with written approval of the candidate's pastor. This should be worked out at least a month in advance so the candidate's questionnaire can be sent with the ceremony group.
- **Scheduling Confirmation:**
 - Confirmations are scheduled in the winter/spring for the following calendar year (i.e. Confirmations for 2026 are scheduled in 2025). Scheduling information is sent via email to all parishes by the (arch)bishop's office as well as the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis.
 - Parishes who anticipate fewer than 15 candidates are asked to collaborate with neighboring parishes for a combined Confirmation Mass.

RECORD KEEPING:

- The pastor or parish director is to record in the Confirmation register the names of those confirmed, the minister, the parents and sponsors, and the date and place of Confirmation.
- Notification of Confirmation must also be sent to the baptismal parish of each candidate to update their baptismal records.

POST CONFIRMATION OPPORTUNITIES:

- Since Confirmation is not a form of graduation, post-Confirmation catechetical programs must be provided by the parish to bridge ongoing, lifelong learning.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Special sensitivity is to be shown to single parents, those in interdenominational or interfaith marriages, those who have participated in similar programs recently, those parents of children with special needs and those who exercise the role of legal guardian.
- **Students with disabilities**
 - All baptized Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are "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.⁷

⁷ USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, 18