

Roman Catholic
First Eucharist
Guidelines
And
Customs

St. Cecilia Catholic Church
2159 Highway 195
Jasper, AL 35503

FIRST EUCHARIST

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, art. 47

Citing a different canon (914), the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time" (can. 1457). Even so, some may find it difficult to argue that every child must confess sins before receiving Communion. The Church obliges the confession of serious sins, but recommends the confession of venial sins (can. 988).

Parents, catechists, and the pastor should carefully discern with the child and prepare them for the sacrament so they are properly disposed for its celebration.

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This booklet has been prepared by parishioners of St. Cecilia Catholic Church to help our parish community review the Church's vision, understanding, teaching, and discipline of the Sacrament of First Eucharist and the local Customs for celebrating the Sacrament at St. Cecilia Church.

First Communion

To share in Communion for the first time, children must have “sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity” (Code of Canon Law, 913). They must also be able to receive Communion “with faith and devotion” (can. 913).

Our Church expects a child to discern ordinary food from the Eucharistic bread. That ability comes at the age “of the use of reason.” We generally place that at about age seven, but it has never been defined because children mature so independently. If children cannot make the distinction, they should not come to the Eucharistic table.

However, infant Communion is common among other Christian churches. Children should understand the mystery of Christ “according to their capacity.” They need not comprehend the total mystery. (Who of us can?) They should come to the table with a spiritual disposition. Communion requires not just using reason, but having faith as well.

Formerly, children were expected to adore the host. That requirement fit an age when the faithful received Communion infrequently and attended mass to adore the host more than to share in Communion.

First Eucharist

INTRODUCTION

Catechesis for proximate first celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist will begin in the second half of the second year of the parish religious education program. Catechesis for First Eucharist is to be conducted separately from catechesis for First Reconciliation, and catechesis for First Reconciliation will precede catechesis for First Eucharist.

Thus, a child enrolled in catechesis for the reception of First Eucharist is to have already received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through Holy Communion, Christ unites the faithful into one body: the Church. Holy Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation which is already achieved by Baptism (CCC 1396).

Priests, parents, and catechists are responsible for correctly preparing children to receive First Communion. (Canon 914)

A child is to be enrolled in a catechetical program approved by the pastor for at least one year prior to catechesis for First Eucharist. Adequate and meaningful catechesis must precede the first reception of Eucharist.

Parents should register their child for a program for the celebration of the sacrament. In the case of older children desiring first reception of the sacrament, the pastor and parish director of religious education should decide upon and implement an appropriate program of study which will adequately prepare that child for the sacrament.

Parents not only have the right but also the responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their child for First Eucharist. That preparation should be both supportive and instructional. The supportive role includes a home environment which nourishes a love of God and an appreciation for the Eucharist.

The instructional role is to assist in teaching and reinforcing of catechetical content. Thus, parents will be invited to participate in at least two sessions of sacramental catechesis for adults.

The significance of the Eucharist is manifested when it is celebrated with faith and devotion by child and parents in the family's own faith community. The celebration of First Eucharist is the celebration of the whole Christian community welcoming the first communicants. Therefore, the whole parish should be involved in the preparation and celebration of the sacrament.

Customs for First Eucharist at St. Cecilia Catholic Church

Criteria for the candidate and families:

- A. Prior reception of the Sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation (baptismal certificate required)
- C. Has reached the age of reason and ordinarily in the second grade
- D. Regular attendance in religious education classes for at least one year
- E. Demonstrates a readiness and willingness to participate in the preparation process and classes
- F. Parents' commitment to be involved in the preparation process through personal spiritual growth, and be committed to reinforcing the lessons with their child at home and attend at least one session of catechesis
- G. Regular family attendance at Sunday Eucharistic celebrations, especially Family Masses
- H. Evidence of prayer, reverence, and reflection that lead to a greater relationship with Jesus

FURTHER RITUAL GUIDELINES FROM THE DIOCESE OF BIRHAMHAM IN ALABAMA

- Children should be given the option of receiving the Holy Eucharist on the tongue or in the hand. Both practices should be explained.
- Children should practice the proper gestures and postures expected during mass. They should be taught how to genuflect; and the proper times during mass to sit, to stand, and to kneel.
- Children should be taught to make an act of reverence before receiving Holy Communion. A slight bow of the head is the appropriate gesture (Prot. NO. 1381/01/L; adapted for the dioceses of the USA to GIRM 160, p.2).
- Parents or capable children should serve as lectors for the readings and intercessions at the First Communion Liturgy.
- The appropriate dress for First Communion is "Sunday Best" (sport coat and tie for boys, white dress for girls). However one should be sensitive and allow for cultural and economic status. Parents may give their child a traditional prayer book, rosary, and scapular set if desired.

The pastor has final responsibility for determining the readiness of a child for First Eucharist. Because pastors are usually not directly involved in the catechesis, catechists in consultation with the parents are normally the ones to decide if a child is ready for celebration of the sacrament. Every effort should be made to see that parents accept this privilege and responsibility. Interviews with parents and children are appropriate if the interview encourages a process of mutual discernment.

Normally, a child will receive First Eucharist in the parish in which the parents are members. Taking into account religious education and the nature of contemporary society, pastors and parish directors can make allowances to permit a child to receive First Eucharist in another parish different from where the preparation has taken place. The permission of both pastors is required.

The catechetical program to be used in the preparation for First Eucharist is to be one approved by the Religious Education Office of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama.

ONGOING CATECHESIS

Since the Eucharist is the heart of the Christian life, the maturing child should continually grow in the understanding and in the experience of this sacrament.

Continued catechesis on the Eucharist and Reconciliation, adapted to the level of the child, is an integral element of all graded programs of systematic catechesis. Parents are to be reminded that the child's catechetical growth does not end with the reception of the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

Parish experiences also provide opportunities for children and parents, and the parish community, to deepen their understanding of participation in the Eucharist.

Since this sacrament celebrates further initiation into the Christian community, a heightened awareness in the Christian assembly as to its own special ministries of welcoming, healing, fellowship, and praise will foster an enriching experience of the Eucharist.

Other enrichment strategies such as family activities and family-centered catechesis can provide for home preparations for the Eucharist.

DOCUMENTATION

This sacrament is to be recorded in the permanent parish records. It is recommended that notification of the reception of this sacrament be made to the parish of Baptism.

FURTHER CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES FROM THE DIOCESE OF BIRHAMHAM IN ALABAMA

- Children should know in faith that the consecrated Host is different from ordinary bread or from unconsecrated host, and that the Precious Blood is different from ordinary wine.
- Children should be taught that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ; that what appears to be bread and wine is actually his living body. (NCD 122)
- Children should know in faith that Jesus is fully present under both forms; we receive the Real Presence of Jesus when we receive either the Body of Christ or his Precious Blood.
- Children should be taught that one must fast from all food and drink for one hour before receiving Holy Communion. Only water and medicine do not break the fast (canon 919 p1).
- Children may need help and guidance in making a Prayer of Thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion. They should be taught to focus during these moments of private prayer.