

Policies of St. William Parish

for

Baptism, Reconciliation, First Eucharist, and Confirmation of Children

Policy for the Baptism of Children of Catechetical Age

The Parish adheres to the policy of the Archdiocese of Detroit with regard to unbaptized children of catechetical age. Such children will follow the norms as stated in *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. (AOD Policy 13, #5). This means that, after an appropriate period in the catechumenate, these catechumens would be admitted to the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Typically, the celebration of all three sacraments would take place during the Easter Vigil.

Guidelines for the Baptism of Infants

The criteria for allowing the baptism of infants is that there be a “founded hope”¹ that the child will be raised in a Catholic faith environment. Normally, this means that at least one of the parents is practicing regularly. There is sometimes a wide discrepancy between what the Church perceives as “regular practice” and what is viewed as such by the individual family. The pastoral contact with the family at moments like this can serve to challenge the family to a deeper faith-life. The expectations of the Church need to be clearly communicated, and any prerequisites placed on the family by the pastor should be reasonable, and achievable. Perfection is not required of the family; progress, or at least demonstrable effort, is required. Additionally, a formal and proximate preparation on the part of the parents is also required. Normally, this consists of a single class session. It ultimately rests on the pastor to determine if criteria are being met sufficiently.

If there is an invalid marriage, we normally expect that there is some practical effort, in cooperation with one of the clergy, to resolve the marital status, so that the parent will be able to more fully practice the faith, and pass that practice on to the child.

Any exception to the above norms must be decided, on an individual basis, by the pastor.

General Guidelines for the Reception of Confirmation, Eucharist, and First Penance

Once the child has been baptized, the Parish takes on a heavier level of responsibility for the spiritual development of the child, even if the parent is negligent. Sacraments, after baptism, are not to be denied solely on the basis of the lack of parental cooperation. Naturally, for minor children, parental *permission* is required.

¹ *Code of Canon Law*: Canon 868.

The other sacraments should be received as soon as is reasonable after the child has reached the “age of discretion”,² which may differ from child to child. (It is also assumed that there will be adequate catechesis according to the child’s capacity,³ and that the sacrament is being requested.) The exception is that, for Confirmation, our diocese expects that children should receive the sacrament between the ages of 13 years and 15 years. A family may request the sacrament of Confirmation for the child—or the child himself or herself may request it, with the parent’s permission—as long as the child will have reached the age of 13 years by the day of the celebration.

A child approaching First Eucharist is expected to have already celebrated “First Penance”.

The candidate approaching any sacrament is also to be, in the opinion of the pastor, “sufficiently disposed”. The pastor, on a practical level, reaches that decision together with parents and catechists. “Sufficiently disposed” means:

- For reconciliation, that “rejecting sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, the person is turned back to God”. (*Code of Canon Law*: Canon 987)
- For Eucharist, that the children “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”. (*Code of Canon Law*: Canon 913)
- For Confirmation, that the baptized child be in the state of grace, properly instructed, and capable of renewing the baptismal promises. (*Rites of the Catholic Church*, IV, #12) It is also expected that the child has a desire to be Confirmed, and can approach the sacrament with faith and devotion.

Policies of St. William Parish for the Reception of Confirmation, First Eucharist, and First Penance

Regarding the reception of First Eucharist or Confirmation, it is expected that the child normally is participating fully in a parish-run religious education program (either the dayschool or the afterschool program) for the one year prior to the sacramental year, as

² “The age of discretion, both for Confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Confession and Communion.” (From the encyclical, *Quam Singulari*)

³ “A full and perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine is not necessary either for First Confession or for First Communion. Afterwards, however, the child will be obliged to learn gradually the entire Catechism according to his ability.

“The knowledge of religion which is required in a child in order to be properly prepared to receive First Communion is such that he will understand according to his capacity those Mysteries of faith which are necessary as a means of salvation, and that he can distinguish between the Bread of the Eucharist and ordinary, material bread, and thus he may receive Holy Communion with a devotion becoming his years.” (From the encyclical, *Quam Singulari*)

well as the sacramental year itself. Because of this level of participation in a formal program, the pastor will assume the candidate has the proper dispositions, and, after the process of immediate preparation (described below), will be able to approach the sacrament. **THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES ARE NOT THE SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**, but, rather, are part of the ongoing faith-development and religious education of the youngster. These classes have their own scope and sequence within which all sacraments are presented each year, appropriate to the child's developmental level.

For families who are not participating in a formal parish program, children who are being home-schooled, and children who are not cooperating with the religious instruction or are absent too frequently, the pastor will make no assumptions about the proper dispositions and readiness of the candidate. Rather, the parents must prove to the pastor the child's proper disposition and readiness. This process of discernment is dependent most heavily upon the parents themselves, who are to give to the pastor written or oral responses to certain questions and issues. The Office of Faith Formation will provide these questions ahead-of-time to the parent. There also MAY be a personal interview with the pastor.

The immediate sacramental preparation will take the form of several classes/workshops/retreat experiences (typically, four for Confirmation, and four for First Eucharist), which will focus on spiritual growth and prayerful proximate preparation for the celebration, as well as provide some familiarity with the signs and symbols. There should be at least one follow-up session of "mystagogia"⁴ after the celebration of Confirmation.

With regard to the sacrament of Reconciliation, the goal is that each child of conscionable age will have an adequate preparation to celebrate the sacrament if they choose. There will be a series of three workshops provided by the Parish in the fall of the year, available to all families that intend to celebrate the sacrament that year. We will provide opportunities for parents to bring their children to the sacrament sometime prior to First Communion, typically during the season of Advent.

With regard to reconciliation and the sacrament of Penance, our efforts as catechists will be to present the concepts of sin and forgiveness at age-appropriate levels, as well as providing practical instructions for the sacrament, also at age-appropriate levels. The practical aspects of celebrating the sacrament of Penance (sometimes referred to as the sacrament of Reconciliation) should be addressed each year in every grade beginning with Grade One. This presentation (or review) would be most appropriate at those times when the regular religion lessons touch on topics of sin and forgiveness. In the cases of the youngest children, such as those in first or second grades, the practical side would be little more than making them aware that they could go to the priest if they want to confess their sins and feel sorry—and that the priest would help them through the process. They should be at least *somewhat* familiar with the reconciliation room. Older children should have an easy familiarity with the form of the sacrament, and be able to pray a prayer of

⁴ "Mystagogy" is a time of coming to a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message the child has learned, and, above all through the experience of the sacrament received.

sorrow, and be properly disposed.

Regarding Registration for the Immediate Preparation Sessions:

Registration for the formal religious education programs, both the dayschool and afterschool programs, begins in the spring of the year. At the time they register for a program, families can indicate their desire that their child receive the sacrament of First Penance, First Eucharist, or Confirmation within the coming year. By early fall, those families who indicated a desire for a sacrament will be advised about the schedule of immediate preparation sessions.

Families not registered in a formal religious education program of the parish, and who are preparing a child to receive either First Eucharist, First Penance, or Confirmation within the coming school year must contact the Office of Faith Formation by October 1st of that same year.

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