Re-visioning Confirmation within the Christian Initiation of Children
This bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope. It is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, catechists, teachers, religious, seminarians, clergy, diocesan liturgical commissions, and for all who are involved in preparing, celebrating, and improving the community's life of worship and prayer.

Editorial commentary in the bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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Volume 33 • Number 161 • 67
In dioceses across the nation, and indeed across the North American continent, and beyond, there is a growing awareness, particularly among people most directly involved in the formation and initiation of both children and adults, of the fact that we have two very different patterns of pastoral practice with regard to the sacraments of initiation: one for children and one for adults. Even our language around these patterns differs. Where the language of conversion and discernment dominate the adult process, understanding and responsibility dominate the process with children.

This dichotomy stems from our treatment of the sacrament of confirmation. Adults are initiated according to the pattern of baptism, confirmation, then eucharist, while children baptized in infancy are confirmed several years after their first full sharing in the eucharist. In some communities, reflection on this experience and study around this issue have resulted in the restoration of the ancient order of the sacraments of initiation for everyone regardless of age. This process was given further impetus when the Canadian bishops were in Rome for their most recent ad limina visits.

Bulletin #161 is offered to dioceses, parishes and other groups who are concerned about current practice with regard to the sacrament of confirmation and are prepared to do the necessary work, especially in light of the call in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that "[t]he rite of confirmation is also to be revised in order that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may stand out more clearly ..." (71).

The material in Bulletin #161 is designed for use by groups and will be most fruitful when used in that way. To this end a brief introduction is provided with regard to the group process and adult learning in general. While the document is clearly on the side of restoring the ancient order of the sacraments, we believe that engagement in the process will help clarify theological and pastoral issues underlying any pattern of initiation of children born into Christian families.

The diocese of Victoria was the first Canadian diocese to begin the process of restoration. Bishop Remi De Roo offered his reflections on this decision in Bulletin #152. In this issue, we reprint Maureen Brechin's article (originally written for Celebrate! in 1993) about the practical realities that arose during that process and as a result of it.

The archdiocese of Ottawa is the most recent Canadian community to announce the beginning of a process of resequencing the sacraments for children baptized in infancy. In "The Last Word" Archbishop Marcel Gervais offers a reflection on the process by which this decision was taken.

In "From the Regions" the Western Canada Conference for Liturgy reports on its work over the past year, and the annual business meeting and conference held in November. And Murray Kroetsch once again shares with us the fruits of his ravenous appetite for books in "Brief Book Reviews."
The sacrament of confirmation has attracted a great deal of attention over the past number of years. Liturgical theologians and religious educators have tried to sort out a number of questions: What is the basic meaning of confirmation? What does confirmation actually "do" in terms of salvation? What is the proper age for celebrating this sacrament? The questions have always been straightforward; but the answers have not come easily.

The Second Vatican Council advanced the discussions immeasurably when it spoke of confirmation as a sacrament of Christian initiation: "The rite of confirmation is also to be revised in order that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may stand out more clearly ..." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 71). This clarification and precision was the key that would finally open the way to resolving the various questions surrounding confirmation.

After the Council, the new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1972) restored the Church's original way of celebrating initiation. Adult converts, including children of catechetical age, are now baptized, confirmed, and admitted to the table of the eucharist during the annual Easter Triduum, the three-day festival of the passover of the Lord. In this rite, confirmation is clearly the second sacrament of Christian initiation; and baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are celebrated together as a unified set of sacramental signs.

The new ritual for the initiation of adults drew attention to the traditional order for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist). At the same time, it highlighted the original practice of celebrating the sacraments of Christian initiation in a single, unified rite.

As the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults came into common use (the rite has been in use in our country since 1974; the current Canadian ritual was published in 1987), the differences between the way the Church initiates adults and children became strongly marked. Whereas adults are now initiated in a unified rite following the order of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist, children who are baptized in infancy are admitted to the eucharist in the years of discretion, and confirmed some time later. As a result of these discrepancies, certain questions were raised: Should children be initiated in the same manner as adults? Or are there legitimate reasons for accepting two distinct patterns of celebration?

The new Code of Canon Law (1983), drawing upon the Second Vatican Council and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, calls for confirmation to be celebrated at about the age of discretion, in the case of children baptized in infancy, unless the conference of bishops has decided on a different age (canon 891). Thus, Catholic children baptized in infancy would be confirmed and admitted to the eucharistic table at the age of discretion and the traditional order of celebration would be restored.

Quite naturally, canon 891 has received a lot of attention in countries where confirmation is currently celebrated some years after admission to the eucharist. National and regional conferences of bishops have been discussing the matter at length. Liturgical theologians and education specialists have been very much involved as well.

There are those who would welcome the return of confirmation to its original place...
in the sequence of initiation rites (baptism, confirmation, eucharist); and there are others who, for pastoral reasons, would prefer to leave confirmation where it is.

There are also those who would recommend moving confirmation back to baptism. Finally, there are those who would argue that the sacraments of Christian initiation belong together regardless of the age of those being initiated. They would favour an eventual return to the Church's original practice of baptizing and confirming infants born of Catholic parents and of admitting them to the eucharistic table by way of communion from the cup.

In 1987 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) decreed that "the sacrament of confirmation in the Roman rite shall be conferred at the age determined by the approved catechetical programmes" (See *Complementary Norms to the 1983 Code of Canon Law*, CCCB, 1996). The commentary attached to the decree includes these observations:

Where the programmes are flexible, so too will be the age at which Confirmation is celebrated ... It is not to be considered as a rite to mark entry into adulthood, nor is it to be used as a means to keep young people interested in the life of the Church ... Thus, in some instances, and for sound pastoral reasons, the approved catechetical programmes could even provide for the celebration of confirmation before first communion, thus restoring the original order of the sacraments of initiation.

Any change in the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation will affect almost everyone in the Church. Thus, the present discussion is of interest to pastors, religious educators, catechists, pastoral councils, liturgy committees, and parish communities at large. *Children of the Passage* is designed to allow this wider audience to discuss some of the issues that need to be explored today.

Chapter One presents a basic history of the sacraments of initiation. This history anchors the chapters that follow. Chapter Two provides a theology of Christian initiation that is rooted in the passage of Jesus through death to glory. Chapter Three explores the pastoral issues surrounding the sacraments of initiation. Chapter Four discusses the process by which children are formed in the faith. It considers the relationship between the religious formation of children and the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation. Chapter Five outlines the various changes that might occur in parish celebrations if confirmation were restored to its original place in Christian initiation.

This study guide is flexible enough to be used in a variety of ways. It is designed for group discussion, with one or more sessions dedicated to each of the five chapters. If the group members read each chapter in advance of their meeting, they can then address the discussion questions or add their own observations and reflections when they come together. The text can also be used for individual study.

**Suggestions for Using the Document**

Groups wishing to study *Children of the Passage* should structure the experience in a way that encourages learning, keeping in mind three factors that will provide an effective framework for your study: the characteristics of adult learners, the need for a good environment, and norms for group interaction. An understanding and respect for each of these factors will enrich the learning process for all involved.

**Adult Learners**

For adult learners, the learning is shaped by the life experience brought by each
member of the group. Discussion around the material in *Children of the Passage* will evolve from and build on the experiences of the adults present. This study guide is not concerned simply with the transmission of information but with fostering critical reflection on present practice.

For adult learners, change (the result of all learning) will occur when the learner is engaged in the process. The experiences of individuals in dialogue with the content of the guide will serve as resources for the discussion as well as foster deeper insights.

Adults expect that what they are learning will have concrete applications within their life situation. In areas marked by deep emotion, several of which may arise in this study, the adult learner may resist change or new ways of thinking. Indeed, before its final editing, the guide was used by three pilot groups who then gave valuable feedback to the authors. The experience of the groups confirmed that the content sparked lively discussion and debate. This should not come as a surprise to those who might facilitate a discussion group, but it certainly underlines the importance of establishing an atmosphere where diversity and differences of opinion will be respected. Facilitators set the example by embodying a spirit of openness and mutuality.

**An Environment for Learning**

Adult learners expect to be comfortable. Learning can be promoted or discouraged by the physical space, mood, and atmosphere. The little things that promote physical comfort are important. Warmth, refreshments, comfortable chairs, and soft lighting all contribute to an effective environment.

**Ground Rules**

Clearly stated norms for group interaction will lay the groundwork for an effective learning environment. Each group is a microcosm of society, comprised of a mixture of personalities and temperaments. Presenting ground rules for interaction at the outset, and restating them along the way as needed, will maintain a positive atmosphere. When such guidelines are established at the beginning, everyone in the group can take responsibility for the quality of discussion.

Personal interaction among group members is to be characterized by mutual trust, acceptance, and respect. The facilitator or chair, and also group members, must present themselves genuinely to one another, respecting one another as unique individuals with valuable insights and ideas. Each member of the group is invited to be involved in the process through active listening and sharing of ideas. A willingness to listen and a willingness to share are both essential. The freedom to speak out, challenge ideas, and give voice to thoughts is to be offered to all members. A commitment to truth must be shared by the group. Erroneous thinking and inaccurate statements will be corrected for the good of all. Although the group strives for greater understanding and knowledge, there needs to be an appreciation for the complexities of life. It is not always easy to obtain clear-cut answers to life's questions. Finally, a commitment to the task, which requires adherence to the set agenda, will benefit all.

**The Facilitator**

Although a skilled and experienced facilitator is an asset to any study group, the task of chairing sessions could be shared by the group. It is important to remember that the facilitator’s role is to create an atmosphere that ensures that the group will stay focused on the matter being discussed. The facilitator need not be the keeper of the wisdom and content.
CHAPTER 1
History of Christian Initiation of Children

Previewing This Chapter

According to our earliest tradition, the sacraments of Christian initiation (baptism, confirmation and eucharist) are celebrated in one liturgical celebration and are not separated except on the grounds of pastoral necessity. Confirmation is clearly a sacrament of Christian initiation. For the first 1900 years of the Church's life, the order of sacramental celebration within the complex of initiation rites was invariably baptism, followed by confirmation, followed by eucharist. This sequence was maintained even when the rites were separated in time.

Historical development leading to our present situation is in four stages. First, confirmation and holy communion are separated from baptism. Next, the number of years separating confirmation and holy communion from baptism increases. Following this, reconciliation is inserted among the sacraments of initiation. Finally, a return to early communion causes a reversal in the order of celebrating confirmation and admission to holy communion.

The Practice of the Early Church

It can truthfully be said that the early Church existed largely in major cities and towns of the Roman Empire. The larger urban populations provided fertile soil for the seeds of the good news sewn by early Christian evangelizers. The concentration of people within urban communities made it easy for local communities to assemble regularly for liturgical celebrations under the presidency of the bishop.

We are fortunate to have preserved for us a selection of writings from the period that provides historical snapshots of early Church life. Among them are accounts of various liturgies, including rites of initiation. These are liturgical rites by which individuals and whole families were joined to the Church by ritually joining Christ in his passage through death into glory.

The early practice of the Church, both in the East and in the West, is quite clear. Adults and infants alike were initiated into the Church in a single celebration, usually as part of the Easter Vigil. In one nocturnal gathering, celebrating the passage of Jesus the Christ from death to new, glorious, Spirit-filled life, the community of his disciples gathered to bring the initiates forth from the death of sin out of the waters of baptism, anoint them into the royal priesthood of the kingdom, and welcome them to the banquet of the kingdom at the table of the eucharist.
Infants, who could not yet take solid food, including the consecrated bread, were given the precious blood alone at this celebration and at all subsequent celebrations of the eucharist. (The minister would dip a finger in the wine and then allow the baby to suck the drops of wine from his finger.) Since there was a bishop in every community, it was he who invariably presided over this celebration.

One Problem—Two Solutions

From about the middle of the fourth century, the Church enjoyed a privileged status throughout the empire. Soon, urban populations were mainly Christian. The missionary effort of the Church then turned to people living in the more remote regions of the countryside.

The isolation of some rural segments of the community from their urban centres meant the inability of many Christian communities to gather in a single assembly for any occasion. People were unable to make their way to the bishop's town for Sunday eucharist or even for Christian initiation. This new situation gave rise to a pastoral problem. The early Church could not tolerate a scenario in which Christians were denied access to Sunday eucharist and other sacraments.

The problem of Sunday eucharist was solved by expanding the role of the presbyters. "Presbyters" originated as advisors to the bishop, ordained to assist in the administration of the diocese. As dioceses became too large, presbyters were delegated to preside over local communities, making the bishop's presence felt when he could not personally be there. (Today presbyters are most often referred to as "priests.") At the rural liturgies, the *femenum*, a fragment of the consecrated bread from the bishop's cathedral liturgy, was added to the cup of consecrated wine at the presbyter's rural liturgy, as a sign of the unity of the celebrations.

For initiation, however, the problem was more complex. Two approaches to the initiation problem evolved, each having apparent advantages and disadvantages.

In the East, presbyters were sent out from the bishop with authority to carry out the entire initiation process. The advantage of this pastoral decision was that in all cases local communities, urban and rural alike, were able to celebrate full initiation at the Easter Vigil. The integrity of the rites was preserved. The disadvantage was that the bishop, the "papa" of the diocesan "household," could be present only in the town, although the presbyter was seen to make him present elsewhere.

In the West, presbyters were sent out from the bishop with authority only to begin the initiation process with...
baptism; the bishop himself would confirm and admit to holy communion as soon as he was free. The advantage of this pastoral decision was the concrete presence of the bishop for at least part of the initiation ritual, not only in the town but in the countryside as well. The “papa” of the diocesan “household” personally anointed each and every individual and welcomed them to the eucharistic table. The disadvantage was a slight time gap in the celebration of the rites, although they would normally be completed within the fifty days of the Easter season.

**Christian Initiation**

**Disengaged from the Easter Season**

By the early medieval period, the bond between the Easter Vigil and the initiation rites had disintegrated. As the world became Christianized, there came a time when most candidates for initiation were infants born to Christian parents. In view of the obvious innocence of these infants, the meaning of “baptism for the forgiveness of sins” came under closer scrutiny. The concept of “original sin” was more broadly discussed and articulated. Subsequent concerns about cleansing infants from original sin became the overriding factor in scheduling the celebration of initiation rites. The liturgical rites marking the infant’s passage with Christ through death to kingdom life became dislodged from the great annual feast that celebrated the original salvific event. So infant baptism was celebrated year round and privately.

**Loss of Cup for Laity = End of Infant Communion**

In the West, in the course of the centuries, the practice of sharing communion from the cup declined. Eventually, communion under one species became one of the liturgical issues raised by Protestant reformers, especially John Wycliffe and John Huss. As a result, in 1415, the Council of Constance, the sixteenth ecumenical council, reacting against the teachings of these reformers, declared that any presbyter who gave communion to the people under both species of bread and wine would be subject to excommunication.

With the loss of communion from the cup for the laity, infants could no longer share in communion. Hence, completion of their initiation by admission to the eucharistic table had to be postponed until they had arrived at the years of discretion, namely the age at which they could be depended on to eat the consecrated bread properly. Now, even in the towns, the period between baptism and the completion of initiation was further extended with confirmation and first sharing in holy communion being celebrated when the children...
Jansenism was a religious movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by an exaggerated sense of unworthiness and by a pervading fear of damnation. It included a doctrine of predestination and the radical corruption of human nature by original sin. Grace was seen as given only to a few. Despite papal condemnation, Jansenism became widespread and pervaded many aspects of faith and practice, including infrequent communion and the requirement of confession immediately before each sharing in communion. It maintains some residual hold in popular thinking and piety today.

THE AGE OF DISCRETION
The current Roman Catholic practice of admitting children to holy communion at about age seven is an outcome of the historical process under discussion. The postponement of an infant's sharing in holy communion until the years of discretion was occasioned by the general loss of communion from the cup. The precise designation of age seven and the use of the term "age of reason" are related not so much to the capacity of a child to consume the consecrated bread properly as to a sociological phenomenon: in early Roman law, seven was the designated age at which a child achieved legal status, possessed rights, and assumed public responsibilities. In other words, these concepts are artifacts of secular Roman culture and have no theological basis. had reached the years of discretion. (This practice is reflected in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which stated that confirmation might be postponed until about age six, the seventh year of life.)

The Time Gap Widens
The period between the baptism of infants and their confirmation and first sharing in communion eventually became a number or years, sometimes approaching adulthood. Some bishops even found it necessary to urge their people not to totally neglect the completion of their initiation with these two sacraments (confirmation and eucharist).

The celebration of confirmation and first holy communion at an even later age, such as sixteen or eighteen, was merely the natural outcome of other factors: the increased size of dioceses, the difficulty of travel, and in some cases, the neglect of pastoral duties.

The choice of an older age for holy communion was later supported by Jansenism, a religious movement characterized by an exaggerated sense of human unworthiness. Jansenist piety inspired a requirement of confession before every sharing in communion, even the first; hence, the insertion of the sacrament of reconciliation into the initiation sequence.

Confirmation Disconnected from Baptism and Eucharist
By the middle of the nineteenth century the rites of initiation had become disengaged from each other in popular thinking and in Church practice and were perceived as three isolated sacramental moments, each with its own prerequisites and effects. Often, even confirmation and first communion, though administered in the traditional sequence, were not administered in the same celebration, but were in fact separated by a number of months or years.

It is not surprising then that, in 1910, when Pope Pius X's decree, Quam singulari, lowered the age of admission to eucharist to the age of discretion (defined in the document as "about the seventh year, more or less"), it was not universally recognized that confirmation must go with it. Thus, the practice of confirming after admission to holy communion is a recent development and then only in small pockets of the Western Church and without the approval of Rome.

The outcome of this complex historical evolution is that today, in most Canadian dioceses, children baptized in infancy are admitted to the eucharistic table at the age of discretion, and are confirmed sometime during adolescence.
Catechesis

Catechesis is a process of bringing others to faith or to a deeper understanding of faith. It goes beyond the boundaries of religious education in that it calls for a response of the full person and results in changed lives. Catechists, allowing the Spirit to work through their ministry, draw on liturgy and prayer, scripture and tradition, witness and daily living as sources for witnessing to and handing on the story of our faith.

Catechetical Age

Simply stated, catechetical age is that age at which a child is able to fruitfully prepare for initiation by participating in a program of catechesis suited to her/his stage of development and, following this, to make an authentic profession of faith. It is assumed that, for those initiated as children, catechesis will continue after baptism, just as it does with adults. This is called postbaptismal catechesis. Generally speaking, postbaptismal catechesis for children should be ongoing and programmed according to the pace of their progress to adulthood.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the benefits of the current approach to the initiation of children? What are the problems?
2. Can you suggest some possible means of overcoming the problems discussed in question 1?
3. To what extent do any of the circumstances that contributed to the process of separation and re-ordering of the rites of initiation of infants exist today?
4. What circumstances in your present situation might stand in the way of a return to the ancient practice of infant initiation?
5. Can you suggest some possible means of overcoming the problems foreseen in question 4?

Concluding Remarks

East vs. West?

Sometimes much has been made of the so-called Eastern and Western traditions regarding the sacraments of initiation. In fact, however, the East and the West are in historical concurrence regarding full initiation of infants and on the sacramental order of celebration. They differ only in that the Eastern Church chose to protect the unity of Christian initiation in every instance, and, to this end, authorized presbyters to confirm, while the Western Church chose to retain the role of the bishop in conferring confirmation, even in the countryside, with the result that the unity of the celebration was disrupted.

Full Initiation in Infancy

The admission of infants to holy communion is of particular interest. Quite simply, it was originally understood that to be received into the Church was to be received into a table community: the community that gathered weekly at the table of the kingdom feast, the banquet table of the household of God, the community nourished and then sent from the table into the world to draw the world into the kingdom and its banquet. Fully initiated infants, children and adults would come to appreciate the deeper significance of the sharing of this table as they lived their lives within the experience of the feast.

Initiation and Catechesis

Of their nature, the sacraments of initiation do not require any catechesis of the candidates prior to their celebration. The full initiation of infants was never postponed simply in order that these children might be instructed first. Naturally, when the sacraments of initiation are celebrated at a catechetical age, appropriate instruction, commensurate with the children's development, is indicated. Historically, however, even in the case of adults, catechesis about the sacraments themselves was always postbaptismal in character and occurred during the time following their Easter initiation.
CHAPTER 2

Theology of Christian Initiation

Previews This Chapter

This chapter examines the theology that lies behind the Church's ancient practice of celebrating the Christian initiation of adults and children as a single, unified rite. It presents baptism, confirmation and eucharist as the sacraments that draw the world into the mystery of Jesus' passage through death and resurrection to lordship and glory and to everlasting communion of life in God.

Raising Questions

Why did we celebrate the sacraments of Christian initiation in a particular way?

The Good News of Salvation

The Church's good news is about Jesus' passage to the life of glory and about our passage through, with and in him.

Raising Questions

Our study of the history of the sacraments of Christian initiation has given us a clear picture of the Church's early practice: adults, children and infants were baptized, confirmed and admitted to the eucharist in a single celebration at the Easter Vigil.

This way of celebrating Christian initiation raises a number of interesting questions. Why did we celebrate Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil? Why did we celebrate all the sacraments together, even in the case of infants and children? Why did we celebrate the sacraments in a particular sequence: baptism, confirmation, eucharist?

In this chapter, we'll take a careful look at each of the three sacraments of initiation and see if they can provide some answers to our questions. But first, let's examine some background material.

The Good News of Salvation

One of the most important things we can say about the Church is that we are a gospel people—a people who believe and live and share the good news of salvation.

This good news is about Jesus, who is called the Christ, the Anointed One of God. (The title "Christ" is taken from the Greek christos meaning anointed.)

It is about his dying and rising from the dead, his ascension in his humanity to glorious, Spirit-filled lordship, and his communion of life in the triune God. It is about his sending of the Holy Spirit to gather the whole world into his own passage to the fullness of life in God.
We call this passage of Jesus through death and resurrection to exalted life in God, and the passage of the world in him, the paschal mystery. The word “paschal” is derived from pasch, meaning passover or passage; and the word “mystery” describes the passage as the once-hidden plan of God for our salvation, which is now revealed, opened out, and achieved.

Although the term “paschal mystery” is only now coming back into common use by theologians and catechists, it alone describes the centre of the Church’s faith, the substance of its proclamation, and the source of its joy. It speaks of the redemption, the “divinization” of our own humanity in Christ. And it is the key to understanding the deeper meaning of the Church’s celebration of baptism, confirmation and eucharist.

**Christian Initiation**

Jesus came to lead the world back to God. He undertook his passage through death to resurrected and glorious life on behalf of us all; and his goal was to make his own passage available to all peoples to the end of time.

Thus, from the beginning of his public ministry Jesus announced the good news of the kingdom of God: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1.15). (The term “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” refers to that utterly new way of being in which the world lives in communion of life with God.)

Jesus showed us the way: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14.6); and he revealed our destiny: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12.32).

For those who have come to believe in the Church’s proclamation of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, one burning question remains. It can be put in many ways: How does the world become one with Jesus in his passage to the kingdom? How does the passage of Jesus become our passage as well? How does the world come to share in the victory of Christ? How does the good news of Jesus Christ become good news for us today?

The Church’s answer is clear. We become even now one with Jesus in his victorious passage through death to kingdom life through our participation in the sacraments of that passage: baptism, confirmation and eucharist. In these sacred rites, our own humanity is caught up in the glorified humanity of Christ, not merely as a future hope, but as a truth that captures our lives here and now.

This is why we call these sacraments the sacraments of Christian initiation. They initiate us into the
Baptism

Baptism makes us one with Jesus in his passage through death to resurrected life.

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paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. They initiate us into the community that holds the paschal mystery to be its very life.

In summary, we can say that the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist are rites of passage. They draw the world into the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Through our participation in them, we become the people of the passage, the Church.

With these reflections in mind, let’s now turn our attention to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist in order to discover how they reveal and achieve our participation in Jesus’ passage through death to glorious, kingdom life. We’ll do this by looking at the sacred signs—immersion in the baptismal font or pool, anointing with chrism, and participation with the assembly at the Lord’s table—and by letting these signs speak for themselves.

Baptism

Perhaps the best place to begin our investigation of the sacrament of baptism is with the word “baptism” itself. In ancient Greek, *baptizein* means to immerse or to submerge. This meaning leads us straightaway to the pool of water or font that is the focus of the baptismal event.

The most interesting observation about water is that it signifies death; and it signifies life.

It signifies death. The great oceans of the world are undoubtedly charged with fearsome power. Buffeted by storms, the seas’ huge waves can swallow and destroy whatever ventures out too far. It is no wonder that ancient myths portray the ocean deeps as the abode of great sea monsters who rise up and devour those who dare to travel in their path. It is no wonder that those who fish the great seas have a healthy respect for their awesome might.

But above all, water signifies life. The opening lines of the Book of Genesis describe the foundation of the world: God’s spirit hovers over the primeval waters; and God speaks a creative word, parting the waters and bringing forth all life.

Already the root meaning of baptism begins to emerge. To go down into the waters of death and to be immersed in them is to die. And to be drawn forth from the waters of life is to be created, to be born, to live.

We need to move ahead now and apply our general observations to Christian baptism in particular. Here we are talking about something very special: a new cre-
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ation, a new life brought about by the death and resurrection of the Lord and by the Holy Spirit, who is at work even now in the world.

The waters of Christian baptism immerse us in the death of Jesus Christ and draw us forth in his resurrected life. The waters of Christian baptism are the waters of a new creation, the waters of rebirth, the waters of new life in Christ. A telling passage from the Book of Revelation comes to mind: "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'" (21.5).

Baptism, then, is our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord. To be immersed in the baptismal font or pool and to be drawn forth from its Spirit-filled waters is to die and rise in Christ, to become a new creation, to be reborn into the resurrected life of Christ. The parallel with the original creation of the world is striking: the primeval waters, the Spirit hovering over them, the creative words spoken in the name of Christ: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Hence, the Church proclaims a new creation, a new life: "you have become a new creation and have clothed yourselves in Christ" (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, [RCIA] 296); "My dear children, by your baptism you have been born again in Christ" (RCIA, 300).

We come, then, to the full meaning of the liturgy of baptism. To be baptized is to be made one with Jesus, in the whole of our being, in his passage through death to resurrected life. Baptism is our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord. It is rebirth into new life. It is our sharing in a cosmic event of the utmost significance: the re-creation of the world in Christ.

From what we have seen, it is easy to understand why immersion is the preferred form of baptism. (See the "General Introduction" to the Roman rituals for initiation, article 22: "As the rite for baptizing, either immersion, which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, or pouring may lawfully be used.") For many centuries baptism was invariably celebrated by immersion; and the Eastern rites have maintained the practice unaltered to the present day.

If we have sometimes struggled with the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, it may be, at least in part, because the Western Church gradually substituted pouring for immersion (perhaps because of the cold climate of Northern Europe!). Happily, there are indications that we may now be prepared to return to
baptism by immersion as the stronger and clearer expression of the Church's first sacrament of Christian initiation.

**Confirmation**

When we move from baptism to confirmation (or chrismation, as it is called in the Eastern rites), our attention shifts from water to oil. As we do so, it's useful to note that there is a long-standing connection between water and oil. We need only recall the ancient practice of anointing the body with oil after coming out of the bath. Because of its natural properties, oil restores and seals the body.

Keeping this connection in mind, let's now turn to the religious tradition of Israel. In this tradition, perfumed oil was used to anoint priests, prophets and kings. The oil was poured lavishly over their heads, thus "sealing" them in a new relationship with God. The fragrant oil, which delighted the senses, was an outward manifestation of God's grace and favour, God's blessing and joy, God's gracious presence in their lives.

This leads us forward to confirmation. Here we have a new anointing, a new sealing with fragrant oil. (The oil used for confirmation is called chrism, a word that comes from the Greek *chriem* meaning to anoint.)

This anointing, as we have seen, follows in a long tradition; but it is also something utterly new. This anointing is connected with Jesus, who alone is the great High Priest, Prophet and King. It is connected with Jesus, who is the Christ, the Anointed One of God.

If we put baptism and confirmation together in our minds, we see a double sacramental sign that uses water and oil; and when we relate this double sign to the paschal mystery, an interesting picture emerges.

In the waters of baptism, the participant is made one with Jesus in his death and resurrection; and in the anointing with holy oil, the participant is made one with Jesus in his ascension to Spirit-filled lordship at the right hand of the Father, where he is the great High Priest, Prophet and King forever.

The liturgy has always referred to Jesus as Lord; and the Acts of the Apostles says the following: "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (2:36).

The earliest meaning of lord in English is "head of the household." Jesus, who is "seated at the right hand of the Father" is established forever as the head of the...
new household, the whole of creation renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism and confirmation, then, reveal two complementary but distinct aspects of Jesus' passage: his death and resurrection, and his ascension to the right hand of God—or, to put it in similar words, his victory over death, and his exaltation as the anointed, Spirit-filled Lord of glory.

The Apostles' Creed helps us to recognize these two aspects of the passage. After we proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection we continue as follows: "He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father."

We may also turn to St. Paul, who writes as follows:

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2.9-11).

When we turn to the Chrism Mass, the Church's prayer at the consecration of the chrism offers some interesting insights:

And so, Father, we ask you to bless this oil you have created. Fill it with the power of your Holy Spirit through Christ your Son. It is from him that chrism takes its name and with chrism you have anointed for yourself priests and kings, prophets and martyrs.

Make this chrism a sign of life and salvation for those who are to be born again in the waters of baptism. Wash away the evil they have inherited from sinful Adam, and when they are anointed with this holy oil make them temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you.

Through this sign of chrism grant them royal, priestly and prophetic honour, and clothe them with incorruption. Let this be indeed the chrism of salvation for those who will be born again of water and the Holy Spirit. May they come to share eternal life in the glory of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen (Consecratory Prayer [A]).

Later, in the rite of confirmation itself, the bishop or presbyter anoints the participant with this holy oil saying, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (27).
From all that we have seen so far, a picture of the first stages of Christian initiation begins to emerge. The sacraments of Christian initiation are rites of passage that join us to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. In the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit draws us through death into resurrected life; and in the anointing with holy chrism, the Holy Spirit draws us into Christ's ascension to the right hand of God, sealing us with the Lord's Spirit-filled life of glory.

In this passage we become living witnesses to the unbounded graciousness of our God. We experience what the ancient writers have dared to call our divinization in Christ.

Today we are seeing a gradual return to the lavish use of chrism—a chrism exuding a fragrance that permeates the entire assembly. This is a welcome change that will help communities appreciate more readily the significance of the Church's second sacrament of Christian initiation.

**Eucharist**

We come now to the crowning point of Christian initiation, our full participation in the Church's eucharist.

As we have seen from our look at the history of initiation, those who were baptized and confirmed then joined the assembly for its sacred meal. It's time, then, for us to turn our attention to the altar, which is the table of the Lord, and to its holy food and drink, the body and blood of Christ.

From ancient times, the table has been the special sign of shared life. Even the stranger who knocked at the door was always welcomed to the table, for food and drink are God's gift of life to be shared by all.

The Jewish people have always recognized that the family meal, with its food and drink and shared life, is an embodiment of God's blessings. Hence, every meal begins with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for the wondrous gift of life.

The Passover meal is the supreme expression of the Jewish people's shared life in God. During the table blessing of this annual feast, Israel remembers its passage from slavery to freedom in the promised land and offers thanksgiving to God for the blessings of its new life. By sharing the food and drink of the Passover meal, succeeding generations of Israelites participate in this ancient passage through the desert and rejoice in the blessings of new life in the promised land.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave this Passover meal a new meaning. He said to his disciples, "Do this in
remembrance of me" [emphasis added]. Jesus brings the Passover meal to its fulfillment, transforming it from a memorial of the ancient passage through the desert to the promised land into a memorial of his own passage through death to the glorious life of the kingdom of God.

Succeeding generations of those who follow Christ come together for this new sacred meal that marks the Passover of the Lord; and by partaking of its holy food and drink, the body and blood of the Lord, they make passage with Jesus and celebrate communion of life with the living God.

This reflection allows us to see the feast as the great image of the kingdom. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son" (Mt 22.2ff). It is this image that discloses the deepest meaning of the Church's eucharist. The eucharist is the sacred meal that celebrates the Passover of the Lord. Those who gather for that event dine with Jesus in the banquet feast of the kingdom and rejoice in communion of life in God.

We are now in a position to summarize our observations regarding the sacraments of Christian initiation. Joined to Jesus through baptism and confirmation in his passage to the life of glory, we celebrate with him the banquet feast of the kingdom, which is nothing less than a foretaste of shared life in God. The Church's eucharist brings the world to its destination; it brings us home.

If we have at times lost sight of the significance of the table, it is at least in part because it was gradually removed from the midst of the assembly and because it no longer looked much like a table at all. Returned to its proper place and restored to its original squarish shape (inviting the nations from the four corners of the earth), the table will stand once again as the gracious invitation of God to rejoice in communion of life forever. Then, the assembly, gathered at the table, sharing the one broken bread of life and the one cup of salvation, will recognize ever more fully its remarkable dignity and its festive kingdom life.

Re-visioning Our Lives

Jesus once said to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (Lk 10.23). And so it is with us. The Church's sacramental celebrations reveal the coming of the kingdom and open our eyes to the wonder of the moment. They allow us to see our lives in a wholly new way.
The first part of our new vision of life begins with Jesus. His birth means that the Son of God assumed a human nature. He redeemed and glorified that humanity through his passage back to God. And our own humanity is redeemed and glorified by our participation in his passage. Even now we stand in the dignity of Christ. And it is this new dignity that lays claim to the whole of our lives.

The second part of our new vision of life rests in our recognition that even now we participate in the life of the kingdom. What does that kingdom life look like? Let's take a couple of examples from the Church's eucharist.

The Book of Revelation records John's vision of "what must soon take place" (1.1). The text captures the remarkable newness of kingdom life: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ..." (21.1). "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'" (21.5). Here is the most concrete example of that newness:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (7.9-10).

Now let's turn our attention to the Sunday eucharist. Is it not true that in the great assembly on the Lord's Day the Holy Spirit is already gathering the nations by the hundreds and hundreds of millions into the presence of God? And is it not true that that same Spirit is breathing love into their hearts, leading them to express a new life of unity, peace, harmony and joy, and leading them to praise and glorify God with their whole being? Here, step by step, the kingdom of God is making its entrance into the world. It's not here in its fullness, to be sure, and we pray and work for that day. But it's here, all the same.

We have already seen our second example. The parable of the wedding feast recorded in the gospel according to Matthew compares the kingdom of heaven to "a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son ..." (22.1ff). Now, is it not true that in the Sunday eucharist the Lord already sets before us the table of the feast? Do we not, even now in holy communion, share communion of life in the living God?
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These reflections merely scratch the surface, but they do lead us in the right direction. They help us to see the transforming power of the Spirit already at work in the world and in our lives. They help us to glimpse the coming of the kingdom. They help us to experience the wonder of our lives.

They also help us to understand why the Church makes the following bold statement about its liturgical celebrations: "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10).

Conclusion

The paschal mystery is the heart and centre of our Christian lives. Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, the world is drawn into this saving mystery of Jesus' passage to the right hand of God. The Church is the community of that passage. It proclaims a paschal faith; it celebrates a paschal life; it lives in paschal joy.

Let's now take these theological observations and apply them to the questions that were posed at the beginning of the chapter.

Why did we celebrate Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil? Because the Easter Triduum ("triduum" meaning a period of three days) is the Church's annual celebration of the Passover of the Lord. In this regard, we need only remember the proclamation that marks the beginning of the Easter Vigil:

Dear friends in Christ, on this most holy night, when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life, the Church invites her children throughout the world to come together in vigil and prayer. This is the Passover of the Lord. If we honour the memory of his death and resurrection by hearing his word and celebrating his mysteries, then we may be confident that we shall share his victory over death and live with him forever in God.

Why did we celebrate all the sacraments together, even in the case of infants and children? Because together they draw the world into the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. And this mystery is for us all.

Why did we celebrate the sacraments in a particular sequence: baptism, confirmation, eucharist? Because the sacraments draw us, sign by sign, into Jesus' passage through death to resurrected life, his ascension into Spirit-filled glory, and the communion of life in the triune God.

The more we hear the good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed by the Church, the more we recognize that
God's plan for our salvation is to gather the world together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit—to create a new household of God centred on the table of the feast of the kingdom. As the sacred Scriptures show again and again, salvation does not lie in a private and individual relationship with God; rather, it is found in our personal incorporation into the family of God and our sharing with that family in the life of God.

When adults approach the Christian community, they bring to the sacraments of initiation their personal faith in the good news of salvation. When Christian parents bring their newly born children to the Church, the community embraces the infants as their own, drawing them to the household table even as their families do at home. In either case, it is the Lord himself who graciously calls both young and old to share his life.

Perhaps there is no better way to conclude this chapter than with St. Paul's beautiful prayer for the Ephesians:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (1.17–23).

Discussion Questions

1. How much have we been aware of the paschal mystery as the heart and centre of the Church's life?

2. How does our awareness of the paschal mystery change our understanding of the sacraments of Christian initiation?
The Paschal Mystery

Jesus' passage through death to the life of glory is the heart and centre of the Christian life.

When we studied the history of the sacraments of Christian initiation, we saw how baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist became separated from one another and how the order in which they were celebrated gradually changed.

As time passed, we took this new state of affairs for granted. Today, however, questions are being raised about the long-term effect that the changes have had on the life of the Church. This chapter explores these concerns.

The Paschal Mystery

Let's begin with a phrase that, at least until now, may have sounded a little strange to our ears: the paschal mystery.

The term "paschal mystery" is a very useful phrase because it summarizes in a couple of words the central event of our Christian lives: Jesus' death and resurrection, his ascension into glory, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the gathering of the world into the passage of Jesus to the kingdom of God.

This passage of Jesus—and the passage of the world in him—is the good news of salvation that the Church proclaims to the world. It is also the basis of the Church's life of praise, thanksgiving and joy.

The paschal mystery is so central to our lives that it actually identifies who we are. We can quite rightly describe ourselves as the people of the passage—the people who share the passage of Jesus to the life of the kingdom of God. We are the people who share communion of life in God.

This is why words and phrases like passage, Passover, paschal mystery, kingdom, and the reign of God have a place in the vocabulary of every Christian in every age.
The Sacraments of Christian Initiation

The reason why we prize the sacraments of Christian initiation so much is that they draw us into the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Put another way, the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist initiate us into the Church, which is the community that lives the mystery of Christ's passage to the Father.

This is why it is important for catechists to be able to "read" the sacramental signs: to see death and resurrection in the water-rites of baptism, to see ascension into glory in the anointing with holy chrism, and to see the feast of the kingdom in the eucharistic table and its food and drink.

Celebrating the Sacraments

When the sacraments of Christian initiation are celebrated together, their connection with the paschal mystery tends to shine through.

This is because it is easy to see that baptism and confirmation lead into the eucharist; it is easy to see that they are the sacraments that prepare us to celebrate the feast. Joined to Jesus in his death and resurrection and in his ascension into glory, we gather with him at the table of the feast of the kingdom. Even in the case of infants and children the picture remains clear, since, for them as well, baptism and confirmation lead straightaway to the table of the Lord.

Since the sacraments of Christian initiation are paschal sacraments—sacraments that draw us into the passage of the Lord to the kingdom of God—they constantly proclaim, reveal, and establish our identity as the people of the passage. But it is at this point that we need to ask some hard questions. Have these sacraments lost their paschal "voice" in the course of time? If they have, is it at least in part because of the way in which we are celebrating them today? And, as a result, have we become less aware of who we are as Church?

The Sacraments Today

When we examine our current catechetical approach to the sacraments of Christian initiation, we see that the paschal mystery is indeed the centrepiece of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, where baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are once again celebrated as a continuous rite during the Easter Triduum.

But when we move outside the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, where the sacraments are separated and where their traditional order of celebration is changed, we find that our catechesis has been adjusted to meet the situation and that the paschal mystery does not
Baptism

A paschal catechesis of baptism might read something like this: In baptism we die and rise in Christ in order to share the feast of the kingdom of God. It will always tie baptism to the passage, and it will always point to the eucharist as the feast of communion of life in God. But when baptism is separated from confirmation and eucharist by a number of years, it is no longer so obvious that the purpose of baptism is to lead us to the feast; and it is more difficult, in our catechesis, to speak in paschal terms.

Perhaps the best way to assess our catechesis is to ask what Church members would say about baptism today: Baptism takes away original sin; it makes us children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. These observations are important; they are correct, and they need to be said. But for our own purpose we may note that they lack a clearly paschal edge; they don't turn our attention to the eucharistic feast.

In the case of baptism, there is a further complication. Since baptism no longer leads directly to the eucharistic table, it is not necessary to celebrate it within the feast. But when it is moved to Sunday afternoon, the connection between baptism and the eucharist is further obscured.

Happily, the new Rite of Baptism for Children compensates for this by providing a concluding ceremony at the altar. The admonition reads as follows:

Dearly beloved, these children have been reborn in baptism. They are now called children of God, for so indeed they are. In confirmation they will receive the fullness of God's Spirit. In holy communion they will share the banquet of Christ's sacrifice, calling God their Father in the midst of the Church ...(69).

The new ritual also provides a complete rite of baptism within mass.

Confirmation

So far we have seen that the separation of baptism from confirmation and the eucharist has made it difficult for us to keep our focus on the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Let's now turn our attention to the sacrament of confirmation and examine whether a similar pattern emerges here as well.
A typical paschal catechesis of confirmation would read something like this: Coming forth from the waters of baptism, where we are made one with Jesus in his death and resurrection, we are sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit and are thus joined to Jesus in his ascension to Spirit-filled glory and lordship at the right hand of God. Made one with Jesus in his passage, we celebrate with the Lord the feast of the kingdom of God.

But when confirmation is separated from baptism by many years, and when it is celebrated some time after participation in the eucharist, it becomes difficult to fit this sacrament within a passage to the feast. It becomes difficult to talk about a paschal sacrament that anoints us with the glorious life of Christ so that we might share the banquet table of the kingdom.

As a result, we are inclined to modify our catechetical language and to speak in less paschal terms. Let's take a look at five common explanations of confirmation. As with baptism, everything we say is important and true; but it lacks a clearly paschal thrust.

**Confirmation: Sacrament of the Holy Spirit**

It is certainly appropriate to describe confirmation as a sacrament of the Holy Spirit. The ritual words make this clear enough: “N., be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Nevertheless, the weakness here as elsewhere, is that the paschal movement toward the feast is obscured. Confirmation seems to stand on its own.

To capture the paschal nature of the sacrament we need to focus on the ritual text once again: “Be sealed [emphasis added] with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” This sealing is nothing less than the world's ascension in Christ to share the Spirit-filled lordship and glory that he enjoys in his humanity even now at the right hand of God. It is by being joined to Jesus in his exaltation that we too receive the Holy Spirit as Gift, that the Holy Spirit becomes our very life-breath, that our spirit and the Holy Spirit become one. We are anointed unto glory.

**Confirmation: Sacrament of Witness**

The Holy Spirit is given for the sake of witness, so it is proper to describe confirmation as a sacrament of witness. Here again, however, there is no strong paschal orientation to what is said. Since confirmation is celebrated some time after admission to the eucharist, witness is described primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of our daily lives in the world.
To arrive at a different orientation, let's return to confirmation as a sacrament of the passage. As we have seen, those who were baptized and confirmed were led directly to the table of the paschal banquet. There, joined to the assembly, they offered for the first time the eucharistic prayer—the great prayer of praise and thanksgiving that is the table blessing of the feast.

Thus, the Spirit is given precisely for the sake of the eucharist. The Spirit opens our minds and hearts and empowers us for praise. The Spirit frees us to offer the great prayer by which the world dedicates itself, its whole life, to God: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever." The Great Amen that concludes this table blessing is the assembly's powerful affirmation of everything that has been acclaimed. It is our Spirit-filled "so be it" to God for ever.

In this prayer, we are joined to Jesus, the glorious Lord and the great High Priest, who offers an everlasting sacrifice of praise to the glory of God.

It is in the Sunday assembly, then, gathered in the Spirit-filled praise of God, that we find the Church's essential witness to the world, the Church's public proclamation about the world's destiny, and its ongoing call to the world to be gathered into the fullness of life in God.

It is from the experience of the feast that the assembly goes forth to continue its witness in the world. The witness of the eucharist surges forward into the whole of our lives. This is the significance of the dismissal from the Sunday eucharist. This dismissal is the dramatic hinge between the eucharist and the rest of our lives. It is the powerful sending forth of the assembly toward its mission to proclaim the good news of salvation to the world, to invite the world to take part in the passage and to experience the marvellous joy of the feast.

Confirmation: Sacrament that Makes us Soldiers of Christ

This explanation of confirmation speaks a further truth about the Holy Spirit: it is in the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to engage in the struggle against sin and darkness and become strong in our witness to Christ.

Again, however, because confirmation is celebrated on its own, some time after admission to the eucharist, this "strengthening for the struggle" is usually related to our daily lives in the world. But when we return to the paschal orientation of confirmation, we see that, first
and foremost, the Holy Spirit enables us to remain constant in our paschal faith, to stand tall in the eucharistic assembly and boldly offer the praise of God in the face of a sometimes hostile world. From the experience of this eucharistic feast, the power of the Holy Spirit goes with us as we live our daily lives.

**Confirmation: Rite of Passage**

Confirmation is also described as a rite of passage. But when confirmation stands on its own, apart from the eucharist, “rite of passage” comes to be understood as a coming of age, a kind of Christian bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah. It is seen as marking a person’s passage into adult responsibility in the Church. In a similar vein, we sometimes speak of confirmation as a sacrament of Christian maturity or as a sacrament of Christian adulthood.

When, however, we take into account the paschal nature of the sacraments of Christian initiation, a different picture emerges: baptism, confirmation and eucharist are rites of passage to the kingdom of God.

But these rites of passage are for the whole of the world. They have nothing to do with chronological age; they have nothing to do with a person’s passage into physical, intellectual and emotional maturity. They have everything to do with what one might call “spiritual maturity”: a person’s full appropriation of the mystery of Christ. The sacrament of confirmation brings to perfection or completion the passage through death to Spirit-filled life and draws the initiate to full stature in Christ.

Thus, the growing physical, intellectual and emotional maturity of the Church’s young people is marked, not by their confirmation, but by their gradual inclusion in the organized ministries of the community’s life and witness.

**Confirmation: Sacrament of Christian Commitment**

Commitment is also connected with the Holy Spirit, who inspires us to follow the way of the Lord. We should notice once again, however, that this description does not say very much about the paschal orientation of the sacrament.

According to this approach, confirmation is the occasion when we make an adult commitment to Christ and to the Church, “a time when we make our baptismal promises our own.” In the same vein we sometimes describe confirmation as a sacrament of choice or as a sacrament of belonging, as the occasion when those who were baptized as infants now choose of their
own free will to belong to the Church and take part in its life.

Allowing first of all for the fact that the focus of every sacrament is what God does for us, we may nevertheless say that confirmation is indeed a sacrament of commitment. But then, every sacrament, and not just confirmation, demands our commitment according to our capacity and age.

In terms of the sacramental signs that comprise Christian initiation, however, it is above all the eucharist that expresses our full commitment to God. Joined to the assembly in the Church’s eucharistic prayer, we commit our lives utterly to the glory of God. The Gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us to pray this prayer of commitment to God.

The renewal of baptismal promises is not at all the central part of the rite of confirmation. These promises were included in the new ritual in an effort to bridge the distance between the two sacraments in response to the requirements of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: “The rite of confirmation is also to be revised in order that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may stand out more clearly; for this reason it is fitting for candidates to renew their baptismal promises just before they are confirmed” (71).

Lent is the special time when the Church renews its baptismal commitment. During this season, the Church’s annual retreat, the community undertakes the work of ongoing conversion to the Lord. Then, during the Easter Triduum, the entire assembly renews the vows of baptism. Thus, each year we bring the growing maturity and experience of our lives to public account in renewed baptismal commitment.

The notion that confirmation is a sacrament of choice is rooted partly in English usage: to confirm means to firm up or to ratify something. But when the Latin word confirmare first came to be used in connection with Christian initiation it meant to complete or to perfect what was begun in baptism. In confirmation the Holy Spirit brings to completion the work begun in baptism by drawing us to Spirit-filled life and lordship at the right hand of God.

**Eucharist**

We explained the eucharist, too, in language that was less paschal in nature.
this point we need to complete our study by examining the crowning sacrament of Christian initiation, the eucharist.

A paschal catechesis of the eucharist would highlight the kingdom dimensions of the feast. The risen and glorious Lord sets a festive table in our midst, and it is he himself who presides. The eucharistic prayer is the table blessing of the feast; and in this prayer, the Lord gathers us to himself in offering the everlasting sacrifice of praise to God. In this prayer, we are joined to him in his enduring sacrifice, the gift of his life for the sake of the world. In holy communion we share the food and drink of the banquet feast of the kingdom: the body and blood of Christ; and in this sharing we enter into communion of life with the living God.

However, when the first two sacraments of initiation lose something of their paschal orientation, the eucharist is affected as well. Our language shifts slightly and its paschal punch tends to recede into the background. For example, we speak of the eucharistic prayer as the prayer that consecrates the bread and wine, and we talk about receiving holy communion; but we don’t do a very good job ofanchoring these truths within the wider setting of the banquet feast of the kingdom of God.

When the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated together, it was evident that baptism and confirmation led to the eucharist, that they were rites of access to the feast, that their very goal was to impel us forward to the banquet table of the kingdom. But when the eucharist is separated from baptism by many years, and when it is followed much later by confirmation, it is difficult for us to see the eucharist as the grand culmination of the initiation event.

As a result, it is common enough today to hear adults preparing for Christian initiation to say, “If I am baptized, does that mean that I will have to go to mass on Sunday?” And it is common enough to hear candidates for confirmation say, “I want to be confirmed, but I have no intention of going to mass on Sunday.” Statements such as these reflect a genuine confusion regarding the eucharist as the very goal of the initiation process.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have explored the pastoral implications of separating the sacraments of Christian initiation and of celebrating confirmation some time after admission to the Church’s eucharist.
Our investigation suggests that this way of celebrating the sacraments diminishes the Church's consciousness of the paschal dimension of Christian initiation and, in turn, the Church's consciousness of itself as a paschal people.

Conversely, a return to the traditional pattern of Christian initiation would almost certainly help to restore the Church's focus on the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.

The critical issue is the status of the eucharist. We can put the problem this way:

- If baptism, not the eucharist, seems to be the sacrament that makes us the people of the Church ...
- If confirmation, not the eucharist with its great prayer of thanksgiving, seems to be the sacrament of the Church's normative witness ...
- Then our whole understanding of God's enterprise of salvation becomes disjointed and the eucharist seems to be only one means of grace among many, rather than the supreme expression of communion of life in God.

Whether or not the sacraments of Christian initiation for children will eventually be restored to their original pattern—baptism, confirmation and eucharist celebrated as a unified rite in infancy—will depend, at least in part, on the weight we give to pastoral considerations such as these, which are rooted in the central place that the eucharist holds in our lives.

### Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that restoring the original practice of celebrating baptism, confirmation and eucharist in infancy would be well or poorly received by the community at large?
2. What obstacles would you foresee in bringing a change like this about?
3. Would you prefer to see the sacraments of initiation joined together without any interim stage; or would you prefer to see confirmation joined to baptism or to the eucharist as a step along the way?
CHAPTER 4
Forming Children in the Faith

Previewing This Chapter

If we are to restore confirmation to its rightful place within the initiation complex for children baptized in infancy, some significant shifts must occur both in the fundamental assumptions out of which we operate and in our actual catechetical practices.

This process is to be governed by three major considerations:

- The spirituality of children must be respected.
- The liturgy must dictate the agenda of initiation.
- The whole Christian community is responsible for the initiation and formation of children.

The family, the worshipping assembly and the catechist each have unique roles in shaping and nourishing the faith of children. The community's liturgical life forms the basis of its catechetical work.

Current Practice

It has been argued that the current practice of conferring confirmation at an older age provides some distinct advantages in the area of pastoral care. It is said that the Church is provided with a special time for catechesis and is able to lead the children who are preparing for confirmation into a richer understanding of the mystery of Christ and to dispose them to a greater love for the Church and for the Christian life. However, this practice leads many to look upon the sacrament as marking the end of catechesis and formation, a sort of Church graduation. Initiation becomes the end of a journey rather than the beginning of a life of continual conversion. Furthermore, there is little evidence that this strategy is achieving its goals.

Current Programs

Current programs of immediate preparation for the sacrament present confirmation as the sacrament of commitment, the sacrament of mission, or the sacrament of Christian development or maturity. In each case, closer examination shows these models to be inadequate. First, all three present a theology of the sacrament of confirmation that is radically different from that of the same sacrament in the context of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Second, they tend to reduce confirmation from a life transforming encounter with the living God to a merely optional Christian rite of passage.
into adulthood, demanded by the biological process of maturation. Third, the goals of each model in particular, and of delayed confirmation in general, are better met in other ways, as demonstrated below, and without distorting the traditional understanding of the sacraments of initiation.

**When Confirmation is Understood as the Sacrament of Commitment**

When confirmation is understood as the sacrament of commitment, the renewal of baptismal promises becomes the focus of attention. At confirmation, it is said, children can make these promises their own. As young adults, they can choose to belong to the Church. This approach may be described as a natural outgrowth of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which exalted the authority of reason and prized human freedom.

But this emphasis on confirmation as renewal of commitment falls wide of the mark. First, the classic and normative occasion for renewing our vows of baptism is the Church’s annual celebration of Christ’s Passover from death to life. Each and every year, on the occasion of the great Easter Vigil, the members of the household of God renew their baptismal promises, bringing to the proclamation of these vows the added experience of their lives and the growing maturity of their years, whatever their age may be. If the renewal of baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil is prepared for, celebrated, and preached to the full, this renewal of vows will serve the pastoral objectives of the Church much better than any unwarranted focus on a once-and-for-all renewal of these promises by children at the time of their confirmation.

Second, in point of fact, the new *Rite of Confirmation* (1971) introduced the renewal of baptismal promises simply to make clearer the close connection that exists between the first two sacraments of initiation (baptism and confirmation). In Catholic tradition, confirmation is an unrepeatable sacrament because it configures us once and for all to Jesus Christ in a new and permanent way, as the Spirit-filled Lord of glory. Indeed, the major signs of the sacrament are the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil, not the renewal of vows.

Finally, it is true of all the sacraments that any explanation that gives priority to human action over divine initiative is less than adequate. Sacraments have the power to transform human life, to divinize, only because they are the action of God. Our role is one of response.
For these reasons, confirmation should not be understood as the sacrament of commitment.

**When Confirmation is Understood as the Sacrament of Mission**

When programs present confirmation as the sacrament of mission, the focus is Christian witness in the world, and they involve children in service projects of various kinds. These programs fail to recognize the full import of the eucharist, for it is eucharist, with its public and communal proclamation of the glory of God, that is the Church's foremost witness to the working of the Spirit in the world.

Moreover, it is the great dismissal from the eucharist that is the essential hinge that links the Church's liturgy and its mission in the world. It is the dismissal, "Go, in the peace of Christ to love and serve the Lord," properly understood, that is the dramatic sending forth of the community of the eucharist on its mission to announce the good news to all peoples and to invite the world to share the life of the kingdom. We who respond with a resounding "Thanks be to God" go forth into our daily working and living, taking up this mission as agents of the missioned Church. When our liturgical catechesis presents the rite of dismissal in its full and proper light, the link between liturgy and mission becomes abundantly clear, and the community is marshalled for mission, not once in a lifetime, but every time that it gathers.

For these reasons, confirmation should not be understood as the sacrament of mission.

**When Confirmation is Understood as the Sacrament of Christian Development**

In programs that present confirmation as the sacrament of Christian development, the period of preparation is seen as a privileged time for extended catechesis and as an opportunity for spiritual retreats.

This approach neglects the full potential of the Church's liturgical year, the year of grace. In particular, the forty days of Lent are recognized today as the great annual retreat of the entire Church. Each year during Lent, the whole Christian community prepares to celebrate the sacred Easter Triduum—the great three-day festival stretching from the Mass of the Lord's Supper to evening prayer on Easter Sunday. The Church prepares to celebrate Christ's passing-over to glory, prepares to celebrate our passing-over with him, prepares to renew baptismal vows, and prepares to draw newcomers, catechumens, into the kingdom life by their own participation in this Passover. Fasting from all but that which is necessary for sustenance, the Church journeys, nourished only by the proclamation and unfolding of the baptismal gospels in the Lenten Sunday liturgies—those gospels that speak of...
temptation, covenant, water, light and life. Accompanied by the catechumens and the penitents (those who, having fallen away from the Church, are being welcomed back to the table community in time to celebrate the Triduum), the community, as one people, undertakes the renewal of its life in the Spirit.

Baptism and penance are at the heart of this renewal: we recall our baptism or prepare for it; we listen more carefully to God's word and devote ourselves to ardent prayer. Lent, recurring as it does each year, is the Church's classic and normative time for appropriating anew the spirit of the journey to the kingdom. When the forty days of Lent and the Easter Triduum are celebrated as a genuine time of retreat and renewal, and when, as well, the fifty days of Easter are filled with preaching, teaching, savouring and exploring the mysteries we celebrate, they provide the Church with a remarkable opportunity to catechize youth and to draw them, year by year, ever closer to the Lord.

For these reasons, confirmation should not be understood as the sacrament of Christian development.

**Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation**

Once confirmation is returned to its traditional initiation setting, the true nature and meaning of confirmation as a sacrament of initiation, part of the process of conforming the initiate ever more closely to Christ, of moulding one radically in the image of “the Christ,” “the Anointed One of God,” is then clear, as well as being consistent with the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. If confirmation can ever be spoken of as a sign of commitment, mission or Christian development it is only true because and to the extent that these other understandings are derived from this central meaning of the sacrament.

Furthermore, in view of the above considerations, the catechetical goals presently associated with the sacrament of confirmation (commitment, mission, Christian development) can be achieved and, indeed, surpassed in another, more appropriate and more effective forum, namely the celebration of Sunday and the liturgical year.

**A Renewed Approach**

If we are to restore confirmation to its rightful place within the initiation complex for children baptized in infancy, some significant shifts must occur both in the fundamental assumptions out of which we operate and in our actual catechetical practices.

**Recognizing the Spirituality of Children**

If, indeed, as previous chapters have indicated, confirmation is above all a sacrament of initiation with meaning to be found in Christ's ascension to Spirit-filled glory and
lordship at the right hand of God, then our catechetical practice and programs must reflect this understanding. Sacraments can no longer be held out as rewards for programs completed; nor can the Church call entire classes or age groups to the sacraments of initiation based merely on the fact of membership in these groups.

The Church must take seriously the spirituality of children and the wondrous and varied ways young people experience God. We must avoid at all cost the temptation to minimize the reality of children’s religious experience or to dictate its form, in the very young as well as in teens.

Allowing the Liturgy to Set the Agenda
As with adults, the secular calendar can no longer be allowed to dictate the timetable of initiation. Likewise, if it is the liturgy that is the source and summit of the Christian life, then the liturgy itself must be at the heart of catechesis and the liturgical year must set the agenda of catechesis and Christian formation for adults and children alike, for baptized and unbaptized alike.

Formation is the Work of the Whole Parish Community
When conversion, initiation and formation are the goals of those involved in the spiritual development of children, the strategy is far broader than teaching and the work requires support from across the whole spectrum of the Church’s life and work. The proverb, “It takes a whole village to raise a child,” is no less true in the Christian community than in other human communities around the world.

The Blossoming of Faith
Within the Family
The Rite of Baptism for Infants clearly proclaims the Church’s hopes and expectations for the blossoming of a child’s faith, which begins within the family. In the opening dialogue of the celebration, the family clearly declares the wish that the child share in the faith of the Church. And the Church pledges itself to provide a welcoming home, a nourishing environment and a place of dignity within the community.

It is within the domestic Church, the family, that the child first experiences this welcome, spiritual nourishment and dignity through the ministry of parents, brothers, sisters and other family members. And through the ministry of godparents, the community expresses its intention to support the family in the spiritual formation of these young Christians.
The family passes on the Christian story by living it. It is by observing family members that children learn values and virtues. Indeed, the principles by which we live our lives are caught more than taught. Children act on the example set by respected adults more than on the rules they make. The influence of the family on values and priorities is most profound.

The ordinary daily interactions of family life together are permeated with graced teaching moments. Moments and occasions of joy and wonder provide opportunities to point out traces of God in everyday experience. Sharing songs and stories of the loving, living God during quiet times helps to draw the child into the Christian story and into a loving relationship with the divine. Engaging children in domestic rituals like mealtime prayer, family blessings and the Advent wreath draws them into intimacy with God in daily living and marks the flow of Christian life to and from the Sunday celebration.

Moreover, the close relationship between learning and play cannot be denied. Therefore, parents should not be surprised when children, enchanted by the experience of parish liturgy, begin to "play church" at home, re-enacting processions, communion rites and other ritual gestures inspired by domestic happenings.

In addition, it is within the family that children are first included in the Church's apostolic work and community life, joining family members in activities such as helping seniors, running errands at mission fund raisers, sorting and counting coins, and serving cookies at parish parties.

Within the Worshipping Assembly

From the moment of baptism, the child has a rightful place in the Sunday assembly and a right to be welcomed, recognized, acknowledged and empowered as an active participant in the liturgy. To this end, families need the freedom to answer the child's questions about liturgy when they are asked. And children require the freedom to be children at worship. Were the community to take seriously its mandate to welcome, recognize and give a place of dignity to children and families with children within the worshipping assembly, separate liturgies for children would perhaps no longer be thought necessary.

Given community support, children grow in liturgical participation modelled on the involvement of the elders of the community. As they mature, older children with suitable skills and the disposition to ministry may be trained and publicly commissioned for service in the worshipping assembly or as apprentices in the Church's pastoral outreach.
Catechesis

Catechesis for Continual Growth and Conversion

According to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, development in the Christian life involves four processes, not rigidly sequential nor mutually exclusive. "Evangelization" may be briefly described as the announcement and acceptance of the good news of salvation in Christ. "Catechesis" draws on this good news as lived and celebrated in the life of each local community, or parish, to draw the individual into ever-closer conformity with Christ. A significant period of "enlightenment" (Lent) immediately precedes initiation. The whole community, catechumens and baptized alike, engages in prayer, almsgiving and fasting in preparation to celebrate the sacraments of initiation. "Mystagogy" is a process of reflection on the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christian initiation and Christian life—an ever-deepening engagement with the richness and challenge of Christ, the gospel and the eucharist.

For those involved in the Christian initiation and formation of children, the task is indeed complex. None of these phases of initiation [evangelization, catechesis, enlightenment, mystagogy] can be automatically declared unnecessary simply because children have been baptized before reaching catechetical age. There will be children who have not yet heard or considered seriously the good news of Jesus Christ. Many others will already have an active faith life. The work of the catechist then is evangelization and mystagogy as well as catechesis.

Catechesis for initiation and formation in the Christian life involves drawing on the experience of the liturgy and presenting the grand vision of Christian initiation and life in a manner that is adapted to the age and circumstances of the participants without compromising the breadth and richness of its truth.

The story of Jesus in his passage through death to glorious kingdom life is the essential ground plan for the sacraments of Christian initiation. Jesus died and rose. He ascended to Spirit-filled glory, to reign for all time, the Anointed One of God, at God's right hand, pouring out the Gift of that Spirit upon the Church, upon the world. By the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and eucharist) the Church, individually and communally, has died, risen, ascended and shares in the Spirit-driven mission of the Christ whose body the Church now is.

Hence, the catechist's first responsibility will be twofold: to tell and retell this story in multifaceted ways, and to present Jesus as undertaking his journey on behalf of all humanity. When this story is told with the fervour of
living faith, it has the power to touch the lives of those who hear it. They sense the wonder of God's mighty works; they experience the joy of the good news and of God's personal call of love; they have a yearning to share the journey of Jesus and to be part of a new world that stands under the reign of God. This is how we understand conversion and the blossoming of faith.

Catechesis about Initiation

With the story of Jesus' passage in the foreground, the catechist is able to present the sacraments of Christian initiation in their basic reality—as the great events that draw the world into the passage of Jesus through death into kingdom life. In this context, the sacraments of initiation will always be treated as a sequence of integrated rites.

Baptism and confirmation are rites of access to the celebration of the eucharist, the banquet of the kingdom; and, conversely, full participation in the liturgy of the eucharist is the crowning event of Christian initiation.

The Catechist as Agent of the Church

In the catechesis of children, the catechist recognizes and respects the primacy of the parents and supports them in their work. Although the Church certainly draws on the resources of gifted specialists such as catechists and religious educators to provide ongoing catechesis, religious education and preparation of candidates for initiation, the context or setting of sacramental celebration is always the Church, the new assembly in Christ, the family of God, locally manifested in the flesh and blood people and families of each parish. The sacraments of initiation draw the world into this new community and its life. The catechist acts only as an agent of the Church, which is itself the catechetical community.

The Catholic School as Agent of the Church

When the work of Christian formation and catechesis occurs in a school setting it must be understood to have a nature and purpose that is profoundly distinct from academic pursuits and programs. The process of conversion and the blossoming of faith cannot be measured by tests or projects.

The Catholic school community provides a richly nourishing and protective environment in which the blossoming of faith begun in the family is encouraged, supported and refined. In addition to teaching the stories and facts of the faith, the school community educates and, to the extent possible, practices children in the ways and habits of the faith. In this regard the school staff, like the parish catechist, shares in the teaching ministry of the Church.

Especially in larger urban centres, it can often happen that a child's richest experience of Christian community
life is, for a variety of reasons, within the school context. Even in this case however, Catholic schools must guard against temptations and demands to replace or fulfil the roles of the family and the worshipping assembly in the initiation and formation of children. In particular, sacraments must never be considered the responsibility of the school and must never be associated with an arbitrary grade or level of achievement.

Ultimately, the child's faith, understood as the radical capacity for trust and confidence in God, is the gift of God and is not subject to evaluation but to discernment. It is outside the reach of academic assessment expected in other fields of the school's program, being unrelated to mastery of knowledge or skills. For children of catechetical age, conversion and growth in the Christian life must remain as the sole and true measure of readiness for initiation.

Ritual Defines and Shapes the Content of Catechesis

Liturgy as an Expression of Faith

The Church has always looked to its liturgy as the primary statement of its faith. Long before there was a catechism, a creed or even a written gospel, there was liturgy. These other verbal expressions of the faith grew out of the liturgy.

The Catechetical Power of the Liturgy

In fourth century Jerusalem, when the bishop, Cyril, instructed his people on the meaning of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, he drew directly on their immediate experience of the rituals they had just celebrated at the Easter Vigil. Where else would one look for the meaning of the liturgy, but in the liturgy itself? Where else would one look for the meaning of Christian life, but in the liturgy from which and to which it flows? Where else would one look for an understanding of our God, but in the liturgy where we encounter our God in so many ways?

So, throughout the process of formation, children, along with all the baptized, must be systematically led to an understanding of their experience of the liturgy of the word, the celebration of the sacraments, the liturgical year, and the Church's liturgy of the hours. The catechist, the liturgical ministers and those responsible for preparing celebrations must recognize the basic and essential catechetical power of the sacramental celebrations themselves. This power rests not in the words we speak, but in the ritual action itself. Nothing we say or add to the liturgy can unleash this power, but it certainly can stifle it. The power of the liturgy is fully
MINIMALISM
The reduction of a sign to its minimally recognizable form, e.g., using communion wafers instead of bread that has the appearance of food, withholding the cup from lay people, and baptizing by pouring a few tablespoons of water.

DIDACTICISM
The burial of the ritual action in intrusive, verbose, mundane explanatory comments, e.g., the habit of interrupting the flow of the ritual action to announce all possible meanings of the rite of clothing with a white garment, instead of simply undressing and re-clothing the candidate and proclaiming the prescribed texts clearly and with dignity, or the habit of instructing everyone to stand and sing the alleluia to greet the gospel, instead of carrying out a dignified gospel procession during which the assembly bursts forth in joyful song in praise of the saving Word.

CONVENIENCE
The deletion of ritual elements, or the addition or substitution of new gestures for prescribed rites because it is convenient or popular, e.g., the arbitrary reduction of Old Testament readings at the Easter Vigil, the substitution of hand-washing for footwashing during the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, and the use of the unity candle at weddings.

released only when the signs are freed from all that inhibits their ability to touch and transform: minimalism, didacticism, and convenience.

When signs are allowed to speak for themselves, celebrations provide a wealth of experience on which catechists and indeed the whole community, can draw for reflections on Christian life.

The power of the Church’s year of grace should not be underestimated. Indeed, the liturgical seasons must be allowed to dictate the rhythm and flow of parish life, rather than surrendering to the pressures of commercial interests—interests that would, for example, eliminate Advent, open the Christmas season on the day after Halloween and close it on Boxing Day (which the profit motive has expanded to Boxing Week). Observing Advent means refusing to have Christmas concerts, Christmas parties or even Christmas pageants during Advent. Unleashing the power of Lent means clearing the parish calendar of all business meetings and other “as usuals” so that the parish enters “en masse” into the spirit of the great annual retreat. Celebrating the great fifty days of Easter means preaching the Sundays of Easter as a unity—a gradual unravelling of the paschal mystery and a re-weaving of the Church’s self-understanding, finally exploding in the Pentecost experience.

A rich liturgical life opens up possibilities of new dimensions of understanding of the mysteries of the faith, as children and indeed the whole community progress toward Christian maturity. Hence, sacramental catechesis is developed from the signs themselves.

The Fundamental Signs
The Assembly: those gathered for worship: the sign of the new gathering of the world under the call of God, the light of the good news of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism: going down into the waters of death and emerging from the waters of rebirth: the sign of becoming one with Jesus in his passage through death to resurrected life.

Confirmation: the people of God, radiant with the oil of gladness: the sign of becoming one with Jesus in his ascension to Spirit-filled glory and lordship at the right hand of God, sharing in the royal priesthood of Jesus, Christ and Lord, sharing his prophetic mission in the world, sharing in the anointing for kingship and lordship in Christ.

Eucharist: the table: sign of the table of the kingdom, gathering place for all humanity in the unity and peace of the reign of God; the table blessing and sacrifice of
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praise: prayed in union with Jesus and company of heaven; the food and drink of the kingdom feast, the body and blood of Christ: drawing humanity into communion of life in the triune God.

Implications for Formal Catechetical Programs

Although some accommodation of the new reality will be needed within catechetical programs, it need not cause major disruptions. Age-appropriate catechesis on the Church's sacramental use of oil and the meaning of being “sealed with the Spirit” will need to be included even in pre-primary and primary level programs. (The CCCB catechetical series Born of the Spirit has already taken this step in its most recent revisions. Come Join Us at the Table, a program designed by Muriel Loftus and Lawrence DeMong, is another excellent example.) In this way children will be drawn into an ever-deepening understanding of the entire process of initiation regardless of the age at which they are brought to the sacraments.

Of course, children are not the only ones among us who need ongoing formation. A broad-based effort will be needed to implant a renewed understanding of confirmation within the hearts of all who are involved in the formation of children: bishops, priests, parents, teachers, catechists and the parish-at-large.

Discussion Questions

1 What changes would be needed within your parish in order to implement this approach to the formation of children?

2 Discuss specific ways the catechetical power of the liturgical signs can be "unleashed" in your parish, diocese, situation. What is minimized? Have words begun to smother some actions? What has been sacrificed for the sake of convenience?

3 How would the process of formation of children differ if children were to be fully initiated in infancy?
Previewing This Chapter

As we have worked our way through the issues at the core of the "confirmation question," we have attempted to demonstrate why the sacrament of confirmation can no longer be treated in isolation from the other sacraments of initiation and from the everyday life of the Church. When we turn our attention to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, several broader, yet parallel, issues emerge. Our exploration of the sacrament of confirmation leads us forward to a fresh examination of the proper celebration of Christian initiation. In particular, we need to consider:

- the role of the community,
- the primacy of the paschal mystery,
- the quality of liturgical signs and celebrations, and
- the liturgical life of the local Church gathered around its bishop.

The Role of the Community

Everything we have seen so far points to the fact that Christian initiation is an ecclesial event—the sacramental act by which the community welcomes others into its life. Hence, it is the community itself that celebrates initiation. And it follows directly that the community needs to be there, that its presence and involvement constitute the basic shape of the sacramental sign. If the whole Christian community is to understand and accept its role in the initiation of its children, then the celebrations of initiation of children, whatever pattern we adopt, must take place in the midst of the assembly. We cannot effectively teach people their identity based on rites they have seldom or never witnessed.

Our current practice often seems to place the initiation of children either in the shadows or in a narrowly focused spotlight. Because many of our parishes have been allowed to grow beyond a manageable size, the parish community is frequently squeezed out of the celebrations of Christian initiation. The bond among the people and families within the household of God is increasingly eroded. Private family celebrations of baptism on Sunday afternoons and school-based celebrations of first communion and confirmation on Sunday afternoons and weekday evenings leave out the Sunday assembly that continues on unaware of its identity or its connection to the initiates.
Yet, since the majority of initiates today are infants and children, these celebrations become our normal pattern of initiation. When this happens, parishioners come to feel that these sacraments are not their concern, that the celebration of Christian initiation belongs only to those being initiated and to their families, relatives, sponsors and friends.

When the celebration of Christian initiation is not shaped by the presence and participation of the community, the event is envisioned in a new way. Even those who are present no longer see themselves as celebrants of the sacraments of initiation, as a community actively engaged in welcoming children into its life. Instead, they see themselves as a group of invited guests whose only role is to watch, camera-ready, as the ceremony is performed on their children. They become onlookers to the scene.

Ordained ministers and school staffs no longer just represent the Sunday assembly, but in fact are made to assume the role that rightly belongs to the community as a whole. In this context, the school staff and school community tend to become the surrogate parish and sacraments become rites of passage through the school system, especially if children have failed to bond with the parish community.

Only the presence and active involvement of the community itself can overcome this unintended distortion of the celebration. Truly the time has come to reunite the assembly with the rites celebrated in its name. Infants and children must be brought to the table of the kingdom feast by the table community itself.

Prior to celebration, however, it is essential that the community establish a relationship with infants and children to be initiated (and, of course, with their families), just as is required of parishes with adult candidates in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. A parish's first step in building such relationships could be as simple as posting candidates' names and photos on bulletin boards or banners, or listing names in the bulletin announcements requesting prayers during their period of immediate preparation.

The Primacy of the Paschal Mystery

Our current practice of year-round initiation of infants and children has blurred our understanding of Christian initiation and displaced the paschal mystery as the heart and centre of our Christian lives. The bond between the great annual celebration of the Passover of the Lord at Easter and the rites that mark
Children of the Passage • The Future Shape of Celebration

THE FIFTY DAYS OF EASTER
Each December, North Americans look forward to at least one rousing rendition of The Twelve Days of Christmas. Roman Catholics have long been accustomed to celebrating the forty days of Lent. This cannot be claimed for the great fifty days of Easter. Easter, like Lent, Advent and Christmas, is a season, not just a day. The Church uses the fifty days of the season to unfold again the meaning of the paschal mystery of Christ. Rather than fading away over the seven weeks the season should expand and festivities continue, climaxing with the celebration of eucharist on the day of Pentecost. These fifty days are prime time for celebrating the sacraments of initiation with children.

our sharing and that of our infants and children in that passage has been severed.

An insistence on Easter Vigil initiation of adults is but a first step in re-establishing the centrality of the paschal mystery and the paschal feast. An overwhelming majority of candidates for initiation will continue to be infants and children. Celebrating their initiation, or any stage of it, at any time other than on the Sundays of the fifty days of the Easter season not only divorces initiation from its paschal roots but also creates a perception that adult and infant initiation are essentially and inherently different processes, emphasizing the dignity of adult initiation at the expense of that of children.

The Quality of Signs and Celebrations
A significant share of the work of bringing our communities to a deeper understanding of Christian initiation and identity can be accomplished by opening up the signs within the celebrations themselves. Insistence on the presence of the community as constitutive of the sacramental sign is but a beginning.

Energy and flow are also major concerns. Too often, initiation rites are carried out as special ceremonies tacked onto mass. Once these less familiar rites have been completed, we heave a communal sigh of relief and carry on with the liturgy of the eucharist, “business as usual.”

If the rites are to exert their full catechetical power, the flow of energy will intensify as the assembly journeys from the proclamation at the table of the word, through the rite of baptism and/or confirmation, climaxing as the initiates join in the community’s breaking of the bread at the table of the eucharist. Furthermore, within each of the initiation rituals, attention is needed with regard to the quality of signs.

Rite of Baptism
In the rite of baptism, even a generous scooping and pouring of water to moisten a portion of the head, although acceptable for validity, is incapable of proclaiming the initiate’s participation in the passage of Christ through death to life in the new creation. The experience of communities that baptize both adults and infants by immersion in a baptismal pool indicates that in such celebrations the death-defying, life-giving nature of the sacrament is communicated at a profound level that mere words cannot reach. Strong signs such as this clearly illuminate the fact that the salvation story proclaimed in the Vigil readings and the journey enacted in the ritual are in fact one.
CHRISM MASS
The Chrism Mass is a unique liturgy celebrated annually during the final week of Lent, in which oils for use at the Easter Vigil and throughout the coming year are blessed and distributed to parish delegations. These oils are: oil of catechumens, oil of the sick, and sacred chrism. Chrism is used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy orders, as well as in the ritual for the dedication of a church and an altar.

Rite of Confirmation
It is good to keep in mind that stillness and silence have as great a sign value as actions and words. For example, in the prayer at the laying on of hands in the Rite of Confirmation (24), the assembly's stillness as they stand for a significant period of silent prayer bespeaks a sharing in the invocation of the Holy Spirit. “Let us pray to God our Father that he will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen his sons and daughters with his gifts and anoint them to be more like Christ, the Son of God.”

The prayers for the consecration of chrism proclaimed by the bishop during the Chrism Mass challenge our current method of anointing for initiation.

Make this chrism a sign of life and salvation for those who are to be born again in the waters of baptism. Wash away the evil they have inherited from sinful Adam, and when they are anointed with this holy oil make them temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you (Consecratory Prayer [A]).

And so Father, by the power of your love, make this mixture of oil and perfume a sign and source of your blessing. Pour out the gifts of your Holy Spirit on our brothers and sisters who will be anointed with it. Let the splendor of holiness shine on the world from every place and thing signed with this oil. (Consecratory Prayer [B]).

Surely a lavish outpouring of richly fragrant chrism in amounts that render the initiate visibly radiant seems to be called for, rather than our now standard barely visible dab on the forehead.

Liturgy of the Eucharist
In the celebration of eucharist, the altar must be allowed to stand out as the table of the feast of life. Its vesture and location within the worship space must speak of the shared life of a table community.

Surely, too, it is time for a return to the use of bread that speaks to the senses as bread, as well as a return to full sharing in communion from the cup for the whole assembly. (Such a move to communion from the cup would certainly open the door to a return to full initiation in infancy.)

Signs of Commitment to Quality in Celebration
If catechists and religious educators are to root their efforts in the ongoing experience of the parish liturgy, then quality celebration must be given high priority in the distribution of parish and diocesan resources. Financial commitment is needed in order that
personnel and materials are available to and used by parishes as they work toward enriching Sunday celebrations.

Every aspect of the liturgical celebration must be examined with a view to enriching the community's worship experience. The worship space and the quality of its furnishings and art (especially the table, lectern, and font), as well as the materials used for liturgy (e.g., bread, wine, books, vessels, candles, and vestments) must reflect the community's esteem of the liturgy. Liturgical ministers, including the liturgy committee and the decorators, as well as the ministers of hospitality (greeters and ushers), the musicians, presiders, deacons, lectors, homilists, ministers of communion, and servers must prepare diligently for ministry. They must carry out their roles with style and grace, and in a spirit of service to God and to the community that calls them to serve.

The liturgical year must uncompromisingly set the pace of parish life—a reminder that the community is in the world, but not of it. Above all, liturgical preaching must be given priority among the duties of those ordained to public ministry, so that the message of both the scriptures and the liturgy will be planted deep within the heart of the community.

The Liturgical Life of the Church Gathered Around the Bishop

The Presider at the Church’s Eucharist

Perhaps the best way for us to understand the liturgical life of the Church is to consult the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

The bishop is to be looked on as the high priest of his flock, the faithful's life in Christ in some way deriving from and depending on him. Therefore all should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centred around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church; they must be convinced that the preeminent manifestation of the Church is present in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers (41).

The bishop's role as the presider at the Church's eucharist is well established in the history of the Church. For approximately the first four centuries it was the bishop who invariably presided at the eucharist. During this time Christians were clustered
in the towns and cities, and there was a bishop in each community. The people gathered around the bishop in a single church building for the celebration of the eucharist.

The movement of missionaries into the countryside led eventually to the development of satellite Christian communities some distance from the towns and cities. It was at this time that the bishop sent presbyters to become resident pastors of these outlying communities and to preside at their eucharists. Thus, parishes came to be an established feature of the diocesan Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has the following to say about parish communities:

But because it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over the whole flock in his church, he cannot do otherwise than establish lesser groupings of the faithful. Among these the parishes, set up locally under a pastor taking the place of the bishop, are the most important; in some manner they represent the visible Church established throughout the world (41).

The Bishop’s Role in Christian Initiation

The bishop’s role in Christian initiation flows from his presidency at the Church’s eucharist, since initiation is the sacramental process that draws the world into that eucharist. With regard to adults, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults describes the bishop’s role as follows:

The bishop, in person or through his delegate, sets up, regulates, and promotes the program of pastoral formation for catechumens and admits the candidates to their election and to the sacraments. It is hoped that, presiding if possible at the Lenten liturgy, he will himself celebrate the rite of election and, at the Easter Vigil, the sacraments of initiation, at least for the initiation of those who are fourteen years old or older ... (12).

This, too, reflects the traditional practice of the Church. In early times, the bishop always presided at Christian initiation. When parish communities...
developed, the parish priests became responsible for baptism, and the bishop presided at confirmation and eucharist when he visited the outlying areas.

We have seen from our survey of history that this arrangement led eventually to a significant separation between baptism and confirmation/eucharist, especially as diocesan territories expanded, the number of parishes multiplied, and episcopal visits to the various parishes became less frequent.

When earlier communion was restored in the twentieth century, admission to the eucharist, the culminating act of Christian initiation, became the responsibility of the parish priest; and confirmation, still under the presidency of the bishop, came at least in some places to be celebrated sometime later and on its own.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* reflects the Church's desire to reassert the bishop's role in the whole of Christian initiation. What is particularly noteworthy in the rite is the Church's determination to restore the integrity of the initiation process. Hence, while the bishop is urged to preside at Christian initiation in the cathedral church at the Easter Vigil, the parish priest is authorized to preside at Christian initiation in the parish church.

The explanation is given as follows:

In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults are not to be baptized without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized (208).

The quotations we have seen above apply specifically to those who come to the Church as adults and to children of catechetical age. But if the traditional order of celebration is restored for Catholic children, and if the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are drawn more closely together than in the past, then we may see the parish priest presiding at the complete initiation not only of adults but of the children of Catholic parents as well.

**Maintaining the Link between the Bishop and Confirmation**

Since the Eastern Church has had a long rich experience of this kind of sacramental arrangement, it will be
helpful to explore how it has maintained a strong link between the bishop and confirmation even though the bishop does not personally preside at confirmation in the parish church.

The Eastern Church has always emphasized the importance of the holy oil used for confirmation. In fact, it commonly calls the sacrament “chrismation” or the sacrament of holy chrism. The consecration of this oil by the bishop in the cathedral church thus becomes the primary and essential link between the bishop and the celebration of confirmation.

In the West, the personal presence of the bishop for confirmation in the parish church has somewhat lessened the wider significance of the consecration of chrism in the cathedral church. A few simple steps, however, would help to restore the strong connection between the bishop and the holy chrism used for confirmation.

Representatives from each parish, gathering at the cathedral church in joyful anticipation of the festivities of the Paschal Triduum, could receive the oils from the bishop during the Chrism Mass. They could then present these oils to their parish communities when the Paschal Triduum celebration begins with the introductory rites of the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening.

The Bishop and the Parishes

Freed from a sometimes time-consuming confirmation schedule, the bishop would find more time available for visiting parishes of the diocese, presiding at their eucharists, and meeting the parishioners in formal and informal ways.

These visits could become occasions of high festivity for the parish community. They could also be an opportunity for the bishop to meet with and personally congratulate all who have celebrated Christian initiation since his previous visitation. In these and other ways, the liturgical life of the Church gathered around the bishop could not only be maintained but enhanced.
Discussion Questions

1. Assuming the bishop will delegate presbyters to administer the sacrament of confirmation (as is currently done in the case of adults initiated at the Easter Vigil), how could your parish accommodate the initiation of all children within the fifty days of Easter in each of the following scenarios:
   - celebrating full initiation in infancy?
   - celebrating baptism in infancy, and confirmation and first communion at the age of discretion?
   - celebrating baptism and confirmation in infancy, with first communion at the age of discretion?

2. What problems do you envisage? Are these problems insurmountable?

3. What practicalities must be considered in opening up the symbols in the celebration of initiation?

4. How would you rate the overall quality of liturgical celebration in your parish? Consider ministries, materials and seasons.

5. What would your parish need in order to carry out a process of liturgical enrichment?

6. Do you think that the bishop’s role in the liturgical life of the Church can be maintained through other means if he does not preside at confirmation in the parish church?

The Ontario Liturgical Conference

presents

Summer School for Liturgical Musicians

Voices in Joyful Praise

The Role of Music in the Sunday Celebration of Eucharist

August 2-5, 2000
Providence Spirituality Centre
1200 Princess Street, Kingston, ON

The purpose of the OLC Summer School is to re-energize parish musicians for ministry, and to assist them in developing knowledge and skills for leadership in the liturgical assembly. This 4-day event includes liturgy sessions, focus sessions and repertoire sessions, along with skill sessions (keyboard/organ, music leaders, cantors, guitar) to help individuals further develop existing skills, or learn new skills. This is an excellent opportunity for sharing and learning with fellow parish musicians.

For further information contact:
Archdiocese of Kingston (613) 548-4461
www.romancatholic.kingston.on.ca
Now, all the cards are on the table. Throughout the period of your study of Children of the Passage the deck may have been shuffled and reshuffled many times. What comes next? It is hoped that whatever your personal position is on the issues dealt with, your reasons are now, at the very least, clearer and better informed. If, during the course of this study, you have become convinced of the need and the possibility of change in any area touched on, it is time to develop an action plan. Local groups may not be able to implement or even influence change beyond their own borders, but within them much is still possible. You may be surprised how much is possible!

For Parents
Introduce your children to domestic ritual and family prayer (no, it's not too late for the teens!). Answer your children's questions about our worship when they ask, and do it with enthusiasm and joy. Encourage them to play church. Use some New Testament stories at family story time or as bedtime stories. Celebrate anniversaries of baptisms and other initiation sacraments. Keep stories about family initiation celebrations alive. Bring your children to parish celebrations of the sacraments of initiation. Involve your children in your parish activities as apprentices. (Your teens would love to be included.) Ask about parish activities for children and teens outside the liturgy, as well as intergenerational activities for the whole community. And don’t forget to offer your assistance with implementing whatever you suggest.

For Liturgy Planners
Work toward a more lavish use of signs and a heightened sense of joy and celebration in all parish liturgy and all liturgical ministers; move all celebrations of initiation (including first communion and confirmation) into the Easter season and into the regular parish Sunday celebration of the eucharist.

For Pastors
Even if your parish includes a Catholic school, strengthen the ties between the sacraments of initiation and the parish by sponsoring, organizing and offering programs (catechetical sessions and retreats) of immediate preparation for the sacraments of initiation at the parish centre. Offer an ongoing family program of liturgy-based catechesis. And by the way, do your small faith communities or other parish groups make room for teens and children?

For Parish Communities
It is right “always and everywhere” to welcome families, welcome babies, welcome toddlers, welcome children, welcome teens, welcome everyone who shows up on the doorstep. Loosen up and let children be themselves. Show them what full, conscious and active participation looks like. Make sure liturgical ministries and all parish groups and activities reflect a broad range of ages. Insist on celebrating well.

For All Who Have Participated in This Study
Pass on your copy of Children of the Passage to another person or another group. Stimulate discussion on these issues. If you feel you have no influence, bring your concerns to someone who does, and offer your assistance in the implementation process.

To Those Who See the Need and Possibility of Change and Have the Ability to Implement or Influence It
Pray. Plan carefully. Gently enlist those whose cooperation is needed. Offer an abundance of opportunities for discussion and for becoming thoroughly informed about these issues to as many people as you can reach.
Related Reading


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National Meeting of Diocesan Directors of Liturgy and Chairs of Liturgical Commissions

Due to the heavy schedule of festivities of the Jubilee Year in the dioceses across the country, the national meeting of the Diocesan Directors of Liturgy and Chairs of Liturgical Commissions, which normally would have been held this year, is delayed until November 12-15, 2001. Mark your calendars now!
In 1984 the Victoria Diocese set up a committee to review its pastoral practice around the sacrament of confirmation. At that time confirmation was celebrated at ages 11-12 or at the grade 6-7 level. Many questions had arisen, as well as a general sense of dissatisfaction with our practice.

As its first step, the review process invited parishes to gather the various initiating ministries to study the parish pastoral practice and to address the needs and issues that emerged. In an amazing response, almost 100% of the parishes participated in the study. An excerpt from the committee's first update letter to the parishes testifies to its initial success:

When we met last week to discuss our findings from the individual parish or regional confirmation meetings, we had an overwhelming sense of the Spirit working in our diocese. There were so many common elements in each parish report, including a strong desire for a more in-depth study of present pastoral practice and the implications of the RCIA for future direction. The main concern was to design more appropriate ways to catechize, to ritualize, and to involve the total believing community in the initiation process.

Studying the individual reports, we saw that each parish recognized confirmation as an aspect of a much broader question—the unity and integrity of the sacraments of initiation. Because of their rich experience of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults many parishes identified a glaring inconsistency in their initiation practice. Why is it that for adults and children of catechetical age who join the Church, eucharist is the culmination of initiation, whereas for baptized children, it seems that confirmation is the moment of completion? Several who also had RCIA experience expressed the need to move from the concept of "getting a child done" to inviting people to embark on a journey of "becoming Christian." Other responses reflected concern about our seeming preoccupation with age or grade.

In summary, parishes identified the core issue as the theology of the sacraments of initiation, and especially the relation of confirmation to baptism and eucharist. Baptism is the sacrament of commitment. Confirmation confirms baptism. Eucharist incorporates a person fully into the body of Christ.

The study ended with a clarification of needs and the question: "What are we going to do about it?"—or as one parish put it, "We have to dare to try something!" We decided to test three different models of initiation and to evaluate these models at the end of the year.

Three parishes participated in this pilot process. Following the example of the Eastern Church, the first parish celebrated
baptism, confirmation and eucharist in one initiation event. As infants in this parish were baptized, confirmed and shared in communion, the fullness of the unity of the paschal mystery was celebrated. Children baptized as infants who had not yet received their first communion, were confirmed and received eucharist together. A large group of children from grade 3 up was also confirmed, to eliminate the practice of confirming at grade 7 level.

The second parish celebrated confirmation and eucharist together at the grade 2 level, while other children were confirmed at the grade 6–7 level until the "catch-up was complete.

The third parish continued the traditional practice of infant baptism, first communion at grade 2, and confirmation at the grade 7 level.

After one year the experiences of the parish teams and families were evaluated. Before any changes were introduced, each parish had tried to explain the rationale for the change. Education of parents and pastoral sensitivity were priorities. However, it became clear that not all had been smooth sailing. Some Catholic parents, with deep-rooted memories of their own childhood sacramental experiences, raised intense responses and objections. Some catechists and other members of the parish expressed concerns, too. Their major questions included: When confirmation and first communion are celebrated together, will our children be confused? Won't two separate events mean more to them? Will our children continue to come to church if we don't make them wait for confirmation? What will be the impact on our parish? Does this mean the end of our catechism programs? Can seven-year olds understand the commitment of confirmation? If we don't have clear divisions, how will we design our programs?

These questions reflect the degree of confusion in parishes one and two at the outset. With good education, discussion and encouragement, however, most parents, catechists and parishioners became extremely supportive in restoring the sequence of the sacraments. They affirmed that the experience brought them into a deeper understanding of what it really means to celebrate the sacraments. They also expressed a renewed appreciation for eucharist as the sacrament of commitment, a commitment that is a continual process, not just a one-time event. Many families experienced a sense of belonging to the parish community they had never felt before.

The third parish (which had continued to celebrate confirmation at the grade 7 level) expressed a sense of continued dissatisfaction with the process, especially the lack of parent involvement. Most parents and children continued to see confirmation as graduation from formal religious instruction.

As a result of the evaluations, the committee recommended that the diocese encourage parishes to adopt the second parish's model of early and combined confirmation and first communion, while continuing to confirm older children at ages 11–12. It was also strongly recommended that parishes follow the process as outlined in Part II, Chapter 1 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults when welcoming children of catechetical age into the church.

Not all parishes were ready to start confirming their children when they received their first communion. The diocesan guidelines encouraged changes in pastoral practice "influenced by appropriate adult education and directed by research, dialogue and evaluation." The guidelines further directed parishes to adapt present pastoral practice "according to the growing awareness of the faith community."

As more parishes began to participate in the process, other concerns surfaced. The transient nature of our population meant new families moved in to the diocese, many of whom resisted our initiation practice. Therefore, re-education was a constant need. Some parish teams were tempted to introduce a process that encompassed too many changes with too
little education. Parishes that decided to use the "catch-up" approach (confirming all children of seven years old and up) discovered that parents were more complacent and less informed. Parents in those parishes also expressed dissatisfaction with the liturgical celebration. With so many children involved, the experience was overwhelming and very impersonal.

Another major concern was the lack of resources that responded to our needs: intergenerational participation, catechesis for confirmation before first communion, and for non-graded candidates. We also were looking for a resource that reflected the "journey" approach of the RCIA, offered formative experiences central to the process and emphasized the responsibility of both parents and parish communion to be "companions" on the journey.

In 1992 several fortunate parishes in Victoria had the opportunity to pilot a new Novalis resource, Come Join Us at the Table. According to reports from diocesan co-ordinator Margaret Craddock, who directed the project, this resource responded wonderfully to our needs. Parents commented especially on how much they like the intergenerational gatherings, where parents and children were supported by so many from the community. They were also positive about the approach, a prayer experience in which catechesis flows out of ritual and celebration of the word.

A highlight of the process took place in the cathedral parish, where, for the final stage of their journey, three unbaptized children and their families joined the group. Bishop DeRoo presided at the celebration of their full initiation, as well as at the confirmation and first communion of the fifty other candidates. This combining of groups in the initiatory process is part of the vision of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (244.1, 246) and we find that the cathedral experience provides us with a good model for the future.

While we have faced some problems and concerns in restoring the sequence of the initiation sacraments, we have also experienced much positive feedback. Participants and leaders indicated that intergenerational learning experiences such as those provided in Come Join Us at the Table offer a process that respects the children and their families. It addresses what is happening in their lives and links that experience with the story of Jesus. It gives parents the opportunity to learn sacramental and ritual language, and to reach a deeper understanding of the sacramental experience without making them feel inadequate or lacking in catechetical formation. It invites them gently to ask themselves, as well as their children, if they are really ready and willing to make a commitment to this community of faith.

This approach removes the burden of readiness from the individual child and places it with the community. It challenges the community to be open and welcoming, and respects the community's need to be faithful to what it is celebrating. It emphasizes the importance of the Sunday assembly, rather than the catechism class, as the centre of the Christian life.

The diocesan synod (October 31, 1986–October 31, 1991) affirmed the initiatives which our confirmation committee began in 1984. The synod's final decision-making for action in regard to sacramental initiation received direction from them.

We continue, as a diocese, to explore and evaluate our experience of restoring the sequence of the sacraments of initiation with children, while struggling to respect all members of the body—whether adult or child—and to recognize that we all stand together as church. We feel it is important to respect everyone's need for time, encouragement and support as they grow in their relationship with Jesus. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides us with the insight and the direction. May we be open to the conversion to which it calls us.
Seasonal Notes

Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12
On March 25, 1999, the congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published a decree (Prot. 803/99/L) concerning the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. The decree follows on the heels of Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation, Ecclesia in America (January 22, 1999), and raises the former optional memorial to the rank of feast.

The decree points to the role of Mary in salvation history and her unique place in the communion of saints. The Virgin of Guadalupe provides an extraordinary example of concern for the poor, but also for the indigenous peoples of the Americas. She is therefore called "patroness of the Americas."

The feast was suppressed in Canada in December 1999 because it fell on a Sunday of Advent.

An Official Welcome to the Calendar!
Anne and Joachim (July 26 – feast) are named as Mary's parents in a late second century tradition. Churches dedicated to Saint Anne are found in Jerusalem and Constantinople from the middle of the sixth century. The feast of Saint Anne was kept in Rome by the eighth century, that of Saint Joachim from the fifteenth century. The feast honours the parents of the Virgin Mary and grandparents of the Lord. The new life given to the devotion to Saint Anne in seventeenth century Brittany was transported to New France and is not only centred around her shrine at Beaupré in Quebec but is also found among First Nations people across Canada.

Blessed Frédéric Janssoone (August 5 – optional memorial) was born in Ghyvelde, France on November 19, 1838, and died in Montreal August 4, 1916. He entered the Friars Minor in 1864, and was ordained a priest in 1870. After serving as a chaplain in the military, he was sent to the Holy Land where he preached retreats and promoted pilgrimages to the holy shrines. In 1881, he made his first trip to Canada to raise support of the Shrines of the Holy Land. He settled permanently in Canada in 1888, and developed the pilgrimage of our Lady of the Rosary at the shrine of Cap-de-la-Madeleine near Trois-Rivières, Quebec. He is buried in Trois-Rivieres.

John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, Antoine Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier, Noël Chabanel presbyters, martyrs René Goupil and Jean de la Lande martyrs (September 26 – feast)
In the seventeenth century, eight French missionaries suffered martyrdom in New France: six Jesuits and two lay associates. Three were killed at Auriesville, near Albany, New York, and five in Huronia, 200 kilometres north of Toronto. The Jesuits were John de Brébeuf (1593–1649), Isaac Jogues (1608–1646), Antoine Daniel (1600–1648), Gabriel Lalemant (1610–1649), Charles Garnier (1606–1649), Noël Chabanel (1613–1649); and the two lay associates were René Goupil (1608–1642) and Jean de la Lande (160?–1646).

Easter Vigil Times of Darkness
As this issue goes to press the Church's celebration of the Easter Vigil, 2000 is long past. Readers are asked to comment (in writing or by e-mail) on the usefulness and accuracy of the times of darkness published in Bulletin #159, p. 243. Send comments to: National Bulletin on Liturgy, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 90 Parent Ave., Ottawa, ON, K1N 7B1, or mbick@cccb.ca.
From the Regions

The Western Canada Conference for Liturgy includes the four western provinces as well as the territories of Yukon, Northwest and Nunavet, and meets once annually in the fall.

1999 saw more than 170 people in attendance for the fall meeting and conference in Regina. Facilitators for the weekend gathering were Bishop Raymond Lahey and Bishop Attila Mikloszary. The theme of the conference was “Re-exploring the Paschal Mystery and the Presence of Christ in the Assembly.” Both presenters gave some solid background to these issues and presented firm ideas that conference participants could take back to their respective dioceses and parishes. The 2000 annual conference will be held in Calgary on October 27-29, 2000.

The Summer School in Liturgical Studies, offered at Newman College in Edmonton, remains one of the most important aspects of the work of the Western Conference. This annual summer program continues to consistently provide sound leadership for liturgical renewal and formation. Students come from all over the western region of Canada. The 1999 Summer School had an enrolment of 178 and this year produced a total of four graduates from the dioceses of Prince George, BC, St. Paul, AB, and Saskatoon, SK. Each member-diocese continues to support and encourage the work of the Summer School and it is hoped that in the future there will be more people who take advantage of the courses offered.

Sharing of resources and resource people allows the member-dioceses to take advantage of the work being done in different areas of the country. A compilation of all published directives, guidelines and educational resources is kept on hand by the conference with all member-dioceses having access to any of the documents they wish. This has proven an invaluable asset to those diocesan commissions who may not have the needed expertise or leadership in certain areas.

The year 2000 will also see the Western Conference supporting the institute “Concerning the Baptized” presented by the North American Forum on the Catechumenate. This institute will be held in Saskatoon, SK from July 27-29. This new institute will explore the underlying vision for journeying with baptized adults who seek to complete their initiation and/or be received into full communion of the Catholic Church. It will help participants to clarify the distinct theological and pastoral realities of the baptized. Among issues to be explored will be the understanding of baptism, discerning a suitable path to the eucharistic table, and appropriate formation of the baptized, uncatechized adult.

At the 1999 Conference our new executive was elected. David Tumback of Saskatoon was elected chair; James Ravenscroft of The Pas was elected first vice-chair (as well as being elected the western representative to the National Council); and Judy Zolc of Regina was elected second vice-chair.

The Western Conference looks forward to continued growth in their pursuits of liturgical renewal and service to the needs of the church in western Canada.

For more information contact the chair of the conference:

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Brief Book Reviews

Murray Kroetsch

Youth at Worship, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Ottawa: Conccan, Inc, 1999); 48 pp., $9.95 CAN.

Many liturgists and catechists have discovered in the Roman Directory for Masses with Children a rich source of pastoral guidance for liturgical celebrations, especially the eucharist, with pre-adolescent children. In this new resource we are provided with an equally rich source of pastoral guidance for celebrations with those moving through the life stages from early adolescence to early adulthood.

Included in this resource is a discussion of the place of youth in the community of faith, an examination of the world of young people today, some notes on liturgical catechesis, liturgical time and space, a comprehensive commentary on the fundamental elements of every liturgical celebration, and an outline of the various liturgical ministries in which young people may participate during the liturgy, as well as suggestions for planning, preparing and reflecting on liturgical celebrations. Especially to be noted are the sidebars throughout the text which offer lists of concrete do's and don'ts. The extensive lists of reflection questions for participants, ministers and liturgy planners at the conclusion of the book are exceptionally well developed. This resource is highly recommended for pastors, liturgists, religious educators and secondary school chaplains. A wonderful addition to every liturgical library!

Celebrating Catholic Rites and Rituals in Religion Class, by Kathy Chateau and Paula Miller (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998); 70 pp., $9.95 US.

This book consists of a collection of catechetical celebrations inspired by the ritual actions of the Church's liturgy—particularly the rites of Christian initiation. Each chapter provides background information about the ritual along with suggestions for use in a religious education program. The celebrations are well designed and easy to follow. This collection provides a useful resource for catechists. However, Canadian catechists will quickly notice the similarity between what is offered in this collection and what is found in the Born of the Spirit series, published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Real Presence: the Work of Eucharist, by Nathan Mitchell (Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications, 1998); 135 pp., $12.00 US.

The content of this book arises out of a concern that Catholic eucharistic identity is in serious danger of disappearing. Nathan Mitchell sets out to address this concern by providing an excellent commentary and critique of the eucharistic teaching provided in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He then offers insights from biblical research that have influenced our growing understanding of the connections between the Jesus and the celebration of the eucharist. Finally, draw-

Murray Kroetsch, pastor of St. Dominic's Parish in Oakville, ON, also works in the Office of Liturgy of the diocese of Hamilton. He is currently chair of the Ontario Liturgical Conference.
ing on the work of George Steiner, he proposes a context for understanding the eucharist in contemporary Western culture. In this final section of the book, Mitchell provides an excellent summary of the foundational principles on which rests the Church’s traditional understanding of real presence in the eucharist.

In this book, Nathan Mitchell demonstrates the breadth of his scholarship as well as his ability to articulate in a clear and unencumbered way the truths that we cherish regarding the real presence in the eucharist. Pastors, liturgists, teachers and RCIA teams will all find this book an invaluable resource for deepening their own understanding of the eucharist and for communicating the genuine faith of the Church to others. Highly recommended.

Responses to 101 Questions on the Mass, by Kevin W. Irwin, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); 180 pp., $12.95 US.

This book is one in a series of "Responses to 101 Questions ... on the Bible ... about Jesus ... on the Church" etc. In response to a series of 101 questions on the mass, Kevin Irwin provides an explanation of the mass that includes historical background, theological and liturgical insights, and commentary on the relationship of the liturgy to daily spiritual growth. The questions and answers are arranged in groups dealing with background and terminology, liturgical roles, the reform of the liturgy and the structural elements of the mass. The final sections of the book deal with the role of music at mass, eucharistic doctrine and practice, and the eucharist and daily life.

The responses are well balanced and, with a few exceptions, are very comprehensive. In his introduction, Irwin indicates that many of the questions were originally posed by his students in graduate courses and by people who come from a broad range of educational and theological backgrounds. His responses are clearly addressed to such an audience. This book is recommended for anyone who seeks to understand the mass better. It will be particularly helpful for those who are still perplexed by the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council.


This is the thirteenth collection of homilies to be published by the gifted preacher, Walter Burghardt. The contents of this book clearly reflect his recent preoccupation with "preaching the just word." Included in this present collection are homilies preached in a variety of locations throughout the liturgical year. Almost all of them were preached during 1995, and therefore are based on the readings of Year A in the Sunday Lectionary and Year 2 of the Weekday Lectionary. With few exceptions, Burghardt builds his homilies around his usual three points, and a careful reader will recognize favourite phrases and illustrations from previous collections. However, what is instructive in this book is the connection that Burghardt is able to make between the assigned lectionary texts for a given day and the biblical justice themes. Thoughtful preachers who struggle to preach on justice issues can learn from Burghardt’s skill in doing just that. Recommended.

Preaching Basics: A Model and a Method, by Edward Foley, (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998; 42 pp., $12.00 US.

Based on the US bishops’ document, Fulfilled in Your Hearing, Edward Foley sets forth a model for effective preaching. He begins by pointing out that preaching is fundamentally about passion: for the Word of God, for the liturgy and for the
baptized assembly. Foley then defines the nature of liturgical preaching as a ritual conversation between the assembly and God with the help of the preacher. He effectively illustrates this by inviting the reader to consider "non-forms" of liturgical preaching which sometimes take place. In chapter three, Foley likens the art of preaching to using the required ingredients for a recipe and mixing them according to the instructions. He examines the "ingredients" for preaching (the lectionary, the liturgy, the world, the arts and the human story of the assembly), and proposes a method for combining these ingredients to shape an effective homily. A series of helpful worksheets are provided at the end of the book to assist the preacher in homily preparation.

This book is a brief and very user-friendly resource that will be helpful to all who have the privilege to break open God’s word in the liturgical assembly. Highly recommended.


This book will be of interest to scholars and pastoral musicians who seek to understand the nature of early hymn texts addressed to Christ and the relationship of these texts to the Christological controversies of the early Church. Liderbach argues that early Christian hymns emerged from the tensive faith of the Church in Christ "known as human and imaginatively believed as the Son whom God had sent to act among humans in God's place" (p.83). He discusses the early Church's declarations about Christ in its hymns, and traces the development of the Christological controversies that led to the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE. Noting that the early Church held on to hymns that expressed both the human and divine identities of Christ, Liderbach suggests that what is needed in contemporary hymns is a similar tensive belief in the humanity and divinity of Christ.

North American Forum on the Catechumenate PRESENTS

A “Focus on Initiation” Institute Concerning the Baptized

July 13-15, 2000, Archdiocese of Toronto (ON)
July 27-29, 2000, Diocese of Saskatoon (SK)
October 12-14, 2000, Diocese of Charlottetown (PEI)

• presents the vision for journeying with baptized adults seeking to complete their initiation and/or to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church
• helps to clarify the distinct theological and pastoral realities of the baptized
• explores appropriate preparation and celebration with the baptized catechized adult
• explores appropriate liturgical, catechetical and pastoral formation of the baptized uncatechized adult
• invites reflection, faith sharing, discernment, and liturgical celebration

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The Last Word
The Story of a Decision

Marcel Gervais

There is an old story that travels in church circles, the one about getting rid of bats in the church belfry. It ends with the line, “If you want them never to come back to the church, confirm them.” The story is funny, because there is an element of ironic truth in it.

I have been confirming young people since 1980. Developing appropriate homilies for these celebrations was always a challenge. I sometimes used the imagery of a ship, with passengers and crew: all were baptised, but now with confirmation passengers became members of the crew. And of course the wind in the sails is the Spirit moving the Church where it would. A certain truth to it, yes! But it really was about adolescence, not confirmation, and certainly nothing about the essential link to the eucharist—except that the crew members had to eat to do their job.

I had accepted common practice—baptism in infancy, followed by first sharing in eucharistic communion at the age of discretion, then confirmation several years later—and for twenty years I defended it. If I did, it was first of all because of the young people’s need for something to mark their transition to adulthood. The words of the ritual seemed to support this, with its prayer asking for all the gifts, the very adult gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Frequently, I questioned what I was doing and what the teachers were doing in preparing our young people for confirmation. Sacraments are for us, but the very thing being done is done by God. It is God, in Christ, who confirms what is done in baptism. Was there anything about God in the preparation or execution of this sacrament? Yes, some, not much.

I even tried to develop a paper to counteract those promoting a change to the original order of the sacraments of initiation. Fortunately, I did not have time to finish it. What brought about the change of mind? A series of events. I had delegated confirmations to our parish priests. This went well. The ones closest to the people were doing what they should—bringing their young people into the Church.

We had asked our priests to celebrate confirmation during the Easter season. I got any number of calls from disgruntled pastors saying that this was conflicting with first communion, with graduation, with final exams, etc. In the midst of these calls I knew that a neighbouring bishop had restored the original order of the sacraments of initiation. Then, one of the priests from our diocese sent me an article by John Huels, of Saint Paul University. I read it, and I was converted. What convinced me?

It struck me that in placing confirmation after first communion I was creating an imbalance that was distorting exactly what confirmation was about. In every parish, I was creating a fuss that was com-

† Marcel A. Gervais, archbishop of Ottawa, is currently a member of the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy.

peting with first communion, a fuss in the parish that did nothing to promote reception of the eucharist. (I even celebrated confirmation without mass!) I had been over-emphasising one sacrament to the detriment of another much more important: the eucharist. I was inevitably placing the youngsters in the centre, and displacing God as the main actor. I felt guilty, and resolved not to do this anymore.

I know how upsetting this is to those who are still firmly where I was for so many years. We will all have to re-evaluate what we have been doing. It will take time, but we have a lot of that. I am allowing a full year for our adaptation. I am willing to be flexible. I am grateful to all who provoked me, prodded me. I am also thankful to my neighbour, Bishop Eugene Larocque, for leading the way. Thanks also to Cardinal Jorge Medina of the Congregation for Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for telling Bishop Gerald Wiesner, President of the CCCB, back in 1999, that a return to the original order of the sacraments of initiation was in order.

We will have to develop a mystagogia of the sacrament and more suitable adolescent programs to prepare our youngsters for adulthood in the church, but confirmation will no longer be seen as marking the end of participation in the life of the church, but the end of the beginning of full participation in this life.

The Annual Meeting of the Ontario Liturgical Conference has been scheduled for October 25–27, 2000 at St. Joseph’s Centre in Toronto. Further details TBA.
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