

Notes for the Pastor & the Liturgical and Music Leaders

Introduction

Welcome to the Growing Up Catholic series of sacramental preparation texts and guides. Whether you're preparing someone for **Eucharist, Reconciliation, or Confirmation-in-restored-order**, you will find that these materials are a delight to use.

Every effort has been made to be both faithful to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and contemporary for today's families and young people.

The goal of all our materials at Growing Up Catholic is to coach parents to form their own children. In this process, the role of the catechist shifts from "doing it" to "coaching them." This eases the burden of the catechist and is also far more effective at providing formation which lasts a lifetime.

By coaching parents, we also form them. Many parents have not had formation themselves since their grade school years. This adult formation, motivated by the needs of their children, often re-evangelizes them and reinvigorates their faith.

We take this work very seriously because of the call from Vatican II that everyone take a full, active part in the liturgy of the Church. Here's what the Council said:

"It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy,



Growing
Up
Catholic

Sacramental Formation that Lasts a Lifetime!
By Coaching Parents to Form Their Own Children

and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Peter 2:9, 4-5) have a right, and to which they are bound by reason of their baptism.” (from article 14 of the Constitution on the Liturgy from Vatican II)

Preparing a child for his or her Confession, Communion, or Confirmation is one of the greatest and most noble acts of love possible. It’s for this reason that we bring the parents fully into the process. Preparing for these sacraments, however, doesn’t begin and end with a parish program. It is a household activity which flows from baptism and ends in adulthood.

The role of the parish is to provide resources and assistance to parents. Growing Up Catholic is designed to do precisely that.

We hope that throughout every child’s life, the moments spent in preparation will be remembered. In every difficult situation, the child will seek comfort and peace in the Eucharist or Reconciliation. At the time of marriage, anniversaries, or even death, the sacraments will remain central in this child’s life. For every child is part of that “chosen race” which St. Peter described above. Every child is in the “royal priesthood.”

So our task is to do more than merely pass on some facts about our Faith. We must touch the heart of each child under our care, inspiring each to love the sacraments and let them shape his or her life.

This resource is designed to help you as the **Pastor or Liturgical Leader** come to understand the role you can play in this vital parish ministry. We hope these notes will help you support and assist your catechists and parents as this process unfolds.

The role of the pastor



As pastor you play a significant role in the lives of everyone in the parish. You are the one to whom people turn at all the key moments of their lives. Thank you for all that you do for your parish or parishes.

Even though there is a paid or volunteer sacrament prep program director and there are many volunteers working in the program, your occasional presence connects the program to the wider parish and is a key sign to the participants of how central the sacramental life of the church is to us Catholics.

In today's church, many pastors serve more than one parish. We do realize it is not possible for you to be everywhere at once. There may also be pastoral leaders who are not ordained to assist and support your program.

Among the roles you might play as pastor are these:

Planning. You can help, if time permits, with the pre-program planning. It's important to set dates early and make sure they fit into your own calendar. And if possible, you can schedule one or two times to be in the room while the parents are forming their children.

Diocesan Guidelines. There are also diocesan guidelines and parish customs to be considered, and you play a role here as well.

Brief Presentations. The process for Growing Up Catholic is that catechists coach parents who form their own children. The material is largely provided in the various children's texts and parent coaching notes. Check with the catechists involved to see when it might be possible for you to provide some "teaching moments" in this process. Your words will help to unify the group and connect them to the larger church.

Families which are out of sync with the Parish.

- ✚ Many families today find themselves in irregular marital situations – divorced and re-married without benefit of an annulment. They do not feel or are not welcome to receive all of the sacraments.
- ✚ Many other families no longer attend Sunday Mass regularly.
- ✚ Many others enroll their children in sacramental preparation programs out of latent sense of guilt or obligation and will be surprised to learn there is a role for them.
- ✚ Many others are “ecumenical families” where more than one religious tradition is observed in the household. It can be tough and lonely for the Catholic parent, especially if the non-Catholic parent is indifferent or antagonistic toward the Church.

This is a golden opportunity for you to meet these families and begin to guide them to a fuller faith. We recommend the use of family interviews in parishes where this is appropriate. (They are described in the Parish Leader Guide.) These might be a time to begin a new journey of faith for some families.

The invitation. Families often do not know whether or not to invite friends and family members who are not Catholic to a First Reconciliation, Confirmation in restored order, or First Eucharist celebration. You can help as a liturgical leader to create a welcoming parish, where members of other faiths feel comfortable and know what roles they are invited to take.

It is important that family members take the responsibility for explaining to such guests, in advance of the liturgy, that reception of the Eucharist is open only to those in full communion with the Catholic church, with rare exceptions.

The Celebration Itself. Finally in the sacramental celebrations themselves you are the key leader. How you address the children and their parents is so important! The words which you use at the homily can be an encouragement to all the children and families in attendance. Your welcome, especially to families in irregular situations, sets the mood for the entire celebration. And your presence at the post-liturgical celebration affirms and extends the celebration.

The role of the coordinators of music & liturgy

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from Vatican II makes clear that the liturgy of the church is both its high point as well as a fountain from which grace flows into the whole church. Celebrating the sacraments well is itself catechesis! It's part and parcel of the parish formation enterprise.

Because of the importance of the liturgical celebrations, we offer here some reflections on the role that you might play as the parish coordinators and directors of music and liturgy.

Whether you are paid or volunteer, thank you for all you do for this parish. Our liturgical life depends on you!



In the sessions themselves. Each session of Growing Up Catholic includes a prayer celebration. No particular music is selected for these para-liturgies, but when possible, adding music will greatly improve them. As parish musicians, you know what music the children will sing best. Please be available to consult with the catechists, or even to provide the music itself at the parent-with-child sessions.

Parish customs. You also know what music the parish customarily uses for sacramental celebrations. Together with the liturgy coordinator, if any, you as the parish music staff will help insure that the celebration of sacraments fits into the overall flow of the liturgical year.

Growing Up Catholic relies heavily on having good liturgical celebration at the time of the sacraments. It is generally best for a parish to teach its children music that will be sung at Sunday Mass or

at other times of public prayer. There are also songs written just for children, however, which may inspire them and help them sing.

Planning and celebrating. Finally, of course, your role in helping to schedule, plan, and celebrate the sacraments is vital.

One of the moments to plan for is the Rite of Enrollment. We have provided a Rite for your use, but enhancing it with parish customs and music is up to you! Scheduling a formal Rite of Enrollment or making a public announcement during weekend Masses helps the whole parish community see that it is taking part in the sacramental formation of the children who are in formation.

Such a Rite or announcement helps people see that the sacraments are not private celebrations. Sometimes in celebrating them for the first time the focus is on the young person to such an extent that the place and role of the wider community is blurred. A Rite of Enrollment or public announcement would play a role in the preparation of young people and their parents similar to that which the “Acceptance Into the Order of Catechumens” plays in the RCIA.

A bright idea!



Why not invite individual parish members to pray for individual children and their parents who are in this formation process? You could place their names in a public location (using first names only if privacy is an issue) and provide a simple way for the parish at large to select them.

Planning for the Liturgical celebrations for First Reconciliation Confirmation in restored order First Eucharist

Preparation for these special parish celebrations should begin as soon as the program is planned. Knowing the date, time, and principal celebrant in advance can make your work so much easier! As a liturgical leader, you act as coordinator of the many people who will play a role in these liturgies.

If you can, we recommend that you involve the children being prepared, their families, and other parishioners in celebrating one or two special reconciliation services and Masses before the actual celebrations take place. This helps families who have been away from regular participation prepare more fully for the sacraments.

Depending on parish customs, giving roles to as many children and parents as possible, and providing post-celebration mystagogia, will greatly enhance the catechetical results.

Thank you for all that you do for the parish where you work!