



SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION FOR CHILDREN



POLICY STATEMENT

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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT - POLICY STATEMENT

My dear people,

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, the Church revised the rituals for the celebration of the sacraments. In line with the teachings of the Council, the revision included a renewed appreciation of the links between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist as the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. The revision also reflected the Council's emphasis on the community aspect of celebrating the sacraments.

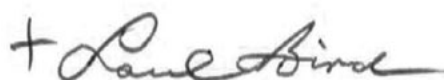
In regard to the sacraments of Christian Initiation for Children, the revised rites highlighted the role and responsibility of parents and of the parish community in preparing children for these sacraments and in supporting them as they grow to maturity in their Christian lives.

Over the years, there have been a number of documents about the celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation for Children in our diocese of Ballarat. I am pleased to present this 2023 text which builds on provisions from earlier documents and provides the policy to guide us in the years ahead.

I hope these pages will help to foster a joyful and fruitful celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation for Children throughout our diocese.

God bless you all.

Yours in Christ,



Paul Bird CSsR

Bishop of Ballarat

September 2023

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church welcomes people into the Body of Christ through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the reception of First Holy Communion. These sacraments complement each other and are required for full initiation into the Catholic Church. In the case of children baptised as infants, this initiation process is extended over a number of years and is accompanied by appropriate catechesis and pastoral formation.

A child is born into the family of believers through the faith of his/her parents/guardians through infant Baptism. The child's faith is nurtured within both the domestic Church of the family and within the parish community. When old enough, the child is introduced to formal catechesis and is prepared for the reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion, which complete the Initiation process. The opportunity for children to celebrate their first sacramental reconciliation precedes the first reception of Holy Communion.

The reception of Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion marks the beginning of a journey of growing intimacy with Jesus Christ as a Catholic Christian. This relationship continues right through life. Further education in faith at home, in the parish and at the Catholic school will build on this beginning, so that there will be a gradual integration of children into a sacramental community which is always working to deepen its faith, celebrate it more prayerfully and share it with the world.

The process of Christian Initiation into the Catholic Church is subject to the universal law of the Church and the particular discipline of each diocese. The Bishop, taking account of the particular circumstances of the local Church, establishes appropriate Policy.

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The initiation of children into the sacramental life of the Church is family based, co-ordinated by the parish and supported by the Catholic School.

1. ORDER OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

- 1.1 Incorporation into the life of Christ begins with reception of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, but is most fully expressed and brought about through participation in First Holy Communion, which is the culmination of our initiation into the Catholic Church.

Therefore the sequence of the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation for children in the Diocese of Ballarat is: Baptism, Confirmation and the reception of First Holy Communion.

2. AGE OF RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS

- 2.1 According to the Church's tradition, children may be baptised from early infancy. According to the practice of the Western Church, children may be confirmed and receive their First Holy Communion around the age of discretion, presumed in Church law to be around the age of seven.

2.2 However, readiness for the reception of Confirmation and First Holy Communion is not simply a matter of age. Parents/guardians, priest and catechists all have a role in ascertaining that the child has achieved appropriate faith development and that adequate faith support is assured.

2.3 Children not baptised as infants who have attained the age of reason and are of catechetical age seek Christian Initiation into the Catholic Church either at the direction of their parents/guardians, or, with parental/guardian permission, on their own initiative. This is normally done through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) with Children of Catechetical Age.

(See the “Parish Handbook for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with Children of Catechetical Age” 2021. Copies of this handbook are available from the members section of the diocesan website www.ballarat.catholic.org.au or the Pastoral Ministry Office, ph. 5337 7159).

2.4 Children who have been baptised in another faith tradition (see pastoral note), who have attained the age of reason and are of catechetical age, seek full membership in the Catholic Church either at the direction of their parents/guardians, or, with the permission of parents/guardians, on their own initiative.

(See the “Parish Handbook for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with Children of Catechetical Age” 2021. Copies of this handbook are available from the members section of the diocesan website www.ballarat.catholic.org.au or the Pastoral Ministry Office, ph. 5337 7159).

PASTORAL NOTE – Baptism in other traditions

There is a mutual recognition of the validity of the Sacrament of Baptism between the Catholic Church and the Anglican, Uniting, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Orthodox Churches.

Conditional Baptism is not normally required.

3. FORMATION/PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

3.1 The reception of the Sacraments of Initiation is the means by which children enter into the life of the faith community.

Therefore it is proper that the local faith community be responsible for, and intimately involved in, the preparation and presentation of children for the Sacraments.

3.2 A formal process of sacramental preparation, involving the family and local faith community, precedes and accompanies the celebration of the Sacraments.

3.3 The parish will encourage and provide opportunities for the on-going formation and integration of children into the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

PASTORAL PRACTICE

Parishes have the responsibility to put in place and maintain structures for the preparation of children for the Sacraments of Initiation.

SEQUENCE AND CELEBRATION

- Each child is to be enrolled for reception of the Sacrament.
- The enrolment of children is celebrated ritually during Sunday parish Masses and after appropriate communication and notification within the parish.
- Where possible, the reception of the Sacraments is to be incorporated into appropriate times of the liturgical year.
- Some of the rites associated with Baptism may be spread over a number of liturgical celebrations, particularly at gatherings for formation for the Sacraments.
- The celebration of Confirmation and reception of First Holy Communion may take place within the one celebration of Mass in particular circumstances.
- Whilst the Bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation, if the parish priest is delegated to confirm the children, all fully initiated children should be formally presented to the Bishop during pastoral visitation.
- While ideally children should receive First Holy Communion under both kinds, uniformity of reception must not be imposed.

AGE AND READINESS

- The readiness of each child is to be determined prior to enrolment for the reception of the Sacrament.
- Readiness of children must be related to their age and ability to participate in the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion, in a way that is appropriate for their age and development.
- It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to take the initiative in responding to a parish invitation to present their child for reception of the Sacraments. Provision must then be made to allow parents/guardians to understand what is involved in this continuing initiation of their children and indicate their willingness to participate in the preparation program. If necessary, questions of faith involvement, or the lack of, can be addressed in an appropriate way at this time.
- **Children with special needs** become full members of the Catholic community at the same age and time as their peers.
(See “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with People with Disability” available from the diocesan website www.ballarat.catholic.org.au or the Pastoral Ministry Office, ph. 5337 7159).

FORMATION/PREPARATION

- Formal preparation is to be in the context of a parish co-ordinated program which embraces all children eligible for the Sacraments, irrespective of the schools which they attend.

PASTORAL NOTE – Parish Co-ordinated

The parish is responsible for the planning of the Sacramental Initiation of Children into the parish community. Therefore the manner in which this is done is organised in all aspects by the leadership group (eg. Parish Council / Parish Sacramental Team).

- On-going formation in faith appropriate to the age and readiness of each child, should continue long after the Sacraments of Initiation have been celebrated.
- The Catholic school, which is part of the parish community, has an essential role to play in offering systematic instruction in Catholic faith through the Religious Education curriculum. This complements and supports parish co-ordinated Sacramental Programs.
- The parish should provide the appropriate structures and support for on-going religious formation in regard to children who are not attending a Catholic school.
- Any process for the sacramental initiation of children should include adult education, which assists parents/guardians and sponsors to better understand the Church's teaching and sacramental practice, gives practical help for working with their children and provides parent/guardian-child communal activities.

- It is recommended that this process includes four catechetical sessions with the child and two parent/guardian formation sessions, ending close to the date for reception of the Sacrament. The timeline for the formal preparation program should recognise the pressures of today's lifestyles, and allow some months for the catechesis to develop and take place.
- Parents/guardians and children should be assisted by the parish community to undertake and/or continue regular on-going participation in the sacramental life of the faith community in the years following first reception of Holy Communion.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The opportunity for children to celebrate their first sacramental reconciliation precedes the first reception of Holy Communion.

It is important that the preparation for and celebration of this sacrament is accommodated to the age and development of the children. Conversion is an on-going dimension of Christian life and the first celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation should provide the child with an occasion to recognise and develop this in a way that is suitable for his/her age and understanding.

CATHOLIC
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of
BALLARAT



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