

Sacramental Catechesis

*An Online Resource for Dioceses
and Eparchies*

COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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WASHINGTON, DC

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General Secretary, USCCB

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INTRODUCTION

The sacraments are efficacious¹ signs of grace, “instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.”²

In the Trinity’s mysterious and loving plan, God the Father sent his beloved Son into the world for the salvation of the world and the glory of his name.³ Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, through his saving Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension,⁴ accomplished the work of our salvation.⁵ Since the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has continued to make present to the Church this saving action of Christ in the sacraments, culminating in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. “The Church draws her life from the Word and the Body of Christ, and so herself becomes Christ’s Body.”⁶ The Church is itself Christ’s continuing presence in the world and mediator of God’s grace.⁷ The Seven Sacraments, called “the Holy Mysteries” by the Eastern Churches, continue the saving work

of Jesus throughout time and space until he comes again; they form the center of the celebration of the Christian mystery.⁸

The sacraments were instituted by Christ and are an encounter with Christ.⁹ They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church.¹⁰ Through this encounter, God’s sacramental grace¹¹—the grace of the Holy Spirit given by Christ and proper to each sacrament—is communicated¹² to those properly disposed to receive it.¹³ “Sacraments confer the grace that they signify.”¹⁴ In each sacrament, the faithful are enabled to give fitting worship to God who purifies them, calls them to worship, and serves as the object of their worship. Through the saving action of Christ at work in each of the sacraments, the whole of creation is increasingly healed and sanctified so that it can once again give glory to the

1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) (2nd ed.) (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2000), no. 1127. “Efficacious” means that the sacraments bring about a result. The sacraments “are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.” (CCC, no. 1127). Unlike the seven sacraments, “sacramentals” (e.g., holy water, statues, rosaries, religious medals) do not bring the grace of Christ *efficaciously*. While they also bring the grace of Christ, their fruits depend more directly on the disposition of the one who makes use of them or prays with them.

2 CCC, Glossary, p. 898.

3 CCC, no. 1066.

4 CCC, Glossary, p. 891.

5 See CCC, no. 1067. See also *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006), Chapter 8.

6 CCC, Glossary, p. 871.

7 CCC, nos. 774-776.

8 CCC, nos. 1076, 1099; USCCA, 166-168.

9 CCC, nos. 1114-1116. “Adhering to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, to the apostolic traditions, and to the consensus . . . of the Fathers,’ we profess that ‘the sacraments of the new law were . . . all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord’” (CCC, no. 1114, quoting Council of Trent [1547], DS 1600–1601). “Jesus’ words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished” (CCC, no. 1115).

10 CCC, no. 1116.

11 Grace is the life and activity of God in our souls. See CCC, no. 1999: “The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.” See also CCC, nos. 1996-2000.

12 See CCC, Glossary, p. 898: A sacrament is “an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.”

13 CCC, no. 1131.

14 CCC, no. 1127. See also CCC, no. 1131: “The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.”

Father. Likewise, recipients are enabled to serve in charity, grow in holiness, and form one body in union with Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ In well-disposed recipients, the sacraments are efficacious—that is, they confer the grace they signify (*ex opere operato*),¹⁶ because the Lord who instituted the sacraments is also the one who confers and dispenses them through the minister of the sacrament.¹⁷

The Seven Sacraments are properly ordered according to three designations. Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist are the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation, which lay the foundation for the Christian life.¹⁸ Penance and Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick are the Sacraments of Healing. Through them the Church continues, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish Christ's work of healing and salvation among the Christian faithful.¹⁹ Matrimony and Holy Orders are the Sacraments at the Service of Communion. They confer a special mission of service to the People of God.²⁰

The diocesan bishop, as chief teacher of the faith, exercises his responsibility to provide the faithful with doctrinally sound faith formation that integrates knowledge of the faith with living the faith.²¹ Assisted by his priests, deacons, religious, and laity,²² he cares for the proper formation of all who approach the Church for the reception and the celebration of the sacraments. In order to enable a deeper understanding and commitment to an active and worthily celebrated sacramental life, this sacramental catechesis is both preparatory and ongoing.

Such sacramental catechesis does not take place in a vacuum. Its reception and fruitfulness is

influenced by many changes that touch the lives of the Catholic faithful, along with those of the rest of society. These changes may either encourage or block a relationship with God rooted in a community of faith and committed to an active sacramental life.²³

SIGNS OF VITALITY

Several encouraging signs of vitality may be identified today in the life of the Church in the United States. The Catholic population in the United States continues to grow and diversify, in part due to the influx of a number of immigrant groups. The implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults continues to provide large numbers of newly initiated members and to inspire all forms of catechesis.²⁴ The revised third edition of the *Roman Missal* provides a wonderful opportunity to focus on the centrality of the Eucharist and to invite the faithful to a renewed commitment to active participation in the Mass and worthy reception of the Eucharist. The ministry of priests, deacons, and religious, in union with the active participation of the lay faithful in pastoral life, serves as a leaven to transform day-to-day life. Catholics in the United States continue to recognize Jesus present in those suffering from numerous natural and man-made disasters and to provide outreach to the poor and vulnerable as he commanded his followers to do.²⁵ Another positive sign is the increasing number of dedicated catechists and Catholic school teachers engaged in initial and ongoing sacramental formation for a continuum of age groups and settings.²⁶ A catechetical renewal is underway, guided by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, and the *National*

15 CCC, nos. 1123-1127; USCCA, 168-170.

16 CCC, no. 1128: "Ex opere operato (literally: 'by the very fact of the action's being performed')."

17 CCC, no. 1128.

18 See CCC, no. 1212. See also *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006), no. 36 A.

19 CCC, no. 1421; NDC, no. 36 B.

20 CCC, nos. 1534-1535; NDC, no. 36 C; USCCA, 168-169.

21 NDC, nos. 33, 35 B.

22 NDC, no. 54.

23 See *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: LEV-USCCB, 1998), nos. 14-33; NDC, nos. 3-4, 12-14; and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1999), nos. 25-37.

24 NDC, no. 35 D.

25 See Mt 25:31-40. Examples of Catholic outreach to the poor include special collections and initiatives for victims of disasters around the world.

26 NDC, no. 3.

Directory for Catechesis. There is heightened awareness of Church teaching on the Sacrament of Matrimony as a result of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)'s initiatives on behalf of marriage and the defense and protection of marriage. Additionally, there is a groundswell of interest and engagement in the New Evangelization. This is expressed in outreach to those who are un-evangelized and under-evangelized to proclaim the Good News and to invite them to fuller participation in the Church and life in Christ, characterized by an active sacramental life, and committed Christian witness, which includes an embrace of Christian stewardship and a share in the Church's mission *ad gentes*.²⁷

SIGNS FOR CONCERN

After mentioning signs of vitality, we must also acknowledge signs for concern in providing sacramental catechesis today. There is a growing tendency, especially among younger generations of baptized Catholics in the United States, for individuals to be wary of religious institutions and leaders associated with them and to favor a privatized spirituality not rooted in Divine Revelation or in a historic faith community. According to a 2008 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) study, "Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics,"²⁸ there appears to be some confusion among the faithful about what constitutes an active sacramental life. This is evidenced by low levels of participation in weekly Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance, as well as by the reduced numbers of Baptisms and marriages being celebrated within the Church. While many people will acknowledge that sin exists, fewer are likely to believe in the *possibility of forgiveness* due to a scarcity of experiences of forgiveness in their families and in society. Various state and national initiatives seek to redefine

marriage, causing confusion among Catholic faithful and society as a whole. Diversity is increasing among families due to a growing number of ecumenical, interfaith, or Catholic–nonbeliever/non-practicing marriages, leading to the potential for the Catholic members of these couples to decrease or abandon their practice of the Catholic faith. Finally, some of the faithful lament that their own catechetical formation has been inadequate. Under-catechized Catholics often feel unable either to witness confidently about their faith in public or to serve as volunteer catechists in their parish formation programs. Because of such shortcomings in catechetical formation or faith practice, adults face difficulties in understanding their faith, living active sacramental lives in their parish communities, or serving as evangelists or catechists. Catholic parents who believe their formation was lacking also may find themselves ill-prepared to serve as the primary catechists of their own children or to model and instruct their families in prayer.

AUDIENCE

This online resource is provided to help bishops and the diocesan leaders who assist them to provide ongoing, doctrinally sound catechesis on the sacramental life. It is intended to be a resource to guide the efforts of a diocese in developing or enhancing programs for sacramental catechesis. Diocesan efforts will now be reviewed and strengthened by applying the principles contained in this resource. In part 1, this text will explore some of the challenges present in our culture. In part 2, it will provide an overview of all sacraments in general. Then it will offer eight principles that should govern all sound catechesis before focusing on the principles for doctrinally and pastorally sound catechesis specific to each sacrament. Finally, it will identify moments of opportunity when this sacramental catechesis may be particularly fruitful.

27 Latin phrase meaning "to the nations."

28 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), "Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics," cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html (accessed February 15, 2011).

PART ONE

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS

The Seven Sacraments continue the saving work of Jesus until he comes again and form the center of the celebration of the Christian mystery.²⁹ Through the ministry of the Church, all are invited to hear the Good News, follow Christ, and share in these saving mysteries: mysteries that symbolize, make possible, realize, and nurture the grace of the sacraments in the baptized. Participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, is therefore not an option but is foundational to sustain the faithful in union with the very life of the Trinity and to strengthen them for the rigors of living their faith as committed disciples.

The Church is solicitous to ensure that the faithful continue to be well prepared and to fully participate in sacramental life. Toward that end, she carefully discerns in every culture those elements that are compatible with the Gospel and those that are not.³⁰ While many aspects of the culture in the United States are positive, some elements are hostile to the Gospel and tend to undermine the faithful's understanding and practice of the faith, and in particular their sacramental practice.

SECULARISM

Today we are witnessing a form of secularization that marginalizes human dependence upon God, denying him any significant role in human history or daily life.³¹ In a secular atmosphere, people are prone to dismiss moral arguments based on natural law, universal principles, or objective truth. Likewise, they are reluctant to embrace the notion of divinity, transcendence, and mystery. This

atmosphere erodes faith in God, leading many to believe only in what can be experienced with the senses or explained scientifically. Secularism denies man's capability to know God or to discern God's self-revelation found in the Scriptures, Tradition, and Magisterium. Extreme secularism rooted in postmodern cynicism and nihilism erodes hope, denigrates the notion of a person who is made in God's image and has an eternal destiny, and discourages active participation of all the catechized in their Christian formation.³² It has led some to embrace agnosticism or atheism.

RELATIVISM

A pluralistic culture, in order to avoid impinging on people's freedom, tends to privatize truth. People believe, "I have my truth. You have your truth. Who's to say which is valid or objectively true?" They believe that it is up to each individual to determine morality. This determination is often made independent of Divine Revelation, the Church, and the sacramental life. Even those willing to consider a faith community as helpful often view all religions as being equal. Catholics are affected by the culture they live in. If they adopt society's values, even unconsciously, they may find it difficult to embrace Catholic teaching and morals when these conflict with commonly held societal views.

29 CCC, nos. 1076, 1099.

30 NDC, no. 21 C.

31 NDC, no. 10 B.

32 NDC, no. 30 G.

A FAULTY ANTHROPOLOGY

Christian anthropology³³ is concerned about what God has revealed about the origin, nature, woundedness, vocation, salvation by Jesus Christ, and destiny of the human person. Influenced by secularism and relativism, some in the United States base their understanding of the human person on subjective human experience without reference to God, Revelation, or natural and divine law. Based on a faulty anthropology, they come to quite different conclusions than the Catholic Church about human nature and a host of moral issues such as the need for forgiveness, participation in sacramental life, human relationships, the meaning of redemptive suffering and death, reproductive technology, and end-of-life issues—to name just a few. Ongoing catechesis can assist Catholics in understanding and practicing their faith without compromise.

A WEAKENED SACRAMENTAL WORLDVIEW

Common among Catholics is a weakened sacramental worldview that inhibits believers from seeing creation as “charged with the grandeur of God”³⁴ and able to reflect the Creator. This also blocks them from understanding the central importance of the sacraments—especially the Eucharist—in the life of the faithful. Some are inclined to view sacraments as mere ritualizations of significant moments in the life journey rather than encounters with the

33 For further reading on Christian anthropology, see Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]) and *Decree on Religious Freedom* (*Dignitatis Humanae*) in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996); see also Blessed John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 35-36, 210.

34 Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*, in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*, eds. D.H.S. Nicholson and A.H.E. Lee (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1917), accessed at www.bartleby.com/236.

Risen Lord in which he offers the grace unique to each sacrament. Low participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation,³⁵ a decrease in participation in weekly church attendance,³⁶ and a lack of belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist³⁷ also illustrate the need for doctrinally sound sacramental catechesis. Sacramental catechesis invites all to listen to God's Word, to enter into a relationship with Christ, to accept his ongoing invitation to conversion, and to participate in the sacraments and in the life of the Church.

CATHOLICS LEAVING THE CHURCH

According to the PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life in *The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, 28 percent of survey participants reported leaving the faith in which they were raised, and 16.1 percent reported being unaffiliated with any religion.³⁸

35 CARA, “Sacraments Today.” CARA notes that only 26 percent of adult Catholics participate in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at least once a year or more. Another 45 percent say they never participate in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

36 Lydia Saad, “Church-Going Among U.S. Catholics Slides to Tie Protestants” (Princeton, NJ; Gallup Poll News Service, April 9, 2009). However, Saad notes that “the long-term decline may have leveled off in the past decade.” A 2009 Gallup Poll shows that Catholics dropped from 75 percent to 45 percent weekly church attendance between 1955 and the 1990s. The CARA “Sacraments Today” survey documents less participation in parish and sacramental life, especially among young adults. The study states that only 23 percent of Catholics in the United States attend Mass each week. It notes reasons given for missing weekly Mass, including (a) a busy schedule or lack of time, (b) family responsibilities, (c) health problems or disability, (d) don't believe missing Mass is a sin, and (e) are not a very religious person.

37 CARA, “Sacraments Today.” In general, 43 percent of those surveyed stated that “bread and wine are symbols of Jesus, but Jesus is not really present.”

38 See PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, religions.pewforum.org/reports, accessed March 2, 2011. Conducted in 2007, the PEW survey sampled a representative group of over 35,000 adults eighteen years of age and older from the major religious groups in the United States.

The Catholic Church has experienced the greatest net losses as a result of its members abandoning the Church of their Baptism.³⁹ While nearly one-third of American adults were raised in the Catholic faith, only 23.9 percent describe themselves as Catholic. Men baptized in the Catholic Church are five times more likely than women to claim no religious affiliation.

SHORTCOMINGS IN CATECHETICAL FORMATION

The bishops in the United States have expressed concern about the “religious illiteracy” level of the Catholic faithful. They are concerned not only about gaps in intellectual formation but also gaps in spiritual formation. They have been working to address these concerns, which impact Catholics’ understanding and practice of their faith. This includes an understanding and commitment to an active sacramental life.⁴⁰

At a meeting with representatives of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany on September 23, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out major challenges facing Christianity in our day and time, especially the spread of a new form of Christianity that has “little institutional depth, little rationality, and even less dogmatic content, and . . . little stability.”⁴¹

39 These losses would have been much more dramatic if they were not more than offset by the large number of immigrants arriving and identifying themselves as Catholic.

40 See Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, “Renewing Catechesis Redounds to Social Order’s Benefit” (Origins 27:11 December 1997, 435): “Religious ignorance or, as some call it, ‘illiteracy,’ is a significant part of the culture with which we deal pastorally. Within the U.S. Catholic Conference the bishops have attempted, through the implementation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, to address this disquieting phenomenon by strengthening catechetical texts. . . . While we have worked hard to ensure the quality of our religious education programs . . . the religious illiteracy level of our faithful is still a concern and one that needs to continue to be the focus of our pastoral ministry.”

41 Pope Benedict XVI, Address at the Chapter Hall in

CONCLUSION: DATA FROM CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN THE APOSTOLATE (CARA) SURVEYS

CARA research shows that there is a need for enhanced sacramental catechesis. Not all the news about sacramental practice and catechetical formation is bad. Recent data suggest that the efforts of the bishops and the attention given to improving catechist formation and providing sound catechetical texts may be meeting with some success. Catechetical texts have improved considerably through the work of Catholic publishers and the review process offered by the USCCB’s Subcommittee on the Catechism.

Comparisons between CARA’s earlier findings and its 2008 survey⁴² results show some gains and some losses.

- In 2008, 57 percent of respondents professed Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist. This is a decline from 63 percent in 2001.⁴³
- In 2008, 54 percent of respondents agreed somewhat or strongly that ordination confers on the priest a new status or a permanent character that makes him essentially different from the laity within the Church. In 2002, an equal 54 percent of respondents agreed somewhat or strongly with that statement.⁴⁴

Erfurt, Germany, September 23, 2011, www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110923_evangelical-church-erfurt_en.html.

42 CARA, “Sacraments Today.” Some examples: 76 percent affirm creedal statements on the Trinity; on Jesus’ Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension; on the existence of heaven; on Mary, Mother of God; and on the Last Judgment.

43 CARA Catholic Poll 2001, cara.georgetown.edu/mass_eucharist.pdf, p. 54, accessed January 6, 2012.

44 CARA Catholic Poll 2002, cara.georgetown.edu/beliefattitude.pdf, p. 96, and CARA 2008 Study, “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics,” cara.georgetown.edu/sacramentsesum.pdf,

- In 2008, 32 percent of all responders and 55 percent of weekly Mass attendees said they would encourage their own child to pursue a vocation as a priest, deacon, religious brother or sister, or nun. In 2002, 33 percent of campus ministry participants at Catholic colleges and 27 percent of campus ministry participants at non-Catholic colleges said they would encourage someone to pursue a vocation as a priest or a religious sister or brother. 27 percent said they have encouraged someone to pursue a vocation as a priest or a religious sister or brother.⁴⁵
- In 2008, 51 percent of respondents said they have requested the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick for themselves or for a sick family member.

p. 6. Special thanks to Mary L. Gautier, PhD, Senior Research Associate, CARA, Georgetown University, for providing earlier statistics to compare with the CARA 2008 Survey results.

45 CARA Catholic Poll 2002, cara.georgetown.edu/Publications/workingpapers/CampusMinistryWorkingPaper.pdf, p. 20.

PART TWO

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

Full participation in the sacramental life of the Church is essential to sustain the faithful in pursuit of a life of committed discipleship. Since today's Catholics face a challenge in living an active sacramental life due to the influences of secularism, relativism, a faulty anthropology, and a weakened sacramental worldview, a vibrant and doctrinally sound sacramental catechesis is needed to address confusion about the sacraments and promote an active sacramental life.

EIGHT PRINCIPLES FOR ALL DOCTRINALLY SOUND CATECHESIS

The Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis presents the following eight principles of doctrinally sound sacramental catechesis as multiple lenses through which the strengths of sacramental catechesis programs on Baptism, Confirmation/Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders should be viewed.

1. Trinitarian Communion as the Foundation of Ecclesial Communion

The Trinity is a communion of persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian God created us in his image and likeness that we might be in communion with the three Divine Persons and also with one another. Sin ruptured this communion—we were alienated from God and from one another. No longer could we be in communion with the all-holy Trinity, and no longer could there be a loving communion among

ourselves. Nonetheless, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each in his own unique manner, worked together in order to restore our communion with the Trinity and with one another. The Father sent his Son into the world in order that through his work of salvation—his life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection—we would find forgiveness and new life. This new life is the Holy Spirit given by the Father through his resurrected Son. By coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and through Baptism, Christians receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming children of the Father and brothers and sisters to one another. Christians enter into the new life: the new communion that is the Church, the Body of Christ. The Trinitarian communion—the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is then the foundation for our ecclesial communion, because it is through the Trinity's work of salvation that we are brought into communion with the three Divine Persons and so with one another. The night before he died, Jesus prayed that Christians “may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:20-21). The oneness of love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, and the same Holy Spirit makes us one with the Father and the Son and with one another—this is the Trinitarian foundation for our ecclesial communion.⁴⁶

2. Christological Centrality

In the opening verses of his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul provides an overview or summary of the Father's plan for creation and for salvation. Paul tells us that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

46 See Pope Benedict XVI, *God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), nos. 19-20.

Christ should be blessed because he has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (Eph 1:3).

Paul enumerates what these heavenly blessings are. The Father chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). Notice that even before we and the world were created, Christ held central place: the Father first chose us in him and then created the world and us through him. The Father chose us in Christ “to be holy and without blemish before him” (Eph 1:4). It is Christ, the holy and blameless Son of the Father, who is the source of our holiness and our freedom from sin and guilt. The Father thus “destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will” (Eph 1:5). It is only in and through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, that we come to be sons and daughters of the Father. This is the Father’s destiny for us.

Even when sin entered the world, making us unholy and blameful, what the Father willed and destined us to be in Christ was not shattered. Paul tells us that in Christ “we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions” (Eph 1:7). As we were chosen in Christ before creation and as we were destined in Christ to be children of the Father, so now it is through Christ that we are freed from sin by his Death on the Cross. Not only is Christ the center of our creation, but he is now also the center of our redemption.

This is the great mystery that the Father has revealed to us. In the fullness of time, the Father willed that all things would be united to Christ, “in heaven and on earth” (Eph 1:10). This is the climax of Jesus’ centrality as the one in whom the Father created all things and as the one in whom all of humankind is redeemed—Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth. All centrality and primacy belongs to him.⁴⁷ Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, empowers us for discipleship through grace, and is the guarantee that we will share in the glory of Jesus. We are “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s possession, to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:13-14).

47 See CCC, nos. 515 and 774, regarding Christ as sacrament.

Paul makes similar points in his Letter to the Colossians. Christ is the firstborn of all creation, and all things were created through him and for him. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17). Moreover, “he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Jesus is first with regard to creation and first with regard to redemption, and thus he is “preeminent” in every way (1:18). All things are reconciled in him, and so Jesus holds all primacy and centrality, and his name is above every other name (see Phil 2:5-11).

3. The Church as Sacrament in the World

The Church, whose origin is the Holy Trinity, has been revealed throughout salvation history. Ever present to the Father, established by Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, the Church is sacrament to the world: a visible sign of God’s grace for all.⁴⁸ “The word *Church* means the people gathered by God into one community, guided today by the bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles and whose head is the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.”⁴⁹ In a privileged way, the Church mediates Christ to the world through the sacraments. The Holy Spirit sanctifies and blesses the Church, which in turn blesses the world.

“The Holy Spirit, whom Christ the head pours out on his members, builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Holy Trinity’s communion with men.”⁵⁰ Through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, she is made holy and blesses the temporal order.⁵¹ As the “universal sacrament of salvation,”⁵² the Church is

48 See CCC, nos. 774-775, and LG, no. 1, regarding the Church as sacrament.

49 USCCA, 113: “The term *Church* also applies to specific geographical communities called dioceses. It also applies to the buildings where the faithful gather for the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and to families, who are called domestic churches.”

50 CCC, no. 747.

51 USCCA, 112-113. “The Holy Trinity abides with the Church always, creatively and providentially.”

52 LG, no. 48.

both the sign and the instrument of communion with God and of the unity among Christ's faithful. This communion with Christ, and with one another as the Body of Christ, is made possible and is continually perfected in every liturgical action of the Church, through the work of the Holy Spirit, until it is fully realized after death by those who are united with Christ and thus share in the beatific vision. The Church continues the saving work of Jesus, which is revealed and active in the sacraments.⁵³

4. Ecclesial Communion

Ecclesial communion finds its source in Jesus Christ. Jesus, as Lord, is the head of his Body, the Church. To be a member of Christ's Body means that we are not only united to him as our head, but we are also united to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, as witnessed through love of neighbor, acts of solidarity, justice, service,⁵⁴ and welcome to all.⁵⁵ This ecclesial communion is founded upon and strengthened through the sacraments. We are twenty-one Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church in communion with one another under the pope of Rome.

We become members of the ecclesial communion—the Body of Christ, the Church—through Baptism. In Baptism, we are not only freed from Original Sin, but we are also united to Christ and incorporated into the Church. The life we now live is an ecclesial life—a Spirit-filled life lived together with our brothers and sisters who make up the Church: those on earth, those in Purgatory, and those in heaven. This ecclesial communion finds its greatest expression within the Eucharist. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, we are joined to the one sacrifice of Christ and receive the glorified Jesus in Holy Communion, which both fully expresses and nurtures our ecclesial unity. The Eucharist unites us to Christ and to one another; it fosters

and strengthens that unity with Christ and with one another. In the Eucharist the Church truly becomes the Church—the living Body of Christ, an ecclesial communion.

Our ecclesial communion is also nurtured through the diverse gifts and ministries within the Church.⁵⁶ The pope and the bishops in union with him are the chief shepherds and guardians of the Church. They ensure that the truth of the Gospel is proclaimed, that the sacraments are celebrated properly, and that the body of Christ is governed in peace and love. The ordained priests collaborate with the bishop of each diocese so as to provide for the theological, sacramental, and pastoral care of souls for all those within the diocesan territory. Consecrated religious, through the witness of their lives and ministries, work to build up and serve the Body of Christ.⁵⁷ They witness to the heavenly goal that the whole body, the ecclesial communion, strives to obtain.

Empowered by the graces of an active sacramental life, the laity is called to the evangelization and sanctification of the temporal order. Married couples and single men and women further the ecclesial communion of the Church through their witness to the Gospel in their daily lives and activities, in the political arena, and in work situations. The laity builds up this unity within the Church through its own apostolic and charitable work. The Sacrament of Matrimony establishes a communion of persons between the spouses, ordered toward the perfection of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. “The Church lives in the daily life of families, in their faith and love, in their prayers and mutual care.”⁵⁸

All of this finds its expression in the words of St. Paul:

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or

53 See CCC, nos. 774-76, 780, 1045, 1108; see also USCCA, Chapter 10.

54 See Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009), no. 5.

55 *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1978), no. 12.

56 For more on the charismatic gifts, see 1 Cor 12-14; see also LG, no. 12.

57 See LG, nos. 43-47.

58 USCCA, 284.

Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. . . . Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27-28).

This is the ecclesial communion: all the members of Christ's Body working together for the good of the Body, for the sanctification of the world, and for the glory of Jesus Christ—the head.

5. The Church's Mission *Ad Gentes* and the New Evangelization

Jesus' last words in the Gospel of Matthew are these:

All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age. (Mt 28:18-20)

This is known as the Great Commission. Jesus possesses all authority over heaven and earth, and so he commissions his Apostles to make disciples of all nations. They are to go *ad gentes*—to the nations. Jesus commissions them to proclaim the Gospel—all that he has taught them—and they are to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity. Jesus also promises that he will be with them until the end of time. But why does Jesus commission his Apostles to go *ad gentes*? There are a number of very important reasons.

First, the Apostles and all subsequent Christians are to bring to the nations the Gospel of salvation—the Good News. Only in the name of Jesus, only because of his Death and Resurrection, do the nations find salvation—forgiveness of their sins and the new life of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is a gift that by its very nature is to be offered

to all. The offering of the Gospel to another person is a profound act of love shown to that person. Second, Jesus wants all peoples and nations to be members of his Body, the Church. He knows that only within the Church can the new and everlasting life that he offers be nourished and thus mature. Only within the Church do its members participate in the sacraments—the sacraments that draw them closer to Christ and to his Father—Baptism, Confirmation/Chrismation, the Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders. The Good News of the Gospel is lived out fully only within the communion of the living people of God—the Church. Third, Jesus desires that all those who are saved may share eternal life with him.⁵⁹ Lastly, Christians who have experienced Jesus' saving love in their own lives⁶⁰ are enabled by God's saving grace to witness to the nations from their own experience of salvation in order to glorify Jesus and make him loved. Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings. Only in his name is there salvation.

In going to all of the nations, Christians are preparing for Jesus' coming in glory at the end of time. Then, "at the name of Jesus," by the power and love of the Holy Spirit, every knee will bend, "in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).

In the New Evangelization, the Church proclaims the Gospel to those who have never heard about Jesus and require an initial proclamation of the Gospel ("*missio ad gentes*"). The Church also is engaged in re-proposing the Gospel to those who are baptized members of the Church but who have lost a living sense of the faith. Finally, the Church supports the ongoing evangelization of practicing Catholics at their diverse stages of conversion, sacramental life, and committed discipleship.⁶¹ To

59 See CCC, nos. 458, 1042-1045.

60 See 1 Jn 1:1-4.

61 For further reading, see Blessed John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1990), no. 33, and Pope Benedict XVI's *Homily on the Solemnity of Peter and Paul*, June 29, 2011, www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110629_pallio_en.html.

assist the faithful to embrace and commit to the New Evangelization, Pope Benedict XVI has created the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. He has also announced a convocation of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2012 to discuss the topic “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”

6. Sacramentality and a Sacramental Worldview

What is the basic idea of sacramentality? Sacramentality means that all physical matters and actions have the potential to become transparent vehicles of divine activity and presence in our world. This being the case, we are also aware of the transformative character of the sacraments.

What is the reason for this belief? It is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation itself: “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14). Taking upon himself our humanity, he has transformed it. God’s mysterious presence can now and forever be found in and through our created world.

From one perspective, God is above our created and material world (transcendence), but from another perspective, God is present in our cultural and material world (immanence). The Word of God can be perceived by faith through the sign of human words and actions. A sign is any person, thing, event, or reality that points to, relates to, represents, or re-presents another unseen person, thing, event, or reality. Such signs make us more aware than ever that God has entered and daily enters again into the history of salvation. What a wonderful awareness this is!

This privileged moment of encounter with God, when it is accepted in faith, has a tremendous transformative power to it. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “To receive the Word means to let oneself be shaped by him, and thus to be conformed by the power of the Holy Spirit to Christ, the ‘only Son from the Father’ (Jn 1:14). It is the beginning of a new creation; a new creature is born, a new people

comes to birth. Those who believe—that is to say, those who live the obedience of faith—are “born of God” (Jn 1:13) and made sharers in the divine life: sons in the Son (cf. Gal 4:5-6; Rom 8:14-17).”⁶²

Understanding this basic principle clarifies the definition of sacraments as given in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: sacraments are “efficacious sign[s] of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁶³ “The visible rites . . . signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament.”⁶⁴

7. Christian Moral Life: Personal and Social Dimensions That Include Stewardship

The human person, created in the image and likeness of God,⁶⁵ is called to follow the path of holiness, to choose the good and avoid evil, to make of his or her life a gift to God and to others, and to be a steward of all the goods that God has given. Due to Original Sin and its effects⁶⁶ as well as to personal sin, the human person is in need of the salvation won by the merits of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, in his Passion, Death, and glorious Resurrection. In and through the action of the Church, and by the grace of the sacraments, people advance in the internalization of the life of virtue. In this way, the Holy Spirit, “the interior Master of life according to Christ,”⁶⁷ shapes the intellect, will, and appetites of the person so that his or her conscience is properly formed to choose the truly authentic good in accord with right reason and the natural moral law.⁶⁸

62 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (Verbum Domini)*, no. 50, www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html.

63 CCC, Glossary, p. 898.

64 CCC, no. 1131.

65 Gn 1:27; CCC, no. 1701.

66 Gn 3; Rom 5:12.

67 CCC, no. 1697.

68 CCC, no. 1776.

With the strength provided by God, the human person has the capacity to live the imperatives of the Ten Commandments⁶⁹ and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount,⁷⁰ in particular that of the Beatitudes.⁷¹ In the Christian moral life, the believer responds to his or her vocation to be made holy, to sanctify the world, and so to transform society. The Christian, as a true disciple, strives to become a good steward of his or her own life as well as of time, talent, and treasure in service to the Kingdom of God. Baptism initiates a person into discipleship of the Lord. Confirmation enables that disciple to become a responsible steward of life and a generous steward of the gifts God has given. In the Eucharist, the Christian disciple expresses stewardship in the offering of personal life and goods to the Father in union with the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus Christian morality leads to an authentic and responsible stewardship of life and goods in service to a culture of life and a civilization of love.

8. Growth in Christian Prayer and in the Spiritual Life

We are created in the image and likeness of God to know the Father in his Son, to love him in the Holy Spirit, and so to be in relationship with him. This relationship is nurtured in prayer. Prayer is the searching of the human heart for God, whom we desire even in our fallen nature. Prayer is dialogue with Jesus, who redeemed us and who teaches us to pray, and prayer is shaped and formed by the Holy Spirit, who draws us ever closer to the Father in Christ. Throughout time, prayer has been our response to God's initiative of love, through which he reveals himself to us.

Prayer as relationship and communication is fully revealed and realized in Jesus Christ. Jesus' relationship with his Father is shown through his prayers, parables, miracles, and sacrifices. We learn how to love and seek God our Father by our

imitation of Jesus and our union with him in the Holy Spirit. He teaches us the dispositions necessary for communion with the Father by the words of the Our Father and by his own examples in prayer, charity, purity of heart, faith, watchfulness, and humility. Jesus also teaches us the various forms of prayer: blessing, adoration, repentance, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

In her wisdom, the Church teaches her children that growth in the spiritual life requires daily prayer and participation in the sacraments. The Sacred Scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharistic adoration, and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass are sources of grace that nourish the spiritual life and strengthen our imitation of Christ in the likeness of God the Father. Vocal prayer, mental prayer, meditation, contemplation, and prayer in our daily activities invite the love of God to transform all we do, think, and say.

Formation in prayer relies also on learning the "principal formulations of the faith" by heart: "basic prayers; key biblical themes, personalities, and expressions; and factual information regarding worship and Christian life."⁷²

The communion of the members of the Church is described in Scripture as the mystical Body of Christ. As the head of this mystical Body, Jesus hears our prayer and intercedes to the Father on behalf of all people. Our prayer and growth in the spiritual life is assisted by the witness and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints on our behalf.

69 Ex 20:2-17; Dt 5:6-21; CCC, no. 2052.

70 Mt 5-7.

71 Mt 5:3-12; CCC, no. 1716.

72 NDC, no. 29 F. For a detailed list of formulations that should be learned by heart, please see NDC, p. 103.

“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 human beings.”⁷³

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

Doctrinally and Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis in General

This section will provide more specific guidance for doctrinally and pastorally sound catechesis for each of the sacraments in light of the preceding eight principles. After an introduction, each sacrament will be treated individually.

Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation and are the foundations of Christian life. Baptism, the first of the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, as it initiates the person into Trinitarian life and incorporates one into the Church as a child of God. Baptism cleanses the soul of Original Sin and imparts sanctifying grace to the baptized.⁷⁴ Confirmation more perfectly binds one to the Church. It increases and deepens baptismal grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that the individual can serve the Church’s evangelizing mission and become a Christian steward.⁷⁵ The Eucharist is the principal celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the source and summit of all ecclesial life. The Real Presence of Christ is made present through the conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.⁷⁶

The Sacraments of Healing are Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation grants the penitent pardon through God’s mercy for sins committed after Baptism, reconciles the penitent to God and the Church, and grants the grace to live a renewed life in Christ Jesus.⁷⁷ The Anointing of the Sick unites the sick with the suffering of Christ, giving them strength, peace, and courage to endure illness and death. This sacrament also forgives sins, restores health, and prepares one for eternal life.⁷⁸

Holy Orders and Matrimony are the Sacraments at the Service of Communion. Holy Orders configures a man to Christ. The sacrament imparts to the cleric the triple *munera* of teaching, sanctifying, and governing so that he can serve the People of God in the person of Christ, the Head and Shepherd.⁷⁹ Instituted by Christ, the Sacrament of Matrimony is between a baptized man and a baptized woman. Matrimony is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children.⁸⁰

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer an indelible “sacramental character or ‘seal’ by which the Christian shares in Christ’s priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. . . . These sacraments can never be repeated.”⁸¹

73 Blessed John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation On Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)* (Washington, DC: LEV-USCCB, 1979), no. 23.

74 See CCC, nos. 1212, 1239-1242, 1257, 1263-1267; see also USCCA, Chapter 15.

75 See CCC, nos. 1285, 1302-1303; see also USCCA, Chapter 16.

76 See CCC, nos. 1324-1327, 1375-1381; see also USCCA, Chapter 17.

77 See CCC, nos. 1422-1424, 1443-1445; see also USCCA, Chapter 18.

78 See CCC, nos. 1500-1505, 1520-1523; see also USCCA, Chapter 19.

79 See CCC, nos. 1581-1584, 1592; see also USCCA, Chapter 20.

80 See CCC, nos. 1601-1605; see also USCCA, Chapter 21.

81 CCC, no. 1121: “The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental character or ‘seal’ by which the Christian shares in Christ’s priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible; it remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church. Therefore these sacraments can never be repeated.”

In addition to ensuring that catechesis is doctrinally sound, catechists must also attend to a pastorally sound mode of presentation. Like all catechesis, sacramental catechesis

“is radically inspired by the pedagogy of God, as displayed in Christ and in the Church.” . . . The methods employed by catechesis aim to harmonize the personal adherence of the believer to God, on the one hand, and to the content of the Christian message, on the other. Catechesis attends to the development of all the dimensions of the faith: as it is known, as it is celebrated, as it is lived, and as it is prayed. It seeks to bring about a conversion to Christ that leads to a profession of faith in the Triune God and to a genuine personal surrender to him. It helps believers to become disciples and to discern the vocation to which God is calling them.⁸²

This divine pedagogy, in the words of the *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC), does the following:

- Emphasizes God’s loving initiative and the person’s free response
- Accepts the progressive nature of Revelation, the transcendence and mysterious nature of the Word of God, and the word’s adaptation to different persons and cultures
- Recognizes the centrality of Jesus Christ
- Values the community experience of faith
- Is rooted in interpersonal relations and makes its own the process of dialogue
- Utilizes signs, which link words and deeds, teaching and experience
- Draws its power of truth, and its task to bear witness to the truth, from the Holy Spirit⁸³

With divine pedagogy as the paradigm and reference point, the catechist should call on a variety of methods responsive to the individual’s age, intellectual development, and ecclesial and

spiritual maturity to serve the primary object of evangelization and conversion to Jesus Christ. These methods include learning (1) through human experience, (2) by discipleship, (3) within the Christian community, (4) within the Christian family, (5) through the witness of the catechist, (6) by heart, (7) by making a commitment to live the Christian life, and (8) by apprenticeship.⁸⁴

Sacramental catechesis is both preparatory and a lifelong process. Preparatory catechetical programs prepare the faithful to receive the sacraments worthily and are the foundation for a lifelong faith formation. Sacramental catechesis must not only be doctrinally sound and imbue the faithful with the living faith,⁸⁵ but must be geared in content and method to meet the unique learning needs of individuals.⁸⁶ Faith formation that integrates knowledge of Church doctrine with witness to the faith enables the faithful to become the “salt of the earth.”⁸⁷

A pastorally sound catechesis primarily aims to lead recipients to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and a desire to give their lives over to him. Again in the words of the NDC, it

- Integrates knowledge of the faith with living the faith
- Is . . . Trinitarian and centers on initiation into the life of the Triune God
- Presents Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit
- Is appropriate to the age level, maturity, and circumstances of those being catechized
- Is intended for all members of the Christian community, takes place within the community, and involves the whole community of faith

82 NDC, no. 28 B.

83 NDC, no. 28 B.

84 See NDC, no. 29.

85 NDC, nos. 33, 35 B.

86 See *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities*, no. 25.

87 Mt 5:13-16. To explore the parish’s role in this process, see *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1993).

- Involves parents in the preparation of their children for the sacraments
- Is integrated into a comprehensive catechetical program
- Focuses primarily on the symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each sacrament
- Enables the believer to reflect on the meaning of the sacrament received by implementing a thorough experience of *mystagogia* following the celebration⁸⁸
- Chooses texts from those found to be in conformity with the *Catechism* and from those that provide bilingual translations

General Principles for the Sacraments of Initiation

Both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the NDC cite the catechumenate formation envisioned by the Church as a paradigm for good catechesis.⁸⁹ Why is this? The NDC says that the catechumenate formation

- Summons the catechumen to profess faith in the person of Jesus Christ from the heart, to follow him faithfully, and to become his disciple
- Recognizes that Christian initiation is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life and so should include more than instruction
- Presents a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith so that the catechumen or candidate can enter deeply into the mystery of Christ
- Incorporates the catechumen into the life of the Christian community, which confesses, celebrates, and bears courageous witness to the faith of Jesus Christ
- Includes instruction on the rites of Christian initiation, their basic symbols and forms, and the offices and ministries at work in them⁹⁰

88 NDC, no. 35 B.

89 See GDC, no. 90, and NDC, no. 35 D.

90 NDC, no. 36 A.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides that

- Adults and children who have reached the age of reason and are seeking the Sacraments of Initiation are invited to participate in the baptismal catechumenate⁹¹
- Parish formation processes include four stages and the rituals that mark those stages
- Parish formation processes are characterized by a gradual conversion process, ample use of the Scriptures, systematic and comprehensive catechesis, prayer and ritual celebrations often celebrated within the parish weekend liturgy, and involvement of the parish community in prayer, support, and witness on behalf of the catechumens and candidates⁹²
- The pastor and/or parish RCIA leader usually meets early in the process with each inquirer to answer questions and to determine whether canonical impediments exist
- Parishes normally employ a team approach with a RCIA director, catechists, and other team members⁹³
- The pastor and/or parish RCIA leader provides an orientation for sponsors⁹⁴
- Sponsors attend the catechetical sessions and the prayer and ritual celebrations, and they serve as mentors throughout the process. Sponsors may accompany an inquirer to the parish RCIA inquiry meetings.⁹⁵
- From the time when inquirers are accepted into the catechumenate, parishes dismiss the catechumens after the Gospel is proclaimed to allow them to break open the Word⁹⁶
- Many parishes provide for a catechetical session and a “breaking open the Word” session each week⁹⁷

91 See NDC, no. 36 A. See also *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), Study Edition (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), Appendix III, no. 18.

92 See RCIA, no. 9. See also NDC, no. 35 D.

93 See RCIA, nos. 9-16.

94 See RCIA, nos. 10-11.

95 RCIA, nos. 10-11, 75.2.

96 RCIA, nos. 47, 67, 75.3.

97 See RCIA, nos. 75.1, 3.

- Some parishes maintain a year-round inquiry period⁹⁸
- Primary resources used are the Bible, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- During the Easter Vigil, parishes welcome their catechumens and, through the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, the candidates receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion⁹⁹
- Baptized Christian candidates (adults or children of catechetical age) preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church should make a sacramental confession of sins beforehand¹⁰⁰
- Children of catechetical age enrolled in the RCIA, like adult catechumens, are provided catechesis and specific opportunity to celebrate first Penance after full initiation
- Parishes gather the neophytes periodically after Sunday Mass until Pentecost for mystagogia¹⁰¹
- Some parishes welcome the neophytes back for an anniversary Mass¹⁰²

The next section will offer specific guidance for developing sacramental catechesis that is both doctrinally and pastorally sound.

Baptism

A Doctrinally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Baptism

- Baptism is the foundation of the Christian way of life and incorporates one into the Church as a son or daughter of God¹⁰³ (CCC, no. 1267; USCCA, 193; CIC, c. 849; CCEO, c. 675).
- Baptism is the first Sacrament and, together with the Sacraments of Confirmation/Chrismation and the Eucharist, it forms the Sacraments of Initiation (CCC, no. 1212; USCCA, 183).
- Baptism is necessary for salvation (CCC, no. 1257; USCCA, 183-184, 187; CIC, c. 849).
- Baptism initiates the recipient into Trinitarian life as witnessed to in the baptismal formula (CCC, nos. 1239-1242, 1256; USCCA, 186, 188).
- The ordinary minister of the sacrament is a bishop, priest, or deacon in the Latin Catholic Church; in the Eastern Catholic Churches the ordinary minister is the bishop or priest. However, in the case of necessity, any person intending to baptize as the Church does can baptize. The minister of Baptism confers the sacrament by the washing of true water while pronouncing the proper formula (CCC, nos. 1246, 1256; USCCA, 186, 188-189; CIC, cc. 849, 854, 861; CCEO, cc. 677, 679).
- Baptism can be conferred only once on the unbaptized, regardless of one's age. Children have been baptized since the earliest days of the Church, because the grace of the sacrament does not presuppose any human merit. The Church places her trust in God's mercy for children who have died before Baptism (CCC, nos. 1246, 1250-1252, 1261; USCCA, 188-192).
- Catechumens, through a Baptism of desire and repentance of their sins, can be saved (CCC, no. 1259).
- Catechumens and those who have not heard the Gospel but who seek God sincerely can be saved even if they have not been baptized, if they seek the truth and do the will of God in accordance with their understanding of it (CCC, nos. 1258-1260; USCCA, 192).
- Baptism imparts sanctifying grace (grace of justification), bestowing on the baptized the theological and moral virtues and granting them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As with each of the sacraments, Baptism confers a unique "sacramental grace" (CCC, nos. 1266, 2003; USCCA, 195-197).

98 See RCIA, nos. 4-5.

99 See RCIA, nos. 8, 17, 207.

100 See RCIA, no. 482; see also Appendix III, nos. 27, 36.

101 See RCIA, nos. 244-248; Appendix III, nos. 22-24.

102 See RCIA, nos. 249-251.

103 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for Baptism include Gn 1-2, Gn 7; Ex 14; Mt 3:1-12, 3:13-17; 28:19-20; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:22-34; 3:1-15; Acts 2:37-41; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 12:13.

- Baptism cleanses one of Original Sin and all personal sins and marks one with an indelible character on the soul (CCC, nos. 1263-1264, 1272-1274; USCCA, 192, 194-195).
- Through Baptism one is incorporated into the Church and therefore obtains the right and duty to proclaim the Good News of Christ through the *ad gentes* mission of the Church, according to one's proper state in life (CCC, nos. 1267, 1270; USCCA, 193, 195-197).
- In-depth catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rite, including teaching on the baptismal formula: "N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," or in the Eastern Catholic Churches, "The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, nos. 1234-1245; USCCA, 184-187).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Baptism

- The baptismal catechesis for parents and godparents is as outlined in the NDC.¹⁰⁴
- The parish provides catechesis to parents and godparents preparing for the Baptism of infants.
- The parish welcomes the newly baptized and their families into the community.
- Parish catechesis on the sacrament should teach that by reason of their Baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God and have the same divine calling to holiness of life.
- Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring Baptism.¹⁰⁵
- Parishes involve parents and children in parish life after infant Baptism.
- Godparents understand their role in the life of the baptized.

104 NDC, no. 36 A 1.

105 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, nos. 12, para 1, and 13, para 9.

Confirmation/Chrismation

A Doctrinally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Confirmation/Chrismation

- The Sacrament of Confirmation/Chrismation more perfectly binds the baptized to the Church and enriches each person with special strength of the Holy Spirit so that the individual can be a true witness to Christ¹⁰⁶ (LG, no. 11; CCC, no. 1285; USCCA, 207-209; CIC, c. 879; CCEO, c. 692).
- The ordinary minister of the sacrament is a bishop in the Latin Catholic Church and a priest in the Eastern Catholic Churches (CCC, nos. 1312-1313; CIC, c. 882; CCEO, c. 694). In the Eastern Catholic Churches, Chrismation is conferred immediately at Baptism, and some also offer reception of the Holy Eucharist (CCC, no. 1233; USCCA, 206; CCEO, cc. 695, 697).
- Those preparing for Confirmation in the Latin Church, who have the use of reason, must be able to renew the baptismal promises, be in a state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to assume the role of disciple (CCC, nos. 1306-1310; USCCA, 208; CIC, c. 889 §2).
- Confirmation/Chrismation increases and deepens one's baptismal grace (CCC, no. 1303; USCCA, 207).
- Confirmation/Chrismation marks one with an indelible character on the soul (CCC, nos. 1304-1305; USCCA, 208).
- Confirmation/Chrismation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit (CCC, no. 1303; USCCA, 207).
- Confirmation/Chrismation increases in the confirmed the gifts of the Holy Spirit (CCC, nos. 1302-1303; USCCA, 207-209).
- Confirmation/Chrismation strengthens one's bond with the Church to enable the confirmed/chrismated to serve the Church's *ad*

106 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for Confirmation/Chrismation include Is 11:2; Jn 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 8:14-17.

gentes mission and become Christian stewards (CCC, no. 1303; USCCA, 207).

- Catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the Rite, including emphasis on the anointing of Sacred Chrism/Holy Myron, the imposition of hands, and the words, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” This catechesis should also include catechesis on the Eastern Catholic Churches’ practice of anointing with Holy Myron the more significant parts of the body (forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet) with the formula, “The Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Some Eastern Churches also give the Eucharist to infants just after Baptism and Chrismation (CCC, nos. 1293-1301; USCCA, 204-206).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Confirmation/Chrismation

- Confirmation catechesis for children and young people is as outlined in the NDC.¹⁰⁷
- The Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin Rite dioceses in the United States shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop, and in accord with USCCB complementary norms.
- Children of catechetical age, being prepared for reception into full communion of the Catholic Church, who have already received Baptism, but not Eucharist or Confirmation, are appropriately part of the RCIA process as candidates for full initiation. They should be prepared for full initiation with the older candidates through reception of Confirmation and Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration, whether at the Easter Vigil or, if necessary, at some other time.¹⁰⁸
- “Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian to receive the sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time.”¹⁰⁹

107 NDC, no. 36 A 2.

108 See RCIA Statutes 14, 18-19; see also CIC, c. 852 §1.

109 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with*

- Catechesis for adults preparing for Confirmation follows the pattern recommended in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
- Programs include a catechetical focus on the relationship between Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation.
- Programs provide catechesis on and opportunities to celebrate¹¹⁰ the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance for all candidates.
- Programs emphasize a call to discipleship, active witness, and stewardship. Preparation for this sacrament therefore calls for a sound teaching on the meaning of the sacrament, including (1) a catechesis on the increase (*augmentum*) of the activity of the Holy Spirit in this sacrament, (2) the strengthening (*robur*) that the Holy Spirit gives to witness to the faith in the midst of criticism or opposition, and (3) the call to stewardship that flows from the Spirit’s activity, inviting a person to share his or her time, talent, and treasure in service of the Church.
- Programs include a community service component.
- Programs include a retreat experience.

The Eucharist

A Doctrinally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on the Eucharist

- “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and ‘the work of our redemption is carried out.’”¹¹¹
- The Eucharistic mystery is a memorial of Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection, a sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet, and a pledge of future glory¹¹² (CCC, nos. 1341-1344, 1362-

Persons with Disabilities, no. 16.

110 CCC, no. 1310.

111 Blessed John Paul II, *On the Eucharist (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003), no. 11.

112 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis

1372; USCCA, 220-222; CIC, c. 897; CCEO, c. 698).

- The Mass or the Divine Liturgy is the principal celebration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ and is the source and summit of all ecclesial life. The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. "Sunday is the day on which the Paschal Mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church" (CCC, nos. 1324-1327; USCCA, 224; CIC, c. 1246).
- The Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ made present through the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood is transubstantiation (CCC, nos. 1373-1381; USCCA, 223-224).¹¹³
- Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant, acting through the ministry of the priest, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Only a validly ordained priest can preside at the Eucharistic sacrifice and consecrate the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ (CCC, nos. 1410-1411; USCCA, 228; CIC, c. 900; CCEO, c. 699).
- The first of the precepts of the Church obliges the faithful to attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor (CCC, no. 2042; CIC, cc. 1246-1248; CCEO, cc. 880 §3, 881).
- During the celebration of Mass or the Divine Liturgy, any baptized Catholic who is in the state of grace and desires to receive Christ in the Eucharist is encouraged to receive Holy Communion. The faithful are obliged by the Church to celebrate the Eucharist and receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter

season¹¹⁴ (CCC, nos. 1385-1387; USCCA, 222; CIC, cc. 912, 920; CCEO, cc. 708, 712).

- The Eucharist effects and strengthens the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ (CCC, nos. 1396-1401; USCCA, 224-225).
- The Eucharist commits us to the poor (CCC, no. 1397; USCCA, 229).
- The Eucharist is a source of communion with the Trinity, forgives venial sins, and helps one avoid mortal sin (CCC, nos. 1393-1395; USCCA, 223-225).
- Catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rite. This catechesis emphasizes the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It includes thanksgiving to God the Father; the re-presentation in sacrament of the sacrificial self-offering of the Son; transubstantiation; and participation in the liturgical banquet by receiving the Lord's Body and Blood. These elements constitute one single act of worship (CCC, nos. 1345-1355, 1408; USCCA, 217-220).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on the Eucharist

- General catechesis for the Sacrament of the Eucharist is as outlined in the NDC.¹¹⁵
- Catechesis for children's first reception of the Eucharist is also outlined in the NDC.¹¹⁶
- Catechesis on the Eucharist is done following and distinct from catechesis for Reconciliation and Penance.
- Children being prepared for First Communion and their families are directed to attend Mass weekly and on holy days of obligation, and to pray daily.
- Catechesis includes an explanation of the parts and responses of the Mass to allow for full and active participation.

for the Eucharist include Gn 14:13-21; Ex 12; Dt 8:3; Mt 14:13-21; 26:26-29; Mk 6:34-44; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 9:10-17; 22:14-20; Jn 2:1-11; 6:1-58; Jn 13:1-17; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:23-26.

113 See also Pope Paul VI, *On the Holy Eucharist (Mysterium Fidei)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1965), nos. 35-39, 59.

114 For more information about worthy reception of the Eucharist, please see the USCCB document *Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist* at old.usccb.org/doctrine/Eucharist.pdf; see also USCCA, 231-232.

115 NDC, no. 36 A 3.

116 NDC, no. 36 A 3a.

- The celebration of First Communion is an opportunity to catechize the whole community on the sacrament and to invite all to regular reception of the Eucharist.
- “The criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally.”¹¹⁷

Penance and Reconciliation

A Doctrinally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Penance and Reconciliation

- Reconciliation with God is part of the plan of salvation. Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation—also called the sacrament of conversion and confession—the penitent obtains pardon for sins committed after Baptism through God’s mercy¹¹⁸ (LG, no. 11; CCC, nos. 1422-1424; USCCA, 235-236; CIC, c. 959; CCEO, c. 718).
- The sacrament consists of repentance (including contrition for sins and a firm purpose to sin no more in the future), confession, absolution, and reparation or satisfaction (CCC, nos. 1450-1460; USCCA, 237-240).
- Repentance of one’s sins arising from an act of perfect love of God is called perfect contrition, while repentance founded in other motives is called imperfect contrition (CCC, no. 1492; USCCA, 237-238).
- The bishop and the priest are the ministers of the sacrament (CCC, nos. 1461-1467).
- All members of the Christian faithful may seek absolution from a minister of their choosing.
- The faithful are obliged to confess all grave (mortal) sins at least once a year after a careful

examination of one’s conscience, before receiving Holy Communion (CCC, nos. 1456-1457).

- Confession of one’s venial sins helps in the formation of one’s conscience, combats against evil tendencies, allows one to be healed by Christ, the Divine Physician, and allows one to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit (CCC, nos. 1457-1458; USCCA, 238; CIC, cc. 988-989; CCEO, c. 719).
- Penance and Reconciliation allows one to heed Christ’s call to conversion and penance and strengthens the penitent to resist concupiscence (CCC, nos. 1425-1433; USCCA, 236-237).
- The sacrament reconciles the penitent with the Church (CCC, nos. 1443-1445, 1469; USCCA, 242-243).
- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation offers the penitent remission of eternal punishment from his or her sins, along with remission, in part, of temporal punishments, and restores one’s intimate friendship with God (CCC, nos. 1468-1470, 1496; USCCA, 242-243).
- Integral confession of grave sins is necessary for absolution (CCC, no. 1484).
- Catechesis should include the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rites, and should state that the ordinary celebration of the Sacrament is individual confession (CCC, nos. 1480-1483; USCCA, 237-240).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Penance and Reconciliation

- General catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is as outlined in the NDC.¹¹⁹
- Catechesis for children’s first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is also as outlined in the NDC.¹²⁰
- Parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation.¹²¹

117 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, no. 20.

118 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for Penance and Reconciliation include Mt 6:9-15; 16:19; 18:18; Mk 2:1-12; 7:14-23; Lk 15; Jn 8:1-11; 20:22-23; 2 Cor 5:16-21.

119 NDC, no. 36 B 1.

120 NDC, no. 36 B 2.

121 NDC, no. 36 3b-2.

- “Readiness for reception includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and an understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion.”¹²²
- Sacramental absolution may be received by those whose disability may limit their ability to describe their sin precisely in words as long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed acts that are sinful to some degree. Catholics who are deaf can confess in sign language and use an interpreter if necessary, or in writing. They should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication.¹²³
- “In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist.”¹²⁴ When an adult candidate for full communion is seeking reception into the Church, the candidate must receive Penance and Reconciliation prior to first reception of the Eucharist.¹²⁵
- Catechesis is provided prior to and distinct from catechesis on the Eucharist.
- Parishes often use a penance service format with individual confessions afterwards.
- Parents are encouraged to receive the sacrament.
- During Advent and Lent, many dioceses coordinate with their pastors and confessors to provide regular weekly times for celebration of the sacrament. These are opportune times to catechize on the sacrament.

122 NDC, no. 36 3b-2.

123 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, nos. 22-25.

124 CCC, no. 1457; NDC, no. 36 3b-2.

125 See RCIA Statutes, 482.

Anointing of the Sick

A Doctrinally Sound Catechesis on Anointing of the Sick

- Anointing of the Sick commends the faithful who are seriously ill to the suffering and glorified Lord so that he may relieve and save them. The sacrament aids the recipient to address human suffering, sickness, aging, and death in light of the Christian faith¹²⁶ (LG, no. 11; CCC, nos. 1500-1501, 1503-1505; USCCA, 251-253; CIC, c. 998; CCEO, c. 737).
- The Church offers preparation of the faithful for death through Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum. Faithful to Christ’s command to “heal the sick,” the Church offers to those who are about to leave earthly life the Eucharist as *Viaticum*, the Body and Blood of Christ, that goes “on the way with” or accompanies the dying person as he or she passes from this life to the next (CCC, nos. 1523-1525; USCCA, 254).
- Those preparing for surgery, the infirm, the elderly, seriously ill children who have reached the use of reason, and those who have previously received the sacrament but whose condition worsens, should seek the sacrament (SC, no. 73; CCC, nos. 1514-1515; USCCA, 253-254).
- A priest or bishop is the minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In some Eastern Catholic Churches, the custom is for several priests to administer the sacrament (CCC, no. 1516; USCCA, 253, 255; CCEO, c. 737 §2).
- As the ritual indicates, those recipients of this sacrament who are conscious of serious sin should ordinarily receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation before being anointed (CCC, nos. 1456-1457, 1517-1525).
- The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick unites one to the suffering of Christ, gives one

126 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick include Is 33:24; Mk 1:41; 6:12-13; 6:56; 16:17-18; Rom 8:17; Jas 5:14-15.

the strength, peace, and courage to endure illness and death, forgives sins, restores health, and prepares one for eternal life (CCC, nos. 1520-1523, 1532; USCCA, 254).

- The Church encourages the Christian faithful to visit and care for the sick (CCC, nos. 1506-1510; USCCA, 256).
- Catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rites, including the anointing of the forehead and hands of the sick person (in the Roman Rite) or of other parts of the body (in the Eastern Catholic Churches, and as an option in the Roman Rite), accompanied by the liturgical prayer of the celebrant asking for the special grace of this sacrament (CCC, nos. 1531, 1517-1519; USCCA, 253-254).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on the Anointing of the Sick

- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is as outlined in the NDC.¹²⁷
- “Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful.”¹²⁸
- Catechesis on this sacrament highlights that Jesus is at work in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, touching our wounds in order to heal us and restoring us to communion with his Father in the Holy Spirit.¹²⁹
- In the Latin Church, the normative reference point for catechesis for the Anointing of the Sick is the *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing & Viaticum*.¹³⁰
- In some of the Eastern Churches, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is available to all the baptized on the Wednesday or Thursday

before Easter and on certain other occasions, such as in the context of a pilgrimage. In these Churches, the faithful are anointed according to the particular Eastern tradition.

- Catechesis on Viaticum should include careful instruction so that the faithful can arrange for Viaticum to be brought while the dying person is able to receive it.

Holy Orders

A Doctrinally Sound Catechesis on Holy Orders

- All members of the Christian faithful share in the common priesthood of Christ through Baptism¹³¹ (CCC, nos. 1546-1574; USCCA, 264-265).
- The ministerial priesthood, unlike the common priesthood, is conferred only on baptized men judged suitable for the exercise of the ministry by Church authority. It empowers the cleric with the triple *munera* of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (CCC, nos. 1548-1553, 1577, 1592; USCCA, 267-269, 271; CIC, cc. 1008, 1024; CCEO, cc. 743, 754).
- “The existence of a physical disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the order they receive.”¹³²
- Holy Orders consists of three degrees: the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate. Those ordained to one of the three degrees participate, each in their particular way, in

127 NDC, no. 36 B 3.

128 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, no. 28; cf. CIC, c. 1004.

129 See Jas 5:14-15.

130 See *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing & Viaticum* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1982).

131 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for Holy Orders include Gn 14:18; Ex 19:6; 29:1-30; Lv 8; Nm 1:48-53; Jos 13:33; Ps 110:4; Is 6:8; 61:6; Mt 16:18-19; 19:12; 28:19-20; Mk 3:14-19; Lk 6:12-16; Jn 21:15-17; Acts 14:22-23; 1 Cor 7:32; Eph 4:11; 1 Tm 2:5; 3:1-13; 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6-8; 4:2; Ti 1:5-9; Heb 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28.

132 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1995), no. 31; CIC, cc. 1029 and 1041 §1.

the triple *munera* of Christ (CCC, nos. 1536, 1554-1571; USCCA, 264-267; CIC, c. 1009; CCEO, c. 325).

- The bishop receives the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which integrates him into the episcopal college. As successors of the Apostles and members of the college, bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the pope, successor of St. Peter (CCC, nos. 1555-1561, 1594; USCCA, 265-266).
- Priests are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity and are called to be the bishops' prudent co-workers in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing of the Church (CCC, nos. 1562-1568, 1595; USCCA, 266).
- Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service in the Church, including ministry of the Word, of divine worship, of pastoral governance, and of the service of charity (CCC, nos. 1569-1571, 1596; USCCA, 266-267).
- "All the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, with the exception of permanent deacons, are normally chosen from among men of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain *celibate* 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'" (CCC, no. 1579). Priests and deacons ordained for the Eastern Catholic Churches are permitted to marry in their country of origin, and in the United States with special permission, before ordination (CCC, nos. 1579-1580; USCCA, 270-271; CIC, c. 1037; CCEO, c. 758 §3).
- In the case of ordination to the presbyterate or the diaconate, the minister of the sacrament is a consecrated bishop. In the case of ordination to the episcopate, a bishop should be ordained by three bishops, except in case of extreme necessity (CCC, nos. 1575-1576; USCCA, 267; CIC, cc. 1012, 1014; CCEO, cc. 744, 746 §1).
- Holy Orders configure a man to Christ and mark him with an indelible character (CCC, nos. 1581-1584; USCCA, 271).
- Catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rites, including the laying on of hands by a bishop on the

ordinand and the solemn consecratory prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (CCC, nos. 1572-1574; USCCA, 267).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Holy Orders

- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Holy Orders is as outlined in the NDC.¹³³
- Catechesis about the Sacrament of Holy Orders should be given to all members of the Christian community.
- Catechesis should teach that the whole Church is a priestly people and that through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ, the common priesthood of the faithful.
- Those who have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation/Chrismation, and the Eucharist share the vocation to holiness and to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations.
- Based on this common priesthood and ordered to its service, there exists another participation in the mission of Christ: the ministry conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders, where the task is to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community.
- Catechesis should teach that the ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful.
- It should teach that there are three degrees of the ordained ministry: that of bishops, that of priests, and that of deacons.
- The ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful both participate, each in its proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ.

133 NDC, no. 36 C 1.

Matrimony

A Doctrinally Sound Catechesis on Matrimony

- Instituted by Christ, the Sacrament of Matrimony is between a baptized man and a baptized woman and is brought about through the mutual exchange of consent before the Church¹³⁴ (CCC, nos. 1601-1605, 1625-1632; USCCA, 279-282; CIC, cc. 1055, 1057; CCEO, c. 776).
- The ministers of the sacrament in the Latin Catholic Church are the man and woman, while in the Eastern Catholic Churches the priest or bishop, but not a deacon, is the minister (CCC, nos. 1621-1623; USCCA, 282; CCEO, c. 828).
- “It is . . . appropriate for the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance” (CCC, no. 1622).
- Marriage is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children (CCC, nos. 1601, 1652-1654; USCCA, 283-285).
- Unity, indissolubility, and openness to procreation are essential to the sacrament. The practice of polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage, and divorce separates what God has joined together, while the refusal of fertility and a lack of openness to procreation turns married life away from the gift of children (CCC, nos. 1644-1651, 1664; USCCA, 283-285).
- The sacrament signifies the union of Christ and the Church, and the grace of the sacrament enables the couple to help one another to attain holiness (LG, no. 11; CCC, nos. 1641-1642; USCCA, 283-285).
- All persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage, including persons with a variety of disabling conditions. Pastors and other clergy are to decide cases on an individual basis in light of consultation with diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and canonical, medical, and other experts if needed.¹³⁵
- Pastors are obliged to offer formation to couples presenting themselves for marriage in the Church. Marriage preparation should normally include instruction on the meaning of Christian marriage, the rights and obligations of the vocation, and formation in natural family planning. Marriage preparation programs should also be attentive to the unique needs of ecumenical or interreligious marriages involving a Catholic (CCC, nos. 1632-1637, 1652-1654, 2366-2372; USCCA, 284, 289, 408-410; CIC, c. 1063; CCEO, c. 783).
- The Christian home is the place where children receive their first proclamation of the faith. For this reason, the family home is rightly called “the domestic church,” a community of grace and prayer, and a school of human virtues and of Christian charity (CCC, no. 1666).
- Catechesis should be offered on the words, gestures, signs, and symbols of the rites for marriages between Latin Catholics, including that the wedding is preferably celebrated within a Mass before a bishop, priest, or deacon, two witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful. Catechesis for marriages celebrated in the Eastern Catholic Churches should include that a wedding is always celebrated before a bishop or priest, but not a deacon, who witnesses to the mutual consent of the couple and confers the Church’s sacramental blessing (CCC, nos. 1621-1624, 1663; USCCA, 282; CIC, c. 1108).
- Additionally, catechesis on marriage should present the Church’s teaching on divorce and remarriage.¹³⁶
- Families affected by divorce should be treated with pastoral solicitude and welcomed into the parish (CCC, no. 1651; USCCA, 287).

134 References that prefigure or provide the scriptural basis for Matrimony include Gn 1:26-28; 2:7-8; 21-25; Mt 19:6, 8; Lk 6:12-16; Jn 2:1-11; 1 Cor 7:2-5, 12-16; Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:7-9.

135 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, nos. 35-39.

136 NDC, no. 36 C 2.

- Divorce does not prevent participation in the sacramental life of the Church. However, Catholics who are divorced and remarried without having obtained a declaration of nullity cannot receive Holy Communion (CCC, nos. 1649-1651, 1665; USCCA, 287-289).
- All Catholics who are divorced and remarried outside of the Church are encouraged to regularize their marriages, if possible, and ministers are to offer their assistance to them (CCC, nos. 1650-1651; USCCA, 288-289).

A Pastorally Sound Sacramental Catechesis on Matrimony

- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Matrimony is as outlined in the NDC.¹³⁷
- Many parishes make use of a pre-marital inventory.
- Couples are encouraged to participate in a marriage preparation program that systematically and comprehensively teaches couples about the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- Engaged couples are often paired with mentor couples.
- Couples are provided a catechesis on natural family planning (NFP) or are taught an NFP method.
- Nearly all dioceses include catechesis on the wedding liturgy.

“Liturgical 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, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries.’”¹³⁸

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS

This section will identify opportunities for offering sacramental catechesis and sharing helpful pastoral practices. There are many opportunities to provide sacramental catechesis in the parish. The task is to plan intentionally for such moments with a customized sacramental catechesis for each of the predictable occasions.¹³⁹

The Baptismal Catechumenate

As stated above, the baptismal catechumenate is characterized by a gradual process of conversion, ample use of the Scriptures, catechesis, prayer, and ritual celebrations often celebrated within the parish weekend liturgy. Since the Church’s life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.¹⁴⁰ While questions about the sacraments may surface throughout the process, a particular sacramental focus is provided for in the catechumenate and the mystagogical periods. The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* should be the primary resource for this catechesis. In the catechumenate, catechumens and candidates should receive systematic sacramental catechesis. In mystagogy, the neophytes and newly received reflect upon the experience of

137 NDC, no 36 C 2.

138 CCC, no. 1075.

139 Please feel free to use the suggested outline with USCCA and CCC references in this document as your resource for the homily or catechetical session.

140 RCIA Statutes, no. 75.4.

the initiation sacraments.¹⁴¹ The baptismal catechumenate provides a rich opportunity for sacramental catechesis.¹⁴²

The Liturgy as a Catechetical Moment

“Liturgy itself is inherently catechetical.”¹⁴³ The Sunday liturgy teaches and shapes the faith of the People of God through the proclamation of the Scriptures, the recitation of the Creed, the Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion.¹⁴⁴ The implementation of the revised translation of the *Roman Missal* provides another powerful moment for catechesis. As the faithful move through the liturgical year, they are invited to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ.¹⁴⁵ The Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery on Sunday, the Lord’s Day.¹⁴⁶ Diverse cultures offer graced opportunities to mark the special moments throughout the liturgical year, such as feasts of Our Lady and the saints. The liturgy is enhanced through sacred art, architecture, and music, which turn “human minds, hearts, and souls toward God.”¹⁴⁷ Some Eastern Churches portray the sacred images of Christ, the Mother of God, the saints, and the angels in Christian iconography. The Church building itself is “a sign and reminder of the immanence and transcendence of God.”¹⁴⁸ Care taken by liturgical presiders to teach the congregation about the liturgy enriches and invites their participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

141 See Pope Benedict XVI, *The Fathers* (Huntington, IN: *Our Sunday Visitor*, 2008). The Fathers of the Church gave great importance to preaching and teaching about the sacraments.

142 NDC, no. 35 D.

143 NDC, no. 33.

144 NDC, no. 33.

145 NDC, no. 37 A: “The Eastern Catholic Churches begin and end the liturgical year in accord with their particular traditions and follow the pattern of the Church year by means of their own particular lectionaries.”

146 NDC, no. 37 A: “In the Byzantine Liturgy, Sunday is called ‘the day that knows no evening.’”

147 NDC, no. 37 B 1.

148 *Built of Living Stones* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2000), no. 50.

Homilies at Mass and at Other Liturgical Celebrations

The homily at Sunday Mass or as part of sacramental celebrations is an ideal opportunity to provide initial and ongoing sacramental catechesis for the faithful. The homilist can use the homily to affirm and enhance the faithful’s understanding and deepen their experience of the words, signs, rituals, and symbols expressed in the liturgy. Baptisms, First Communion celebrations, Christmas, Easter, and other sacramental celebrations are opportunities to invite people back to the sacraments, to reach out to unengaged parishioners, or to call for a more active witness and commitment to service flowing from participation in the sacramental life.¹⁴⁹

Intercultural Parishes

Parishes should reach out to and make room for diverse cultural groups that share a single parish facility. They may have need of special sacramental ministry for members “on the move” and for the deaf community.¹⁵⁰ They will also have need of sacramental formation for the diverse groups of candidates, catechists, and other team members in their languages and traditions. The role of popular piety in the faith lives of many people and cultures¹⁵¹ can provide an opportunity for catechesis on prayer and the sacraments.

Family Catechesis

Parents are the first educators and most influential agents of catechesis for their children. Family catechesis takes place through words and especially through witness. Parents must be not only taught about the faith but invited to a full and active participation in the sacraments and life of the Church. “Adult catechesis, designed especially for parents,

149 *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 12-14.

150 For better understanding of people “on the move,” please see the Office of Cultural Diversity website at uscgb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/people-on-the-move.

151 NDC, no. 38 B.

also helps them nourish their own faith, as well as that of their children.”¹⁵²

Formation for Parish Ministry

Parish ministry requires a certain level of understanding and active participation in the sacraments. Besides those preparing to receive the sacraments, sacramental formation should be offered for catechists,¹⁵³ Catholic school teachers,¹⁵⁴ parents,¹⁵⁵ and godparents/sponsors¹⁵⁶ who are preparing for infant Baptism and/or for their child’s first sacrament reception. This formation should also be offered for those assisting with marriage preparation, as well as for parish evangelization teams, RCIA teams,¹⁵⁷ and those entrusted with preparing young adults for Confirmation. Lastly, formation would be helpful for those who do liturgical planning or who serve as music directors, musicians, cantors, choir members, ushers, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

Parish Outreach Ministries

Many parishes have some form of outreach to the sick and to homebound parishioners. Volunteers and those they serve will be enriched through a deepened understanding of the sacraments, especially the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick.

Sacramental Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities¹⁵⁸

Catechesis for Catholics with disabilities is as outlined in the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*.¹⁵⁹ Catholic

communities must identify, welcome, and serve the catechetical and sacramental needs, as well as call forth the gifts, of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities include those with physical, intellectual, emotional, and sensory disabilities. A broad array of resources and curriculum materials are available to assist persons with disabilities and their network of support in preparing for and celebrating the sacraments.¹⁶⁰

“Mixed Marriage” Couples

A special mention is in order for “mixed marriage” couples where one spouse is Catholic and the other Protestant, non-Christian, or without a faith community.¹⁶¹ It is estimated that more than one-third of couples approaching the Church for marriage today fit this profile.¹⁶² Homilists are advised to keep this in mind as they preach at Baptisms, First Communion, Confirmations, and marriages. Catechists also need to provide special catechetical assistance to support “mixed marriage” couples as they approach the Church to better understand the sacraments for themselves and for their children.¹⁶³

Outreach Through Media

Some parishes provide outreach and sacramental information through printed materials, parish websites, and social media. This enables the parish to touch the lives of those who do not or cannot frequent the church and to provide bridges of

152 NDC, no. 54 C.

153 NDC, nos. 54 B 8, 55 C-F.

154 NDC, nos. 54 B 9, 55 C-F.

155 NDC, no. 54 C.

156 NDC, no. 61 A 6.

157 NDC, no. 54 B 10.

158 See NDC, no. 49.

159 See *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with*

Persons with Disabilities and Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1978).

160 The USCCB offers a variety of such resources, including *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*, *Opening Doors of Welcome and Justice to Parishioners with Disabilities: A Parish Resource Guide*, and *Welcoming Parishioners with Disabilities*. See also the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (www.ncpd.org) for many more helpful resources and support.

161 See NDC, nos. 50-51.

162 PEW 2007 *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*; NDC, no. 13.

163 CCC, nos. 1633-1636.

information and connection between the parish and the larger community. This is also a means of reaching out to those who have felt rejected by the worshipping community, including some people with disabilities and their families, and inviting them back to the community and the sacraments.¹⁶⁴

164 See *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities*, no. 14. The statement offers remedies to welcome Catholics with disabilities and their families: “At the very least, we must undertake forms of evangelization that speak to the particular needs of individuals with disabilities, make those liturgical adaptations which promote their active participation and provide helpful services that reflect our loving concern.”

CONCLUSION

As we have seen in the Introduction, the Seven Sacraments continue the saving work of Jesus throughout time until he comes again, and they form the center of the celebration of the Christian mystery.

In part 1, an analysis of some secular challenges to sacramental catechesis and a decline in Catholic sacramental practice, especially among the last two generations, attested to the timeliness and necessity of providing a renewed emphasis on sacramental catechesis.

Part 2 provided concrete support of every Catholic's right and duty to receive doctrinally

sound sacramental catechesis and to celebrate the sacraments worthily. Among the resources provided were eight principles for all doctrinally sound catechesis, a detailed outline of doctrinally and pastorally sound sacramental catechesis for each of the Seven Sacraments, and opportunities for sacramental catechesis.

Confident in the continued inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we entrust the success of our renewed efforts on sacramental catechesis to the intercession of Mary, Star of Evangelization and Mother of the Church.

APPENDIX 1

SELECT RESOURCES ON SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS ON (ARCH)DIOCESAN AND EPARCHIAL WEBSITES

(Arch)diocesan websites provide rich resources for sacramental catechesis. Here are a few that have come to our attention. You are invited to do your own search for helpful ideas. For a complete list of all (arch)dioceses and eparchies in the United States, please visit www.usccb.org/about/bishops-and-dioceses/all-dioceses.cfm.

Archdiocese of Baltimore

www.archbalt.org/evangelization/elementary-sacramental/index.cfm

Archdiocese of Boston

www.bostoncatholic.org/Being-Catholic/Content.aspx?id=11344

Archdiocese of Chicago

www.catechesis-chicago.org/Resources/Some-CatholicBeliefsandPractices/tabid/7138/language/en-US/Default.aspx

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

www.catholiccincinnati.org/evangelization/SYP.pdf

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

www.archgh.org/Our-Programs/Education-and-Formation/CCE/Ministries/Sacramental-Preparation

Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux

www.htdiocese.org/SacramentalGuidelines/tabid/806/Default.aspx

Archdiocese of Los Angeles

www.la-archdiocese.org/org/ore/elementary/Documents/ElementaryGuidelinesRev081210.pdf (Elementary Guidelines Including Sacramental Guidelines)

www.la-archdiocese.org/org/ore/elementary/Documents/HomeschoolGuidelines.pdf (Homeschool Guidelines)

www.la-archdiocese.org/org/ore/elementary/Documents/Initiation_of_ChildrenGuidelines.pdf (Initiation of Children Guidelines)

Archdiocese of New York

www.nyfaithformation.org/resources/index.cfm?c=1390

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

archphila.org/evangelization/worship/guidelines/guidelines.htm

Diocese of Sacramento

www.diocese-sacramento.org/evangelization_catechesis/sacramental_guidelines.html

Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn

www.stmaron.org/marriage.html#top (Marriage Guidelines)

Archdiocese of Washington

site.adw.org/sacraments-of-initiation

Diocese of Paterson

www.patersondiocese.org/pdf/sacramentalpolicies-guidelines.pdf

Diocese of Pittsburgh

www.diopitt.org/sites/default/files/FaithEducation-Home.pdf (Pittsburgh Sacramental Guidelines for Home Schooling)

Archdiocese of Newark

www.rcan.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=category.display&category_id=96

Diocese of Richmond

www2.richmonddiocese.org/worship/docs/Guidelines_Sacraments_Persons_Disabilities.pdf

APPENDIX 2

SACRAMENTAL CATECHESIS

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Documents from Vatican Offices or Congregations

General Directory for Catechesis. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccclergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for-catechesis_en.html

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