

Catholic Diocese of Salina

Sacramental Preparation Guidelines

1. Introduction: Our Vision for Restored Order

1.1 The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are called the Sacraments of Christian Initiation because together they initiate us into the life of Christ and His Church. In the earliest centuries of the Church, these sacraments were always celebrated in that order: Baptism, then Confirmation, and finally Eucharist—the fullness of communion with Christ.

1.2 Over time, historical and pastoral circumstances caused the order to shift, separating Confirmation from its original place. After prayer, consultation, and study, the Diocese of Salina is returning to the Church’s original practice, celebrating the restored order of the sacraments of initiation.

1.3 Under this restored order:

- First Reconciliation will ordinarily be celebrated in 2nd Grade.
- Confirmation and First Eucharist will be celebrated together at the same Mass in 3rd Grade.

1.4 This change, effective beginning in Fall 2025, allows children to receive the fullness of sacramental grace earlier in life—strengthened by the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Eucharist as they continue their lifelong journey of faith.

1.5 As Bishop Gerald Vincke explains, “We don’t earn the sacraments; we simply receive them.” The sacraments are not rewards for reaching a certain age or completing a program—they are gifts of grace. Confirmation completes Baptism and strengthens us for Christian life through the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist, “the source and summit of Christian life,” brings us into full communion with Christ and His Church.

1.6 The restored order emphasizes that initiation is God’s action, not ours. It reaffirms that the Eucharist is the goal toward which the other sacraments of initiation are directed.

1.7 Receiving the sacraments in third grade does not mark the end of formation—it is the beginning of a lifelong journey. Parishes are called to walk with children and families through continued formation in middle and high school, offering opportunities to grow as disciples through prayer, service, discernment, and community life.

1.8 Parents remain the primary educators of faith, and the parish community stands beside them as partners. The Holy Spirit received in Confirmation empowers the faithful—young and old alike—to live as witnesses of Christ in the world.



2. Preparation for First Reconciliation (2nd Grade)

2.1 Purpose: The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers God’s mercy and healing, inviting us to return to the Father’s love and forgiveness. Preparing for this sacrament helps children understand God’s mercy and the joy of being reconciled with Him and the Church.

2.2 Catechetical Objectives:

By the end of 2nd grade, children should:

- Understand that God loves them and is always ready to forgive.
- Know the difference between right and wrong and understand sin as a choice.
- Be familiar with the Ten Commandments and Jesus’ teachings on love and mercy.
- Know the steps of Confession: examination of conscience, contrition, confession, absolution, and penance.
- Be able to pray the Act of Contrition and basic prayers of the Church.

2.3 Parent and Parish Role:

- Parents should attend a parent meeting and be involved in home preparation using parish-approved materials.
- Parishes and schools should provide age-appropriate catechesis on the sacrament and offer a retreat or prayer service before receiving the Sacraments.
- The sacrament should be celebrated before Lent of the child’s 2nd-grade year.

2.4 Liturgical and Administrative Notes:

- Children must be baptized and properly prepared to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. (Code of Canon Law 1983)
- All celebrations should be recorded in the parish sacramental register.
- Pastors ensure that catechesis emphasizes God’s mercy rather than fear or obligation.



3. Preparation for Confirmation and First Eucharist (3rd Grade)

3.1 Theological Foundation:

In the restored order, Confirmation precedes First Eucharist and completes Baptismal grace. Through Confirmation, the baptized are sealed with the Holy Spirit, strengthened to live as disciples, and prepared to receive Christ in the Eucharist with hearts fully open to grace.

3.2 The Eucharist, received for the first time immediately after Confirmation, is the summit of Christian initiation, completing the child's entry into the life of the Church.

3.3 Catechetical Objectives:

By the end of 3rd grade, children should:

- Understand that Confirmation and Eucharist are gifts from God that strengthen and unite them with Christ.
- Recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit and identify the seven gifts of the Spirit.
- Know that the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Be able to participate reverently in the Mass and understand the basic structure of the liturgy.
- Know how to receive Holy Communion properly.
- Be familiar with the meaning of Baptismal promises and renew them consciously.

3.4 Program Structure:

- Preparation begins in 2nd grade and continues through 3rd grade.
- Catechesis may take place in parish programs or Catholic schools, using diocesan-approved curriculum.
- Parents should be actively involved through meetings, at-home lessons, and parish events.
- A retreat is recommended for children and parents before the celebration of the Sacraments. (See Appendix C for an example of a retreat)



3.5 Choosing a Saint's Name for Confirmation

- Candidates are encouraged to use their Christian Baptismal name to emphasize the unity between Baptism and Confirmation, but if a candidate prefers to choose a saint's name for Confirmation, they may do so.
- Confirmation Candidates should learn about that saint's life and virtues, and ask for their intercession as they prepare to receive the Holy Spirit in Confirmation.

3.6 Celebration:

- Confirmation and First Eucharist are celebrated together during the same Mass.
- The Bishop, or a priest delegated by him, confers the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Following the anointing with Chrism, the liturgy continues with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in which the newly confirmed receive Communion for the first time.
- The celebration should be joyful, reverent, and parish-centered.

3.7 Sponsors:

- Candidates are encouraged to use one of the baptismal Godparents as a sponsor to emphasize the unity between Baptism and Confirmation. If that is not possible, another qualified Catholic sponsor may be chosen.
- Sponsors must be baptized, confirmed, and practicing Catholics at least 16 years old.
- Parents should not serve as sponsors.
- Sponsors should be involved in prayer and formation with the child.

3.8 After the Sacraments:

Formation does not end after the 3rd grade. Parishes are encouraged to:

- Offer ongoing programs for grades 4–12, focusing on prayer, service, Scripture, and mission.
- Encourage children and families to remain active in Sunday Mass and parish life.
- Develop opportunities for youth ministry, retreats, and service learning.



4. Parish, School, and Family Collaboration

4.1 Roles and Responsibilities:

- Pastors oversee sacramental preparation and ensure diocesan norms are followed.
- Directors of Religious Education (DREs) and Catholic school principals coordinate programs and communication with families.
- Catechists and teachers provide faithful instruction and witness to the joy of the sacraments.
- Parents are the primary catechists and are expected to participate actively in preparation and ongoing formation.

4.2 Collaboration Principles:

- Parishes and schools should work together to provide unified sacramental programs.
- Regular joint communication ensures consistency between parish and school catechesis.
- The goal is not only proper preparation but building lifelong faith practices within families.



5. Liturgical Norms and Record-Keeping

5.1 Liturgy Planning, sacramental records, and special situations.

- The pastor or delegated minister coordinates scheduling with the Bishop's office for Confirmation and First Eucharist celebrations.
- All sacraments must be recorded in the parish register and notated in the child's baptismal record.
- For transfers or late candidates, pastors provide individualized preparation and record the sacraments appropriately.
- Unbaptized children in the 2nd grade should be baptized and enrolled in Catholic School or the parish RE program to receive preparation with their classmates for First Reconciliation, Confirmation, and First Communion.
- Unbaptized children in 3rd grade and above should follow the OCIC directive to be specially prepared and receive all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil or at some other appropriate time.
- Adults receive the sacraments through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).



6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Catechetical Objectives by Grade

A summary of faith concepts, prayers, and practices for 2nd and 3rd grade.

6.2 Appendix B: Sample Parent Communication

- Letter from the pastor introducing the restored order
- Parent meeting invitation and preparation checklist
- Suggested family prayer before receiving each sacrament

6.3 Appendix C: Retreat Outline

- Simple retreat structure (Scripture reflection, Reconciliation, Adoration, parent participation)
- Confirmation & Eucharist retreat theme: “Sealed with the Spirit, Nourished by Christ.”

6.4 Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions

- Why restore the order?
- Are third graders old enough?
- What happens if a child misses preparation?
- What about youth ministry after Confirmation?

6.5 Appendix E: Sponsor Form and Parish Checklist

- Sponsor eligibility declaration
- Parish-level checklist for record-keeping and preparation steps

6.6 Appendix F: Parent Responsibilities

- The role parents play in their child’s sacramental prep



7 Conclusion:

7.1 The restored order of the sacraments renews our understanding that God’s grace is freely given, not earned. It strengthens our children earlier, deepens family involvement, and calls all of us—parents, clergy, catechists, and parish leaders—to walk with them beyond sacramental moments into a life of discipleship.

“Please pray for our diocese in this endeavor. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide our families, strengthen our parishes, and renew our love for the Eucharist—the source and summit of our faith.” +Bishop Vincke



Appendix A: Catechetical Objectives by Grade

Second Grade – First Reconciliation

Faith, Knowledge, and Understanding

- God loves us unconditionally and calls us to live as His children.
- Sin is a choice that damages our relationship with God and others.
- Jesus teaches mercy, forgiveness, and a change of heart.
- The Ten Commandments guide us in making good choices.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores our friendship with God.

Prayer and Practice

- Children should know the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Act of Contrition.
- They should understand the steps of confession and feel comfortable using an examination of conscience.
- They participate in classroom or family prayer regularly and experience God's mercy through scripture (e.g., the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus).

Third Grade – Confirmation and First Eucharist

Faith, Knowledge, and Understanding

- Confirmation completes Baptism and strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.
- The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit help us live holy and brave lives.
- The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, the source and summit of Christian life.
- At Mass, we listen to God's Word and receive Jesus in the Eucharist to become more like Him and become His disciples.
- The sacraments of initiation fully unite us with the Church, and through them we join in Jesus' great mission to proclaim the Gospel, to live as His disciples, and to build up the Body of Christ in the world.

Prayer and Practice

- Children should know and be able to participate in the Mass responses and gestures.
- They understand how to receive Communion reverently and prayerfully.
- They can identify the parts of the Mass and explain their meaning.
- They pray regularly as a family and are encouraged to attend Sunday Mass weekly.



Appendix B: Parent Communication Templates

Sample Parent Letter (from Pastor or DRE)

Dear Parents,

Our parish community is blessed to walk with you and your child as they prepare to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The Diocese of Salina is now celebrating the sacraments in their restored order. This means that your child will celebrate First Reconciliation in 2nd grade and, in 3rd grade, will receive Confirmation and First Eucharist together at the same Mass.

These sacraments are not milestones of maturity or graduation—they are gifts of grace, freely given by God to strengthen your child in faith. Your role as parents is essential. You are the first and best teachers of the faith, and your example of prayer and participation in Sunday Mass forms the foundation of your child's understanding of God's love.

Thank you for allowing us to partner with you. Let's continue to pray for one another and for our children as they grow in faith, hope, and love.

In Christ,

[Pastor's or DRE's Name]

[Parish Name]

Parent Preparation Checklist For Reconciliation (2nd Grade):

- Attend parent meeting and review materials provided by the parish.
- Work with your child on learning the Act of Contrition and the steps of Confession.
- Participate in the parish Reconciliation retreat or prayer service.
- Schedule and attend your child's First Reconciliation celebration.

Parent Preparation Checklist For Confirmation and Eucharist (3rd Grade):

- Attend required parent meetings and family sessions.
- Participate in the parish retreat or family day of reflection.
- Ensure your child attends all formation sessions and Sunday Mass.
- Help your child choose a qualified sponsor.
- Attend the Confirmation and First Eucharist Mass together as a family.



Appendix C: Retreat Outline

Theme: “Sealed with the Spirit, Nourished by Christ”

Suggested Schedule (Half-Day Retreat)

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer – Focus on the Holy Spirit and Baptismal identity.
2. Scripture Reflection – John 15:1–11 (“I am the vine, you are the branches”) or Acts 2:1–4 (Pentecost).
3. Teaching Moment – Connection between Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.
4. Interactive Stations:
 - Holy Spirit Gifts Reflection
 - Eucharistic Adoration or church tour
 - Service activity
5. Reconciliation Opportunity
6. Closing Prayer and Blessing – Invite families to bring home a symbol (cross, candle, or dove) to remind them of their preparation.



Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the age for Confirmation in the Diocese of Salina?

A: Confirmation is received in the third grade, following two years of preparation beginning in second grade. First Reconciliation takes place in second grade. Then, in third grade, children receive Confirmation and First Holy Communion together—restoring the original order of the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Q: Are third graders old enough for Confirmation?

A: Yes. Canon Law (Can. 891) states that Confirmation is to be conferred “at about the age of discretion” (around age 7), unless the bishops set a different age. The Church teaches that Confirmation is not about choosing to be an adult in the Church, but about completing the grace of Baptism.

Even infants can receive this sacrament in cases where there is a danger of death. This is because Confirmation, like Baptism, is a gift of grace from God, and the Church desires that no one, especially the youngest members, die without receiving the graces associated with this sacrament. (These cases are rare, and pastoral guidance should be sought from the pastor.)

Confirmation and First Eucharist complete one’s initiation into the Church and are the beginning of full participation in the life of Christ and His mission through the Church.

Q: What is the Sacrament of Confirmation, and what does it do spiritually?

A: Confirmation strengthens the baptized with the Holy Spirit, obliging them more firmly to live as witnesses of Christ.

It imprints a spiritual character on the soul, deepens baptismal grace, and binds the person more closely to the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1302–1305; *Canon Law* 879).

It is not a symbol of graduation, but a sacrament of initiation that empowers the Christian for lifelong mission.



Q: What do children need to know to be confirmed?

A: Canon Law requires that candidates be “suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew their baptismal promises” (*Can. 889 §2*).

Children should know the basics of the Catholic faith, appropriate to their age, and have a desire to receive the sacrament.

They must be baptized and not prevented by law from being confirmed.

Importantly, they do not need to have a complete or mature understanding of the faith—Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation that strengthens baptismal grace and prepares one more fully for the Eucharist.

Q: What does Canon Law say about the order of sacraments?

A: *Canon 842 §2* teaches that Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are all required for full initiation. *Canon 866* adds that adults should be baptized, confirmed, and receive the Eucharist in that order. The Eucharist, described in *Canon 897* as “the most august sacrament,” is the culmination of initiation—the summit and source of Christian life. Restoring this original order emphasizes that the Eucharist is the goal toward which the other sacraments are directed.

Q: What if a child missed Confirmation in third grade and is already baptized?

A: The child should be brought to the pastor or parish catechetical leader to arrange age-appropriate preparation and to receive the sacrament at a later date.

Q: How are adults and older children who are unbaptized prepared?

A: Adults and children age seven and older who have not been baptized are prepared for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist together through the Order of Christian Initiation (*OCLIA or OCIC*).



Appendix E: Sponsor Eligibility and Parish Checklist

Requirements for Sponsors:

- Must be a baptized and confirmed Catholic.
- Must be at least 16 years of age.
- Must be actively practicing the faith, regularly attending Mass, and living in accord with Church teaching.
- Should not be the parent of the child being confirmed.
- Should be a model of Christian faith and prayer for the candidate.
- Complete Sponsor Eligibility Form

Sponsors are encouraged to attend preparation meetings, the retreat, and the sacramental celebration when possible.

Parish Checklist for Sacramental Preparation

- Schedule parent meetings and provide family formation materials.
- Maintain accurate records of baptism and sacramental preparation.
- Confirm all catechists use a diocesan-approved curriculum.
- Coordinate with Catholic schools to ensure consistency.
- Schedule and communicate celebration dates with the Bishop's office.
- Record all sacraments in the parish and baptismal registers.
- Offer ongoing post-sacramental formation opportunities for children and families.



Appendix F: Parent Responsibilities

Parent Responsibility

Parents/guardians are the primary educators in the faith and play a crucial role in preparing their children for the Sacraments of Initiation. Parishes and schools assist families, but cannot replace the responsibility of the home.

To help their child prepare for First Reconciliation, Confirmation, and First Eucharist, parents/guardians are expected to:

- **Attend parent meetings and formation sessions** offered by the parish/school and actively participate in the preparation process.
- **Ensure their child's regular attendance** at all required sacramental preparation sessions and Sunday catechesis (if applicable).
- **Lead by example** by participating in the life of the Church through:
 - regular Sunday Mass attendance
 - prayer in the home
 - participation in parish life
- **Pray with and for their child**, helping them learn and practice basic Catholic prayers and habits of faith.
- **Help their child understand the meaning of the sacraments**, using provided resources and home activities as part of preparation.
- **Foster a habit of frequent Confession**, beginning with First Reconciliation and continuing regularly as part of Catholic life.
- **Encourage reverence for the Eucharist** by modeling a respectful and prayerful disposition at Mass and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.
- **Provide the necessary documentation**, including:
 - a baptismal certificate (if needed)
 - sponsor eligibility information (for Confirmation)
 - completion of required forms and permissions
- **Support ongoing faith formation after sacramental reception**, recognizing that sacraments are not an “ending,” but a beginning of deeper discipleship.

What Matters Most—A recent study by the Peyton Institute for Domestic Church Life (an apostolate of Holy Cross Family Ministries) found that, along with regular family prayer, one of the strongest influences on a young person's faith is experiencing faith as something *shared at home*—a source of warmth that draws families together in good times and strengthens them through difficult times.

