

SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES



BISHOPRIC OF THE FORCES

2012

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These Guidelines are written:

- As a Pastoral Handbook for preparation for the Sacraments with reference material for chaplains, deacons and catechists.
- As a resource for discussion, formation, reflection and implementation of programmes used in the Catholic communities of the Bishopric.
- As support and with ideas for ongoing catechesis.
- As a support and affirmation of the vital role of parents.

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Abbreviations

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| CIC | The Code of Canon Law |
| CCC | Catechism of the Catholic Church |
| CCCC | Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church |
| RICA | Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults |
| GDC | General Directory for Catechesis |
| CT | <i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> |
| CL | <i>Christifideles Laici</i> |
| EN | <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> |

Message from Bishop Richard Moth



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our journey of life is a journey in faith and should be one of continued growth and deepening in our understanding of the call of the Gospel and our response to that call, lived out in the community of the Church.

The Sacraments are wonderful gifts to the Church and to each one of us as we make this journey. These moments of encounter with Father, Son and Spirit are life changing. They are sources of nourishment on our pilgrim way. Formation for the reception of the Sacraments forms a basis for formation that should be life-long.

These Guidelines provide a framework for the Catechetical provision within the Bishopric of Forces – the community in which Catholic Service Personnel and their families are nourished in faith and find support and friendship.

They provide a resource for chaplains and catechists in the formation of adults and in their support for parents, who are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.

As we journey together, may we grow together in faith and understanding that our witness to the love of God, both within and beyond the Armed Forces community, may be ever more effective.

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+Richard Moth'.

+Richard Moth
Bishop of the Forces

October 2012

Theological Reflection

Whenever we gather as the people of God, our sacramental celebrations follow the same pattern as that of the early church, namely to come together as a community, to listen to the Word of God, to share the experience of God's action in our lives and to depart aware of our calling to bring the Good News to others through the example of our lives and our duty to serve others in Christian charity. We celebrate the sacraments because through them God makes his presence felt. They are the moments when we are closest to Him in this life. At these times we recall all the wonderful things God has done for us and we experience His love. In our Catholic tradition we celebrate seven sacraments. We are all called to five of them, namely Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation and the Sacrament of the sick. We may be called to the other two, which are Matrimony and Holy Orders, but not necessarily so.

As Catholics serving in Her Majesty's Forces, we are a local church within the universal church of God. Our diocese does not have territorial boundaries as do most other dioceses throughout the world, for it exists wherever our service personnel and their dependants are stationed. As followers of Christ, we share the same experiences as our brothers and sisters wherever our faith is expressed, and celebrate the sacraments in the same way as they do, though sometimes in more challenging circumstances. It is worth noting the military connection with the word 'sacrament':

Originally, the word sacrament referred to the Roman custom of making an oath of allegiance. A soldier made his 'sacrament' or avowal of allegiance to pledge his service to the empire. The word never lost this meaning entirely, especially in reference to baptism, which was seen as a pledge of allegiance to Christ.¹

In Sacred Scripture, the word sacrament is translated as mystery. The sacraments are the 'mysteries of salvation', alluded to in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and exercised throughout the ages in the Church. They are efficacious signs of the Kingdom of God, meaning they bring about here and now the very things they are celebrating. The saving actions of Jesus are made present in these sacramental signs which assist the people of God to grow in holiness as they strive to accomplish all that God asks of them. As we travel along the road of building up God's kingdom, the sacraments mark significant moments in the journey of our lives:

Through **Baptism** we become members of the Christian community. Our parents or guardians may have professed our faith on our behalf while we were infants, or we may have made a more mature personal declaration of faith later in life. At the moment of baptism, life changed for us forever, for we were reborn, dying to our old selves and rising to new life in Christ.

Confirmation completes the rite of Baptism through anointing with the oil of Chrism and the laying on of hands. This shows that we belong to God. In the Confirmation rite we hear the words, 'Be sealed with the gift of Holy Spirit'. In the time of Jesus, soldiers were marked with their leader's seal. Confirmation makes us soldiers for Christ, strengthened by the Holy Spirit which has been poured out upon us, as it was upon the disciples at Pentecost.

The sacrament of **Reconciliation** allows us to make a new start on our spiritual journey, by having our sins forgiven. By expressing our remorse and affirming our determination not to sin again, we experience the healing love of Christ who wipes all our sins away. The mercy of God restores us to our full dignity as his children.

¹ William J Bausch, "A New Look at the Sacraments", Fowler Wright Books Ltd, Leominster, 1983, p 3.

In the **Eucharist**, we receive God's greatest gift to us, namely Himself, under the appearance of bread and wine. The word 'Eucharist' is Greek and means to give thanks. We marvel at a love so great that Jesus gave up His life for us. Our response to this is to make receiving Our Lord's body and blood in Holy Communion a priority in our lives. In this we make our home in Him as He makes His home in us.

Marriage is the sacrament of the love a couple have for each other, which is expressed in an exclusive and lifelong promise of fidelity to God and one another. The requirements such a union make on us cannot be overstated. As Bernard Haering reminds us:

To promise before God and before men faithful conjugal love 'for better and for worse' is a great venture that demands superhuman courage and trust in young people, especially in this testing age.²

Nowhere is the commitment to marriage under greater pressure than in the Armed Forces, where prolonged separation on the one hand and personnel serving in dangerous locations on the other, present added stress.

The Sacrament of **Holy Orders** provides a threefold ministry to the Church, namely that of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.

- Our bishop is appointed to unify our diocese and have oversight of it. We are all entrusted to his leadership and he in turn blesses and instructs us.
- The Priests of our diocese serve the Navy, Army and Air Force wherever its personnel are deployed. They exercise leadership in the communities to which they have been appointed through pastoral care, preaching and the administration of the sacraments.
- The deacons help our bishop and his priests through the ministry of charity³ by assisting them at Mass, and share in their pastoral work through preaching, proclaiming the Gospel, ministering at weddings and baptisms.

Through the **Sacrament of the Sick**, those whose health is impaired by sickness, old age or injuries, experience healing and comfort in mind and in body. For those facing danger of death through deployment in conflict zones, this sacrament can both reassure them of the presence of God and bring deep comfort.

Recalling that the sacraments are vows of allegiance to Christ, in the same way that the Roman soldier of old pledged his service to the empire, we engage with the guidelines which follow, to ensure the best practice of these signs of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. God's plan is that humankind should be saved from sin and death, enter into fellowship with each other and enjoy eternal salvation. Our celebration of the sacraments means that we already experience these effects in our lives. God comes to meet us every day of our lives. May we continue to grow in this knowledge, in gratitude that through the celebration of the sacraments God is with us always, assuring us of His love and helping us to grow in love of Him and each other.

² Bernard Häring, "The Sacraments in a Secular Age", St Paul Publications, Slough, 1976, p 146.

³ Acts 6:2-3.

Introduction – The Sacraments

**The Sacraments,
instituted by Christ
and entrusted to the Church,
are efficacious signs of grace
perceptible to the senses.
Through them divine life is bestowed upon us.**
CCCC 224

1. These Guidelines are offered to assist all those who are involved in preparing people of all ages and abilities for the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Communion and Confirmation. While providing a framework which indicates the principles and approaches that are suggested by good practice, it is hoped that these guidelines are flexible enough to suit the varied situation across the Bishopric and the needs and resources that are available. They will need to be adapted to assist military personnel in a context where flexibility is required.
2. The aim of this document is to give some indication of the scriptural and doctrinal essentials which are elements that should form part of the catechesis for the sacraments and to link these to both the liturgical celebration and the living out of the sacraments in the challenges of daily life within the context that is, in many ways, particular to the Military community. We are obliged to educate people **to** faith and **in** faith.
3. Faith formation and preparation for sacraments in the military setting take place in a variety of contexts: in the home; in those communities where there are churches – and where there are not; in the wider Catholic community (including the Catholic school); with chaplains; with catechists; at training establishments; on operations where little time is available for the formation required. Some may have grown up with little experience of the Church's life, or may have drifted away from the practice of their faith and returned to it through the ministry of their chaplain or experience on operations. There will be occasions where a course must be run on an individual basis, where the composition of a bigger group is impractical.
4. Preparation for sacraments is an opportunity not only for evangelisation and catechesis for children and adults. It is an opportunity for parents too and for all members of the Catholic community. Parents need to be affirmed and supported in their role as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.

**Ideally we are in the process of maturing existing
faith, but we “must allow for the fact that the
initial evangelisation has often not taken place”**
CT19

5. The Code of Canon Law does not lay down any set programmes or courses for catechesis, recognising that families and communities vary, as do the resources available to them. However, it establishes the important principle of provision of adequate catechesis for the sacraments and that those seeking to receive sacraments should be **properly disposed**. (CIC 843)

All the baptized are called by God to mature faith and have the right to sufficient catechesis.

GDC 167

6. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us of the four pillars of our faith; namely that it is something which is **believed, celebrated, lived** and **prayed**. These pillars stand together, supporting and complementing each other. (CCC 13)
7. We have the rich resources of scripture, doctrine, liturgy and life experience as expressions of the four pillars on which our faith is built. The life experience gained in the military setting brings particular strengths and challenges to the journey of faith. Our task is to respect the different stages where people are and to help them as they take the next steps on their faith journey.
8. Catechesis needs to be **adapted** to the age, ability, language, culture and condition of the people to whom it is addressed. (GDC 170) The particular circumstances of the military setting must be taken into account, particularly when time is short – on operations and in training establishments, for instance.
9. There are seven sacraments which strengthen and sustain us on our lifelong journey of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church groups them as three **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion), two **Sacraments of Healing** (Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick) and two **Sacraments at the Service of the Community** (Holy Orders, Matrimony).
10. Many will be familiar with the 'Penny Catechism' definition of a sacrament: "A sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls." In the gift of grace we encounter God's love freely offered to us.
11. A sacrament is a sacred sign by which we worship God, his love is revealed to us and his saving work accomplished in us. In the sacraments God shows us what He does and does what He shows us.

Adaptation is realised in accordance with the diverse circumstances in which the word of God is transmitted.

These are determined by differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial conditions amongst all of those to whom it is addressed.

GDC 170, CCC 24

12. A sacrament always celebrates the presence of Christ our Risen Lord – with us and for us. In the sacraments of the Church we are offered a personal encounter with Christ himself. Through the sacraments we are put not only in mind of Christ but in living touch with Christ, indeed in intimacy with Christ and formed as his disciples.

13. The sacraments are always God's loving initiative and God's gift to us. They invite our free and loving response. They are gifts to celebrate, to be unwrapped and to be lived out. Sacraments reveal but they also conceal. Human words, even human signs, can never exhaust the mystery of God. There is always more than meets the eye, always more for us to discover.

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ.

CT 5 GDC 80

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

14. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (**RCIA**) is the normative way for **adults** to be welcomed into the Catholic Church through Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. It has also been adapted to welcome those already baptised as Christians into the **full communion** of the Catholic Church.
15. Becoming and being a Christian is a journey that takes place within the pilgrim community of the faithful. This pilgrim community of the faithful exists as much in the military context as in any other. Indeed, this process of welcome, evangelisation and catechesis is sometimes usefully called 'Journey in Faith' rather than RCIA.
16. The Rite of Christian Initiation reminds us that faith is a journey which takes place in four distinct stages, marked by liturgical rites and celebrations along the way:
- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Pre-Catechumenate | (seeking God's will) |
| Catechumenate | (Hearing God's word) |
| Purification and Enlightenment | (Pondering God's word) |
| Mystagogia | (Doing God's will) |
17. The baptismal catechumenate is "the inspiration for catechesis in the Church" and "the model of its catechising activity" (EN 44, GDC 90). In the case of adults, the catechising happens before the baptism. For children, the catechising takes place after baptism. In all cases catechesis is a gradual activity, since "good catechesis is always done in steps." (RCIA 19)
18. The model for adults can be used and adapted for all ages, abilities and circumstances. The need to respond to different circumstances is especially relevant in a military setting.

Christian initiation is accomplished by means of the sacraments which establish the foundations of Christian life. The faithful are born anew in Baptism, are strengthened by Confirmation and are then nourished by the Eucharist.

CCCC 251

BAPTISM



“As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.’”

Mt. 3: 16-17

The Gift of Baptism

19. The importance of Baptism should be clearly understood according to the Church’s teaching:

Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. It is validly conferred only by washing in real water with the proper form of words. CIC 849

Principles of Baptism

20. From earliest times, the Church has practised the baptism of all those in a household, including infants. The Code of Canon Law (CIC 869) encourages parents to take care that their children are baptised as soon as possible, preferably in the first weeks after birth.
21. For an infant to be baptised the Catholic Church requires there to be a well founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith. This must always be judged with pastoral sensitivity. If such a hope is truly lacking the baptism is to be deferred. (CIC 868)
22. The purpose of deferral is to help the parents to become more prepared to fulfil the promises they will make. There may be occasions in a military setting when the possibility of deferral will need to be balanced with other considerations, such as the mobility of service families. Any decision to defer must never be construed as refusal to baptise.
23. It is important to affirm the positive role that non-Catholic parents can and do play in supporting the baptism and Catholic upbringing of their child.

“Baptism creates a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it. But Baptism, of itself is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the fullness of life in Christ.”

John Paul II, May 1982 (cf. UR, n.22)

Baptism – Preparation

24. The Code of Canon Law presumes and requires preparation for baptism, but does not lay down any specific norms or programmes. Baptism preparation should be presented as a positive opportunity for all concerned and approached with pastoral sensitivity and love.

“The Celebration of Baptism should be properly prepared. Accordingly, the parents of a child who is to be baptised and those who are undertaking the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. The parish priest is to see to it that either he or others duly prepare the parents, by means of pastoral advice and indeed by praying together.”

CIC 815,2°

25. Parents who request baptism for their child will themselves be at different stages of faith. We need to meet people where they are, while at the same time helping them to move on in their faith. Tensions can arise for clergy and catechists when parents are diffident or weak in the practice of their faith. At the same time this can be a valuable pastoral opportunity to fan into a flame any spark of faith that exists.
26. The priest should ask for a copy of the Catholic parents' baptismal certificate so as to be clear who is undertaking the responsibility for the Catholic upbringing of the child.
27. The Code of Canon Law states that “as a rule and unless a just reason suggests otherwise, an adult is to be baptised in his or her proper parish church, and an infant in the proper parish church of the parents.” (CIC 857§2). In the military context, the equivalent to the parish church will be in the service church where the family is posted.
28. There may be legitimate reasons to hold the baptism in another place, e.g.: on board ship or on operations. In such a context the impact of the celebration can be especially profound and have a great impact on colleagues.

Baptism - Preparation

29. Where possible, a team of parents and other suitable adults could be formed who will undertake the important ministry of preparation for baptism, along with the priest, deacon or religious. Parents are a powerful witness and support to other parents during this time and can share their practical experiences of bringing up children in the Catholic faith. Where such a team cannot be formed, the responsibility for baptismal preparation lies with the chaplain.
30. It is important to recognise and affirm parents in their role and assure them of the support of the Catholic community.
31. It is a good pastoral opportunity for the chaplain to meet the family (ideally in their own home) both to establish personal contact and to complete any necessary paperwork.
32. Couples or individuals who are expecting a baby should be encouraged to come forward for a blessing of the pregnancy. At this time they could also be enrolled for baptism preparation.
33. Baptismal preparation is required for the baptism of the first child and then suggested as an opportunity of renewal before the baptism of subsequent children. Parents who have experienced the preparation course for themselves could be invited to support other couples preparing for the baptism of their child.
34. Parents who know they are carrying a child with a disability should be supported by the community and given reassurance that their child is a welcome child of God and of value to the community. The community celebrates the birth of this child with the same joy and hope shared with all new parents.

“Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ’s faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ.”

CIC 208

Baptism – Celebration

35. The community aspect of baptism should be highlighted, especially as the Rite of Baptism itself says: “The Christian community welcomes you with great joy.”
36. When possible, parents should be encouraged to bring their children for Baptism at Sunday Mass. While it is recognised that such a celebration may not always be practicable in the military context, Baptism during Mass adds to the richness of the liturgy and recalls the baptismal grace and responsibility of each member of the parish community.
37. Where baptism takes place outside of Mass, members of the community may be invited to be present to join the family, participate in the liturgy and represent the community the child is joining.
38. When a child has been baptised in an emergency, a Liturgy of Welcome should follow later where the rest of the baptismal rites can be celebrated. An invitation could be extended to members of the community to be present to welcome the child and the family into the community of the Church.
39. The names of those to be baptised can be announced in newsletters and also included in the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.
40. It is important to inform parents of all that is available to support their own faith formation and that of their children, for example: Mass times, local Catholic schools, publication of a newsletter, Children’s liturgy.
41. The role of the Godparent is to assist the parent(s) in the Catholic upbringing of their child. Godparents should be chosen carefully and their role clearly understood.
42. Godparents themselves must be confirmed and practising Catholics, usually aged 16 or above and must not be a parent of the child. (CIC 874). At least one godparent is required. Other Christians may be invited to be a “witness” at a baptism and to be a “witness of Christian living for the whole family”.

Baptism – Follow Up

“The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.”

CCC 1255

43. Follow up is intended to support the parents in living out their faith in the home, in the community of the Church and in the world.
44. Catholic communities which are welcoming and family-friends will be attractive to parents and offer them a wider circle of support beyond their own immediate or extended family and friends.
45. Post-baptism home visits by the chaplain continue the pastoral connection and support of families.

“With Baptism we become children of God in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Rising from the waters of the baptismal font, every Christian hears again the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan River: ‘You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.’ (Lk.3:22)”

Christifideles Laici, n.11

RECONCILIATION

“Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? I tell you solemnly, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

Mt. 18:12-14

The Gift of Reconciliation

46. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a sacrament of healing. The new life of Christ given to us in baptism can be weakened and even lost through sin. Because of this, Christ himself, our Good Shepherd, always looks for us when we wander away and brings us safely home. As with the loving father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God our Father always welcomes back his prodigal sons and daughters with an embrace of love, placing the cloak of holiness around them, putting a ring on their finger and celebrating their return with joy.

Principles for the First Celebration of Reconciliation

47. Christ wills that his Church should continue his work of healing and gives us the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we celebrate the joy of being forgiven.
48. The Sacrament has many names which reveal its *various* aspects, such as conversion, penance, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. (CCC 1423-24).
49. The Catechism speaks of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick as the two Sacraments of Healing, so that when weakened through sin or suffering Christ draws close with his healing touch.
50. The Catechism entitles its section on this sacrament in terms of Penance and Reconciliation in order to highlight the gift of God in reconciling us to Himself and our loving response through conversion and penance. Accordingly, the word ‘reconciliation’ reminds us of the great gift of reconciliation between God and all the world which Christ has achieved by his death and resurrection.
51. Calling the sacrament ‘Reconciliation’ also reminds us that sin and holiness, although always deeply personal, are never simply a private affair. Sin impairs our relationship with others as well as with God; forgiveness reconciles us to one another as well as to the Lord.

Reconciliation – Preparation

“If you are bringing your gift to the altar and there remember that you have something against your brother, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first and then come back and present your offering”

Mt. 5: 23-25

52. The home is our first school in which, by being loved and forgiven, we in turn learn gradually how to love and forgive. It is important to be pastorally sensitive to those who may have poor or bad experiences of childhood – which entails being positive about goodness wherever it is to be found.
53. The experiences of being loved, or having failed someone, of ‘saying sorry’ and of being forgiven (whether experienced in the home, the school or the community of the Church) lay the foundation on which the Sacrament of Reconciliation builds.
54. It can be very powerful for children when an adult is prepared to say ‘sorry’ to them and teaches forgiveness by example as well as by word.
55. Children should be prepared for the sacrament so that they understand both **what** is being celebrated and **why** it is being celebrated.
56. Catechesis for reconciliation should focus on God’s love and forgiveness, inviting us to express sorrow for our sins, a resolve to try not to sin again and to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. For this reason careful attention should be paid to emphasising that the sacrament brings about reconciliation with God and with the Church.
57. Although First Reconciliation both precedes and is linked to a child’s preparation for First Communion, it is important that preparation for First Reconciliation should not lose its distinctive identity but be clearly recognised and celebrated as a sacrament in its own right.
58. It is customary, and good practice, for children to be prepared for their First Reconciliation at around the age of seven to eight years old, while recognising that it is the readiness of a child for such preparation rather than simply their age which needs to be considered.

Reconciliation – Celebration

“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Prayer of Absolution, The Rite of Penance

59. Many communities find that celebrating **Rite 2** (Rite of Reconciliation with several penitents and individual confession) gives a positive and joyful experience of the sacrament to those celebrating their First Reconciliation. This Rite emphasises the communal nature of sin and reconciliation, while at the same time recognising that every sacrament is a personal encounter with Christ.
60. Children should also be prepared to celebrate **Rite 1** (Rite of Reconciliation with individual penitents) since both Rite 1 and Rite 2 are complementary ways of celebrating the one sacrament.
61. Where Rite 1 is being used, the provision of an inviting Reconciliation Room (which the children could see beforehand) is encouraged. The choice for the penitent of either ‘face to face’ or anonymous confession must be explained to them.

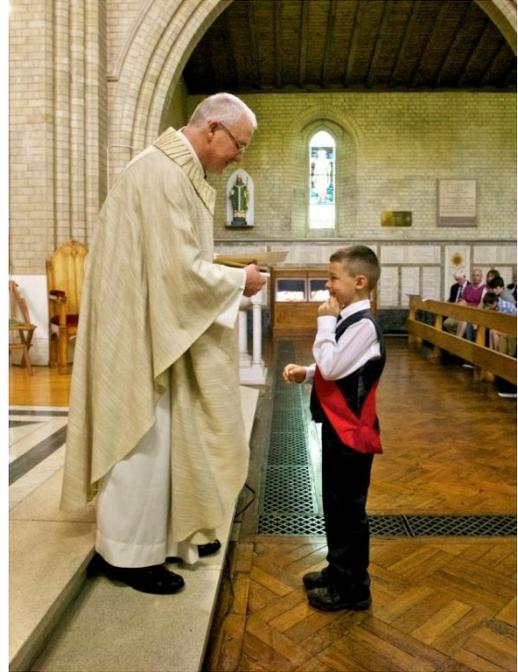
Reconciliation – Follow Up

62. On-going catechesis on reconciliation, adapted to particular life stages, is needed throughout our lives.
63. Services using Rite 2 are encouraged, particularly during the seasons of Lent and Advent.

HOLY COMMUNION

“Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me’. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you’.”

Luke 22:19-20



The Gift of Holy Communion

**“O God, who have called us to participate
in this most sacred Supper,
in which your only begotten Son,
when about to hand himself over to death,
entrusted to the Church a sacrifice for all eternity,
the banquet of his love,
grant, we pray,
that we may draw from so great a mystery,
the fullness of charity and of life.”**

Opening Prayer – Mass of the Lord’s Supper

Principles for the First Celebration of Holy Communion

64. The Church is the sacrament of God’s love for the world. By its life and witness the Church *points towards*, by its sharing and worship it *anticipates* and through its mission it is an *instrument* of the ultimate reality of the Kingdom of God actualised in Jesus Christ.
65. The Eucharist gives us the strength we need both as individuals and as a community to witness to God’s love in the world.
66. The Prayer after Communion is often an invitation and reminder to all people that the Eucharist is to have its effect in their lives as they are strengthened in working towards making God’s Kingdom come more fully. We are then sent out to go and witness to the Kingdom through our good works, service to each other and the community, and our praise of the Lord.

67. The First Celebration of Holy Communion is a stage in the journey when a baptised person is introduced, by specific formation and celebration, to a deeper relationship with Christ and the Church.
68. A fundamental catechetical requirement (set out by Pope St. Pius X in 1910 when he lowered the age for First Holy Communion for children) is that candidates should be able to recognise that there is a distinction between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.
69. Celebrating the Eucharist invites us to recognise this as **Eucharistia = Thanksgiving** – an opportunity to thank God for all the blessings of our lives; **Acknowledging** – the memory of Christ’s gift to us, both as something which has happened in the past, but which is both present and real for the people of God today; **Appreciating** – Christ as present in Word and Sacrament, and in the clergy and people, wherever we are gathered.
70. While generally children are prepared for First Communion at around the age of eight years old, it is important to remember that the readiness of the child and **“their capacity to understand what the mystery of Christ means, and that they are able to receive the body and blood of the Christ with faith and devotion”** (CIC 913) are ultimately more important than the age of the child.
71. Canon Law presumes that children will understand sufficiently at the age of seven, but accepts that sufficient understanding may come at different ages in individual cases. It is important that the readiness of the child is best decided by parent(s), catechists and clergy discerning together.
72. It is important to note that the sign of faith in the child may not always be expressed in an intellectual form, but can nonetheless express a real understanding and a desire of the heart.
73. Mindful of the principle that ‘faith is caught, not taught’, the example of faith life in the home is crucial. Parents need to be encouraged and supported as “the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith.” (Rite of Baptism)
74. As families prepare their children for the Eucharist, they are to be supported by the faith community and reminded that they are continuing the initiation process which began at baptism and which will be sustained through to confirmation and beyond.
75. Careful preparation for the sacrament should respect the need to adapt to the age, ability, language and culture of the candidate. (GDC 208)
76. Preparation for First Holy Communion is a shared responsibility between home and faith community. Where there is a Catholic school involved, its role is to support the work of the family and community in deepening the child’s faith life.

**“The Eucharist
is the source and summit
of the Christian life.”**

CCC 1324, cf. *Lumen Gentium* n. 11

HOLY COMMUNION – PREPARATION

77. The home, faith community and, where applicable the school, each have distinctive tasks. They should work closely together since the children belong to all of these groups though in different ways.
78. Preparation for the first celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion should begin with the faith experience of the home and be continued in the worshipping community, bearing in mind that not all children attend Catholic schools.

“There are innumerable reasons why people develop at different speeds on their faith journey and it is important that when they come to us we do not judge them regarding this. What is important is that we recognise these varying speeds.”

On the Threshold, A Report to the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, 2000

Home:

79. Home life varies considerably, and priests and catechists will need to meet people where they are.
80. The first meeting in preparation for First Communion can be an opportunity to outline what the programme will be covering and the parents' role in their child's First Communion and to deal with any questions or concerns of the parents.
81. This time of preparation is also an invitation to help parents reflect on their own faith development and practice.
82. It is important to ensure that parents who have a disability have adapted resources in order to meet their needs. You may need to enquire at the initial invitation to the parents' meeting as to whether there are any special requirements.
83. Further information regarding ongoing adult formation to support the faith life within families is available. The Bishops' Conference of England & Wales provides Marriage & Family Life resources on www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk

Worshipping Community:

“At the heart of the life of the Catholic Church is the celebration of the Eucharist.”

One Bread, One Body

84. Parents and children need to be reminded and encouraged to join in the weekly celebration of Sunday Mass.
85. Experience shows that active involvement in the liturgy deepens understanding of the Mass, which is the “privileged place for catechesis”. (CCC 1074)
86. In addition to the family to which we belong by birth, the life of the worshipping community celebrates the extended family of faith to which we belong by baptism.
87. The role of the catechist is to assist (but not replace) parents in the formation of their children for this sacrament by providing formation that complements the work of parents, through immediate preparation for First Communion.
88. It is essential that candidates are taught about the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion and that they know how to receive Holy Communion with reverence. This formation should include preparation for reception of Holy Communion under both Kinds.
89. First Communion programmes usually go well beyond the minimum. Nevertheless, having a *basic requirement* is a helpful indicator in cases where a child has learning difficulties or where parents have prepared a child with little assistance.
90. Any programme should be positively encouraged, but not imposed as a “requirement” in itself. The chaplain must be satisfied that any child presented for First Communion is adequately catechised and suitably disposed. (CIC 843)
91. In the military context, it is recognised that a degree of flexibility will be present, in terms of programmes offered and resources available. This will not mean that preparation will be any less effective than might be the case in another setting.
92. Where possible, sessions for parents should also be provided. Such sessions provide an opportunity for parents to reflect, to value and to grow in their own faith, by the use of suitable resources for adult formation.
93. Preparation for First Communion provides an excellent opportunity for young people and their parents to build friendships with other members of the family of the Church.
94. It is important to encourage all in the worshipping community to pray for those preparing for First Communion, for example: by having prayer partners who pray for the children; by inclusion of this intention in the Prayers of the Faithful; through the children’s involvement at some Sunday Masses.

Schools:

95. The military context in which our families live will mean that children may change schools more often than will be the case in other contexts. It is recognised that it will not always be possible for the children of our families to attend a Catholic school, although this should be the case whenever possible. With such a variation in schooling patterns, it will be all the more important for the programme provided by the faith community to take account of different school experience and to provide effective support for parents.
96. Where there is a Catholic school, one of its roles is to provide a broad programme of religious education from the Catholic perspective. In this it complements the work of the faith community, which has a specific role in the provision of sacramental preparation.
97. Children who are educated outside of the Catholic school system are to be sought out and warmly invited to participate in First Communion preparation.
98. Children with special educational needs must similarly be warmly welcomed and provided with suitable and adapted catechesis.

HOLY COMMUNION – CELEBRATION

“The blessing cup that we bless is a communion with the blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.”

1 Corinthians 10:15-18

99. The celebration of First Holy Communion should take place within the community where the candidates and their families worship.
100. The celebration of this sacrament should focus on the person of Christ and his loving gift. This requires careful liturgical preparation with the families to enhance their appreciation of this great mystery.
101. It is good to encourage the First Communicants and their families to be actively involved in the liturgy through, for instance, the bringing of the gifts to the altar, the Prayers of the Faithful and as readers.
102. Many members of the extended family, and friends, who join the celebration may not be entirely familiar with the liturgy. This celebration offers an opportunity for welcome, evangelisation and an experience of the praying and celebrating Christian community.
103. Where applicable, a teacher or representative from the local schools could attend the celebration of First Communion in order to provide a link between the school and the worshipping community – and (in the case of a Catholic school) between the Bishopric and the territorial Diocese – for the communicants and their families.

HOLY COMMUNION – FOLLOW UP

“These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”

Acts 2:42

104. Celebration of First Communion should never be seen as a “one-off” event. Every Sunday is a celebration of this wonderful gift.
105. Communities may celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving some weeks after the First Communion, with the children and their families thereby reinforcing the importance of the sacrament.
106. The faith community is called to provide on-going support by balancing the ministries of Word, Worship, Welfare and Witness.

CONFIRMATION



“There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The Gift of Confirmation

Confirmation is so called because it *confirms* and strengthens baptismal grace. (CCC 266) Confirmation celebrates the call of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to us. “God never takes back his gifts, nor revokes his choice.” (Romans 11:29)

Confirmation perfects baptismal grace by:

- **affirming that we are beloved sons and daughters of the Father**
- **uniting us more closely with Christ**
- **deepening the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism**
- **strengthening our bonds with the Church**
- **empowering us for our mission in the world**
- **helping us bear witness to our Christian faith in word and deed**

CCC 1316

Principles of Confirmation

107. Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. “Baptism, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the ‘sacraments of Christian initiation’, whose unity must be safeguarded.” (CCC 1285) They “lay the foundations of every Christian life.” (CCC 1212)
108. These guidelines are principally concerned with young people who have been baptised as infants or as young people who have received the sacrament of the Eucharist and are now seeking the sacrament of Confirmation.
109. In the military setting, it will often be the case that adult Catholics will offer themselves for Confirmation. They should be encouraged to receive this sacrament and should be offered suitable adult preparation.

Confirmation – Preparation

110. Every baptised person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. (CIC 1306).
111. Theologically, there is no specific age required for Confirmation and, in fact, the sacrament can be conferred at any age. Pastorally, there are different views as to the best age for Confirmation. An earlier age makes a closer link with Baptism, while a later age has the potential for greater understanding and maturity in the candidates.
112. The Code of Canon Law presumes that Confirmation is celebrated around the age of reason (unless the Bishops' Conference determines otherwise). The Bishops' Conference of England & Wales has left the decision as to age to each diocesan bishop. The current practice, whereby candidates should generally be a minimum age of 12 years old, is appropriate.
113. While maintaining the general principle regarding age, the military context in which families live out their faith may determine that candidates come forward at different ages. The readiness of the person for the sacrament is ultimately more important than their age and any preparation needs to be adapted to the age, ability and maturity of the candidates.
114. It is advisable to provide an introductory information evening for parents and adult candidates to outline the thinking, approach and programme proposed for Confirmation before a programme of preparation begins. Requirements for a sponsor can also be outlined at such an occasion.
115. Candidates need to be guided as to their choice of sponsor. The sponsor should be at least sixteen years of age, be a confirmed, practising Catholic and must not be the parent of the candidate. (CIC 874)
116. To make the link between baptism and confirmation it is recommended that, where possible, one of the candidate's Godparents should take on the role of Sponsor. (CIC893§2)
117. Attending to the Rite of Confirmation itself, the Gifts of the Spirit and the Scripture readings of the Church's liturgy should provide the foundation on which other topics can be developed.
118. Creative methods of catechesis which engage young people on many levels should be encouraged; including use of symbols relating to Confirmation, current media and visuals, small group discussions and acts of service to and within the wider community. A comprehensive Youth Ministry resource is available on www.revealedonline.co.uk
119. Confirmation provides an opportunity to encourage the family to support the candidate and to respect their decision to be confirmed.
120. In cases where the candidate is at a Catholic school, it will be the school's role to support and complement the preparation offered at home and in the faith community, through its ethos and RE curriculum.

CONFIRMATION – CELEBRATION

“Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The Rite of Confirmation

121. The seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrolment in His service for ever. (cf. CCC 1296)
122. When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, its connection with Baptism is expressed, among other ways, by the renewal of Baptismal Promises. The celebration of Confirmation during the Eucharist helps underline the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation. (CCC 1321)
123. The liturgy of the Confirmation Mass highlights the gifts given to those being confirmed so that they may play their part in building up the communion of the Church and further Christ’s mission in the world.
124. Initiation into the community of Christ’s faithful people through Confirmation, for adults and children alike, is a community event. It is initiation into a community of faith and into the faith of the community.

**“All powerful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by water and the Holy Spirit
you freed your sons and daughters from sin
and gave them new life.
Send your Holy Spirit upon them
to be their helper and guide.
Give them the spirit of wisdom
and understanding,
the spirit of right judgement and courage,
the spirit of knowledge and reverence.
Fill them with the spirit of wonder
and awe in your presence.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”**

The Rite of Confirmation

**“From that time on the apostles, in fulfilment of
Christ’s wish, imparted the gift of the Spirit to the
newly baptised by the laying on of hands to
complete the grace of Baptism.”**

The Rites of the Catholic Church, p.312

CONFIRMATION – FOLLOW UP

125. The follow-up for this sacrament should flow naturally from the preparation and celebration of Confirmation.
126. Young people of all abilities should continue to be affirmed and helped to discover, develop and use their personal gifts and talents in the service of the community, recognising the needs of others.
127. Involvement in various ministries or social action groups enables the newly confirmed to live out the variety of gifts active within them, while giving a positive example to all in the faith community.

“Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian towards a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

To this end, catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community.”

CCC 1309