

**Archdiocesan Guidelines
for the
Sacraments of Initiation
and the
Sacrament of Penance**



Archdiocese of Atlanta

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INTRODUCTION

These *Archdiocesan Guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Penance* (Sacramental Guidelines) are designed primarily for the benefit of the religious education departments of the archdiocesan parishes, although they are also for the benefit of religious education departments of Catholic schools and parents, including those who home school.

The Guidelines complement provisions, otherwise controlling preparation for and reception of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) and the Sacrament of Penance, reflected in *Code of Canon Law* (CLSA and Paulist Press 2nd Ed. 2000)(1983 CIC), [the Compiled Liturgical Norms for the Archdiocese of Atlanta](#), and the rituals for particular Sacraments adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and approved by the Holy See.

These Guidelines supersede those published June 1, 1994, by the Department of Catholic Education. They incorporate by reference herein the DREFF *Guideline for Religious Education in the Home* (included in the DREFF Textbook Review 1998), to the extent that its provisions are not inconsistent with these Sacramental Guidelines.

While DREFF, parish and Catholic school religious education departments, as well as home school and other parents, are called upon to apply these Guidelines on a day-to-day basis, the ultimate decision with respect to any question involving preparation for and reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Penance, including selection of appropriate catechetical materials and Sacramental formation processes, belongs to the Pastor in which the individual adult or the family of a child or youth is registered, acting in accordance with the directions of the Archbishop and the applicable laws of the Catholic Church. 1983 CIC c. 773, 774.2, 776-777, 913.1 and 914; Archdiocese of Atlanta, Compiled Policies nos. 1.1, 2.2(a), 3.1.1(a), and 4.4.1(a); see also *Catechism* nos. 2204-2233.

SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES SUMMARY

Reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance is ordinarily to occur in the parish in which the individual adult family of children and youth are registered. The record of Sacramental reception occurs in the parish where the Sacrament is received.

Certain “foundational” and “specific” preparation guidelines are established for preparation for reception of the respective Sacraments of Initiation and Penance under either of the two reception sequences, which have developed in historical practice of the Roman or Western Catholic Church, namely, the Infant Baptism Sequence and the Christian Initiation Sequence.

Under the Infant Baptism Sequence, preparation for reception of First Penance and First Eucharist will ordinarily occur when the child is in 2nd grade. Preparation may occur either in a Catholic school, a parish religious education department, or home school.

Under the Infant Baptism Sequence, preparation for reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation will ordinarily occur when the youth is in 10th grade. Preparation for Confirmation will occur through a “free-standing,” brief duration, and intensely focused program, administered by the parish religious education department, independently of the regular 10th grade religious education curriculum, which would continue in the Catholic school, the parish religious education department, or the home school.

Under the Christian Initiation Sequence, the unbaptized, who are seeking all three of the Sacraments of Initiation, as well as uncatechized non-Catholics seeking Full Communion with the Catholic Church and uncatechized Catholics, who are seeking the Sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation, will be prepared for Sacramental reception through an appropriate Christian Initiation program, whether separate or combined for unbaptized and baptized, and governed by the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (USCC 1988). As provided in the *Rite*, an appropriate Christian Initiation program should also exist for unbaptized and baptized non-Catholic children and youth between the ages of seven and 18.

Pastors must determine, in collaboration with their parish religious education department and Christian Initiation catechetical leaders, whether uncatechized Catholic children and youth between seven and 18 should be prepared for reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance through a separate Sacramental formation program independent of the religious education program, administered by the religious education department or through the Christian Initiation process.

Pastors, in collaboration with catechetical leaders, are responsible for determination of Sacramental formation and reception readiness. Individuals over the age of 12 should participate in this determination, too.

FOUNDATIONAL SCRIPTURE AND *CATECHISM*
REFERENCES FOR SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION AND PENANCE

While there are numerous references to the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance in both Scripture and the *Catechism*, these are foundational:

Baptism	Mt. 3:13-17 & 28:19; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 3:3-8
Confirmation	Jn. 14:26 & 16:7-15; Acts 2:1-4 & 8:17
Eucharist	Mt. 26:17-19, 26-30; Mk. 14: 12-16, 22-26; Lk. 22:7-20 & 24:13-25; Jn. 6; 1 Cor. 11:23-29
Penance	Lk. 15 & Jn. 20:22

The *Catechism* nos. 1113, 1210-1212, and 1422 (citations omitted and italics in original), respectively, observe:

“The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments.”

“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. They are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.”

“In this organic whole, the Eucharist occupies a unique place as the ‘Sacrament of sacraments’: ‘all the other sacraments are ordered to it as to their end.’”

“The sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist – lay the *foundations* of every Christian life. ‘The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.’”

“Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offence committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.”

Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum* (Deposit of the Faith) no. 3 (1992), introducing the *Catechism*, declared it to be “a sure norm for teaching the faith” and “a sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine.” The *Catechism* systematically and thoroughly sets out the Church’s teachings with respect to the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance: for Baptism (nos. 1213-1284), Confirmation (nos. 1285-1321), Eucharist (nos. 1322-1419), and Penance (nos. 1422-1498). See also 1983 CIC c. 840 and 842.1 & 2.

Every person who engages in the process of Sacramental formation should be intimately familiar with these Scripture and *Catechism* passages.

HISTORICAL PRACTICES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH RESPECT TO THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION AND PENANCE

Depending upon the age at which one becomes a member of the Roman Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated together with or separately from the other two Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism and Eucharist). And, depending upon whether one is unbaptized or was either baptized Catholic as an infant or otherwise baptized validly as a non-Catholic, a person will receive the Sacrament of Penance either before or after reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, 1983 CIC c. 914 and *Catechism* no. 1457.

In the first three centuries of Christianity, the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation were received in one single celebration, along with the Sacrament of the Eucharist, all as part of the Christian initiation or conversion process. After Constantine ended the persecution of Christians in 313 A.D. and his son made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 381, substantially all adults received the Sacraments of Initiation. About 400, St. Augustine advocated infant baptism.

At this point Western and Eastern Christianity diverged with respect to reception of Confirmation. In the West Confirmation was reserved to the bishop (signifying the apostolic origins of the Church), while in the East it was not (giving greater emphasis to the unity of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation). Consequently, in the West, infants only received Baptism, with Confirmation and Eucharist deferred until the age of discretion (12 or older), and with the Sacrament of Penance preceding reception of Confirmation and Eucharist. In the East even today, infants receive all three Sacraments of Initiation simultaneously. *Catechism* nos. 1290-1292.

The Eastern Schism of 1054, which gave rise to the separation of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity, did not alter the sacramental practices of the Eastern and Western Churches. But, the Protestant Reformation did alter sacramental life. Protestant denominations for the most part retained Baptism for adults (but not infants) and for mainline denominations with the matter and in the form recognized as valid by the Catholic Church: pouring of water or immersion with recitation of “I baptize you, N., in the name of the Father, ...”). As a result, a person who has been baptized *validly* in a Protestant denomination is not re-baptized in the Catholic Church. An adult Protestant seeking Full Communion with the Catholic Church, after prior reception of the Sacrament of Penance, would only make a Profession of Faith and would receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist during the same Mass. (Individuals whose Baptism, after investigation, might not have been valid as to matter or form, should be conditionally baptized, 1983 CIC c. 869).

Pope St. Pius X, in 1910, altered the sacramental reception pattern further when he made eligibility for reception of First Penance and First Eucharist the age of reason (or age seven), see, 1983 CIC no. 913.1 and accompanying note. Thereafter, reception of the Sacraments of First Penance and First Communion and then the Sacrament of Confirmation became separated by the passage of a number years.

In the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965), the Catechumenate was restored, along with the early order or sequence of reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance, but only with respect to the unbaptized, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* nos. 64-66; *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* no. 14; *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* nos. 13 and 14; *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* no. 14; and *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* nos. 5 and 6. A. Flannery, *The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Costello/Dominican 1996).

Subsequently, the 1983 CIC stipulated that all three Sacraments of Initiation were to be received together at the Easter Vigil by catechumens, those who had not received Baptism. Likewise, candidates (previously baptized and seeking full communion) were to receive Confirmation and Eucharist at the same time, after previously receiving the Sacrament of Penance, nos. 842.2, 866, 883.2, and 885. The 1983 CIC also codified the rule that all persons seven or older were to be considered “adults” for purposes of Christian Initiation, 1983 CIC no. 852.1; Compiled Policies no. 2.4.

Finally, the Holy See approved for use by United States dioceses the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (USCC 1988)(*Rite*), including the USCCB's *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, both of which govern the Christian Initiation process in this Archdiocese today. With respect to candidates for Full Communion with the Catholic Church who have received valid Baptism as a non-Catholic, the *Rite* distinguishes the Sacramental formation needs, depending upon whether the individual has been catechized, nos. 400-401, 405-408, 473, 477-478; see *National Statutes* nos. 30-37. For those previously catechized “no greater burden than necessary” is to be imposed, *Rite* no. 473, citing Acts 15:28; see *National Statutes* no. 30. The *Rite* no. 400 and the *National Statutes* nos. 25-29 also made provision for preparing uncatechized Catholics through the Christian Initiation process for reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Finally, the *Rite* nos. 252-330 and *National Statutes* nos. 18-19 provide for Christian Initiation of children over age seven. Any non-Catholic or Catholic candidate for Confirmation and Eucharist who has previously received Baptism must receive the Sacrament of Penance first. *National Statutes* no. 36.

As a result of the foregoing historical practices, the Catholic Church and this Archdiocese now have two distinct reception tracks for the Sacraments of Initiation: for persons baptized as Catholics between infancy and age seven, the order or sequence is Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation; and for the unbaptized and all validly baptized non-Catholics being brought into full communion and baptized Catholics completing the Sacraments of Initiation at age seven or older, the sequence is Confirmation and Eucharist. A previously baptized person must receive the Sacrament of Penance before reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

SACRAMENTAL RECEPTION LOCATION

The Sacraments of Initiation are ordinarily to be received in the parish in which a child or youth and his or her family, or an adult, is registered, absent special permission from the Archbishop to a Pastor for good cause shown, see 1983 CIC c. 515.1, 753, 773, 776-777, and 914. The past practice of Sacramental reception in the parish co-located with a parish or regional Catholic school or at a private Catholic school attended by a child or youth from another parish, with permission sought and obtained from the Pastor of the parish of family registration, is hereby abrogated. Cf. *Catechism* nos. 1324, 1343, 1396, 2179, and 2226.

The Sacrament of Penance may be received either in the parish or elsewhere, from whatever confessor a penitent chooses, 1983 CIC c. 991.

SACRAMENTAL RECEPTION RECORDING

Recording of reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, which is the responsibility of the Pastor, will occur in the parish where the Sacrament was received, 1983 CIC c. 535.1 & 2, 877, and 895; in recording Baptisms, the date and place of birth must also be entered, Compiled Policies 1.6.

A notice of reception of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation must be sent to the parish of Baptism, see 1983 CIC c. 535.2 and 895.

BAPTISM/CONFIRMATION NAME & GODPARENT/SPONSOR QUALIFICATIONS

“Parents, sponsors, and the Pastor are to see that a name foreign to the Christian tradition is not given,” Compiled Policies no. 1.4; 1983 CIC c. 855.

While a distinction exists between godparent and sponsor in the *Rite* nos. 8-9 and 42-43; see, note to 1983 CIC c. 872, the requirements are essentially the same:

- A sponsor assists the person, who is to receive Baptism and Confirmation, to lead a Christian life;
- There may be only one male and one female sponsor;
- A sponsor must be designated by the parents of an infant, by an adult himself or herself, or by the Pastor or other cleric who administers the Sacrament;
- A sponsor must have completed his or her 16th year;
- A sponsor must have received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist;

- A sponsor must be a practicing Catholic;
- A sponsor must be free of any canonical penalty;
- A mother or father may not be a sponsor for their child; and
- A baptized non-Catholic may only act as a witness where a Catholic sponsor has been designated.

1983 CIC c. 872-874 and 892-893; Compiled Policies no. 1.5.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION GENERALLY

The GDC no. 80 states, among other things relevant to Sacramental preparation:

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ” (citation omitted).

Moreover, GDC nos. 85-86 (and *Catechism* no. 6) summarize the “fundamental tasks” of catechesis:

- Promoting knowledge of the faith
- Liturgical education
- Moral formation
- Teaching about prayer
- Education for community life
- Missionary initiation

These tasks correspond generally to those outlined as prerequisites of Christian Initiation, *Rite* nos. 75, 78, 254, 400-402 and GDC nos. 67-68 and 88-91. The *Catechism* no. 1074 adds: “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men” (citation omitted). Moreover, “[I]iturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ (it is ‘mystagogy’) by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, and from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries,’” *Catechism* no. 1075.

Generally speaking, a distinction exists between religious education (with a scope and sequence carrying over a period of months and years), which should continue throughout life, and Sacramental formation (narrowly focused on a preparation for reception of particular Sacraments.)

Finally, it is important that the Pastor determine specifically how baptized Catholic children between 3rd and 10th grade, who have never put their faith into practice and did not receive First Penance and First Communion in 2nd grade with their peers, will receive their Sacramental formation, namely, through the parish religious education department or the Christian Initiation process for children and youth. Note should be taken, too, that in either case these children should receive Confirmation at the same time, see, 1983 CIC c. 884.1 and *Rite, USCCB National Statutes* nos. 28 (c) and 29; Compiled Policies & Faculties no. 2.5 & 28.1.4.

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION: THE INFANT BAPTISM SEQUENCE

A. Infant Baptism

- Foundational Preparation

“The Christian family ... can and should be called a *domestic church*” [and] “[t]he *role of parents in education* is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.’ The right and duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable” *Catechism* nos. 2204 and 2221 (emphasis in original and citations omitted). Parents, with the help of the Church and their Pastors, therefore, need to learn and live their faith so as to become “a link in the great chain of believers,” *Catechism* nos. 3, 166, 888-891, 900, 907, and 2030.

- Specific Preparation

“Parents are to ensure that infants are baptized within the first few weeks after birth,” Compiled Policies no. 1.1.

Prior to baptism of their infant children, parents are required by the Church to attend a pre-Baptism preparation course so that they understand the responsibilities they are about to undertake with respect to educating their children in the faith. 1983 CIC c. 851.2; Compiled Policies no. 1.1.

B. First Penance and First Holy Communion (2nd Grade Norm)

- Foundational Preparation

The child ordinarily should have attended a Catholic school, a parish religious education program, or a home school religious education program for at least one year prior to beginning preparation for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. An exception to this policy may be made in such other circumstances as the Pastor deems appropriate. The Pastor is responsible for ensuring that children are properly prepared for enrollment in the Sacramental formation program by examining them on the teaching they have received and the knowledge they have acquired. Compiled Policies nos. 3.1.1(a) and 4.4.1(a).

- Specific Preparation

A copy of the child’s baptismal certificate must be presented to the Pastor prior to reception of First Penance and First Eucharist. Compiled Policies no. 3.1.1(b); 1983 CIC 849, 864, 889.1, 912, and 988. Practically speaking, the baptismal certificate should be sought and obtained contemporaneously with enrollment in the Sacramental formation program.

The Pastor, in consultation with the parents, makes the decision about the readiness of the child for receiving the Sacrament of Penance. Compiled Policies no. 4.4.1(b); 1983 CIC 914 note (“Penance before First Communion”) and 988-989; *Catechism* no. 1457. No child should be admitted to the reception of the Sacrament of Eucharist without sufficient preparation as determined by the Pastor in consultation with the parents. Compiled Policies no. 3.1.1(d); 1983 CIC c. 913 and 914.

Sufficient time must elapse between reception of the Sacrament of First Penance and First Eucharist so that the child can distinguish between the two celebrations. Compiled Policies no. 3.1.1(c).

- Topics to be Covered for First Penance Preparation in an Age-Appropriate Way (GDC nos. 167, 171, 177-180)
 1. God made us “in His image and likeness,” from which fact we draw our dignity; He calls us to beatitude or holiness; we are free to accept or reject His call; we are responsible for our actions; we can objectively determine whether we do good or evil; and we are obligated to “form” rightly our moral conscience, by which we can judge our own acts, *Catechism* nos. 1700, 1701-1802.
 2. Concept of “virtues,” or good habits, including theological ones (faith, hope, and charity), *Catechism* 1803-1829.
 3. Sin is an offense against God, neighbor, and self, a violation of the duty of love, *Catechism* nos. 1846-1876.
 4. “Called to beatitude [or holiness] but wounded by sin, man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law [commandments] that guides him and the grace that sustains him ...,” *Catechism* no. 1949.
 5. The 10 Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Precepts of the Catholic Church, *Catechism* Part III, Section 2, and nos. 1716-1729 and 2041-2043.
 6. Distinction between “original sin” and “personal sin,” as well the concept of concupiscence, namely, that we are basically “good” not “depraved” (Protestant theology out of which is derived theory of non-responsibility: faith alone, no works), *Catechism* nos. 397-406, 978, 1264, 1426, and 1846-1876.
 7. The Prodigal Son Parable (Lk. 15:11-24), *Catechism* no. 1439.
 8. Penance as a post-baptismal or second “conversion,” *Catechism* no. 1428.
 9. Concepts of Pardon and Reconciliation, *Catechism* nos. 1422, 1445-46, and 1468-1469.
 10. Only God forgives sin, though He uses a priest as His agent, *Catechism* no. 1441.
 11. Essential elements of the Sacrament: examination of conscience, contrition, confession, satisfaction of penance, and absolution, *Catechism* nos. 1449-1460.

12. Individual confession is the sole means by which a Catholic may obtain pardon and reconciliation from his or her sins, absent very rare and unusual circumstances, *Catechism* no. 1456, 1480-1484; 1983 CIC c. 960-964.
 13. Catholics after the age of discretion are obligated to confess their “serious” or “mortal” sins at least once a year; but they are encouraged to confess “less serious” or “venial” sins; and they are encouraged to use the Sacrament more frequently than annually, *Catechism* no. 1458; 1983 CIC c. 988-989.
- Topics to be Covered for First Holy Communion Preparation in an Age-Appropriate Way (GDC nos. 167, 171, 177-180)
 1. Old and New Covenant “prefigurements” of the Eucharist, *Catechism* nos. 1333-1336, 1338-1339.
 2. Last Supper institution of the Eucharist gave “definitive meaning” to Old Covenant Passover ritual, *Catechism* nos. 1340 and 1384.
 3. Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Catholic faith; and all of the Sacraments are ordered around it, *Catechism* nos. 1113, 1211, and 1324.
 4. Eucharist is at once sacrament, sacrifice, and sacred meal, *Catechism* nos. 1322-1327, 1356-1365 and 1368-1372, and 1382-83.
 5. The Eucharist “re-presents” Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, he is not “re-crucified”: the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass constitute “one single sacrifice,” the victim is one and the same, only once in a bloody manner and thereafter in an unbloody manner, *Catechism* no. 1366-1367.
 6. In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ is really, truly, and substantially “present,” Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity; and the change in the “substance” of the bread and wine into Christ’s Body and Blood occurs through the actions of God and the ordained Catholic priest, *Catechism* nos. 1373-1381, 1544-1553, 1565-1566.
 7. Jesus remains “present” in the Eucharist from the moment of the consecration and for so long as the species subsist; He is “present” in every crumb of a Sacred Host and every drop of the Precious Blood; and reception under either species, Sacred Host or Precious Blood, constitutes reception of the entire Body and Blood of Christ, *Catechism* nos. 1377 and 1390.

8. Reception of Jesus in the Eucharist unites us with Christ and each other; separates us from sin; erases venial sin; and protects us from commission of mortal sin, *Catechism* nos. 1391-1397 and 1436.

C. Confirmation (10th Grade Norm)

- Foundational Preparation

Youth ordinarily should have attended a Catholic school, a parish religious education program, or a home school religious education program for at least two years before enrollment in the free-standing parish Confirmation formation program. An exception to this policy may be made in such other circumstances as the Pastor deems appropriate. The Pastor is responsible for seeing that youth are properly prepared by examining them on the teaching they have received and the knowledge they have acquired. Compiled Policies no. 2.2(a); 1983 CIC c. 889.2.

The free-standing, parish-conducted Confirmation *formation* program must be distinguished from the ordinarily required two year prerequisite *foundational* religious education program. Whether accomplished through an off-site retreat, an on-site classroom, or some other model determined appropriate by the Pastor, the parish Confirmation formation program should occur independently from the on-going religious education program (which should continue throughout the academic year, whether accomplished in a Catholic school, a parish religious education program, or a home school religious education program). The parish Confirmation formation program should also be of brief duration and intensely focused on the nature, effects, gifts, and fruits of the Sacrament of Confirmation as they are discussed in the *Catechism*.

- Specific Preparation

“[R]eception of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace [and] recipients of the Sacrament ‘are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed,’” *Catechism* no. 1285, 1303, 1830. “The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time,” 1983 CIC c. 890.

Copies of the candidate’s baptismal certificate also reflecting reception of First Eucharist must be presented to the Pastor before reception of this Sacrament. Compiled Policies no. 2.2(b); 1883 CIC c. 889.1. Practically speaking, the certificate should be sought and obtained contemporaneously with enrollment in the Confirmation formation program.

The candidate has the right to make the decision about readiness to receive this Sacrament. Compiled Policies no. 2.2(d); 1983 CIC c. 889.2 (“properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises”); *Catechism*, nos. 1306-1307. The Sacrament of Confirmation is sometimes called the Sacrament of Christian maturity, even though biological age is not necessarily an indicator of receptivity to the Sacrament, *Catechism* no. 1308.

More intense prayer and reception of the Sacrament of Penance should be part of preparation for celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, *Catechism* no. 1310.

- Topics to be Covered for Confirmation in an Age-Appropriate Way (GDC nos. 167, 171, 181-185)
 1. God’s Call and Our Response, *Catechism* nos. 1-3, 50-73, 142-184.
 2. Revelation: Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium (general familiarity with and ability to use the Bible and *Catechism* and an understanding of the Creed), see *Catechism* nos. 74-141 and 185-1065 (focus on 12 Articles of the Creed with emphasis on Triune God, Christ’s Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, and Pentecost, as well as the Church).
 3. Brief Overview of History of the Catholic Church since Pentecost, e.g., A. Schreck, *The Compact History of the Catholic Church* (Servant Books 1987), with a look at saints who appear in liturgical calendar, as well as saints of the Americas.
 4. Structure & Content of the Mass and Overview of Sacraments (particularly understanding of Eucharistic doctrine at more mature level, general familiarity with and ability to use a Missal, and understanding of the other Sacraments and their place in the “stages of a Christian life,” *Catechism* no. 1210).
 5. A review and update on Catholic morality, i.e., a more mature examination of topics under Sacrament of Penance.
 6. Prayer & Spirituality, *Catechism* nos. 2558-2758.
 7. Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit, *Catechism* nos. 1831-1832.
 8. Obligations to defend the faith and to evangelize, which flow from Baptism and Confirmation, *Catechism* nos. 3 and 1285.

“Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts, and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community,” *Catechism* no. 1309 (emphasis in original; citations omitted).

D. Adult Confirmation

An appropriate adaptation of the free-standing, brief duration, and intensely focused Confirmation formation program should also be developed for preparation of catechized, adult Catholics, who have previously received infant Baptism, First Penance and First Eucharist, but who have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Many of these individuals will be identified when presenting themselves to be a Baptism or Confirmation sponsor or to prepare for the Sacrament of Matrimony. (GDC nos. 167, 171, 171-176).

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION: THE CHRISTIAN INITIATION SEQUENCE

Origins of the *Rite* and the “restored order” or sequence of receiving the Sacraments of Initiation are discussed, above, under “Historical Practices ...” The *Rite* makes provision for Sacramental formation, among others, of the following classes of individuals:

- The unbaptized (“catechumens” and later “elect”), *Rite* nos. 36-251; National Statutes nos. 1-17.
- Validly baptized and uncatechized non-Catholic Christians (“candidates” for full communion in the Catholic Church) and uncatechized Catholics seeking Confirmation and/or Eucharist, *Rite* nos. 400-504; National Statutes nos. 25-37.
- Children (age seven or older) in both categories, *Rite* nos. 252-330; National Statutes nos. 18-19.

The Christian Initiation under the *Rite* process involves four periods and three rites:

- Inquiry Period (sometimes called Pre-Catechumenate).
- Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate (for the unbaptized, who are called “catechumens”) and/or Rite of Welcoming (for the previously baptized, but uncatechized, who are called “candidates” and who seek Full Communion with the Catholic Church).
- Catechumenate Period (primary time for Scriptural and doctrinal examination).
- Rites of Sending (from parish to bishop) and Election (for catechumens, who become the “elect” when so declared by the bishop) or Call to Continuing Conversion (for candidates).
- Purification and Enlightenment Period (time corresponding to Lent for intense, personal introspection and prayer ordinarily including a retreat; during this period the elect undergo three “scrutinies” reflecting on three of the Gospel stories of St. John, as well as two “presentations” of Creed and Our Father) (candidates may undergo a single, separate “scrutiny” with a penitential theme, which lends itself to celebration of the Sacrament of Penance).
- Rite of Initiation (time of reception of the Sacraments of Initiation ordinarily at the Easter Vigil Mass).
- Mystagogy Period (time for reflection for the “neophytes” or new Catholics on the “mysteries” or Sacraments of Initiation, modeled after Mystagogy Catecheses of St. Cyril of Jerusalem celebrated in the 4th century during the Octave of Easter and at the Tomb of Christ).

For many reasons, including limited catechetical personnel, most parishes use the *Rite's* provision for combining Christian Initiation for catechumens and candidates, nos. 505-594. While reception of the Sacraments of Initiation may occur at the Easter Vigil Mass for them, children are usually prepared separately from adults in the Christian Initiation process, which is contemplated by the *Rite* nos. 252-330. Pastoral considerations and staff limitations may result in high school age youth being prepared with adults, rather than children; and experience suggests that a separation may be beneficial between early elementary (grades 2-5) and middle school (grades 6-8) children for Christian Initiation catechesis, staff and other resources permitting.

- Foundational Preparation

Foundational preparation occurs during the Inquiry period. For the children's initiation process, where it is difficult to maintain an inquiry period, the pastor may choose to require at last one year of religious education before enrollment in the initiation process. The duration of Christian initiation's Inquiry Period is indefinite and its focus is evangelization undertaken through "suitable explanation of the Gospel" and acquaintance with Christian families and groups, *Rite* nos. 7.1 & 37-38. This period ends with the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens, the prerequisites for which include, *Rite* nos. 41-42; see GDC nos. 46-51, 61, 80:

- first faith development
- initial conversion: intention to change life and enter into a relationship with God in Christ
- first stirrings of repentance
- a start of the practice of calling upon God in prayer
- a sense of the Church
- some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or members of the community

- Specific Preparation

Specific preparation occurs in the Catechumenate period. The Catechumenate involves a four-fold objective:

- suitable catechesis leading to "an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also a profound sense of the mystery of salvation, *Rite* no. 75.1 & 78.
- familiarization with the Christian way of life, *Rite* no. 75.2.
- gradual participation in the liturgy, *Rite* no. 75.3.
- apostolic life of service to others, *Rite* no. 75.4.

See GDC nos. 61-68 (distinguishing the first or "primary proclamation" directed at "initial conversion" through the Word of God from "catechesis" aimed at educating in the faith and incorporating into the community).

- Topics to be Covered in an Age-Appropriate Way (GDC nos. 167, 171, 171-176, 177-180, and 181-185)

The *Catechism* is separated into four parts: What we believe, expounding on the Creed in the 12 Articles of Section Two; what we celebrate, expounding on the Mass and Seven Sacraments in the seven Articles of Section Two; what we live, expounding on the 10 Commandments in 10 Articles of Section Two; and what we pray, expounding on the seven petitions of the Our Father in the seven Articles of Section Two. These 36 Articles form an excellent framework on the basis of which to explain the faith to catechumens and candidates at the same time an intense examination of the Word of God is being undertaken.

Some advocate a Lectionary-based form of catechesis for Christian Initiation, namely, exposing catechumens and candidates to Catholic doctrine as it flows from Scripture unfolded in the liturgical cycle. Unfortunately, producing a comprehensive explanation of the Catholic faith through that part of the liturgical year cycle that a Catechumenate period encompasses is virtually impossible without some parallel examination of doctrine in a systematic way. See *Rite* nos. 75.1, 78, 252-253, and 401-402. Nevertheless, some effective reconciliation of the “content-method tension” must be employed in Christian Initiation if participants in that process are to emerge after the Easter Vigil and Mystagogy as well-formed Catholics, see GDC nos. 30, 149-150, 237, and 244; see also, Pope John Paul II, *Fidei Depositum* no. 3, publishing the *Catechism*: elect and candidates need to complete the Christian Initiation process prepared to offer “an account of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15) ... and what the Catholic Church believes,” not to speak of being able “to spread and defend the faith by word and deed”, *Catechism* no. 1285.

In addition, catechumens, who will celebrate the Sacrament of Penance after reception of all three Sacraments of Initiation, and candidates, who will celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before the Easter Vigil Mass, National Statutes no. 36, need to be prepared with regard to the same topics as are outlined above for those covered by the Infant Baptism Sequence.

Finally, the *Rite* nos. 473 and 477-478, as well as the National Statutes no. 30, recommend that “no greater burden than necessary (Acts 15:28)” be imposed on baptized and catechized non-Catholics seeking Full Communion with the Catholic Church. Pastors, using their own discretion and catechetical staff resources, should develop appropriate programs to prepare such individuals for their reception of the Sacrament of Penance, followed ordinarily by a Mass during which they make a Profession of Faith, are received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church, and receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. In such undertaking, care needs to be taken to clarify what our Holy Father calls “the fundamental importance of doctrine” and the Reformation-based differences between Catholic and Protestant Christians in at least four significant areas:

- Mass and the Sacraments, particularly Holy Orders and Eucharist
- The Church, particularly its sacramentality and structure, as well as Petrine and Apostolic Succession
- Mary, the Communion of Saints, and intercessory prayer
- Morality, particularly the dignity of all human life from conception to natural death

See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (That They All May be One) nos. 18 and 64-70 (1995); *Catechism* nos. 813-822.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The Archdiocese of Atlanta has an Office of Disabled Persons, which reports to the Chancellor. Determination of the applicability of these Sacramental Guidelines, as appropriately amended by competent professionals, is a prerogative of the Pastor of the parish within which the disabled person is registered, in collaboration with the Archdiocesan Office of Disabilities. DREFF will assist the Pastor and the Office of Disabilities, as requested (GDC no. 189). 020702