



# Sacramental Preparation Processes for Non-Baptized or Baptized, Non-Catholic Children

Recommendations and Communication with Families



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The celebration of the sacraments stands at the heart of our Catholic faith and Tradition, and as such sacramental preparation plays a central role in the faith formation that we offer to children and their families. Recognizing the many and increasing instances in which children who have not been baptized in the Catholic Church enter the traditional grade-levels for sacramental reception and desire to receive the sacraments of holy Eucharist, penance, or confirmation with their peers prior to being baptized and without proper formation, the archdiocese offers these recommendations to help parish and school leaders anticipate and prepare for such situations in a pastoral manner consistent with archdiocesan policies and procedures for sacramental preparation.

While the Archdiocese Policies and Procedures for The Sanctifying Office of the Church offers the clear guidance for sacramental preparation and reception, the recommendations provided here offer practical considerations with reference to the applicable policies to help parish and school leaders easily navigate the situations they encounter. In this document, we aim to address two realities among children and families; those children who have not been baptized, and those who have been baptized outside of the Catholic Church. The processes of sacramental reception for children in these two groups have distinct characteristics. The following recommendations are guided by this distinction.

Alongside this document's emphasis on the proper processes for addressing various scenarios, we offer recommendations for providing an inclusive and relevant catechesis for children who receive their sacraments outside of the typical school or faith formation program timeline, yet desire to participate in sacramental activities with their classmates and parish community.

Collaboration among parish and school leaders in this matter is essential. This collaboration will ensure that communication of parish-specific procedures for sacramental preparation are readily available and clearly understood by both leaders and parents within parish communities.

Due to the importance of this collaboration and the impact of sacramental preparation on multiple roles and ministries within our Catholic schools and parishes, the archdiocesan Office Catholic Schools, Office of Divine Worship and Office of Lifelong Formation together offer these recommendations to assist you in the important effort to form, accompany and include children in these situations. Together we pray that this guidance will help parish and school leaders to anticipate and prepare for such situations with both a uniform process and a pathway for reaching out to families to begin ongoing conversations about the nature of the sacraments and the importance of proper formation for living a sacramental life.

In Christ,

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# Introduction

With an increasing number of children entering Catholic schools and faith formation programs without having been baptized or having been baptized non-Catholic, concerns arise when families request that children receive additional sacraments without the sacrament of baptism or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church, and without participating in the typical school/parish sacramental preparation classes. To avoid situations of “rushed” sacramental preparation and/or disappointed children and parents, this document is intended to help school principals, pastors and catechetical leaders anticipate and prepare for such situations with a uniform process that has at its center the goal of helping families of children who desire the sacrament of baptism or to be received into the Catholic Church.

## Parish Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the parents to fully prepare and arrange for their child to receive the sacrament of baptism. However, the principal, pastor and catechetical leader can help families by anticipating the needs of non-baptized children, providing clear communication to parents and offering appropriate formation for children and parents through a parish sacramental preparation process.

It is the responsibility of the pastor and parish catechetical leader to be aware of and follow the **Archdiocese Policies and Procedures, Book IV – The Sanctifying Office of the Church**, to provide a clear process for a child's baptism or reception into the full Communion of the Catholic Church, and to make that process known to the parish school (if applicable).

It is the responsibility of the school and parish faith formation program to review the sacramental background of children when they enroll and seek direction from the parish regarding the baptismal and catechumenal preparation process for children who seek such sacramental preparation. This is to be done as early as possible (ideally in preschool or kindergarten) to allow enough time to accompany families through proper discernment and sacramental preparation.

# Recommendations for Principals, Catechetical Leaders and Pastors

The following recommendations for communication and program planning should be followed to help identify children who have not been baptized or have been baptized non-Catholic so that initial conversations with parents can begin at an early stage. We recommend that parishes work with Catholic families in which a child is not baptized to help them fully understand both the process and the nature of these sacraments as sacred, discerned moments on a lifelong journey of faith.

1. Include a sacramental information form in your school and faith formation program registration packets. This will help schools and parish formation programs determine which families to reach out to regarding the parish procedures for baptizing children or receiving them into the full communion of the Catholic Church. Schools and parish faith formation programs are free to use their own sacramental information forms or the samples provided here in **English, Spanish** and **Polish**.
2. Contact parents of all children who have not been baptized or who have been baptized non-Catholic upon enrollment to discuss the family's spiritual and formation needs and to inform them that baptism or reception into the Catholic Church is necessary for their child to receive the additional sacraments of first reconciliation, first Eucharist and confirmation. Refer parents to the parish for information regarding parish baptismal preparation procedures including the parish's catechumenal process for children and youth.
3. Parish and school leaders can discern the best means of documented communication with families regarding the parish process of the baptismal preparation for children. For example, to the extent that it is possible, leaders may consider providing parents with a brief written overview of the parish's preparation process, including a catechumenal process, for the sacrament of baptism or reception into the Catholic Church for older children.
4. It is important to communicate to parents that child/family readiness for the sacrament of baptism or reception into the Church is more important than a hurried reception of the sacrament in hopes of grade-level reception of additional sacraments with peers (e.g., first reconciliation and first Communion). Ultimately, the pastor is responsible for helping families and assessing the readiness of older children for the reception of the sacrament of baptism.
5. Children should be baptized or received into full communion at their home parish according to the parish procedures for sacramental celebrations after suitable formation for themselves as well as their parents. The baptismal/catechumenal preparation for children is to be formation that takes place in addition to regular religious instruction in the school or parish faith formation program.

## Determining the Proper Process

For children who have not yet reached the age of reason (approximately seven years old), their parents are to attend the parish baptismal preparation classes and follow the parish procedures for baptism of infants through which the child may receive the sacrament of baptism without additional faith formation.

Once a child has reached the age of reason (approximately seven years old), the Order of Baptism of Children is no longer the appropriate ritual and a catechumenal process for full communion with the Catholic Church is to take place. Policies and procedures regarding reception into full communion

with the Catholic Church for children of catechetical age are available in the **Archdiocese Policies and Procedures (Book IV)** sections **§101.12**. Ministry to Children of Catechetical Age, **§103.12**. Confirmation of Children of Catechetical Age and **§103.13**. Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.

**In brief:**

1. Unbaptized children of a catechetical age should be welcomed into a children's catechumenate, following the RCIA framework which takes place in addition to the school or parish faith formation programming.
  - The sacramental celebration is full initiation in which the child is baptized in conjunction with their confirmation and reception of the Eucharist.
2. Children baptized in another Christian tradition should be welcomed into a children's catechumenate, following the RCIA framework which takes place in addition to the school or parish faith formation programming.
  - The sacramental celebration is the Reception of Baptized Non-Catholics into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, in which the child is received into the church and then confirmed and receives the Eucharist at the same time.

**Note:** As previously stated, the pastor is responsible for assessing the readiness of older children for the reception of the sacraments. Therefore ongoing conversation with the family and the pastor may be necessary if the family is not seeming to fully engage in the preparation process or other concerns regarding readiness arise.

## Guidance on How to Make Catechesis Inclusive and Relevant for Children Who are Not Preparing for a Sacrament

It is important to provide an inclusive and relevant catechetical experience for children who are participating in the children's catechumenate so they feel welcomed into their school or faith formation program community and are able to engage in sacramental preparation activities with their peers. There is often a desire among children who are not preparing for a sacrament (e.g., a seventh grader who may have already been confirmed through the catechumenate process and whose peers are preparing for their confirmation) and their families to participate in formation activities alongside their peers regardless of the level of involvement in the proper catechumenal process.

School principals, pastors and catechetical leaders are encouraged to work toward a balance of honoring sacramental formation of children and the pastoral realities of working with families of children who are participating in the children's catechumenate. When children enter Catholic schools and faith formation programs while participating or having participated in the children's catechumenate for baptism or reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church, inclusion in grade-level sacramental preparation activities is to be considered. This will help foster a sense of belonging and encourages ongoing spiritual maturation outside of the catechumenate.

# For Children and Families Who Are Participating in the Children's Catechumenate

The children's catechumenate has at its center the goal of helping families of children who desire the sacrament of baptism or to be received into the Catholic Church. To foster inclusivity and provide relevant catechesis for children of catechetical age who are participating in a parish's children's catechumenate process, the following recommendations are provided.

1. For all families in any situation where the child has not been baptized in the Catholic Church, discuss with them that readiness for the sacraments is more important than simply receiving sacraments alongside their peers. Communicate to parents the value of the catechumenal process and that participation in that process does not mean exclusion from grade-level sacramental preparation experiences with peers.
2. To ease concerns, engage families at the beginning of second grade, or as soon as possible, and outline for parents the ways in which children who are not preparing to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and first Eucharist will be included as full members of the class throughout their second and third grade years, including the special efforts that will be made to make the content relevant to their faith journey and how that faith journey will be honored and celebrated even if there is not a sacramental component as there is for others in their class.
3. Let parents know that a child who has been fully initiated prior to the first Eucharist celebration of their grade-level cohort can participate in the parish first reconciliation and first Eucharist liturgies. Even though it will not be the child's first time receiving the Eucharist, it can be a celebration of their own sacramental journey alongside their peers.
4. Invite parents and children of the children's catechumenate process to all parish sacramental preparation events, such as: parent meetings, retreats and liturgies to build a sense of community among all children and families.

## Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures regarding reception into full communion with the Catholic Church for children of catechetical age are available in the **Archdiocese Policies and Procedures (Book IV)** sections **§101.12**. Ministry to Children of Catechetical Age, **§103.12**. Confirmation of Children of Catechetical Age and **§103.13**. Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.