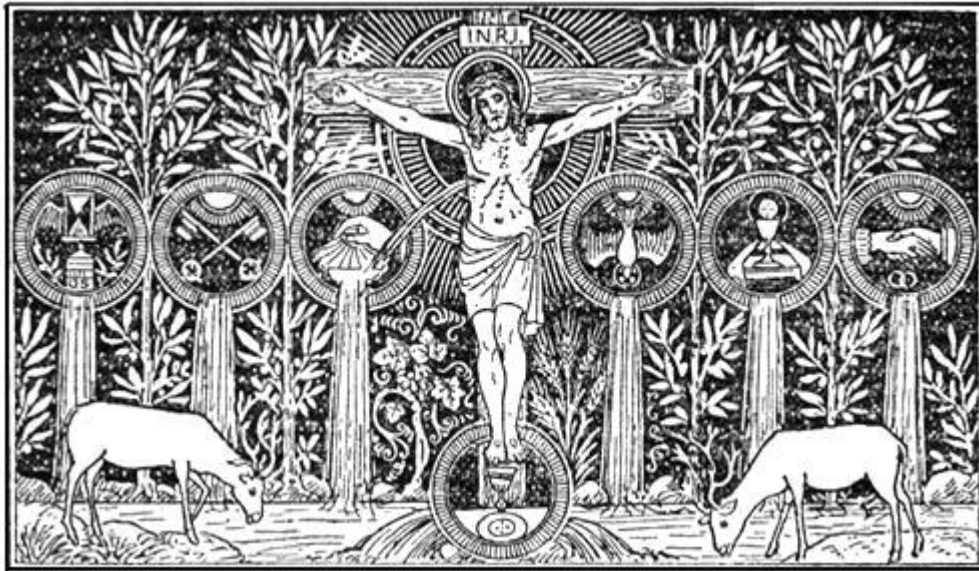


Guidelines for Preparing Children & Teens for the Reception of the Sacraments



**St. Charles Borromeo Parish
Gretna, Nebraska**

updated: March 2024

Introduction

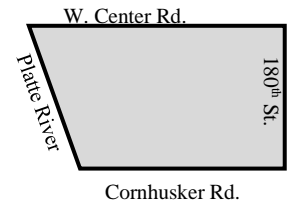
The Sacraments, instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church, are actions of both Christ and the Church. They are the signs and means by which the faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is rendered to God, and the sanctification of humankind is effected. Therefore, both the sacred ministers and the rest of the Christian faithful must employ the greatest reverence and necessary diligence in their celebration (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 840).

It is for the Church alone to approve or define those things which are required for their validity, lawful celebration, administration, and reception. Sacred ministers cannot refuse the Sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times if they are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them. Pastors of souls and their collaborators have the duty to see that those who seek the Sacraments are prepared to receive them by the necessary evangelization and catechetical formation (*Code of Canon Law*, cann. 841 & 843).

At St. Charles Borromeo, we assist and support parents, who are the first educators of the faith for their children. Our program of preparation for receiving the Sacraments runs parallelly to our ongoing faith formation of children and teens. Parents may enroll their children in the parish's preparation programs for First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, Confirmation, and Baptism of Non-Infant Children at the appropriate ages and when they are ready according to the norms enunciated for each Sacrament.

General Norms for Sacramental Preparation

- First and foremost, preparation for the Sacraments begins with the regular practice of the faith by the family. The very necessary minimum for prayer and moral effort for all the faithful is defined as the Precepts of the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2041-2043):
 - 1) Attend Mass on Sundays & Holy Days of Obligation and rest from servile labor,
 - 2) Confess one's sins in Confession at least once a year,
 - 3) Receive the Eucharist at least once a year during Eastertide,
 - 4) Observe the days of fasting and abstinence as defined by the Church, and
 - 5) Help to provide for the needs of the Church through stewardship.
- Church law requires that sacramental preparation take place in the parish where one has domicile (cann. 867, 890, 914). Therefore, St. Charles Borromeo Parish is the proper parish of preparation for the Sacraments for anyone who currently lives within the parish's territorial boundaries, regardless of where he or she is registered as a parishioner. These boundaries are: West Center Road, Cornhusker Road, 180th Street, and the Platte River.



*Any Catholic who does not live within the territorial boundaries of the parish but is registered as a member of St. Charles Borromeo (for at least six (6) months and is **known to be active in the life of the parish**) may enroll in Sacramental Preparation.*

- Sacramental Preparation may only begin after one has completed at least one (1) semester of Family Faith Formation or Youth Group here at St. Charles.
- While attending Sacramental Prep classes, one must also be enrolled in and attending:
 - Family Faith Formation (for parents and their children in grades 1-6) *or*
 - Youth Group (for teens in grades 7-12)

It is preferred that youth in grades 7 & 8 attend Youth Group; however, based on individual circumstances, they may instead participate in Family Faith Formation.

Specific Norms for Sacramental Preparation

The following pages describe the basic theology, guidelines, and laws governing each Sacrament and should be used by parents to determine when their children are ready to begin proximate preparation for the Sacraments. The “Request for Sacramental Preparation” form, found at the end of this packet, must be completed and turned in by the requested deadlines to be admitted to the desired program.

Parents who wish to homeschool their children for ongoing faith formation and/or sacramental catechesis must provide the Director Family Faith Formation with the curriculum being used. Before being admitted to the Sacraments, one or more meetings with the pastor or his delegate will be scheduled to ensure the child is sufficiently catechized and properly disposed to receiving the Sacraments.

First Reconciliation

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Divine Physician of our souls and bodies. He willed that His Church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, should continue His ministry of healing and salvation. Therefore, He instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation for all sinful members of His Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1421 & 1446.) The Sacrament of Reconciliation—also known as Penance or Confession—is the ordinary means by which Christ’s faithful who are aware of serious sin are reconciled to God and His Church after Baptism. Every Catholic after attaining the age of discretion is bound by obligation to confess serious sins at least once a year (*Code of Canon Law*, cann. 960 & 989).

Parents, as models of faith and Christian witness and in virtue of their duty as the primary educators of their children, are to be actively and intimately engaged in preparing their children for the first reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Parents and children attend the catechetical sessions provided by the parish which include: a theology of the Sacrament, the psychological and spiritual development of children, the norms for celebrating the Sacrament, and the roles of all involved (*Archdiocesan Pastoral Policies Handbook*, 3.2.4.5.a).

At St. Charles Borromeo, our program for preparation for First Reconciliation includes a set of six (6) catechetical sessions and one (1) retreat day for parents and their children. The program will be offered two times each year: once in the fall and once in the spring. First Reconciliation will be celebrated at the conclusion of each session. In order to receive the Sacrament the program must be completed in its entirety.

Minimum Requirements to Register for Preparation for First Reconciliation:

- Child must be Catholic and be open to receiving the Sacrament.
- Child must be at least seven (7) years old.
- Child has been attending the monthly Family Faith Formation program with at least one parent for at least one (1) semester.
- Child is attending weekly Sunday Mass with parents and knows how to participate in the celebration of the liturgy.
- Child should know basic prayers: Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be.
- Parent completes and submits the “Request for Sacramental Preparation” form by the registration deadline along with the program fee.

First Eucharist

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. At the Last Supper, our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of His Cross throughout the ages until He comes again. The Lord Himself urges to receive Him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: “Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). To respond to this invitation, we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1323, 1324, 1384 & 1385). All the faithful are bound to receive the Most Holy Eucharist at least once per year during the Easter season (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 920).

After a suitable period of time has passed since First Reconciliation (*Archdiocesan Pastoral Policies Handbook*, 3.2.3.9.a), it is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents as well as of the pastor to see that children who have reached the age of reason are correctly prepared to receive the Most Holy Eucharist. It belongs to the pastor to determine if a child is sufficiently disposed to receive his or her First Holy Communion (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 914).

At St. Charles Borromeo, our program for preparation for First Eucharist includes a set of six (6) catechetical sessions and one (1) retreat day for parents and their children. The program will be offered two times each year: once in the fall and once in the spring. First Eucharist will be celebrated at the conclusion of each session. In order to receive the Sacrament the program must be completed in its entirety.

Minimum Requirements to Register for Preparation for First Eucharist:

- Child must be Catholic and be open to receiving the Sacrament.
- Child must be at least seven (7) years old.
- Child must have already received First Reconciliation.
- Child has been attending the monthly Family Faith Formation program with at least one parent for at least one (1) semester.
- Child is attending weekly Sunday Mass with parents and knows how to participate in the celebration of the liturgy.
- Parent completes and submits the “Request for Sacramental Preparation” form by the registration deadline along with the program fee.

Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For by the Sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Those who are confirmed are more firmly obliged to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1285).

The faithful are obliged to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the appropriate time. Their parents and pastor are to see to it that young people are properly instructed to receive it (*Code of Canon Law*, 890). Likewise, parishes are to make suitable provision for the catechesis of the parents of those to be confirmed (*Archdiocesan Pastoral Policies Handbook*, 3.2.2.2.b).

At St. Charles Borromeo, our program for preparation for Confirmation includes a set of six (6) catechetical sessions for parents and youth and one (1) retreat day for those to be confirmed. The program will be offered two times each year: once in the fall and once in the spring. Confirmation will be celebrated in the Spring.

Minimum Requirements to Register for Preparation for Confirmation:

- Child must be Catholic and is open to receiving the Sacrament.
- Child is between the ages of 10 and 18 (before graduation from high school).
- Child has been attending one of the following for at least one (1) semester:
 - Family Faith Formation program (grades 1-6) *or* Youth Group (grades 7-12).
 - It is preferred that youth in grades 7 & 8 attend Youth Group; however, based on individual circumstances, they may instead participate in Family Faith Formation.*
- Child is attending weekly Sunday Mass and knows how to participate in the celebration of the liturgy.
- Parent completes and submits the “Request for Sacramental Preparation” form by the registration deadline along with the program fee.

Baptism of Non-Infant Children (Ages 7-17)

The Sacrament of Baptism is necessary for salvation and is the gateway to the life in the Spirit and the door to the other Sacraments. It is the way by which a person is freed from sins, is reborn as a child of God, is configured to Christ, is incorporated into the Church, and is made a sharer in the Church's mission (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213).

Parents have a grave responsibility to present their infants for baptism as soon as possible, usually within the first weeks after birth. Parishes are to provide a catechetical program of instruction for parents and godparents which includes: the meaning of Baptism, the obligations attached to the Sacrament, the scriptural foundation for the Sacrament, the sacramental life of the Church, and the Rite of Baptism itself (*Code of Canon Law*, cann. 851 & 867; *Archdiocesan Pastoral Policies Handbook*, 3.2.1.3).

Children ages six (6) and under are considered "infants" by the Church (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 97.2). For the Baptism of infants, parents should contact the parish office to register for instruction and to set a date for the celebration of the Sacrament.

Children who have attained the age of seven (7) must be prepared according to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age (RCIC) (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 852.1; *Archdiocesan Pastoral Policies Handbook*, 3.2.1.2). Anyone who is baptized at age seven (7) or older also receives the Sacraments Confirmation and Eucharist in the same celebration. Ordinarily, this takes place at the Easter Vigil of the Lord's Resurrection.

At St. Charles Borromeo, our RCIC program preparing children for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist meets on a schedule to be determined by our Director of Family Faith Formation and the parents of the children. This program runs the length of the academic year, beginning in September and continuing through Easter.

Minimum Requirements to Register for Preparation in the RCIC:

- Child must be age 7 or older.
- Child is open to receiving the Sacraments.
- Child is beginning to attend weekly Sunday Mass with parents.
- Parent completes and submits the "Request for Sacramental Preparation" form by the registration deadline along with the program fee.
- Parent must contact the Director of Family Faith Formation, to discuss scheduling.