

# The Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation



# The Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated by Catholic Christian families

- ▶ Baptism, (Reconciliation), Confirmation, First Communion in the context of families of faith
- ▶ Children live in the context of family, classmates, and peers

How have the Sacraments of Initiation been celebrated over the last 100 years?

- ▶ A story from my family's history
- ▶ History in my diocese
- ▶ Our own personal histories



# Sacraments of Initiation

## Lessons learned:

- ▶ Historically, Confirmation preceded First Communion in rather close proximity
- ▶ Both Confirmation and First Communion often came at the end of primary education, until Pius X.
- ▶ Confirmation AFTER First Communion is a modern phenomenon
- ▶ Age itself does not determine adequate preparation
- ▶ Readiness can be possible at any age after the age of discretion
- ▶ A child's ability to be prepared depends on the faith of the family!



# Sacraments of Initiation

## Implications for our parish programs

- ▶ Preparation for the Sacraments needs to include evangelization and catechesis of the child and the family
- ▶ Evangelization and catechesis always take into account the capacity of the person
- ▶ Evangelization and catechesis continue throughout life. Children will learn about the sacraments many times!

# How does this work?

## Examples from Prince of Peace Parish, Lewiston, Maine

- ▶ Confirmation and First Communion with the Bishop in a cluster celebration in the fall at the conclusion of two years (24 months) of preparation.

## Catechesis for children and youth through

- ▶ St. Dominic Academy (Pre K to 12)
- ▶ Parish classroom-based religious education (Pre K to 5)
- ▶ Parish family-based religious education (Pre K to 5)
- ▶ Parish junior high youth ministry (6-8)
- ▶ Parish high school youth ministry (9-12)
- ▶ Periodic catechesis of all parents



# How does this work?

Sacramental preparation for First Penance, Confirmation, and First Communion.

- ▶ Takes place over a two year period, either in the school or in the parish
- ▶ Students may begin the process at any age and any grade, starting in Grade 1
- ▶ 4 retreats for parents and children for all students (school and parish) one each on Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation, First Communion
- ▶ 2 additional meetings for all parents (school and parish)
- ▶ A home visit to each family in Year II by the parish priest(s)

# How does this work?

## The Celebration of First Penance

- ▶ All students are invited to the same celebration
- ▶ They may attend this Penance Service without going to confession, with the intention of celebrating the Sacrament at some other time.
- ▶ Reconciliation is offered to students in faith formation each Advent and Lent during formation sessions
- ▶ No record is kept and no recognition is made of those who celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or who don't)

# How does this work?

## The Celebration of Confirmation and First Communion

- ▶ Confirmation/First Communion was a joint celebration for all the parishes (3) of the cluster.
- ▶ The host parish is responsible for all details. This includes participation of ministers from the entire cluster.
- ▶ Mass is adapted for young children as permitted in the *Directory for Masses with Children*.
- ▶ Not at a regular Sunday Mass, not during the evening of a school night.
- ▶ Mass included the baptism of unbaptized children from the preparation program. (If there were no baptisms, Mass began with the Sprinkling Rite.)





## How does this work?

- ▶ Preaching is directed both to the children and then to their parents.
- ▶ The Bishop might give all the children First Communion or he might associate the pastor(s) with him.
- ▶ Students were seated in alphabetical order, not by parish.
- ▶ A very highly organized rehearsal, including individual rehearsal of the children is essential.
- ▶ Give everyone the date early! Allow for proxies.

# What were the positive outcomes?

- ▶ More children are confirmed
- ▶ More families are evangelized and catechized
- ▶ Drop off rate at grade 3 declined over time
- ▶ Junior High and High School Youth Ministry did not die
- ▶ Everyone experienced the wider church



# What were the negative outcomes?

- ▶ Significant drop off remained after grade 3 in some locations
- ▶ Junior High and High School Youth Ministry did not grow
- ▶ Grandparents often replaced parents

*Other factors*

# What could we have done better?

- ▶ Have stronger junior high and high school youth ministry teams
- ▶ Have truly comprehensive junior high and high school youth ministry
- ▶ Have more direct contact with individual families
- ▶ Related the experience of First Penance more closely to Baptism
- ▶ Make sure all the parishes rehearsed the spoken and sung responses of the children prior to the rehearsal
- ▶ Make Reconciliation and the Eucharist the sacraments for adolescents
- ▶ Celebrate more blessings with adolescents
- ▶ Seek out faith formation registration more aggressively
- ▶ Communicate, communicate, communicate with parents!

# How did we get there?

- ▶ Transition process began in 1997
  - ▶ Pastoral Letter from the Bishop
  - ▶ Training of priests, youth ministers, faith formation directors
  - ▶ Information in parishes and to parents
- ▶ Simultaneous but separate celebrations in high school and grade 2 for several years, including all siblings of each population
- ▶ Delegation of Pastors to confirm at one or more celebrations in each parish/cluster
- ▶ Sacrament preparation retreats by age level: grade 2, middle grades, junior high, high school
- ▶ Development of comprehensive junior high and high school youth ministry
- ▶ The transition took place over 3-5 years

# Would I do it again?

Yes!

Here's why

- ▶ No one is willing to do anything anymore because I say so.
- ▶ More children are confirmed. Sacraments do something.
- ▶ More of the confirmed are open to reception of the sacrament.
- ▶ This helps address the lack of catechesis among parents.
- ▶ It forces the parish to be serious about junior high and high school youth ministry.
- ▶ It honors the traditional order of the sacraments of Initiation.
- ▶ It presents a more Catholic understanding of Confirmation.



# Confirmation and First Communion as Sacraments of Initiation

Confirmation completes and perfects Baptism, directs one to the Eucharist, and....

- ▶ Strengthens the baptized, the children of the Father, with the gifts of the Spirit
- ▶ Further conforms the baptized to Christ by the seal of the Spirit
- ▶ Equips the baptized for the celebration, reception, and living the Eucharist

# Confirmation and First Communion as Sacraments of Initiation

- ▶ Baptism and Confirmation are not repeatable.
- ▶ Reconciliation is the “second” baptism.
- ▶ The Eucharist is the repeatable Sacrament of Initiation. It is the culmination of Initiation. It is the high point of the Christian life.
- ▶ The Bishop is the minister of Initiation par excellence
  - ▶ He might baptize personally. Generally, it is through others
  - ▶ The West has maintained his personal role in Confirmation itself (apart from circumstances identified in law)
  - ▶ His personal role in First Communion highlights the initiatory character of the Eucharist.



# Confirmation and First Communion as Sacraments of Initiation

Sacraments are for people

- ▶ What does it say when half of the baptized are not confirmed?
- ▶ If we baptize and admit children to communion, why not confirmation?
- ▶ Sacraments are not meant to be solutions to cultural or pastoral problems
- ▶ They are meant for those who are prepared.

Eligibility for confirmation: use of reason, suitably instructed, properly disposed, able to renew one's baptismal promises (canon 889)

Analogy with the minimum requirement for First Communion

# Confirmation: A sacrament in search of a theology

- ▶ Historically, confirmation and First Communion were tied to the end of formal education. In the case of Confirmation, this association continued, and even strengthened, after the Second Vatican Council.
- ▶ However, the loss of the sense of Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation lead to efforts at seeking its meaning elsewhere
  - ▶ Episcopal Church: Both a post baptismal rite, and the reaffirmation of one's previous baptism
  - ▶ The Lutheran Church: the conclusion of formal catechesis
  - ▶ Each of these place the locus of meaning in the act of the one to be confirmed, not in God's action
  - ▶ This leads to preparation programs which can give the impression of "earning" confirmation

# Confirmation:

## A sacrament in search of a theology

Catechesis and liturgical practice around confirmation needs to guarantee

- ▶ The primacy of the Trinity's action over human achievement or merit
- ▶ The reality of the Person of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the baptized along with the Reality of the Presence of the Body and Blood of the Son received in the Eucharist. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit to each of the baptized!
- ▶ The importance of one's response to God in accord with one's capacity
- ▶ Thanksgiving for the life of grace received in baptism (and restored in reconciliation)
- ▶ The commitment to live fully the reality of the Eucharist, the first, second, third, and all subsequent times!
- ▶ Life-long catechesis about the Christian life