

- I. GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST FOR CHILDREN**
- A.** As baptized children reach the use of reason, they are ready to be properly prepared to celebrate the reception of First Eucharist. (C.I.C., 914)
- B.** “Persons with disabilities are called to the fullness of sacramental life, even in the presence of severe disorders. The sacraments are gifts from God, and the liturgy, even before being rationally understood, needs to be lived: therefore no one can refuse the sacraments to persons with disabilities” (DC, 272). As the Catholic community embraces people with disabilities and their families, involving everyone in the liturgical actions of *sacramental life, prayer, and the proclamation of the Word*, all grow in evangelization” (DC, 269-272).
- C.** If baptized at different parish, a copy of the child’s Baptismal certificate is to be obtained as part of the record keeping process.
- D.** Before entering into the immediate preparation for First Eucharist, a child is to have completed two full years in a catechetical program and be currently enrolled in the third year of the regular catechetical program.
- E.** The reception is to be preceded by the sacrament of Reconciliation except in unusual circumstances. (NDC, p. 135)
- F.** The immediate preparation for First Eucharist is to be a parish program of at least eight hours apart from and in addition to the regular ongoing parish or school catechetical program.
1. The immediate preparation program enriches the catechesis given in the regular classes by offering a deeper understanding of the meaning of the sacrament, its liturgy and its symbols, and the significance of the sacrament for one’s daily life in relationship with God and the Church.
 - a. The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church’s life
 - b. All sacraments and all ministries are oriented to the Eucharist.
 - c. Eucharist is both a sign and a cause of communion.
 - d. Eucharist is an anticipation of eternal life
 - e. The Eucharist within God’s plan of salvation
 2. Immediate preparation can be accomplished through such means as retreat day, workshops, liturgical celebrations, focus on various symbols of the sacraments such as bread and wine, teaching the basic meaning and structure of the Mass, etc.
- G.** Curriculum for the reception of the sacrament should adhere to the curriculum guidelines of the NDC, 2005 and the Diocese of Bridgeport

Grades 2 and 3 Religion Curriculum Standards (2019).

- H.** Catechesis for First Eucharist is to be separate and distinct from the catechesis for Reconciliation so that the specific identity and value of each sacrament is clearly understood. (NDC, p. 135)
- I.** Reception of the Sacrament of First Eucharist requires that the child have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ and are able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ with faith and devotion. (C.I.C., 913)
1. In catechesis, the Eucharist is recognized and taught as the central mystery of the Church. It unites the Body of Christ in a common union that celebrates the member's anticipation of eternal life. It strengthens and compels the faithful to witness to the gospel in the world. "Catechesis has the task of making the heart of every Christian resound with the call to live a new life in keeping with the dignity of children of God received in Baptism and with the life of the Risen One that is communicated through the sacraments" (DC, 83).
 2. The Sunday Eucharist is the center of the Church's life. "The liturgy is one of the essential and indispensable sources of the Church's catechesis," (DC, 95). "The liturgy is the summit and source of the Christian life. Catechesis, in fact, is set in motion by a first effective encounter between the one being catechized and the community that celebrates the mystery, which is to say that catechesis reaches its true fulfillment when the one being catechized takes part in the liturgical life of the community. Catechesis therefore cannot be thought of merely as preparation for the sacraments, but must be understood in relationship to liturgical experience" (DC, 96).
 3. The child is to have a desire for the sacrament.
 4. The child is to be able to distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary bread and wine.
 5. The child knows people are to abstain from any food and drink for at least one hour prior to Holy Communion (except for only water and medicine) (C.I.C., 919.1).
 6. The signs of bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ.
 7. Eucharist, (in Greek, "thanksgiving"), is a celebration of both the thanksgiving sacrifice and memorial banquet of our Lord's Paschal Mystery - Christ's death and resurrection. The child is to know who Jesus is and be aware of the principal events in His life, especially His death and resurrection.
 8. Holy Communion is not an isolated event and goes beyond the time spent at Mass:
 - Holy Communion augments union with Christ.
 - Holy Communion separates us from sin.
 - Holy Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens Baptismal union with Christ.

- Holy Communion commits us to social justice.
- Holy Communion is a sacrament of unity.

- J.** Preparing the child on the meaning and significance of the Eucharist provides the opportunity for the parents/guardians to also revisit these truths about the faith by the parents/guardians being included in the preparation and catechesis leading up to First Communion for the children. Parents or guardians also have a critically important role in preparing their children for Eucharist and are to be assisted through a minimum of three formational sessions: one on the sacraments in general, and two on the sacrament of Eucharist in particular.
- K.** Families are expected to participate in the Sunday celebration of the Mass weekly. “Catechesis, in addition to fostering the living knowledge of the mystery of Christ, also has the task of assisting in the comprehension and experience of liturgical celebrations. Through this task, catechesis helps the believer to understand the importance of the liturgy in the Church’s life, initiates him into the knowledge of the sacraments and into sacramental life, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church.” (DC, 81). Children who participate with their family in the Mass experience the Eucharistic mystery and gradually learn to join with the liturgical assembly in prayer. By celebrating the Sunday Eucharist, itself formational, the faithful continue to follow in the footsteps of the first Christians. Following the example of the early Christians, the assembly gathers together to proclaim the Paschal Mystery. The Holy Spirit consecrates not only bread and wine, but hallows the family of Christ. The Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation unite God and his people in an unbreakable bond. “The sacraments, celebrated in the liturgy, are a special means that fully communicate him who is proclaimed by the Church” (DC, 81).
- L.** Parents or guardians and catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason, have made sacramental confession and are ready to receive First Communion (C.I.C., 914). The indicators for a candidate’s readiness are:
1. The candidate demonstrates a desire to celebrate the sacrament of First Eucharist.
 2. The candidate demonstrates age-appropriate understanding of the sacrament.
 3. The candidate is participating in the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy on a regular basis.
 4. The candidate knows how to receive communion.
- M.** The preparation and celebration of Eucharist for first time recipients is to take place in the candidate’s own parish and is to include children who have prepared together whether attending parochial, private or public schools.

- N. A general parish celebration of First Eucharist is encouraged, although options may include smaller groups or a family celebration during a regularly scheduled parish Mass.
- O. First Eucharist is to be recorded in the church records where the sacrament is received. Parishes are strongly encouraged to send a notice of reception to the parish of Baptism that the Sacrament of Eucharist has taken place (C.I.C., 535.2 and 895).

People live in a world beset by hopelessness. For many people, the reality of the Eucharist is dim. Catechists should strive to show that the Eucharist is indeed a sacrament of hope, because even though it is veiled, the pledge of eternal glory is there. The Eucharist “sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints.” (CCC 1419)