



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

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1 December 2022

Dear Members of the Sacramental Programs in the Diocese of Rockhampton

Re: Sacraments of Initiation

After many years of preparation, the policy document “*The Sacraments of Initiation in the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton*” was released in February 2021.

<https://rok.catholic.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20210216-Sacraments-of-Initiation-Booklet-Feb-2021.pdf>

I encourage you to familiarise yourself with this document and use it as your guide for the Sacraments of Initiation.

This follow-up document addresses some of the issues emerging from the implementation of the policy and provides guidance and best-practice examples for those involved in this important ministry.

1. The importance of Sunday Mass

The Sacraments of Initiation have as their foundation, celebration within the context of the worshipping community, i.e., Sunday Mass. The child and their family are encouraged to attend Sunday Mass before and after the celebration of the Sacraments. The parish’s approach to the Sacraments of Initiation should give witness to the importance of the Sunday Mass and should present the ideal of regular attendance as the norm. The members of the Sacramental Team give witness by their lives and their connection with the Sunday Mass as well as providing an authentic and inclusive welcome, encouraging families and their children to follow their example.

2. The importance of the Pastor

The pastor represents the bishop as he gathers the local worshipping community in prayer and Sunday Mass. The pastor is an invaluable member and presenter of the Sacramental Program during the Sacramental journey. The pastor, in collaboration with the Sacramental Team, assists the family and the child to connect with the community, ideally meeting with the family and the child before the beginning of the program and at times during the Sacramental journey. These important encounters assist the family and the child to anchor themselves within the Catholic community where the child is to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. It is at such meetings that the family discerns with the pastor, the readiness of their child to begin the journey. It also provides an opportunity to discuss and navigate the varied challenges families can experience with their connection with the Church. Such encounters can be marvellous pastoral moments for the pastor, not only to animate the faith, but to extend an invitation for reconnection with the Church.

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3. The importance of the Sacramental Team

The Sacramental Team ensures that families and children are welcomed and that the program assists with their faith journey. The program of instruction is founded on quality catechesis and pedagogical principles reflecting the teaching and the doctrines of the Catholic Church, whilst also being contextually appropriate and sensitive to the needs of communities and individuals.

4. The ministry of Sponsors

The policy outlines the requirements for sponsors. These should be clearly explained to families from the beginning of the Sacramental journey and adhered to. The Sacramental coordinators should be familiar with these requirements and be able to articulate the ecclesial-centred responsibility of the sponsor. Sponsors must meet the specified qualifications i.e., a member of the Catholic community who has been fully initiated into the Catholic Church. Ideally, they practise the Catholic faith and take the ongoing responsibility of Sacramental sponsorship seriously.

Increasingly, many proposed sponsors do not fit the requirements and hence present a dilemma to coordinators. In every parish, there are faith-filled, committed parishioners who fit the criteria and would be able to fulfil the responsibility of supporting a family and candidate. The pastor and the Sacramental Team are encouraged to discern the suitability of such sponsors. Families may require guidance in this area, so that they understand the importance of sponsors being faith-filled and faith-connected people to help the young person and the family to live as members of the Catholic Church.

5. The ministry of the Community

The community has a responsibility to welcome the families and their children and pray for them. In fact, the community has a grave responsibility to these families to ensure support and encouragement to continue in their commitment to their Catholic faith and be regular members of the Catholic community. Community organised social events, such as those held after Mass, can be very successful in promoting a sense of welcome and belonging for families.

6. The Baptism certificate

The Baptism certificate is issued by the church where the child was baptised. The pastor and the Sacramental Team are encouraged to scrutinise the certificate as it contains important information. Such information includes the church and parish of Baptism, the *sui iuris* church to which the child belongs, and whether or not the child has already been confirmed. Appendix 'A' of *The Sacraments of Initiation Policy* outlines the unique situation of children from Eastern Rites. Vigilance is needed here as the custom of some Eastern Rites is to administer Confirmation at Baptism; if this has been done, the child is not to be confirmed "again". Furthermore, the bishop needs special permission to confirm the Catholics of Eastern Rites. Therefore, if a child who belongs to one of the Eastern rite churches seeks enrolment in our Sacramental programs, his/her situation should be referred to my office as soon as possible.

7. The recording of the Sacraments of Initiation

It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are recorded in the parish register as soon as possible after the ceremony. If the child was baptised in another Catholic church, then notification of his/her Confirmation is to be sent to that church for recording in the baptismal register at the place of Baptism.

8. Children of Catechetical Age who are not baptised

The policy envisages a separate program for these children, and they are initiated with all three Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) in the one ceremony. The administration of the Sacraments for these children should not be separated into two or three separate liturgical ceremonies.

9. Children who have been baptised in another tradition

These children are to be welcomed into the church by a rite that is contained in the Rite of Penance, to receive them into full communion with the Catholic Church.

10. Children whose family belong to another Christian tradition and wish their children receive the Catholic Sacraments.

Requests such as these require careful consideration with the pastor of the parish. The family are to make a commitment to the faith life of the child within the Catholic community. Careful discernment and listening may reveal their desire to make the journey to the Catholic Church. If the reasons lack clarity or are less informed, then the discernment process will take this into account.

11. The Sacramental Team

The members of the Sacramental Team are drawn from parishioners from the parish and the Catholic schools within the parish. They form a team with the pastor of the parish and with the sacramental coordinator.

12. Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

Children are introduced to the Sacraments within the parish setting. Children are introduced to the first rite of reconciliation either during the parish times set aside for the Sacrament or in a special time in the parish church, with the pastor. Ideally, multiple opportunities should be provided for the child, along with their family, to receive this Sacrament, including after celebrating the first rite. It also affords members of the family an opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament themselves, setting an example to their child and thus encouraging the forming of a habit of approaching this Sacrament. The second rite of reconciliation may be one of these opportunities.

13. Dress

The celebration of Confirmation and First Holy Communion is a special celebration. Some families may choose special cultural attire to be worn during the celebration of Confirmation and Eucharist. Some parishes may choose formal dress for the occasion. Smart casual would be the minimum standard for the children and their families.

14. Names

The Catholic practice of the inclusion of a saint's name with the name of a person is still encouraged. During the preparation for Confirmation, children are presented with the opportunity to research saints who have led a good and holy life and choose one as their patron saint.

15. The Sacramental Program

A best-practice Sacramental program incorporates two elements of resourcing:

- 1) the in-person presentations and sessions facilitated by the Sacramental Team, and
- 2) resources for families to access and work through, between sessions, at home.

It is recommended that parish Sacramental teams provide at least two (2) in-person preparation sessions for families and their children for each Sacrament. Sufficient time must be provided, from the beginning of the process through to the reception of the Sacrament, to allow families to work through resources, meet with the team for formation and develop their knowledge about and commitment to the Sacrament they are preparing to receive.

Content of the presentations should be theologically-sound and age appropriate. Incorporation of best-practice pedagogy, multiple modes of presentation and contemporary technology is encouraged to ensure programs are engaging, dialogical and meaningful for candidates and their families.

Many of the programs in this diocese are of quality and assist, in a commendable way, families and children to prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation. Over the next 12 months, a suite of programs and resources will be collated and be made publicly available for use throughout the diocese. This may particularly suit smaller or more regional communities, who experience a regular turnover of Sacramental Team members.

Consideration must be given to the suitability of material resources, which are most often purchased by the families. Teams should determine the suitability of content, costs, and availability of such resources. The resources listed below may be useful for use as the “at-home” resources. You are encouraged to support our Cathedral Gift and Bookstore, by emailing cathedralbookstore@rok.catholic.net.au or by calling (07) 49212170.

- Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay
<https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/youth/parish-community/liturgy-and-sacrament/sacramental-program>
- ‘Blessed’ - Dynamic Catholic
<https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/blessed.html>
- Our Family Prepares - Liturgy Brisbane
<https://shop.liturgybrisbane.net.au/products/our-family-prepares-penance>
- My Sacramental Journey - Evangelisation Brisbane
<https://evangelisation-brisbane.myshopify.com/products/my-sacramental-journey-eucharist>
- Crossroads – RCIA Archdiocese of Brisbane
<http://crossroadsrcia.org/>

Thank you for the work you do in preparing our young people to come fully into the beauty of our Catholic faith. With your assistance and following best practice together we can make this a most special and meaningful time.

Yours sincerely



Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton