

## **POLICY 2.2.0    Sacramental Guidelines – Initiation of Children**

Sacramental preparation in the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan is rooted in the following fundamental beliefs:

- a) All sacraments are ecclesial celebrations, i.e. celebrations of the Church.
- b) Parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith.
- c) Catholic schools are an integral part of the on-going religious education of children, and provide valuable assistance in the foundational preparation for the sacraments.

The following general principles are to be kept in mind when all sacramental preparation programs are in place in the parishes and Catholic schools of the archdiocese:

1. **The parish priest is ultimately responsible** for the proper preparation of our young people for the sacraments. The priest's direct involvement in catechesis is vital for the faith life of our young people. He shares in the triple mandate of the bishop, to sanctify, to teach and to govern.
2. In most if not all circumstances, **the parish priest must have a team of trained catechists** to carry out the catechetical programs. These must work as teams. The composition of these teams will necessarily vary from one parish to another. The parish may establish one catechetical team for each sacrament, or the same team may deliver the program for more than one or all of these sacraments.
3. **Catechists must be credible.** They must take seriously the sacraments they are teaching and be role models for their students in their faithful practice.
4. In those communities where there are Catholic schools, **the teachers who are chosen to teach the sacraments** support what is provided by the parish catechetical team. The teachers may be invited to be part of the team.
5. Sacramental preparation needs to engage the whole parish community. Faith requires the community of believers to welcome, support and nurture the faith life of the parents and children involved. **The parish is responsible** (and not the Catholic school) **for the proper registration of candidates** for sacraments. The parish must ensure that valid proof of baptism is provided before the other sacraments are conferred on candidates.
6. In all sacraments, we deal with sacred mysteries. These are not empty rituals, or magical formulas that automatically produce a beneficial effect on the person of the one receiving them. For this reason, **there must be suitable catechesis** which prepares the candidate for the sacrament which they are about to receive. The persons receiving any sacrament must have an appreciation for what they are receiving, consistent with their intellectual and moral and emotional maturity.
7. The process or format for suitable catechesis for each sacrament needs to include the three pillars: the child's family, parish, and the Catholic school community if a child attends there. It should take into consideration the child's abilities and family circumstances. **Parent/family involvement in the preparation is vital for the child's faith development.** The catechetical programs endorsed in these policies all have a component that encourages parent and family involvement.

8. **In the baptism rite, parents are reminded that they are the first educators of their children in the ways of faith, and that they are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith.** In every way possible, parishes must attempt to give the parents of the children the tools and the confidence they need in order to fulfill their role in their children's continual spiritual formation.
9. While there are recognized age/grade levels at which children are prepared and celebrate a given sacrament, the candidate's **parents and catechists must be sensitive to that candidate's "preparedness" to receive that sacrament.** Any departure from the norm, whether to delay or to advance the reception of the sacrament, shall be held in discussion with the parish priest and the parties involved. The child must be ready and willing to receive a sacrament. Any child who expresses his/her own lack of readiness must be free to postpone the reception of a sacrament. A parent or catechist who has the sensitivity to perceive this in a child must also share this discernment with the pastor.
10. All norms laid down for creating a **safe and caring environment for children** are to be followed rigorously. These may be found in the Archdiocesan Policy Manual, section 5.1 and 5.2.

Given these principles which are proper to all the sacraments that a child will receive while in the elementary grades, all parents and priests and catechists should pay close attention to the policies relative to each of the Sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation.