

V. Celebration of First Communion

79. **The Candidate for First Communion:** A child who has been baptized and has reached the use of reason (understood as seven years of age) and has been properly catechized may celebrate First Communion. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated prior to First Communion.
80. One must be a baptized Catholic to receive First Communion. A baptismal certificate should be on file at the parish where the child is to receive First Communion.
81. First Communion should properly occur in the parish where the child/family worships on Sunday, not in a private/parochial school setting or parish.
82. Children, seven years of age or older, who have not been baptized are to be prepared in an adapted process of the Rite of Christian Initiation, (RCIA) at the time of their Baptism, they are to receive Confirmation and First Communion. The preferred time for this celebration is at the Easter Vigil.
83. Children who have been baptized in another Christian faith and are preparing for full communion in the Church, having expressed a faith commitment, ought to be confirmed and receive First Communion within the same celebration of reception. Usually this occurs at Easter.
84. Children who are older than seven and who have been baptized, have celebrated reconciliation and are catechized – but have not celebrated First Communion – may celebrate the sacrament at any suitable time that is agreeable to all involved.
85. Children who have been baptized and are older than seven years of age but are not catechized should enter a catechetical program appropriate to their age. Reconciliation should precede the celebration of First Communion.
86. Children with developmental disabilities are to be given suitable catechesis over a sufficient period of time and should be included in the parish celebration according to their capacity.(GPD, no. 3)
87. For all as well as for the person with a developmental disability, the criterion for reception of First Communion *is the ability to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food*, if not verbally, then through manner, gesture or reverential silence. Doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized to receive (GPD, no. 3)
88. **Role and Responsibilities of Parents:** Parents indicate their desire that their child celebrate First Communion by enrolling their child in the parish or school (second grade) program.

89. The parish offers support to parents as primary teachers of their children through a parish sacramental preparation process that is designed to nourish the faith-life and theological understanding of the sacrament among parents. Such a program should also focus on the Eucharist as a shared meal; the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist; and ways to share scriptural stories with their child. As primary educators of their children, parents, along with godparents, have the duty to be actively engaged in the preparation of their children.
90. Under some circumstances, parents may choose to prepare their child at home with help and direction from the parish, using the same or equivalent resources; and participating in any communal activities including retreat, interview and practice. Parents may also be required to attend parental meetings at the discretion of the pastor.
91. In cases where the child's parents are non-practicing Catholics but who enroll their child to receive First Communion, the child should be permitted to receive, providing the child has been properly catechized and received sacramental reconciliation. Parents should be encouraged to participate in the sacramental preparation process with their child.
92. If a child is living with someone other than the parent(s) or guardian, permission from either parent(s) or guardian must be obtained before the child may receive. In cases of joint custody, permission of both parents must be secured beforehand in writing.
93. Parents, with the assistance and advice of the pastor and/or his catechetical leaders, should determine if their child is [ready to receive](#). An interview with the pastor or his delegate could facilitate the judgment of readiness. If the determination is negative, First Communion is to be delayed to a future date and help offered to parents to remedy the cause of the delay.
94. Parents should accompany their child to Sunday Mass, initiating the child into the worship of the community and inviting the child to participate as fully as possible. While attendance in the catechetical program (parish or school) is required, it is not sufficient preparation in and of itself.
95. **Content for Catechesis:** As described above, the parish should provide parents with a preparation process that enables them to take on their role as primary educators of their children. For the child, preliminary preparation takes place in the first grade and a more intentional/focused preparation takes place in the second grade. The pastor, catechetical leader, together in collaboration with catechists, should determine what resources should be used by referencing the [Catechism Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series](#) published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Subcommittee on the Catechism.
96. Parishes should present age-appropriate catechesis for the reception of First Communion that
 - Teaches 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

- Teaches 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” (*Directory for Masses with Children*, no. 12)
- Ensures that the baptized have been prepared, according to their capacity, for the Sacrament of Penance prior to their First Communion
- Develops 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
- Teaches that “the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ” and that “what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body” (*National Catechetical Directory* [NCD], no. 122)
- Teaches the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread
- Teaches the meaning of reception of the Holy Eucharist under both species of bread and wine
- Helps them to participate actively and consciously in the Mass
- Helps children to receive Christ’s Body and Blood in an informed and reverent manner
(NDC, no. 36)

97. **Location for Preliminary/Immediate Preparation:** The parish (or catechetically within the Catholic school setting) is the primary site of a catechetical program and liturgical celebration. The home parish provides the immediate preparation.
98. In Catholic school settings, special sensitivity must be shown to children from other parishes. The rightful place of celebration (and the process) remains in the home parish. Every effort must be made to safeguard and support the “return” of the child to her/his rightful parish community.
99. Permission by the home pastor must be obtained if the child is to receive First Communion at another parish; this exception should be used sparingly and only in very exceptional cases. At the very start of the second grade and at the outset of the preparation, the school community ought to remind parents in written form of the need to attend Mass at their home parishes so that they may begin the process of integration within the home parish.
100. **Communion under Both Forms:** Catechesis should include the importance of the full sign of the Eucharist. While children are strongly encouraged to receive Communion under both forms, they should not be forced, especially in regard to the Cup. Children should be taught they never receive wine at Communion, but the Blood of Christ. Care should be taken that the children do not think they are drinking human blood in the biological sense but that it is truly the sacramental presence of Christ. Children should be given a small taste of unconsecrated wine during their preparation so that they will not make unpleasant faces when and if they receive the Blood of Christ. They and their parents may then decide whether they should receive Communion from the Cup. Even when children do not receive Communion from the Cup, they should be taught about it so that they will understand what is being offered when they see others receiving Communion from the Cup.

101. **Continuing Catechesis on the Eucharist:** Since young people develop gradually in their ability to understand the mystery of the Eucharist and to grow in faith, continued catechetical formation is needed. Children and teenagers should be provided with catechesis each year as they mature in the practice of their faith.
102. **Reception of First Communion by Persons with Disabilities:** Persons with disabilities should be provided the necessary adaptations and support to assure preparation for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist as well as their active and meaningful participation in sacramental celebrations.
103. No age/grade is set for the reception of First Communion by persons who are developmentally disabled. Each and all may receive First Communion if, after sufficient preparation, she/he has some understanding of the person of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection; is able to distinguish between the Eucharist and ordinary bread/wine and shows some desire to receive the Eucharist. Others might help the disabled person to demonstrate this understanding. Judgment of readiness should balance reverence for the sacraments with each person's need and right to the benefits of the sacraments.
104. If a question remains whether the above conditions are met, the person with disabilities may receive First Communion with the consent of the pastor, parents and catechist. In cases of doubt, the presumption of readiness should be in favor of the recipient.
105. **Administrative Tasks:** The pastor is responsible for providing sacramental preparation for all parish children. Implementation is usually delegated to the catechetical leader who, with the help of catechists, provides sessions for the children and parents. Parents are responsible for participating as required, supporting the efforts made by the parish catechetical staff.
106. Parish and school programs ought to be closely coordinated and conducted in conjunction with one another to the maximum extent possible, especially in parent sessions, retreats, receptions/breakfasts, and liturgical celebrations. Although students may be in separate preparation programs, they are all part of the same parish and should celebrate the sacraments together. Any favoritism or preference of one over the other should be strictly avoided.
107. **Date of First Communion:** The pastor, in consultation with the catechetical community and parents, determines the date and time for the reception of First Communion which is customarily celebrated during the Eastertide. Should a child miss the scheduled First Communion, parents should make arrangements through the catechetical leader so that a new date and time may be secured.
108. **Attire for First Communion:** Since First Communion is a sacrament of initiation completing Baptism, and since the newly baptized are given a white garment, white should be considered as the preferred color of dress. Children and their parents should be instructed on what is considered to be appropriate attire. Veils are not necessary but cultural sensitivities may invite flexibility in this and other matters of custom.

109. **Record Keeping:** A record of those who celebrated First Communion is to be kept in the parish First Communion Record Book. For those who have been baptized in another parish, notice ought to be sent to the church of Baptism, providing the necessary information immediately after the celebration of First Communion. It is recommended that a certificate of First Communion be given to the children on the day they celebrate the sacrament, or shortly thereafter.
110. **Photography:** Families need to be informed of the parish's policy for the taking of photographs or videotaping during the First Communion. First Communion team members need to monitor and implement this strictly.