



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF ROCKHAMPTON

The Sacraments of Initiation

in the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton

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Introduction

The Diocese of Rockhampton endeavours to make available to people every channel of grace, as they grow in holiness on their pilgrim journey in the Catholic faith. Just as Moses and his people found sustenance on their journey with bread from heaven and water from a rock, so too, are people supported on their faith journey by the divine grace that comes through the sacraments of the New Covenant instituted by Christ himself.

The sacraments of initiation in particular are the means by which God forms a new people for himself: through baptism we are configured to Christ in his death and resurrection and become part of the community of his disciples; sealed by the gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, we are strengthened for our mission as Christians in the world; and nourished by the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Eucharist, we are given a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and fed with the Bread of Life. The Catholic journey fosters a deep sense of belonging and a holy relationship with God, family and community in order to carry out the mission of Christ in the world.

The Bishop oversees and has responsibility for the initiation of all into the Catholic community of the faithful. This policy outlines the processes to take place with respect to the sacraments of initiation for the different groups of persons who come to the Church seeking these sacraments. It also clarifies the roles and competencies of the various ministers involved in these processes.

1. Conferral of Sacraments

1.1. Infants (and children below the age of reason¹)

Catholic parents are strongly urged to bring their children to the Church for baptism shortly after their birth, so as to share with them the priceless grace of becoming a child of God².

The pastor of a parish has immediate responsibility for the baptism of infants, or this may be delegated by him to an assistant priest or deacon. After a suitable preparation of the parents and godparent(s), the priest or deacon celebrates the baptism of the child, ideally during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, or at another time.

The role of parents and godparents is particularly important in ensuring that from the time of their baptism, children grow in understanding of the meaning of the faith into which they have been baptised.

In due course, these children will be confirmed by the bishop, after completing an appropriate period of catechesis and formation in their parish under the direction of the parish pastor. If necessity requires it, the bishop may delegate this faculty to one or more specific priests.

The sacrament of Confirmation is usually received around the age of 10 years, although each parish may vary somewhat in this regard. Ultimately, however, parents as the first faith educators of their children, together with the sacramental coordinator and the parish priest, will discern the readiness of their child to complete initiation in the Catholic Church and parents may prudently decide to delay the reception of these sacraments until they deem their child ready.

First Holy Communion may be received during the same liturgical celebration as Confirmation; if this is the case, both sacraments are received during a celebration of the Eucharist.

If it is deemed appropriate by the pastor (after consultation with the bishop), first Holy Communion may be celebrated at a later date (preferably during a Sunday parish Mass) by the pastor or his delegate. In this case, Confirmation would normally be celebrated in a non-Eucharistic liturgy.

Catholic children between the ages of 13 and 18 who have not yet received these sacraments, may join with the other children of the parish in the preparation and reception of these sacraments, if it is deemed appropriate. If pastoral consideration deems it opportune, older children may be prepared separately, and be confirmed by the bishop at a different time.

1.2. Unbaptised Adults

Initiation into the Catholic Church follows the established order found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and should be celebrated in accordance with the liturgical season of the Church Year and the life of the local church community. It is a journey of faith and catechesis that involves the whole parish community, under the direction of the parish pastor. This catechumenal journey culminates with the reception of all three sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), which is normally celebrated during the Mass of the Easter Vigil.

All three sacraments of initiation are celebrated by the pastor (or his assistant priest) to confer at the Easter vigil (or another time if necessary).

As part of the RCIA process, care is to be taken to ascertain if there are any marriage irregularities on the part of the person seeking initiation. This is to be done at the earliest stage of inquiry, well before the time of reception of the sacraments. Any such irregular marriage situations should be referred immediately to the diocesan marriage tribunal representative.

1.3. Unbaptised Children of Catechetical Age³

Children who have reached catechetical age but have never been baptised, are to be welcomed to the sacraments of initiation. The initiation of these children is celebrated liturgically in the same manner as that of adults. That is, ideally they are baptised, confirmed and receive the Eucharist during the Mass of the Easter Vigil, celebrated by the parish priest or his delegate.

If pastoral considerations suggest, their reception of all three sacraments of initiation may be delayed until a later time when the other children of the parish will receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

1.4. Adults Baptised in another Church or Ecclesial Communion

Adults who have been validly baptised in a Church or ecclesial communion not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church⁴, are normally to be received into full communion, confirmed, and receive first Holy Communion at a parish Sunday celebration of the Eucharist by the parish pastor.

These candidates would not normally receive these sacraments at the Easter Vigil with catechumens, as they are already baptised Christians (albeit not yet in full communion with Christ's Church). Their reception into full communion with the Catholic Church and their Confirmation is acknowledged as the completion of the initiation which began with their baptism.

Liturgical rites are to be found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Part II, Chapter 5.

1.5. Children Baptised in another Church or Ecclesial Communion

Children of catechetical age who have been validly baptised in a Church or ecclesial communion not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church⁵, are normally to be received into full Communion with the Catholic Church by the parish pastor at a Sunday parish celebration of the Eucharist, after an appropriate period of formation and catechesis.

The parish pastor, in consultation with the bishop, is to determine whether the child should receive the sacraments of Confirmation and first Holy Communion at the time of his/her reception into full communion, or whether it is more appropriate that this be delayed until he/she can join with the other children of the parish in receiving these sacraments together. In this decision, the pastor and bishop will have recourse to considerations of the child's age and level of catechetical formation.

1.6. Persons belonging to an Eastern Catholic Church

Baptism and Confirmation for adults and children belonging to one of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* is subject to additional laws of the Church (see Appendix A). Any children of an Eastern Catholic Church who seek to be confirmed must be referred to the bishop before enrolment in the parish sacramental program.

1.7. Catholic Adults who have not been Confirmed

In some cases, an adult has been baptised in the Catholic Church as an infant, but for various reasons was never confirmed or received Holy Communion. If and when such a person comes to the Church seeking these sacraments, he/she is to be welcomed and given appropriate formation to receive them.

The permission of the bishop is to be sought in such cases, and where he deems it appropriate he grants the faculty to confirm these persons to the priest.

More information can be found in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, Part II, Chapter 4.

1.8. Persons with Disabilities

Jesus calls us to build communities where we exclude no one and welcome everyone, especially in the celebrations of the sacraments. As the body of Christ and through our baptismal promises, the Church commissions us to invite and welcome all people to our faith communities. In this respect, people with a disability are no different and the Church eagerly seeks to include them in every possible way in the Church's sacramental life. Guidelines for the celebration of the sacraments for those with a disability are to be found in the *document Celebrating the Sacramental Life from Birth to Death*⁶, issued by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

2. Sponsors & Godparents

Insofar as possible, a person to be baptised or confirmed is to have a sponsor (also known as a godparent). The role of the baptismal sponsor (godparent) is to assist the candidate in his/her preparation for baptism (or, together with the parents, presents an infant for baptism); the role of the Confirmation sponsor is to ensure the candidate behaves as a true witness of Christ. In both cases, the sponsor's role is to support the person in his/her life of faith and the fulfilment of the obligations of this life.

2.1. Requirements of Sponsors⁷

- a) There is to be only one male sponsor (godfather), or one female sponsor (godmother), or one of each;
 - b) The sponsor is to be a confirmed Catholic who has already received the Eucharist and leads a life of faith;
 - c) The sponsor is to be at least 16 years of age (unless the minister grants an exemption for a just cause);
 - d) A baptised person of a non-Catholic ecclesial community may accompany a Catholic sponsor (godparent) as a Christian witness to the baptism.
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3. Family Law Matters

In any family circumstances in which there has been a separation of parents, every effort must be made to seek the consent of both parents to the celebration of the sacraments for their minor children. Where there is a court order relating to custody arrangements for children, this must be adhered to when admitting a child to the sacraments. Where one parent objects to the celebration of the sacraments, this is to be deferred until the child has reached the age of 18, or until agreement can be reached between both parents.

Where one parent has no contact with the child and has demonstrated no interest in participating in his/her upbringing, and in the absence of any court order stipulating otherwise, presumption in favour of the conferral of the sacraments is to be practised.

4. Administrative Matters

4.1. Baptism & Confirmation Registers

The parish baptismal register is a document of the highest importance. It is the official record of a person's ecclesiastical history and identity. All baptisms celebrated within the parish – whether of children or adults – are to be scrupulously recorded in the parish baptism register. Similarly, the Confirmation of any person whose baptism is recorded in the parish register is to be recorded against his/her baptismal entry. This is to be done if the person was confirmed in the parish of baptism, or if notification is received that the Confirmation has taken place in another parish.

The parish is also to keep a Confirmation register, in which is recorded every Confirmation that takes place within the parish.

4.2. Notification to Other Parishes

If a person is confirmed within the parish, but has been baptised elsewhere, notification of the Confirmation is to be sent promptly to the parish of baptism, so that it may be recorded in the baptismal register of that parish.

5. Authorisation

This booklet has been produced for use in the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton under the authorisation of Most Rev Michael McCarthy.



Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton

13 February 2021

¹ See *Code of Canon Law* (CIC), can 97, §2

² Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter CCC), 1250.

³ That is, those children who have attained the age of reason. See note 2 above.

⁴ Baptism celebrated by pouring with or immersing in water, together with the Trinitarian formula, is recognised as a valid baptism. The Australian Bishops Conference has issued a document listing the churches and ecclesial communions whose baptism is recognised as valid: <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/downloads/all-downloads/bishops-1/handbook-1/1389-recognition-of-baptism-1/file>

⁵ See Note 4 above.

⁶ <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/downloads/all-downloads/organisations-1/national-network-for-disability-and-spirituality-1/celebrating-the-sacramental-life-from-birth-to-death/2083-acbc-sacramental-guidelines-2016-1/file>

⁷ CIC, cann. 873, 874.

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Appendix A

Sacraments for Children from Eastern Rite Churches

Eastern Churches Established in Australia

In Australia an eparchy has been established for the Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite, Syro-Malabar, and Ukrainians of Byzantine rite Churches. Each eparchy has an eparch (diocesan bishop) with clergy and parishes and the faithful belonging to these Churches are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of their own eparch.

Eastern Churches with No Eparch but with Presence of a Priest

In Australia, there are priests of six such Churches, namely the Armenian, Coptic, Romanian, Russian, Syrian, and Syro-Malankaran Churches. These priests, and the faithful of these Churches are subject to the Latin Church diocesan bishops in all matters, as Latin Church priests and faithful are, except for liturgical matters.

Eastern Churches with No Eparch and No Priests

The faithful of these Churches, except the Ruthenians and Slovaks, are under the care and jurisdiction of the Latin Church bishops and priests. The Ruthenians and Slovaks in Australia are under the care of the Ukrainian Church. These Churches include the: Eritrean and Ethiopian Churches, and the Albanian, Belarusan, Bulgarian, Greek, Hungarian, Krizevcis, Italo-Albanian, Macedonian, Ruthenian, and Slovak Churches.

Consequences for the Reception of Sacraments

- **Baptism**

- A Latin Church priest or deacon may baptise a child of an Eastern Church when a priest or deacon of the proper Eastern Church is unavailable. A priest of the proper Church is considered unavailable when:
 - The child is in danger of death
 - When the priest of the proper Church is too far away to bring the child to him
 - When the priest of the proper Church cannot come to baptise the child.
- In such cases, the Latin celebrant should note the Church of the child in the entry in his own parish baptismal register, and also send notification of the baptism to the proper priest so that he can register it in his register. If there is no priest of the proper Eastern Church in the country, the registration is made only in the Latin Church register but with the note about the proper autonomous Church.
- A Latin priest follows the Latin Rite of Baptism.

- **Confirmation**

- It should be kept in mind the principle that in Eastern Churches a child is normally confirmed at baptism and confirmation may not be repeated.
- Should it be the case that a child ascribed to an Eastern Church was not confirmed at baptism, he must not be confirmed by the Latin Church bishop, but by his own priest or eparch. Please contact the bishop if such a situation arises.

- **Eucharist**

- Communion may be received in any Catholic Church.
- For Eastern Catholics, First Holy Communion should be received in one's own autonomous Church and usually takes place with baptism and confirmation.

For more information see: <https://www.catholica.com.au/misc/EasternCatholics.pdf>



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