



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

*Office of the Bishop
126 Logan Boulevard
Hollidaysburg, PA 16648*

January 20, 1997

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Household of God:

Sacraments are the power that comes forth from Christ. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the faithful of the Church. Through Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation, we are fully initiated into the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord. When we are in need of healing and reconciliation, the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick can be celebrated. The Sacraments of Orders and Marriage provide God's grace for a life of service.

The Christian Initiation process provides a model for sacramental formation. It includes a period of formation before the celebration of a sacrament as well as one of ongoing formation afterwards. Both periods are a necessary part of the Christian journey of faith. Sacraments can no longer be seen as simply things to be received but must also be recognized as graced times to be celebrated within the Christian community.

The preparation for and the celebration of a sacrament needs to be accompanied with suitable catechesis and ongoing formation. That preparation is not to be taken lightly. It is a process which involves the candidate, the family, godparents or sponsors, and the parish. Rather than being a private affair, the preparation for and the reception of a sacrament forms a part of the life of the whole parish faith community.

To complement both the catechetical and liturgical components of sacramental preparation, celebration, and ongoing formation, the process presented here will interweave both aspects.

Catechetically, the candidate will be prepared for the reception of a sacrament first and foremost by the parents, the primary educators of the child. Formal religious education will provide the doctrinal component of the process. The support and role modeling of the family, along with that of the faith community, will show the candidate what it means to live a life of faith.

Liturgically, the candidate is formed by participating in worship celebrations. The Sunday Liturgy not only unites the faithful in the worship of God; but, nourishes and strengthens the participants in their daily witness to the Lord. Even the rites for the various stages of preparation mark the faith journey of the parents and parish faith community, along with that of the candidate.

These directives and guidelines are the result of a collaborative effort of the Education Office, the Liturgy Office, the Christian Initiation Office, the Family Life Office, along with Clergy and Directors of Religious Education. As such, they are comprehensive in their creation and application. They are an integral part of the Guidebook for Catechetical Faith Formation of this Diocesan Church. The simplicity and clear style of the process enables understanding and easy implementation.

As we continue together on our pilgrimage to the Reign of God, may it bring us abundant blessings of grace, peace, and joy.

Fraternally yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph", enclosed in a white rectangular box.

(Most Rev.) Joseph V. Adamec
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown

**CATECHETICAL AND LITURGICAL DIRECTIVES
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF
BAPTISM OF INFANTS, FIRST EUCHARIST,
CONFIRMATION AND FIRST RECONCILIATION**

1. Catechetical faith formation for sacramental preparation and celebration is the responsibility of the pastor under the authority of the Bishop. The pastor may delegate this responsibility to those suitably prepared for this ministry.

2. The formation process for all the sacraments of initiation is to be based on the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults since this is the normative process of initiation in the Church. Sacramental catechesis will include these four phases:
 1. A call from God
 2. Formation of the individual and family
 3. Preparation and reflection
 4. Continuing growth in the faith

(The entire life of the baptized is a process of ongoing formation in faith. Specific to each sacrament is a period of intense preparation and reflection within the family and parish community. Celebrations of liturgical rites mark the passage from one phase of preparation to the next one.)

3. The parish of current membership of the recipient is the normative place for sacramental catechesis, celebration and ongoing formation.

(It is through full, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy that the Body of Christ is nourished. At the parish we celebrate our Christian identity, are nourished by the word, give worship to God, and are sent to serve the world. It is important that the baptized are regularly fed and nurtured by the community of faith to which they are joined as Christ's Body, the People of God.)

4. Catechesis for these sacraments is to be family centered and parish based. In the case of children and youth, additional preparation is provided by Catholic schools, parish religious education programs, or home schooling.

(Parents are the primary educators of their children, therefore it is their duty, assumed at baptism, to teach and form their children in the Catholic faith. It is the duty of the parish community to help parents in this formation. Lastly, it is the responsibility of the Catholic School, parish religious education program or through home schooling to provide additional church teaching and faith formation.)

5. Persons with disabilities are to be offered sacramental preparation in a communal setting and in an appropriate manner.

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Sr. Barbara Bettwy, CCW
Charleen Blum
Reverend James Crookston
Mary Heinrich
Sr. Linda LaMagna, CCW
Reverend Robert Mazur
Reverend David Peles
Robert Sherwin
Susan Stith
Monsignor Timothy Swope
Jeanne Thompson

Francine Swope—Secretary

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Monsignor Michael Servinsky
Mary Frances Shedlock

And finally, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the Archdiocese of Ottawa for the use of their “Baptism Preparation Guidebook” in developing the Baptism portion of our sacramental preparation process.

DIOCESE OF ALTOONA-JOHNSTOWN

INTRODUCTION TO SACRAMENTS

Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be directed toward people's sanctification and the praise of God.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 61

Central to who we are as Catholic Christians is the Paschal Mystery, the dying and rising of Christ, which we celebrate in the sacraments. "The sacraments, symbolic actions which effect what they symbolize, celebrate the coming of the Spirit at special moments in the life of the community of faith and its members, and express the Church's faith and interaction with Christ." (NCD 114) Sacraments then, are ritual actions of people which celebrate the everyday unfolding of God's grace in their lives.

As children we learn about celebration and family ties at times such as birthday parties, anniversaries, and holidays. Food, decorations, singing and the gathering of special people points to a significance greater than mere eating or socialization. It is at these times that we begin to understand the importance of symbol and ritual action, for it is in the gathering, sharing of food, and friendship that the bonds which forge family are developed. It is in the gathering, sharing and friendship in Christ's name that community is established and celebrated.

Children born into Christian families are born into the domestic church, the fundamental cell of society and the place where both human and Christian culture is nourished. In the early church, the infant children of believers were presented for Baptism and recognized as called by God to share the one life of the Lord's family. "The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism when the infant becomes a child of God." (CCC 1250) The gift of faith celebrated at Baptism must continue to grow as it is nourished and supported by family and community.

As we live out our journey of faith which was begun at Baptism, we are continually nourished and strengthened through sacramental celebration. Christ's presence feeds us in Eucharist, strengthens and completes our initiation in Confirmation, heals us in Reconciliation and Anointing and empowers us in Marriage and Holy Orders. Conversion and living the life of a Christian is an ongoing process that requires lifelong catechesis and commitment to the Christian community.

"From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages." (CCC 1229) The sacramental preparation process in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown is based on the **Order of Christian Initiation of Adults**, the normative process of initiation in the Church. The following guidelines are modeled on this process. The four phases are: **a call from God, formation of the individual and family, preparation and reflection, and continuing growth in the faith**

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION FORMAT

Each sacrament will contain:

- one page of guidelines
- a diagrammatic representation of the process modeled on the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults
- an outline of the four phases followed by the rite for each phase
- an appendix- The appendix will contain:
 - materials and suggestions for implementation of the sacrament program
 - pertinent canons from the Code of Canon Law
 - a resource list