

NORMS FOR THE CELEBRATION AND RECEPTION OF FIRST COMMUNION

I. THE EUCHARIST: A SACRAMENT OF INITIATION

Reception of Holy Communion is the culminating moment in Christian Initiation (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* no. 217, 243). First Holy Communion and Confirmation are Sacraments of Initiation and their essential unity with Baptism should be stressed (even for those baptized as infants). They are not to be presented as sacraments of maturity.

The relationship of the Eucharist to daily life is essential particularly with regard to first Holy Communion so that the sacrament will be presented and experienced as the full incorporation into the Body of Christ. First Holy Communion is not just the child's reception of the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time; it constitutes a call to the assembly to realize the significance of their own baptismal commitment and to probe the meaning of Eucharistic sharing.

Sacramental formation should be seen in the context of an appropriate ecclesiology in which children are incorporated into the fuller life of their parish community. As such, sacraments are not to be viewed as "school" or "religious education" realities and sacraments should be celebrated in the home parish of the child. (Canon 913)

Children over the age of seven (7) who are not baptized or catechized must follow the rites contained in Part II of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA 306).

Children with special needs should be encouraged to complete sacramental initiation. Special guidelines have been developed so that they may prepare and participate according to their own level of ability (*Diocesan Sacramental Policy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities*).

II. CATECHETICAL PREPARATION AND FORMATION

Sacramental preparation is both formational and educational. Attention should be given to the spiritual preparation for the sacraments as well as to appropriate intellectual understanding.

First Holy Communion must always be preceded by sacramental confessional and absolution (RS 87). Suggested processes of formation for First Penance for families and children are available through the Diocesan Office of Religious Education.

Those who are responsible for the religious instruction of children, while recognizing the age and abilities of the children, should not only emphasize instruction on the Eucharistic Celebration, but use the principal rites and prayers of the Mass for instruction.

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III. LITURGICAL PREPARATION

A. Scheduling the Celebration

First Holy Communion is ideally celebrated in the context of the Sunday liturgy. Liturgical actions are not private actions but celebrations of the Church itself, which is the "sacrament of unity." Liturgical actions pertain to the whole body of the Church, both manifesting and affecting it. Liturgical actions, by their proper nature, involve a common celebration with the full and active participation of the Christian community (Canon 837).

First Communion should always be administered by a priest and never outside the celebration of Mass (*RS* 87). First communicants are to receive the Body of Christ from a priest (*RS* 87) and the Blood of Christ from a deacon (*GIRM* 94), when Communion is offered under both species.

Apart from exceptional cases, it is not particularly appropriate for First Holy Communion to be administered on Holy Thursday at the Mass of the Lord's Supper. Another day should be chosen instead, such as a Sunday between the Second and the Sixth Sunday of Easter, or the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, or the Sundays of Ordinary Time, since Sunday is rightly regarded as the day of the Eucharist. (*RS* 87)

B. Liturgical Elements of the Celebration

The *Directory for Masses with Children* and the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* may be used in planning and preparing the celebration of First Holy Communion. Fidelity to the liturgical books is of the greatest importance. *First Eucharist Page 3*

Please note that many resources which are available in planning liturgical celebrations with children are often in violation of basic liturgical principles.

Processions

The children's entering in procession with the priest can serve to help them to experience a sense of communion that is thus being created (*DMC* 34).

Introductory Rites

Act of Penitence This should never be replaced by the Renewal of Baptismal Promises.

Mass Texts and Readings

On Sundays, solemnities, and feasts, the proper mass and readings of the day are to be used. On other days, a Votive Mass of the Eucharist and appropriate readings may be used. See Appendix I for sample mass texts.

Creed

In lieu of the Creed the *Renewal of Baptismal Promises* may take place. If the creed is to be used, the *Apostle's Creed* may be used. (*DMC* 49).

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

If the Prayer of the Faithful is recited, the deacon, reader, or *one* other person may read the petitions (*GIRM* 69-71 and *CB* 144).

Presentation of the Gifts

Vessels of bread and wine are to be brought forward by an appropriate number of persons. It is desirable that some candidates bring forward the gifts. Water is not to be brought forth in the procession and should be at the credence table (*CB* 145, 470).

Reception of the Body and Blood of Christ

It is most desirable that all present receive communion under both kinds (*RCIA* 369).

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Multicultural Celebrations

Care must be taken in preparing liturgies that involve children of different languages and cultures. Please refer to *Guidelines for Multilingual Masses*, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. *First Eucharist Page 4*

Environment

Decoration of the church should be in keeping with good taste, liturgical principles, and the liturgical season. If banners are to be used, they are essentially an art form of color and texture, and not of words. Banners, even if made by the children, should not adorn the altar or the ambo (*GIRM* 350-351).

Photography & Videography

Pictures are encouraged following the celebration, but not during the liturgy. In order to preserve the dignity of the celebration, an announcement can be made beforehand and an insert placed in the worship aid/program stating there is to be no flash photography in church. Further, it should be pointed out that members of the assembly are not to leave their seats during the administration of the sacrament for the purpose of picture taking.

A parish might consider the hiring of a single videographer to preserve the dignity of the celebration and to provide copies of the video to the families of the first communicants.

Worship Aid/Program

Music that is reproduced in a worship aid *must* have the permission of the publisher and the proper copyright notice given. Reproduced music that does not have the permission of the publisher is illegal. Worship aids containing such material *will not* be used during the liturgy (*Liturgical Music and Copyright Law: A Guide for Musicians and Clergy*, Diocese of Orlando 1990).

Because of the likelihood that many Non Catholics will be in attendance the Worship Aid should publish guidelines on who can receive Communion.

Music for the Liturgy

The liturgy is a solemn occasion, and the parts of the liturgy that may be sung should be sung. The music chosen for this celebration should reflect the communal nature of worship, and the liturgical day and season. Music that is individualistic is inappropriate for Christian worship (*GIRM* 39-41, *MCW* 23-24).

1. A gathering song should be sung (*GIRM* 47-48, *CB* 128 and *MCW* 61).

2. Act of Penitence (This should never be replaced by the Renewal of Baptismal Promises.) *First Eucharist Page 5*

3. The Gloria is sung on Sundays outside of Advent and Lent and on solemnities and feasts (not memorials). It is not used on weekdays (*MCW 66, CB 135, GIRM 53*).
4. The Responsorial Psalm is sung (*GIRM 61, MCW 63*).
5. The Gospel Acclamation is omitted if it is not sung (*GIRM 62, MCW 55*).
6. The petitions and response of the General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) may be sung (*GIRM 69-71, MCW 74*).
7. A hymn, anthem or instrumental music may accompany the Preparation of the Gifts (*GIRM 74, CB 145, MCW 71*).
8. The Eucharistic acclamations (Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen) must be sung if there is any music at the liturgy (*GIRM 79, CB 154-155, 158, MCW 53-54, 56-58*).
If the Eucharistic Prayers for Children are used, the acclamations should be sung. The candidates and assembly should know the acclamations and be prepared to respond (*DMC 30-31*). With this in mind, if the Sunday assembly is not familiar with the acclamations in the Eucharistic Prayer for Children, another Eucharistic Prayer should be chosen.
9. The Lord's Prayer may be sung (*GIRM 81, MCW 59*).
10. The Lamb of God is sung (*GIRM 83, MCW 68, CB 162*).
11. A Communion processional song which expresses the communal nature of the Eucharistic meal should be sung. A meditation song may be sung after the Communion processional song (*GIRM 87-88, CB 163, 166, MCW 62, 72*).
12. A sending forth song may be sung (*MCW 73*).

IV. LITURGICAL MINISTRIES

A. Pastor/Associate Pastor The pastor and associate pastor(s) properly preside at this celebration. Other priests who may be relatives and friends of those who are receiving the sacrament may also concelebrate the liturgy (*GIRM 93*).

B. Deacon

The presider may be assisted by a deacon who properly exercises the fullness of his role in the Eucharistic assembly (*GIRM 94*). *First Eucharist Page 6*

C. Readers

Those who exercise the ministry of reader might be chosen from those who regularly exercise this ministry at Mass. If there is no deacon present, the reader carries *The Book of Gospels* in the entrance procession (*GIRM* 101).

D. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Ministers of Holy Communion are to be assigned as necessary to distribute both the Body and Blood of Christ (hosts/cups) since communion may be given under both kinds. There should be sufficient ministers so that there are two persons ministering the Blood of Christ for each person ministering the Body of Christ (*GIRM* 100, *NORMS* 28).

E. Altar Servers

The ministry of the altar server will enhance the dignity and solemnity of the celebration. The number of servers is dependent upon the amount of tasks which need to be exercised (*GIRM* 100).

F. Ministers of Hospitality

Ushers/greeters are needed for the liturgical celebration (*GIRM* 105)

Reference Abbreviations

CB Ceremonial of Bishops

DMC Directory for Masses with Children

GIRM General Instruction of the Roman Missal

MCW Music in Catholic Worship

NORMS Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America

RCIA Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

RS Redemptionis Sacramentum

Office of Liturgy

August 1993

Reviewed 2006

Revised November 2006 *First Eucharist Page 7*

APPENDIX I

TEXTS FOR MASS IN CELEBRATION OF FIRST EUCHARIST

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God,
you have invited these children
to your table for the first time
that you may carry toward completion
the sharing in the life of your family,
the church.

Help them always to live in friendship and communion with Jesus,
as living members of his mystical body.

We ask this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

Concluding Prayer for the General Intercessions

With a father's watchful care
and a mother's tender love,
protect, O God, these children
you have called to be nourished with
the bread of life.

Through the saving power of these mysteries
preserve them from evil
and make them generous witnesses
of the love of Christ
who is Lord for ever and ever.

Prayer over the Gifts

God, in this celebration we share
in the sacrifice of Christ
who lovingly offered himself for the life
of the world.

May these children,
our first communicants,
grow in their knowledge of Christ
and their living experience of his love,
who lives for ever and ever.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God, the bread of life
and the cup of salvation
are the sign and source
of that eternal youthfulness
that belongs to those who welcome
your kingdom
with the openness and trust of children.

May these first communicants always
serve you with loving hearts
and joyful spirits.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Translated and adapted from the Ambrosian Sacramentary, *Messale Ambrosiano Festivo* (Milano: Marietti,