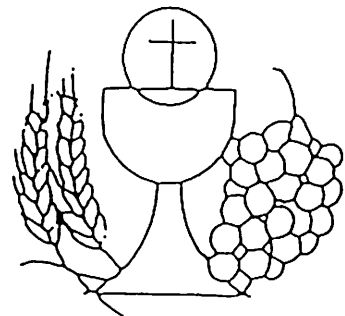


DIOCESAN
FIRST
EUCCHARIST
GUIDELINES
AND
RESOURCES

May, 1998

DIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON
Office of Continuing Christian Education
2403 Holcombe Blvd.
Houston, Texas 77021



INTRODUCTION

Among the very important events in our earthly pilgrimage towards the Father, surely the reception of First Eucharist must rank very high. The first encounter with the Body and Blood of Jesus was the beginning of a lifetime of spiritual nourishment on the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. The importance of this communion with our Savior deserves and even requires that its preparation be thorough and theologically sound while being age appropriate. If the preparation is meager and catechetically impoverished, the child will be denied a beautiful experience and deprived of lasting memories of a grace-filled moment. But, worst of all, the child will grow up with a faulty understanding of the sacrament. I am convinced that many of the misconceptions and misinformation that adults have about the Eucharist stems from the preparation they received as children.

The guidelines which have been prepared for the preparation for First Eucharist are to be faithfully followed by all in the Diocese of Galveston-Houston who prepare children for this sacrament. Followed faithfully, these guidelines will assure that children are taught a correct and proper understanding of the Eucharist as the Church professes it.

I am grateful to the Design and Writing Committee who produced this important catechetical instrument under the direction of Joanne Sanders, the Director of the Office of Continuing Christian Education. The Diocese of Galveston-Houston owes them a great debt of gratitude for the time and effort they gave to this project. The result of their hard work will be thousands of children well-prepared for a lifetime of loving Jesus in this Sacrament of His love and holy presence.

+Joseph A. Fiorenza
Bishop of Galveston-Houston

February 13, 1998

THE CANDIDATE

1. The age of discretion both for Penance and Holy Communion is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Penance and Communion. (Decree of the Congregation of the Sacraments on the Age of Children Who are to be Admitted to First Holy Communion #245-50, Quam Singulari)
2. Children shall be prepared for and given the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before their first reception of Eucharist. (C#914, Paul VI)
3. The child's readiness for the celebration of each of the sacraments is to be determined by the child, the parent, who is the primary educator of his/her child, and the pastor or his delegate. (NCD #122, Diocesan Policy, 9/18/85) If the parent, catechist, pastor or his delegate deems the child is not sufficiently prepared or there is not a sincere commitment to receive the sacrament, it may be recommended to the child and the parent(s) that celebration of the sacrament be postponed. (C #914, GCD Add. #4, #5) However, the preparation of the child to receive the sacrament should continue so that the postponement is a relatively short period of time.
4. Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. Religious readiness for celebration of this sacrament should consider not only chronological age and school grade but also the child's preparedness to encounter Christ in this sacramental celebration. (NCD #178) Special attention must be given to assist persons with special needs, mental retardation, emotional and/or developmental disabilities. (NCD #195, #196, U.S. Bishops' Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, 6/95)
5. Some manner of assessment (i.e. meeting with child or child and parent(s) or other means) should be used to determine a child's readiness to enter preparation for and, after appropriate formation, celebration of the sacrament. (NCD #122)
6. A child's readiness for the celebration of the sacrament is to be judged using the following criteria:
 - a. desire to receive the Eucharist. (NCD #122)
 - b. an understanding of the Eucharist as the real body and blood of Christ, that what appears as bread and wine are actually His living body. (CCC #1412-1413, NCD #122, BT #12)
 - c. an awareness of the significance of participating in Sunday Eucharist. (CCC #1389)
 - d. an understanding of God's action of grace in their lives and of their responsibility to be in a state of grace to receive the Eucharist worthily. (BT #12, NCD #121)
 - e. an awareness of God's invitation to be His child and friend. (NCD #178)

Readiness for the celebration of First Eucharist should be based upon the elements for catechesis of the sacrament. (See Section - Catechesis #3)

"A full and perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine is not necessary either for First Confession or for First Communion." Catechesis continues throughout the life of the Christian. (Decree of the Congregation of the Sacraments on the Age of Children Who Are to be Admitted to First Holy Communion, #245-50, Quam Singulari)

7. Careful attention and sensitivity should be given to the needs of the child regarding language and cultural religious practices of the family. (NCD #194, Many Members, One Body, Pastoral Letter, Bishops of Galveston-Houston)

THE PARENT/GUARDIAN

1. Keeping in mind that parent(s)/guardian(s) have the first responsibility for the education of their children, the parish should provide education/formation and support to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of children preparing for the Sacrament of Eucharist by:

- a. instituting a communication process (i.e., an interview) whereby the needs of a particular family are assessed with regard to the Sacrament of Eucharist.
- b. offering enriching opportunities for parent(s)/guardian(s) to deepen their relationship with Christ, become more involved in the community life of the Church, and be updated on the Sacrament of Eucharist if this is a need. (CCC #2222, NCD #226)
- c. assisting parents in their understanding of their role as models of faith and primary educators of their child helping them to assess their child's readiness for the sacrament. (NCD #212, Diocesan Policy 9/18/85)
- d. giving consideration to the lived experience of the family when setting requirements for attendance at parent sessions and also in scheduling meetings and celebrations.
- e. setting up parish programs with suitable resources that are flexible so as to meet the needs of the families.
- f. being sensitive to individuals with special needs and persons with disabilities in the formation and reception of the Sacrament. (NCD #195, #196)
- g. being culturally sensitive to the language and practices of the people of the community. (NCD #194)

2. Parents have a right and a duty to be intimately involved in preparing their child for First Communion. (NCD #122, DMC #10) Parents may do this by their support and encouragement of the spiritual growth of their child through:

- a. sharing faith with their child. (CCC #2223, #2225, #2226, DMC #10, TTJD #25)
- b. witnessing to a Christian lifestyle. (CCC #1657, #2223)
- c. praying and teaching prayer. (CCC #1657, DMC #10)
- d. participating with their child in worship, especially Sunday Eucharist. (CCC #1657, DMC #10)
- e. providing opportunities for formal religious education/faith formation. (NCD #212, DMC #10, TTJD #25)

- f. being a healthy model for their child by approaching the Sacrament of Eucharist on a regular basis. (C #898, DMC #10, TTJD #25) Pastoral care should be present to parents unable to receive the Eucharist because of impediments. (C #912, #915, #916)
 - g. continuing their own personal growth and understanding of the Sacrament of Eucharist by attending classes designed for parents/guardians of children preparing for the celebration of the sacrament. (DMC #10)
3. Catechesis aims to help parents grow in understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist in order to participate readily in catechizing their child. (NCD #122) Catechesis for the parents should present and/or renew:
- a. an understanding that the Eucharist nourishes us. (NCD #121, GCD #58)
 - b. a realization that once "filled with the love of God and neighbor, they may become more and more a people acceptable to God and build up the Christian community with the works of charity, service, missionary activity, and witness." (NCD #121, GCD #58)
 - c. reflection upon Christ's life as proclaimed in the Gospels, considering the Last Supper and the Jewish roots of this covenant meal. (NCD #121)
 - d. appreciation of the importance and significance of the Liturgy of the Word in the Eucharistic celebration. (NCD #121)
 - e. an instruction on the meaning of the ritual, the symbols, the parts of the Mass, and the liturgical year. (NCD #121)
 - f. an understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrament of thanksgiving and of reconciliation; that it is a covenant meal, a holy sacrifice and a memorial of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. (NCD #121)
 - g. an understanding of the belief in the real presence; that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist; that the bread and wine become Christ with us. (NCD #121, GCD #58)
 - h. an awareness of one's obligation to be free of serious sin before receiving Holy Communion. (CCC #1415)
 - i. knowledge about the Eucharistic fast and the conditions under which the Eucharist may be received more than once a day. (NCD #121)
 - j. an understanding of the history and theology of the Sacrament. (C#898)
4. When formally participating in the catechesis of their children, parents must be mindful of the pre-eminent right of the Church to specify the content of authentic catechesis. They always have an obligation to catechize according to the teaching authority of the Church. (NCD #212)
5. Parents are to provide Baptismal information to the parish prior to the reception of the Sacrament of Eucharist. C#842, #912 (See Celebration-Form of Communal Celebration)

CATECHESIS

1. Formal instruction for the Sacrament of Eucharist should be separate and distinct from preparation for first reception of Penance so that the integrity of each sacrament is maintained. (NCD #126)
2. Parishes should provide catechesis for the Sacrament of Eucharist and catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance within the same school year. However, each of these Sacraments should be taught separately and distinctly. Opportunities to celebrate each of these Sacraments should be provided during the same year. (Diocesan Policy 9/18/85) The opportunity to celebrate Penance must precede the reception of Eucharist with the strongest encouragement that a sacramental Penance precede First Eucharistic reception. (C#914, NCD #126)
3. Catechesis should assist the child in their understanding of the Eucharist adapted to their intellectual capacity. (NCD #122). Essential elements to include:
 - a. a sense of self-worth, a self-image based on a good relationship with God. (GCD Add. #2, NCD #178)
 - b. relating to God as Our Lord and Father, appreciating His love for us and understanding that Jesus, the Son of God, became man, died and rose again. (GCD Add. #2)
 - c. an understanding of God's action of grace in their lives and of their responsibility to be in a state of grace to receive the Eucharist worthily. (BT #12, NCD #121)
 - d. attention to God's self-revelation and His invitation to us to be His child and friend. (NCD #178)
 - e. awareness of the main events of Jesus' life. (NCD #122)
 - f. a strengthening of the child's awareness of the Father's love, of the call to participate in Christ's sacrifice and of the gift of the Spirit. (NCD #122)
 - g. the teaching that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ, and what appears to be bread and wine are actually His living body, which nourishes growth in Christian life. (CCC #1392, #1412-1413, NCD #122, BT #12)
 - h. an understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrament of thanksgiving, of reconciliation; that it is a covenant meal, a holy sacrifice and a memorial of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. (CCC #1328-1331, NCD #121)
 - i. a grasp of the concept of "unity" and "belonging" to God and to the Church from experiences such as sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking and celebrating. (NCD #122, BT #12)
 - j. promoting active, conscious participation in the liturgy, to help the faithful to meditate on God's word, and to provide opportunities for praying. (GCD #25, NCD #145, DMC #12)

- k. instruction in, and participation in, the action of the Mass. (NCD #121, #122, CSL #11, DMC #12)
- l. instruction concerning the time of the Eucharistic fast and the conditions under which Holy Communion may be received. (CCC #1387, NCD #121)
- m. how to receive Christ's body and blood in communion in an informed and reverent manner. (CCC #1387, GCD #25, NCD #121, #122)
- n. seeking to help children make an increasingly personal response to God's word and gifts. (NCD #178)
- o. learning the truths of the faith regarding the Eucharist so that they can participate more fully as members of Christ's Body. (NCD #121, DMC #9, #12)
- p. a realization that once "filled with the love of God and neighbor, they may become more and more a people acceptable to God and build up the Christian community with the works of charity, service, missionary activity, and witness." (NCD #121, GCD #58)

Catechesis for preparation of the Sacrament of Eucharist should also be based upon the criteria used to assess a child's readiness to receive the sacrament. (See Section - The Candidate #6)

4. Catechesis for the Sacrament of Eucharist is found throughout the diocesan curriculum guidelines, Catechesis for Children and Adolescents, and should be a guide and resource of appropriate catechetical materials to be used in the preparation. (NCD #229, #264, #249)
5. The family, the domestic Church, is the primary place for faith formation. From the earliest age a young person is formed through relationships and the witness of faith within the family and within the community. (NCD #178, #212, #226)

Preparation for the celebration of First Eucharist can occur through formal religious education in several ways:

**Family Faith Formation
Parish Religious Education
Catholic School Religious Education**

The child should be participating in the parish religious education process or the Catholic school religious education formation which provides ongoing, systematic catechesis as set forth in the Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines using appropriate materials that focus on an understanding of the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Eucharist. (NCD #229)

Parents may choose to provide formal, systematic catechesis at home for their child(ren). They should be aware of the parish process for preparation, use appropriate resources and meet the criteria as set forth in the Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines. (See Parent/Guardian #4)

6. The parochial community is responsible for providing a focused, immediate preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist just prior to the celebration of the Sacrament recognizing the validity of the preparation that has taken place in the home, parish religious education process and/or the Catholic school. (NCD #60d, #115, #224, #229)

Parents should be invited by the parish at the beginning of the year in which the child is to celebrate the Sacrament of Eucharist to participate in an Information Meeting outlining the requirements for preparation and celebration of the sacrament. They should be encouraged to be an integral part of the child's preparation, use the appropriate resource materials provided by the parish, and take part in parent meetings sponsored by the parish which should inform and challenge them to a better understanding of the teachings and practice of the Church regarding the Sacrament of Eucharist. The parent(s) should provide baptismal information for their child before celebration of the sacrament. (See Parent/Guardian Section)

The pastor and/or the catechist (designated by the pastor) and the parent(s) should assess the child's readiness for celebration of the Sacrament of Eucharist by an interview or equivalent process prior to the celebration of the Sacrament. (See Candidate Section #3 & #5)

7. The parochial community is the place where the reception of the Sacrament of Eucharist is to take place. Assessment of the readiness of the child for the celebration of the Sacrament and immediate preparation are the responsibility of the parochial community. The validity of faith formation which takes place in the home, parish religious education program or Catholic school religion class is to be respected. (CT #24, NCD #60d, #224, #225)

8. Special attention must be given to assist persons with special needs, mental retardation, emotional and/or developmental disabilities. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops makes clear in the Guidelines for the celebration of the sacraments with persons with disabilities that the standard for reception of communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as it is for all persons. The measure is that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food even if this recognition is expressed by gesture or reverential silence rather than verbally. (See U.S. Bishops Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, 6/95)

9. Catechesis should be provided in the language of the candidate and family as needed. Personnel who minister to the candidate and family should be sensitive to their needs with special attention to a hospitable environment. Materials should be provided which are appropriate to their cultural context. (NCD #194, #195, #196, See Candidate Section #7)

THE COMMUNITY

1. The Church is the family of believers in Jesus Christ, a community of persons formed in His life, death and resurrection, the Paschal Mystery. The community is involved in the sharing of beliefs, experiences, ideals and values. (NCD #70) Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (CCC #2182) Therefore, families should be regularly participating in the life of the Church, especially in the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. (DMC #11, #16)
2. All liturgical celebrations with children should lead toward the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday with the entire community. (DMC #21) "The fullest reality of the liturgical assembly is children and adults together -- not separate celebrations which run the risk of diminishing the place of children in the liturgical assembly." (LMC #27)
3. Parishes should provide sacramental catechesis for parents with a special focus on the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. (Diocesan Policy 9/18/85, NCD #212)
4. The faith community should provide ongoing formation, knowledge and skills for catechists who work with children preparing for sacraments. (NCD #211, #213)
5. The entire faith community should be involved in the faith formation of children and youth. All members of the parish and its ministries are called to pray with the children and youth as they prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Eucharist. (NCD #181, LG #11, CT #24, DMC #11, #16)
6. By giving witness to the Gospel, living communal charity, and actively celebrating the mysteries of Christ, the Christian community is an excellent school of Christian and liturgical formation for the children who live in it. (DMC #11)

THE PRESIDER

1. "Priests exercise a uniquely important role and have a special responsibility for the success of the catechetical ministry. They are a source of leadership, cooperation, and support for all involved in this ministry. As leaders in developing a faith community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they perform indispensable catechetical functions: encouraging catechists, praying with them, teaching and learning with them, supporting them." (NCD #217)
2. The presider is called to be sensitive to the inclusion of families with children in their participation in the actions and ministries of the Eucharistic celebration, i.e. offering of gifts, lectors, Eucharistic ministers. (DMC #34)
3. "It is the responsibility of the priest who celebrates with children to make the celebration festive, familial, and meditative." The priest should be concerned about the dignity, clarity and simplicity of his actions and gestures; he should express himself so that he is easily understood, while avoiding any childish style of speech. (DMC #23)

THE CELEBRATION

1. The celebration of the sacrament of Eucharist for children and youth should be in accordance with the Roman Missal and the Directory of Masses with Children.
2. Sunday is the most appropriate day for celebrating First Communion. When it is impossible to celebrate First Communion on Sunday, another solemnity or feast day may be considered. (GNLYC #4, CCC #1389, #2177, CSL #106)
3. Communal celebration involving the presence and active participation of the faithful is preferred to any other form of celebration. (CSL #27) (See Celebration - Communal Celebration and Forms of Communal Celebration)
4. Children should be properly instructed in the correct manner to receive Holy Communion. It is desirable that Communion be offered under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly. (GIRM #240, CCC #1390)
5. The Sacrament of Eucharist should be celebrated in the language and cultural context of the assembly. (CSL #37-49, NCD #139)
6. Community involvement in the liturgical ministries at a Eucharistic celebration for children is encouraged. Ministers should be sensitive to the cultural context and attitude of the candidate and family by providing an environment that is welcoming and hospitable. Worship aids and music should also be appropriate to their cultural context. (NCD #181, Bishops' Pastoral Letter, Many Members, One Body, NCD #194, #195, #196, U.S. Bishops Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, 6/95)
7. All liturgical celebrations with children should lead toward the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday with the entire community. (DMC #21)