

**PART V**  
**SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**  
**POLICIES**

## **ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY**

### **BAPTISM OF INFANTS**

#### **General Introduction**

1) Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God. Christ offered this first sacrament of the new law to all people that they might have eternal life. He entrusted this sacrament and the gospel to his Church when he told his apostles: “Go, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore baptism is, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which men and women, enlightened by the Spirit’s grace, respond to the gospel of Christ. That is why the Church believes it is her most basic and necessary duty to inspire all catechumens, parents of children still to be baptized, and godparents to that true and living faith by which they adhere to Christ and enter into or confirm their commitment to the new covenant. To accomplish this, the Church prescribes the pastoral instruction of catechumens, the preparation of the children’s parents, the celebration of God’s word, and the profession of baptismal faith. (Introduction to Rite of Baptism)

2) Baptism is understood as the gateway to all the sacraments and is necessary for salvation. There are four benefits to baptism: 1) freedom from sin, 2) rebirth as children of God, 3) configuration to Christ by an indelible character, and 4) an incorporation into the Church. (Canon 849)

3) For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that:

- a. The parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully takes their place gives consent.
- b. There be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason. (CCC 868)

4) Please consult the General Introduction for the Rite of Baptism and the Code of Canon Law Par. 849-878.

#### **Preparation**

1) Parents are required to participate in a Baptismal Preparation Program on the occasion of the baptism of their first child. Godparents should likewise participate. The purpose of this program is threefold:

- a. To provide an opportunity for evangelization and catechesis for the parents and godparents so that they can better participate in the Rite of Baptism and better understand the importance of Baptism in the life of the child and of the Church.
- b. To provide information regarding the responsibility of parents and godparents in the continuing faith formation of their child through active Christian parenting.

c. To provide the opportunity for the pastor and those associated with him to promote and assess the readiness of parents to have their child baptized and to raise their child within the faith of the Church.

2) This preparation program is to be both formational and informational. It should enable parents to reflect on their own faith commitment and the responsibilities they have as Catholic parents. The program will include:

- the meaning and responsibilities of Catholic parenthood
- the theology and spirituality of Baptism
- the Rite of Baptism with explanation of symbols and actions
- the role of parents and godparents in the child's on-going faith development.

Model programs, resources and preparation for leaders are to be made available through the Department of Parish Ministries. Appropriate follow-up is an important component of this program so as to encourage the continued faith life of parents and child.

The nature and extent of the program will depend upon the Catholic status of the parents with ecumenical sensitivity to parents who are not Catholic. The program may vary from parish to parish because of varying needs and resources.

3) The pastor is responsible for baptismal preparation and for the celebration of baptism within his parish. The pastor or his associates, are encouraged to be directly involved in baptismal preparation of parents and godparents through group or individual meetings thus preparing them by proper catechesis.

Married couples and others who assist in the preparation of parents for the Baptism of a child are to be prepared through prayerful study and reflection so that they can accurately and faithfully share the Church's understanding of Baptism with parents.

While videos may be helpful, personal involvement of priests and fellow parishioners are invaluable and necessary in all sacramental preparation.

4) Parents who are married outside the Church are to be encouraged to reconcile their marital situation if that is pastorally advisable. However, their doing so is not a prerequisite for the baptism of their child so long as they are striving to practice the faith to the degree possible so as to give evidence of their commitment to share faith with their child.

5) Further preparation, prior to the Baptism of additional children may be required at the pastor's discretion. This may be especially appropriate when parents are negligent in living or rearing their children in the Catholic faith.

## **Celebration**

- 1) Infants are to be baptized in the first few weeks after their birth. An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay.
- 2) Baptism is normally to take place in the parish of the parents with the parish priest baptizing. If the Baptism takes place in another parish, the home pastor is to be asked to provide a recommendation regarding the parents and baptism of the child.
- 3) The pastor and other parish priests are the proper celebrants of Baptism within the parish. The pastor may give permission for other priests to baptize. Except in case of emergency, no priest should baptize without the permission of the proper pastor. Permanent deacons are not allowed to baptize without the express permission of the Archbishop or his designate except in case of true emergency.
- 4) Sunday is the most appropriate day to celebrate Baptism because of its connection with the Paschal mystery although Baptism may be celebrated on other days. Baptism may be celebrated within the context of the Sunday Liturgy so as to emphasize the communal celebration and Baptism's connection with the Eucharist.
- 5) Parents are encouraged to provide a Christian name for their child. Care must be taken that a name foreign to Christian sensibility (such as Lucifer, Stalin, Zeus, etc.) is not given to the child.
- 6) As a rule, Baptism of infants is to be celebrated in the parish church of the parents. Outside of danger of death, Baptism is not to be conferred in private homes or hospitals.

## **Baptism of Older Children**

Those children who have attained the age of reason, that is seven years of age, are to follow the program established by the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Children*. This allows time for their personal conversion.

Those who conduct the RCIC process need to be properly prepared through study and prayer for this special ministry of evangelization and catechesis.

## **Godparents and Sponsors**

- 1) At least one godparent is required for Baptism. There is to be only one male, or one female godparent, or one of each. (c.873)
- 2) Godparents are to be designated by the parents or guardian, in their absence the pastor may do so. They are to be Catholic and have completed their 16<sup>th</sup> year. They are to have been a) confirmed, b) received their first Holy Communion, c) not bound by canonical penalty, d) not the father and mother of the child. (c. 874)
- 3) A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is to participate only together with a Catholic godparent and then as a Christian witness of the baptism.

4) A non-baptized person may never be a godparent or sponsor.

### **Recording**

The parish is to maintain a Baptismal registry with all the pertinent information regarding Baptisms (and Professions of Faith) celebrated in the parish. Entries are to be made in this book as soon as possible following the celebration of Baptism. This and all sacramental records are to be kept in a secure, fire-proof safe.

### **Follow-Up**

Pastoral follow-up is a responsibility of each parish after the celebration of Baptism. Parents should be encouraged and assisted in fulfilling their responsibilities as Christian parents. Parish programs and resources particularly regarding parenting, should be made available to them. The parish has the responsibility to provide appropriate opportunities for catechesis and faith formation for adults and children so that the baptized may grow in knowledge and love of God and the Church.

## **ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY**

### **FIRST RECONCILIATION**

#### **General Introduction**

“The follower of Christ who has sinned, but who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the Sacrament of Penance should above all be converted to God with his whole heart. This inner conversion of heart embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life. It is expressed through confession made to the Church, due satisfaction and amendment of life. God grants pardon for sin through the Church, which works by the ministry of priests.” (Introduction to Rite of Penance Par. 6)

All should be familiar with the General Introduction to the Rite of Penance and to the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law (965-991).

#### **Preparation**

In accord with Canon 914, children who have reached the use of reason are to have made sacramental confession before the reception of First Eucharist. Therefore, catechesis on Reconciliation must precede the catechesis for First Communion. While the relationship between Reconciliation and the Eucharist needs to be understood, each sacrament is distinct and preparation for each is to be provided separately through a clear and unhurried process.

- 1) Pastors, parents and teachers are to provide adequate catechesis so that the child may receive this sacrament knowledgeably and freely.
- 2) “Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. It (i.e., catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation) seeks first, to make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the child’s life; second, to help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and to turn to Christ and the Church for forgiveness; third, to encourage the child to see that, in this sacrament, faith is expressed by being forgiven and forgiving; and fourth, to encourage the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly.” (*National Catechetical Directory* - #126)

Programs of preparation are to include catechesis and formation on

- the mercy and love of our forgiving God
- Scripture reflection focusing on the forgiving Christ
- the reality and nature of sin (both personal and communal)
- the need for sorrow and change of heart
- the forgiving action of Christ through the ministry of the priest
- the process of preparing for and celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- 3) Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be a collaborative endeavor of pastors, parents and catechists.

- a. The primary role of parents in this preparation is both a right and a duty that is to be implemented practically.
  - b. Pastors and catechists must provide programs that involve the parents in catechesis. Further, pastors and catechists must be involved in these programs both in relation to the parents and the children, recognizing both the preparation of children and the ongoing faith development of adults.
  - c. Since the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be celebrated prior to the reception of First Communion, the parents, after consultation with the catechist, have the option to delay **both sacraments** until the child is ready.
  - d. Those who assist in the Penance catechesis are to be prepared properly for the important ministry of communicating an awareness of sin, the mercy of God and the call to conversion and reconciliation.
- 4) In order to maintain the distinction between the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist “by a clear and unhurried separation,” the second grade year is to be devoted primarily to catechesis on these two sacraments. Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should ordinarily be given during the first semester of the second grade. Catechesis for First Communion should be given during the second semester.
- 5) All disciples of Christ are called to an on-going conversion of heart to God expressed through the Sacrament of Penance. Since catechesis and participation in Penance is on-going, parents are responsible for continuing to provide opportunity for their child to enter more deeply into sacramental experience of forgiveness and reconciliation. Likewise, pastors and catechists are to provide on-going catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance for all parishioners and to provide ample opportunity for them to participate in the sacrament.
- 6) It is pastorally advisable that children have the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament within both a communal celebration with individual confession and absolution, and private confession and absolution.

## **ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY**

### **FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

#### **General Introduction**

“For the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.” (Canon 913)

“It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as of the pastor to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession; it is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.” (Canon 914)

#### **Preparation**

Every parish is to have a process of preparation for children to assist them in understanding and appreciating the gift of the Most Holy Eucharist. This process is to include both catechesis and spiritual formation. It is to involve parents, teachers and pastors in a communal commitment to share with children the riches of the Holy Eucharist. On-going catechesis and ever more intentional participation in the Eucharist are to be encouraged by parents, pastors and catechists.

1) Normally, preparation for First Holy Communion takes place during the second grade year. It should be done separately from the preparation for First Penance which is celebrated prior to First Holy Communion.

2) The preparation is to provide:

- a solid understanding of the Eucharist both as sacrifice and meal
- reflection on the Eucharist from Scripture and Church teaching
- instruction on the proper reception of Holy Communion
- inspiration, appreciation and love for the Eucharist and particularly Holy Communion as a means of vital union with Christ and the Church and strength for Christ-like living.

Minimum criteria for participation in formal preparation programs are to be determined by the pastor so that there is some assurance of proper understanding and faith in the Eucharist on the part of those receiving Holy Communion.

3) Preparation is to involve both parents and children, with the parents playing an active role in sharing their faith with their children. This is also an opportune moment for the on-going faith development of parents.

4) Those approaching the Eucharist must exhibit a basic understanding of the Eucharist prior to receiving Holy Communion. Minimally, this means being able to distinguish



between ordinary bread and wine and the consecrated species that are the Body and Blood of Christ.

- 5) Evidence should be submitted of valid baptism through an original Baptismal certificate.
- 6) Instruction is to be given as to the appropriate manner of receiving Holy Communion with proper reverence and respect. Holy Communion may be received on the tongue or in the hand.
- 7) Though not required, reception of Holy Communion involves receiving both the Body and Blood of Christ. Children who are offered the cup should be prepared in advance for the taste of that species.

### **Celebration**

- 1) Normally the celebration takes place in the parish church at a Eucharist on Sunday, though for pastoral reasons another day may be deemed more advisable.
- 2) The celebration should be conducted within a familial environment with parents and other significant persons actively involved in the celebration as is appropriate.
- 3) Special dress is not required for the reception of First Holy Communion, though all are encouraged to dress appropriately for the celebration.
- 4) Excessive photography, videotaping and other displays are to be avoided.

### **Recording**

- 1) The names and proper information of all those receiving First Holy Communion is to be kept in a special registry in the parish. This and all sacramental records are to be kept in a secure, fire-proof safe.
- 2) Record of First Holy Communion is also to be made in the Baptismal registry. Notification of reception of First Holy Communion is to be sent to the parish of Baptism of each of the First Communicants.

### **Follow-Up**

Those welcomed to Holy Communion should continually be encouraged to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist through on-going catechesis and to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love manifest in the Eucharist through prayerful and active participation in the Liturgy.

## **ARCHDIOCESAN POLICY**

### **CONFIRMATION**

#### **General Introduction**

1) Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation. In this sacrament, they receive the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord sent upon the apostles at Pentecost.

“This giving of the Holy Spirit conforms believers more perfectly to Christ and strengthens them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love. They are so marked with the character or seal of the Lord that the sacrament of confirmation cannot be repeated.” (Introduction to Rite of Confirmation)

2) “The sacrament of confirmation strengthens the baptized and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith. It imprints a character, enriches by the gift of the Holy Spirit the baptized continuing on the path of Christian initiation, and binds them more perfectly to the Church.” (c. 879)

3) Familiarity with the General Introduction to the Rite of Confirmation and to the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law (879-896).

#### **Preparation Policy**

1) It is the responsibility of the people of God to prepare the baptized for Confirmation. It is the responsibility of the pastors to see that all the baptized come to the fullness of Christian initiation and are carefully prepared for confirmation.

2) The initiation of children into the sacramental life is, for the most part, the responsibility and concern of Christian parents. They are to form and gradually develop a spirit of faith in the children and, with the help of catechetical institutions, prepare them for the fruitful reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist. This responsibility of the parents is also shown by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments.

3) Every parish is to provide a process of preparation for candidates for Confirmation. The overall purpose of this preparation is to prepare the candidates to celebrate the sacrament with greater faith and understanding and to incorporate them more fully into the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This process is to include:

- catechesis on the Sacrament and Rite of Confirmation
- instruction on the Holy Spirit, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the practice of Christian virtues in daily life
- involvement in the sacramental and spiritual life of the Church
- challenge to live the faith in an ever more mature manner
- Christian service to others
- Witness to Christ through daily life and vocational commitment.

Since mentoring in the faith is an important dimension of Confirmation preparation, this process is to include, to the degree possible sponsors or other significant adults, as well as the candidates themselves.

- a. The remote preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is situated within family life and parish living. Parishes may establish a policy regarding the minimum catechesis required prior to being confirmed e.g. the catechetical component of the program may involve two years of catechesis.
- b. The proximate preparation is a more intensive program on Confirmation and its on-going implications for Christian living. The involvement of sponsors or other significant adults is expected. Each parish is to determine and implement a program of proximate preparation that includes catechesis, spiritual formation, mentoring/faith sharing and Christian service.
- c. Preparation programs should actively involve the pastor, catechists, youth ministers and others who are trained and qualified to assist in the on-going formation of young people.
- d. Parish norms regarding participation in programs of preparation should emphasize its importance and at the same time be reasonable in expectations. These norms and the preparation program itself are to be approved by the pastor.

### **Those to be Confirmed**

- 1) Candidates for Confirmation must be baptized within the Catholic Church or, if baptized in another Christian communion, be received into the fullness of the Church through a Profession of Faith.
- 2) Within the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, Confirmation is usually conferred during the eighth grade with the minimum age being 12. Where Confirmation is celebrated every two or three years, candidates should be in the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades, or 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> grades.
- 3) In case of danger of death, Confirmation may be conferred at any age. 4) If it can be done without grave inconvenience, Catholics are to be confirmed before they are admitted to marriage.
- 5) It is encouraged that those who are to be confirmed use their name given at baptism; however, it is permitted to take a new name which may be more Christian in nature.
- 6) A candidate is to be properly disposed to receive the sacrament and exercise a certain discretion as to whether he/she is ready to receive this sacrament or delay its reception.

### **Sponsors**

- 1) Each candidate for Confirmation is to have his/her own sponsor. In order to keep the connection with Baptism, it is recommended that the godparent also be the sponsor.

However it is permissible to choose another as sponsor. It is not permissible to have one person as a proxy for all the boys or girls who are being confirmed.

2) The Confirmation sponsor must be a Catholic, who is practicing the faith, and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function, he/she is to have completed the sixteenth year of age. The sponsor is to have received Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. They are to lead a life of faith in keeping with the function which they have been asked to assume. They are not to be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.

3) The candidate's father or mother is not to be the sponsor.

### **The Minister of Confirmation**

1) The ordinary minister of Confirmation is a Bishop. The Archbishop may delegate a specific priest to assist him in the same ceremony or to confirm in his absence.

2) During the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* the pastor is delegated by the law itself to confirm those coming into the church.

3) Except in case of danger of death (cf 5 below) the Confirmation of a person previously baptized Catholic is to be conferred by the Archbishop or his designate. A priest must receive special delegation from the Archbishop to celebrate Confirmation in such a case. This includes those adults who are requesting only Confirmation at the Easter Vigil.

4) For those in the RCIC, the Archbishop may reserve their Confirmation to a later age.

5) For those in danger of death, the pastor or any priest may confirm.

### **Recording**

1) The names and proper information of all those confirmed is to be kept in a special confirmation registry in the parish of Confirmation. This and all sacramental records are to be kept in a secure, fire-proof safe.

2) Record of Confirmation is also to be made in the Baptismal registry. Notification of Confirmation is to be sent to the parish of Baptism of each of the confirmed.

### **Follow-Up**

All those who are confirmed are encouraged to continue their study of the faith and to participate ever more fully in the life of the Church. Parishes are to provide special ministry to youth and young adults in response to their needs and to involve them in the overall life of the parish as the fully incorporated members that they are.

## **U.S. Bishops: Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities**

### **Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities**

It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together. To exclude members of the parish from these celebrations of the life of the Church, even by passive omission, is to deny the reality of that community. Accessibility involves far more than physical alterations to parish buildings. Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations such as the sacraments of reconciliation, confirmation, and anointing of the sick (*Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, November 1978; revised 1989*).

### **Preface**

Catholics with disabilities, as well as those who minister to or with them, often point out that pastoral practice with regard to the celebration of the sacraments varies greatly from diocese to diocese, even from parish to parish. Inconsistencies arise in such areas as the provision of sign language interpreters for persons who are deaf, in the accessibility of church facilities for persons with mobility problems, and in the availability of catechetical programs for persons with developmental and mental disabilities. Pastoral inconsistencies may occur in other areas as well.

The inconsistencies in pastoral practice often arise from distinct yet overlapping causes. Some result from a misunderstanding about the nature of disabilities. Others arise from an uncertainty about the appropriate application of Church law towards persons with disabilities. Others are born out of fear or misunderstanding. Still others are the result of a studied and honest acceptance of the realistic limitations of a parish's or diocese's available resources.

These guidelines were developed to address many of the concerns raised by priests, pastoral ministers, other concerned Catholics, persons with disabilities, their advocates and their families for greater consistency in pastoral practice in the celebration of the sacraments throughout the country. With this objective in view, the guidelines draw upon the Church's ritual books, its canonical tradition, and its experience in ministering to or with persons with disabilities in order to dispel any misunderstandings that may impede sound pastoral practice in the celebration of the sacraments. It is our hope that the guidelines will complement diocesan policies already in existence.

The bishops of the United States offer the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* in order to give a more concrete expression to our longstanding concern for "realistic provision" for the means of access to full sacramental participation for Catholic persons with disabilities. While they do not address every conceivable situation that may arise in pastoral practice, the guidelines present a set

of general principles to provide access to the sacraments for persons with disabilities. Diocesan staff, pastoral leaders, catechists, parishioners, health care workers, and all those who minister to or with Catholics with disabilities are invited and encouraged to reflect upon and accept these guidelines in their continuing effort to bring Christ's healing message and call to justice to the world.

## **I. General Principles**

1. By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling.
2. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community (Cf. canon 213). Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them (Cf. canon 843, sect. 1).
3. Parish sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active and conscious participation, according to their capacity. Pastoral ministers should not presume to know the needs of persons with disabilities, but rather they should consult with them or their advocates before making determinations about the accessibility of a parish's facilities and the availability of its programs, policies, and ministries. These adaptations are an ordinary part of the liturgical life of the parish. While full accessibility may not always be possible for every parish, it is desirable that at least one fully accessible community be available in a given area. Parishes may, in fact, decide to collaborate in the provision of services to persons with disabilities.
4. Since the parish is the center of the Christian experience for most Catholics, pastoral ministers should make every effort to determine the presence of all Catholics with disabilities who reside within a parish's boundaries. Special effort should be made to welcome those parishioners with disabilities who live in institutions or group homes and are unable to frequent their parish churches or participate in parish activities. However, pastoral ministers should remember that many persons with disabilities still reside with their families. Pastoral visitation, the parish census, and the diverse forms of parish and diocesan social communication are just a few of the many ways in which the pastoral staff can work towards the inclusion of all parishioners in the parish's sacramental life.
5. In accord with canon 777, n.4, pastors are responsible to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, their advocates and their families, as well as those knowledgeable in serving disabled persons can make a most valuable contribution to these programs. Parish catechetical and sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities. Further, parishes should encourage persons with disabilities to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry (e.g., as care ministers, catechists, etc.). Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate support services for pastors to facilitate the evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities.

6. The creation of a fully accessible parish reaches beyond mere physical accommodation to encompass the attitudes of all parishioners towards persons with disabilities. Pastoral ministers are encouraged to develop specific programs aimed at forming a community of believers known for its joyful inclusion of all of God's people around the table of the Lord.

7. In the course of making pastoral decisions, it is inevitable that pastoral care workers will encounter difficult cases. Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate policies for handling such cases which respect the procedural and substantive rights of all involved, and which ensure the necessary provision of consultation.

## **II. Particular Sacraments**

### **Baptism**

8. Through the sacrament of baptism the faithful are incorporated into Christ and into his Church. They are formed into God's people and obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They become a new creation and are called, rightly, the children of God. (*Rite of Christian Initiation*, General Introduction, n. 1).

9. Because it is the sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it. Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion (Canon 868, sect. 1, n. 2). Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one parent or guardian consents to it (Canons 868, sect. 1, n. 1 and 852).

10. So that baptism may be seen as a sacrament of the Church's faith and of admittance into the people of God, it should be celebrated ordinarily in the parish church on a Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil (Canons 856 and 857). The Church, made present in the local community, has an important role to play in the baptism of all of its members. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the baptized have the right to the love and help of the community (Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nn. 4, 10).

11. Either personally or through others, the pastor is to see to it that the parents of an infant who is disabled, or those who take the place of the parents, are properly instructed as to the meaning of the sacrament of baptism and the obligations attached to it. If possible, either the pastor or a member of the parish community should visit with the family, offering them the strength and support of the community which rejoices at the gift of new life, and which promises to nurture the faith of its newest member. It is recommended that preparation programs for baptism gather several families together so that they may commonly be formed by pastoral direction and prayer, and so that they may be strengthened by mutual support (Canon 851, n. 2).

12. If the person to be baptized is of catechetical age, the Rite of Christian Initiation may be adapted according to need (Cf. canons 851, n. 1 and 852, sect. 1).

13. A sponsor is to be chosen who will assist the newly baptized in Christian initiation. Sponsors have a special role in fostering the faith life of the baptized person. As such, they are to be chosen and prepared accordingly. Persons with disabilities may be sponsors for these sacraments of initiation.

### **Confirmation**

14. Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the sacrament of confirmation. In this way, they receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love (*Rite of Confirmation*, nn. 1-2).

15. Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities, and shepherds of souls--especially pastors--are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized are properly instructed to receive the sacrament of confirmation and to approach it at the appropriate time (Cf. canon 890). The diocesan bishop is obliged to see that the sacrament of confirmation is conferred on his subjects who properly and reasonably request it (Canon 885, sect. 1).

16. All baptized, unconfirmed Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the sacrament of confirmation if they are suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew their baptismal promises (Canon 889). Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time.

17. Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful between the age of discretion (which is about the age of seven) and eighteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop, or when there is a danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

18. A sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present. The sponsor assists the confirmed person on the continuing path of Christian initiation (Cf. canon 892). For this reason, it is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at baptism be the sponsor for confirmation (Canon 893, sect. 2).

### **Eucharist**

19. The Eucharist is the most august sacrament, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered, and received, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. It is the summit and the source of all Christian worship and life, signifying and effecting the unity of the people of God, providing spiritual nourishment for the recipient, and



achieving the building up of the Body of Christ. The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life (Canon 897).

20. Parents, those who take the place of parents, and pastors are to see to it that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed (Canon 914). It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of holy communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental 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 are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. 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 this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the eucharist.

21. Eucharistic celebrations are often enhanced by the exercise of the diverse forms of ministry open to the laity. In choosing those who will be invited to use their gifts in service to the parish community, the parish pastoral staff should be mindful of extending Christ's welcoming invitation to qualified parishioners with disabilities.

### **Reconciliation**

22. In the sacrament of reconciliation, the Christian faithful obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins. At the same time, they are reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example, and prayer (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11).

23. Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental 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 he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental 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.

24. Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice (Canon 990). The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession (Canons 983, sect. 2 and 1388, sect. 2). When no priest with signing skills is

available, nor sign language interpreter requested, Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in writing. The written materials are to be returned to the penitent or otherwise properly destroyed.

25. In the case of individuals with poor communication skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally. In posing questions and in the assignment of penances the confessor is to proceed with prudence and discretion, mindful that he is at once judge and healer, minister of justice as well as of mercy (Canons 978, sect. 1; 979; 981).

### **Anointing of the Sick**

26. Through the anointing of the sick, the Church commends to the suffering and glorified Lord the faithful who are seriously ill, so that they may be relieved of their suffering and be saved (Canon 998).

27. Those who have the care of souls and those who are close to the sick are to see to it that the faithful who are in danger due to sickness or old age are supported by the sacrament of anointing at the appropriate time (Canon 1001).

28. Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful (Cf. canon 1004).

29. The anointing of the sick may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament, or if the sick person has lost the use of reason and would have asked for the sacrament while in control of his or her faculties (*Rite of Anointing*, nn. 12, 14). If there is doubt as to whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, the sacrament is to be conferred (Canon 1005). Persons with disabilities may at times be served best through inclusion in communal celebrations of the sacrament of anointing (Cf. canon 1002).

### **Holy Orders**

30. By divine institution, some among the Christian faithful are constituted sacred ministers through the sacrament of orders. They are consecrated and deputed to shepherd the people of God, each in accord with his own grade of orders, by fulfilling in the person of Christ the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (Canon 1008).

31. The existence of a physical disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the order they receive (Canons 1029 and 1041, n. 1). The proper bishop or competent major superior makes the judgment that candidates are suited for the ministry of the Church (Canons 241, sect. 1; 1025, sect. 2; 1051, n. 1). Cases are to be decided on an individual basis and in light of pastoral

judgment and the opinions of diocesan personnel and other experts involved with disability issues.

32. Diocesan vocations offices and offices for ministry with persons with disabilities should provide counseling and informational resources for men with disabilities who are discerning a vocation to serve the Church through one of the ordained ministries.

33. In preparation for responsible leadership in ordained ministry, the diocesan bishop or major superior is to see to it that the formation of all students in the seminary provides for their service to the disabled community, and for their possible ministry to or with persons with disabilities. Formation personnel should consult with parents, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in the adaptation of programs for ministerial formation.

## **Marriage**

34. By the sacrament of marriage, Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church. They help each other to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children (*Rite of Marriage*, n. 1).

35. All persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage (Canon 1058).

36. The local ordinary should make the necessary provisions to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in marriage preparation programs. Through this preparation all couples may become predisposed toward holiness and to the duties of their new state. In developing diocesan policies, the local ordinary should consult with men and women of proven experience and skill in understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of persons with disabilities (Canons 1063, n. 2 and 1064). The inclusion of persons with disabilities in sponsoring couple programs is an especially effective way of supporting both the needs and the gifts of couples preparing for marriage.

37. For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state (Canon 1095). It is also necessary that the parties understand that marriage is a permanent union and is ordered to the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of children (Canon 1096). Pastors and other clergy are to decide cases on an individual basis and in light of pastoral judgment based upon consultation with diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and canonical, medical, and other experts. Medical and canonical opinions should be sought in determining the presence of any impediments to marriage. It should be noted, however, that paraplegia in itself does not always imply impotence, nor the permanence of such a condition, and it is not in itself an

impediment. In case of doubt with regard to impotence, marriage may not be impeded (Canon 1084, sect. 2).

38. Catholics who are deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication (Canon 1104, sect. 2). Marriage may also be contracted through a sign language interpreter whose trustworthiness has been certified by the pastor (Canon 1106).

39. Pastoral care for married persons extends throughout the married couples' lives. By their care and example, the entire ecclesial community bears witness to the fact that the matrimonial state may be maintained in a Christian spirit and make progress toward perfection. Special care is to be taken to include parishioners with disabilities in parish programs aimed at assisting and nourishing married couples in leading holier and fuller lives within their families (Canon 1063, n. 4).