

# Sacrament Preparation and Ongoing Catechesis

by Kathy Kleinlein

How would you answer the following question from a parent?

*Why does my child have to attend separate classes before making the sacraments?  
Why can't the instruction take place in the regular religious education program as it did when I was a child?*

Hopefully you will:

## **1. Explain the *purpose* of faith formation.**

As Catholics, we need consistent, life-long catechesis to grow in our relationship with God and to more completely understand how to live out our Baptismal vows. Catechesis begins in childhood with regular faith formation classes, each having its own year-long scope and sequence. Many parents don't know that children in grade two learn about much more than the sacraments they will be receiving at the end of the year.

## **2. Explain the requirement for formation *prior* to enrollment in the sacrament class.**

Before children receive a sacrament, they require adequate spiritual and catechetical formation. This is done, first and foremost, by the example of how their family and their faith community live out Gospel values in their daily lives. As the child witnesses their parents sharing their love for God through their faith, the child will similarly develop a personal relationship with Jesus. The requirement for faith formation (usually a year) prior to receiving a sacrament is secondarily accomplished by enrolling (at the parish or at home) in continuing faith formation classes.

## **3. Explain how sacramental preparation (often called immediate sacramental preparation) is *distinct and separate* from faith formation.**

Because reception of a sacrament presumes that the child has a relationship with Jesus and a foundation of faith, it is *readiness*, not age or grade that is used as the basis for whether or not a child should receive a sacrament. Unlike faith formation, sacramental preparation requires the active participation of the family and the involvement of the parish community. To this end, sacramental catechesis may not be done at home since it is by nature an ecclesial event (see #6) and all children, whether they attend the parish or the parish school, are required to receive this instruction together in the parish at which they are registered.

## **4. Explain the *role* of the sacramental preparation teacher.**

The teacher assigned to sacramental preparation ensures that the child not only learns about the specific sacrament, but also understands that receiving sacraments initiates them into a Christian way of living and worshiping in a parish community. Sacramental

preparation teachers are able to provide children with opportunities for conversion and evangelization so that they might develop a sense of their own spirituality and a solid understanding of the transforming aspects of their faith.

**5. Explain the *role of parents* in sacramental preparation.**

As the primary catechists of their children, parents have a right and responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for sacraments, which can only be accomplished by attending the sacramental preparation classes. In addition, it is essential for families to participate regularly, fully, consciously and actively at Sunday Eucharist because this is the most powerful and most significant means parents have for preparing their child for sacraments.

**6. Explain the *role of the faith community* in sacramental preparation.**

Since the celebration of sacraments is a faith community event, the larger Church is responsible for supporting parents by providing ongoing catechesis. The community also serves to witness and attest to the children's readiness to be fully initiated into the ranks of the faithful. This is why the Church recommends that Sunday be the day designated for celebrating sacraments.

Your enthusiasm, belief, and conviction about *immediate* and *separate* sacramental preparation classes will go a long way towards your parents' embracing the idea. But rather than explain all this to a parent in a few minutes, invite them to attend a sacramental preparation class with other parents so they can see for themselves the value and importance of separate preparation.