

The Church, The Body of Christ, is a living reality encompassing a variety of people. Among those who share our journey are children and adults who are emotionally, physically or mentally challenged.

The Body of Christ is enriched when we welcome the specially challenged through the waters of Baptism, the oil of Confirmation, the Eucharistic table and the healing of Reconciliation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS

Parents are the primary educators of their child/children. In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit themselves to forming their children in the life of faith:

“Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor.” (*Rite of Baptism, #39*)

THE ROLE OF THE PARISH

Parish or school programs of faith formation assist parents in this most important responsibility but must never assume the rightful role of the parents.

In the Diocese of Rochester the responsibility for sacramental preparation and celebration lies with the parish to which these families belong. Parents of the specially challenged should not have to labor to discover a community willing to assist them in preparing their children for sacramental celebration. The same is true

for specially challenged adults, whether they live with their families, in group homes or other situations.

All those who are specially challenged are to be respected and granted appropriate access to the sacraments. The liturgical principle of full, active and conscious participation is foremost in all celebration. (*Constitution on the Liturgy, #14*)

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

All those over the age of seven, having the use of reason, seeking Baptism are to participate in the catechumenate process. This is a conversion-based model of catechesis and ritual celebration, which through its very nature, prepares people to be fully initiated (that is, to celebrate Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) into the church community.

BAPTISM

The gift of faith celebrated in Baptism is a free gift of God. All infant children become members of the community through Baptism because their parents have faith and publicly commit to raise their children in that faith. Nothing is required of the child; therefore, readiness is essentially the readiness of the parent to be a Catholic Christian parent.

A person who does not have full use of reason is equivalent in church law to an infant and is baptized similarly. (*CFC.852.2*)

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is the sealing of the sacrament of Baptism. In the Church, the celebration of Confirmation is conferred at the age of discretion. (Canon 891) In the United States, the age of celebration is between seven and eighteen. To celebrate Confirmation, baptized candidates, if they have the use of reason, must be in a state of grace, be properly prepared and able to renew their baptismal promises. (*Rite of Confirmation 12,13*)

Candidates who are developmentally disabled should have catechesis appropriate to their capacity and then celebrate Confirmation with the support of their family and faith community. (*Confirmation Guidelines, Diocese of Rochester*).

EUCCHARIST

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is the culmination and completion of initiation.

The minimal requirements of readiness to celebrate include:

- appropriate formation and participation in the worship life of the community;
- the ability to know the difference between ordinary bread and Eucharistic bread; and,
- a desire to receive the sacrament.

A certain level of discretion is necessary for the celebration of Eucharist. Individuals should be able to enter worship in both a prayerful and respectful manner.

RECONCILIATION

All members of the Body of Christ are in need of the healing offered in the sacrament of Reconciliation. At the same time, it should be noted that those who lack the use of reason do not have the ability to commit serious sin. A person must be aware of serious sin to be required to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation

A process of discernment is essential to determine the readiness of the specially challenged to celebrate this sacrament. For members of the community who are hearing impaired, an interpreter may assist in the celebration of the sacrament. (*Canon 990*) If that is not possible, "Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in writing. Written materials should be returned to the penitent or properly destroyed." (*Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons With Disabilities, US Bishops, June, 1995*)

Attending a parish penance celebration during Advent and/or Lent may be the most appropriate manner of celebration.

A complete copy of the *Sacramental Guidelines of the Diocese of Rochester* is available in each parish. If you would like to read them, please call your pastor or catechetical leader.

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

THE SPECIALLY CHALLENGED AND SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

**IN THE DIOCESE OF
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK**



***The Department of Evangelization and
Catechesis***