

Catechesis: Sacramental Catechesis

Introduction

This segment is meant to help you reflect on the importance of sacramental catechesis. It will point out the differences between merely teaching young people about the Sacraments and preparing them for the Sacraments. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Then read the article “What Is Sacramental Catechesis?” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

First Question

What do you think of when you hear the term “sacramental catechesis”?

What Is Sacramental Catechesis?

Actually, we might say sacramental catechesis takes two forms for young people: teaching and learning about the Seven Sacraments throughout the grades, and immediate preparation of young people to celebrate the Sacraments for the first time. In the *National Directory of Catechesis*, nine general principles are listed for sacramental catechesis (35.B). In most parishes there are preparation programs for young people for Sacraments of Initiation (Children’s Catechumenate for unbaptized children of catechetical age), and for preparation for the celebrations Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. Usually these preparation programs are linked in some way to regular catechesis in the Catholic School and the parish catechetical program,

but they are also separate. Think of what happens in the Catholic School and the parish catechetical program as long term and on-going catechesis about the Sacraments, and special preparation programs as immediate preparation for the Sacraments. Here we will emphasize the process for immediate preparation.

The practices for preparing young people for the Sacraments are diverse and varied but what is most common to most of these practices is:

- The involvement of parents, the worshiping community, and with Confirmation, sponsors or sponsor/mentors.
- A catechetical model that gradually and systematically introduces the young person and their family members to the meaning of the rites and symbols of the sacrament.

The structure for immediate preparation for the Sacraments is often family centered either in addition to or in place of regular catechesis. These separate sessions may take the form of a couple of retreat-like days, or an activity and instructional model that includes young people and their parents or sponsors. The emphasis of both the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *National Directory for Catechesis* models of formation are inspired by the baptismal catechumenate as well as the impetus for lifelong catechesis. This has added the dimension of involving the liturgical assembly more fully in the initiation of young people—in preparation and in actual participation of members of the worshiping community. It works in varying degrees of participation in the preparation, from praying for the young people and families, to participating in intergenerational gatherings and forms of liturgical and doctrinal catechesis alongside the young people and their family members.

Sacramental catechesis follows the model of liturgical catechesis (see previous article) since it focuses primarily on the symbols, rites, and prayers contained in the sacramental ritual. In immediate preparation, the focus is on the meaning of the Sacrament as seen through the lens of the rite itself. It also provides a time when those who celebrated the Sacrament reflect together on the celebration and its meaning for them. This reflection is often called mystagogical catechesis.

As Catholics, we believe that the Sacraments contain what they signify and are powerful vehicles of God's grace for those who are open. Preparation, catechesis, and the full use of the sacramental symbols help us to achieve that openness and experience the power of the Sacraments, as does the ongoing catechesis about the Sacraments in regular catechetical sessions. The Seven Sacraments are the work of God, not simply a human custom or ceremony. Special care in preparing for and celebrating the Sacraments opens the way for their fruitful reception.

Reflection Questions

- Why do you think a separate immediate preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments is important to the student? To the community?
- How well and often do you use liturgical symbols in your sessions?