



# CRITERIA FOR THE SACRAMENTS

## The Initiation of Children

Diocese of St. Catharines  
January 2014 rev 2



**CRITERIA FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION OF CHILDREN  
DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>The following draft guidelines are adapted from Diocese of Hamilton Sacramental Guidelines the Initiation of Children. Used with permission.

## CRITERIA FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION OF CHILDREN DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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My Dear Friends in Christ,

The **Criteria for the Sacraments of Initiation of Children** in the Diocese of St. Catharines is the result of a great deal of preparation and consultation. I sincerely thank all of those who have been involved in creating this fine document. In particular I thank the Ad Hoc Committee on Sacramental Criteria, the members of the Council of Priests, and the Religious Education Office of our diocese. I also wish to acknowledge the invaluable input of priests, deacons and those involved in catechesis and Catholic education in our diocese.

These criteria are provided to assist pastors and all of those involved in helping our youth and their families prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation. It will also help to bring a more unified approach to sacramental preparation across the diocese.

Preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation is indeed a graced period for the students involved, their parish, school and family. It should be a time of joyful anticipation as we prepare to celebrate these unique encounters with God who is love. Sacramental preparation provides a wonderful opportunity to reach out and welcome those who come to encounter Christ. Even though their reasons may vary, they are coming to Christ who says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." (*Matthew 7:7*)

Asking for a sacrament is the first step in a process that should deepen and strengthen faith. This is why preparation is so important. It is a journey that should, like the sacraments themselves, help to draw us into the mystery of God and the Church. Fundamental to this process is coming to know and love Our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the heart of discipleship and should be the focus of all sacramental preparation.

It is my hope and prayer that the **Criteria for the Sacraments of Initiation of Children** will assist all of us who are privileged to be involved with sacramental preparation. May it help many come to know, love, and serve our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. Let us continue to fan the flames of faith so that we will set the Diocese of St. Catharines on fire with God's love!

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Gerard Bergie'.

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Catharines

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## THEOLOGICAL PREAMBLE

### The Gift of Salvation Rooted and Expressed in the Sacraments

The ever living God, the origin and source of all that is, created humanity in his own image and entrusted the care of the world to him, but through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the first human parents, their relationship with the Creator and consequently their own personal relationship, was severely damaged. But God who is love (1 John 4:8) and who wants everyone to be saved from eternal punishment due to sin and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) reached out to them and to this fallen world and promised that in his perfect time he would rescue humankind from the bondage of sin through a Savior that he would send.

Through the years, God gradually prepared his people through the prophets and covenants until at the fullness of time when a young Jewish girl named Mary said yes to him when asked to be the bearer of this truly human, truly divine person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world (Philippians 2:6-8; 1 John 4:14)). Through his teaching, ministry and life he proclaimed the good news of salvation, gave freedom to prisoners, and joy to the sorrowful of heart; and in accordance to God's eternal plan, he ultimately gave himself up to death in atonement for sin, for the consequence of sin is death (Hebrews 2:17; Romans 6:23). But, by rising from the dead, he destroyed death, restored life and in fulfillment of God the Father's promise he sent the Holy Spirit to those who believe; to guide and strengthen them in their life's journey on earth and bring them to the fullness of life in heaven (Roman Missal, 2011, p.634).

Before his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave a great mission to believers (the church), saying "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is in his life, teaching and this great commission that the Church's celebration of the mystery of salvation is rooted and expressed through the sacraments. That is to say that the sacraments derive their credence and vitality from Jesus Christ himself through the working of the Holy Spirit who makes all things holy. That is to say also that the sacraments make the Church and the Church lives by celebrating the sacraments in the name of Christ for the salvation of all.

Sacraments are, therefore, "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church by which divine life is dispensed to us" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC-1131). The restoration or salvation of humanity which God has, therefore, established through Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, is carried on and continually made present in all generations through the ministry of the Church.

The sacraments tell of the glory of God and his gracious inclination to human well being. They proclaim God's superabundant and everlasting love. They call every human being to respond to God's love by living their lives in Jesus Christ, the light of the world. They bring reconciliation with God and indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

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They lead to conversion and sanctification. They offer grace, fuel Christian living and union with God. They bring about eternal salvation. They are in fact the building blocks of a life focused on “Being a Saint” which everyone is called to. In the sacraments, Jesus is present and active to heal, to bless, and to transform by his grace. Such is the richness of these eternal gifts which, though beyond us, are entrusted to us by the Lord of all ages, to whom glory and honor belong now and forever. Amen.

The Church recognizes seven Sacraments which are classified into three categories:

- Sacraments of Christian Initiation, (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion)
- Sacraments of Healing, (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick)
- Sacraments of Communion, (Holy Orders and Marriage)

Our focus in this guideline is limited to the Sacraments of Christian Initiation of children as well as the one Sacrament of Healing – First Reconciliation. In the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the living memorial of the Lord’s death and resurrection (*Vatican Council II, decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity Ad gentes, no.14*).

These criteria focus on the worthy celebration of these sacraments in our local parishes of the St. Catharines Diocese. May the Lord, in his eternal wisdom, open the hearts and dispose the minds of those who apply them and lead the recipients closer to the Lord through the charitable celebration of these sacraments.

**CRITERIA FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION OF CHILDREN  
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**GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

Sacraments are, first and foremost, actions of Christ and his Church. The Church is, therefore, responsible for determining the specifics of sacramental preparation and celebration. Sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them (Canon 843.1). Sacramental preparation in the Diocese of St. Catharines is rooted in the following three principles:

- All sacraments are ecclesial celebrations, i.e., celebrations of the Church.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith.
- Catholic schools are an integral part of the on-going religious education of children and provide valuable assistance in the foundational preparation for the sacraments following Baptism.

Foundational and on-going preparation for sacraments ideally includes:

- Participation in the Sunday Eucharist;
- Prayer in the family;
- Daily living of a Catholic manner of life appropriate to one's age and spiritual development;
- Religious education in a Catholic School (or other supplementary education).

**SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION IN GENERAL**

**Immediate Preparation:**

Immediate preparation for sacraments includes specific sacramental catechesis prior to the sacrament being celebrated. This is the responsibility of the parish in which the child's family is registered or in which they regularly worship. In the case of a child whose family is not registered in a particular parish, or whose family does not worship regularly, it is the responsibility of the proper geographical parish to facilitate the sacramental preparation. For First Eucharist and Confirmation, this involves the participation of the parents and generally takes place in collaboration with the Catholic School. If, for pastoral reasons, it is desirable to celebrate in another church, a letter of permission may be provided by the proper pastor. (See Appendix 1).

**Registration:**

Registration for sacramental preparation is the responsibility of the proper parish where the sacrament is to be celebrated. This includes the collection of any necessary documentation. For First Eucharist and Confirmation, this includes a valid certificate of Baptism in the Catholic Church. Documentation attesting to the suitability of godparents and sponsors is not required. (Please note: Where such documentation for suitability of godparents or sponsors is required by another diocese, the letter provided as Appendix 1 may be used.)

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### **Form of Preparation:**

The form of immediate sacramental preparation is determined by the proper parish where the celebration will take place. For First Eucharist, First Reconciliation, and Confirmation, this preparation will generally involve the child's Catholic School community. Meetings between the parish priest or his delegate and members of the staff of the Catholic school to coordinate the preparation of children will be beneficial and will promote a positive experience for all involved.

### **Types of Preparation Programs:**

Immediate sacramental preparation is to be appropriate to the age and spiritual development of the child and ought to take into consideration the child's abilities and family circumstances. The preparation program ought not to be onerous. In general, four to six meetings including meetings with parents only, or with parents and children together, are adequate. Models for preparation for these sacraments are available from the Diocesan Office of Religious Education.

### **Participation:**

Participation in the sacraments is based on the desire of the child and his/her family to celebrate the sacrament and their good will in participating in the preparation program to the best of their ability, in conjunction with the judgment of the pastor. Readiness to receive the sacraments is never to be determined solely by tests or completed projects or by attendance records.

### **Responsibility:**

The liturgical celebration of the sacraments is the responsibility of the parish priest and those who collaborate with him in the preparation. This may include the involvement of the parish minister, the parish liturgy committee, parents, and representatives of the Catholic School community. The liturgical celebration takes place according to the approved ritual books for the Catholic Church in Canada.

### **Offering:**

For the administration of the sacraments the minister may not ask for anything beyond the offerings which are determined by the competent authority. (Canon 848) In the Diocese of St. Catharines there are no fees for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation beyond what the cost of materials such as gown rentals and catechetical material.



## CELEBRATION OF INFANT BAPTISM

### Theological Preamble:

"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift.... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own, grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water, anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship" (CCC – 1216).

So Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children (1John 3:1), a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God (The Rites, vol.1, p.3).

### Pastoral Guidelines:

#### Minimum Requirements:

For an infant or child who has not reached catechetical age to be baptized lawfully, it is required that:

- the parents, or at least one of them or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent; (Note – If joint custody, both parents must consent to the baptism. In situations where there is sole custody, permission from this parent is sufficient. If one parent has full custody, the custody document from the court should be provided and filed with the baptismal records).
- there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Church. If such a hope is truly lacking, the Baptism is, in accordance with the provision of particular law, to be deferred, and the parents advised of the reason for this. (Canon 868)

#### Personal Contact:

Arrangements for a particular Baptism are always to be made by the parents in a personal meeting with the pastor or one of his associates. Arrangements are never to be made by phone, email, or by simply completing a form.

#### Sacramental Preparation:

Each parish determines the suitable sacramental preparation required prior to the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism. In addition to participation in the Sunday Eucharist, one or two catechetical meetings may take place, especially for parents who are presenting their first child for Baptism. Depending on their availability, godparents ought to be invited to join the parents for these meetings.

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### **Special Situations:**

When parents are not married or are in an irregular situation, or are not practicing their faith, it is advisable to encourage them to take the first steps in re-establishing a relationship with their parish community. In this case, the Baptism may be delayed; it is never denied. Under no circumstances is the marital status of the parents to preclude the baptism of their child, provided they are receptive to participating in the preparation program and have a firm intention to raise their child in the Catholic Church to the best of their ability.

### **Godparents:**

Godparents must be not less than sixteen years of age. They must be fully initiated in the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), and must be living a life of faith which befits the responsibility to be undertaken (Canon 874). Based on these criteria, parents select godparents for their child. There is to be only one male godparent or one female godparent, or one of each (Canon 873). A baptized person who belongs to another Christian denomination may be admitted, together with a Catholic godparent, as a Christian witness. The appropriate notation should be made in the Baptismal Register.

### **Celebration:**

Baptism is normally celebrated on Sunday. It may be celebrated during Mass or at another suitable time.

## Celebration of Baptism for Children of Catechetical Age

### **Catechetical Age:**

According to the law of the Church (Canon 852.1), children who have reached the age of reason (7 years of age) are prepared through their participation in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (Part II, Chapter 1).

In keeping with this rite, they are to be prepared to celebrate the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist at the same celebration. It is permissible to delay the sacrament of confirmation to a later age for pastoral reasons.

### **Preparation:**

A suitable preparation program in the parish would ideally involve the child's parents. Where possible, members of the child's Catholic School community may also provide support. Parishes will recognize that children in the Catholic School system will have the benefit of ongoing foundational catechesis that will be helpful in their immediate preparation.

### **Registration:**

The full initiation of children of catechetical age is to be recorded in the parish's Baptismal Register.

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**Reception of Children into Full Communion of the Catholic Church**

**Definition:**

Children of catechetical age (7 years of age or older), who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to receive their First Communion may be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. Parents must present their baptismal certificate and a profession of faith is made by their parents or guardians. (See Appendix 2). For these children, the sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated at a later date (i.e. in grade 8). See Appendix 3 for the list of denominations whose baptism is acknowledged as valid by the Catholic Church.

**Preparation:**

Children of catechetical age (7 years of age or older) who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination and who wish to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church are to participate in a program similar to the program provided by the parish for children of catechetical age preparing for full initiation. A suitable preparation program in the parish would ideally involve the child's parents. Where possible, members of the child's Catholic School community may also provide support. Parishes will recognize that children in the Catholic School system will have the benefit of ongoing foundational catechesis that will be helpful in their immediate preparation.

**Registration:**

The reception of children into full communion with the Church is to be recorded in the parish's Baptismal Register.

**NOTE: Baptism in another Rite**

Where you are approached by the family of a child baptized in an unfamiliar rite or of uncertain rite, please, having gathered any and all available documentation, contact the Chancellor's Office for direction.

## FIRST RECONCILIATION/ CONFESSION/ PENANCE

### **Theological Preamble:**

Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and; which by charity, by example and by prayer labors for their conversion" (CCC – 1422).

As we all fall short of the Glory of God and sin (Romans 3:23), but because God's mercy is greater than our sinfulness the Lord constituted the sacrament of Penance for the pardoning of sin committed after Baptism (John 20:21-23, Matthew 19:20, Matthew 18:19) and the church has faithfully celebrated this sacrament through the centuries (The Rites, vol.1, p.523).

### **Pastoral Guidelines:**

#### **Preparation:**

The immediate preparation for First Reconciliation is the responsibility of the proper parish where the sacrament is to be celebrated. The involvement of parents and the child's Catholic School community is desirable. All children who are to receive First Eucharist are to be prepared and have the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Communion.

#### **Liturgy:**

The sacrament of Reconciliation always takes place in the church. The second form of the sacrament (communal celebration with individual confession and absolution) is preferred. Wherever possible, provision ought to be made for parents and family members to celebrate the sacrament at the same time.

#### **Attendance:**

It is not permissible to take attendance or to record those who celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation in the parish sacramental records, however recognition or certificates may be given.

## FIRST EUCHARIST/COMMUNION

### **Theological Preamble:**

The Holy Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (CCC – 1324).

Coming to the Eucharist, we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, so that we may have eternal life (John 6: 54-55) and show forth the unity of God’s people. By offering ourselves with Christ, we share in the universal sacrifice, i.e. the entire community of the redeemed offered to God by their High Priest. We pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God’s family (The Rites, vol. 1, p.3).

### **Pastoral Guidelines:**

#### **Age:**

First Eucharist is celebrated with children who have reached the age of reason (7 years of age) and have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.

#### **Readiness:**

The decision concerning the individual child’s readiness to receive First Eucharist rests with the child’s parents in consultation with the parish priest. This is particularly the case for parents of children with special needs. A suitable preparation program in the parish should ideally involve the child’s parents.

#### **Time and Place:**

It is preferable to celebrate First Eucharist at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. However, if there are large numbers that cannot be accommodated in the parish church at Sunday Mass, the celebration may take place at another time.

#### **Liturgical Norms:**

The liturgical celebration of First Eucharist is the responsibility of the parish priest and those who collaborate with him in the preparation, and takes place according to the norms found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

#### **Registration:**

The celebration of First Eucharist is to be recorded in the parish’s First Communion Register.

## CONFIRMATION

### **Theological Preamble:**

Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds (CCC – 1316).

### **Pastoral Guidelines:**

#### **Age:**

Confirmation is celebrated with children who are in Grade 8 and who have completed a program of immediate sacramental preparation.

#### **Preparation:**

The purpose of the immediate sacramental preparation program is to dispose the candidate to receive the grace of the sacrament and to participate fully in the liturgy of Confirmation. A suitable preparation program in the parish should ideally involve the child's parents. It is not intended to prepare candidates for a test of their religious knowledge.

#### **Time and Place:**

Confirmation is always celebrated during Mass at a time determined in consultation with the Bishop's Office.

#### **Children of Other Denominations:**

Children who have been validly baptized in another Christian denomination are received into full communion by their Profession of Faith, Confirmation and First Communion which all take place during the Confirmation liturgy. Appropriate catechesis precedes the celebration.

#### **Sponsor:**

A person being confirmed is to have one sponsor who fulfills the same requirements as a baptismal sponsor (that is, a godparent). The sponsor may be male or female and may be one of the child's godparents. A parent cannot be a sponsor. (Canon 893)

#### **Confirmation Name:**

The longstanding tradition in the diocese of St. Catharines is to choose a saint's name as a confirmation name, different than their own. However, they may be confirmed with their baptismal name as well.

#### **Registration:**

The celebration of Confirmation is to be recorded in the parish's Confirmation Register and notice is to be sent to the parish of the child's baptism where due notation is made in the proper Baptismal Register.

## **SOME NON-CATHOLIC CHURCH COMMUNITIES WITH VALID BAPTISM**

The following are some non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities that have valid baptism: all Eastern non-Catholics, African Methodist Episcopal, Amish, Anglican, Assembly of God, Baptist, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of the Brethren, Church of Christ, Church of God, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Evangelical United Brethren, Liberal Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Metropolitan Community Church, Old Catholic, Old Roman Catholic, Polish National, Presbyterian, Reformed, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Reformed, Uniting Church of Australia, Waldensian, Zion.

Communities whose baptism is doubtful, and for which is required an investigation into each case, are Mennonite, Moravian, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventist. The ministers in these communities do not observe a uniform practice, or they may have splinter groups whose Trinitarian theology is dubious.

Some ecclesial communities without valid baptism are the Amana Church Society, American Ethical Union, the Apostolic Church (Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God), Apostolic Faith Mission, Bohemian Free Thinkers, Children of God ("The Family"), Christadelphians, Christian Community (Rudolf Steiner), Christians of the Universalist Brotherhood, Christian Scientists (no baptism), Church of Divine Science, Church of Daniel's Band, Church of Illumination, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Church of Revelation, Erieside Church, General Assembly of Spiritualists, Hephzibab Faith Missionary Association, House of David Church, Iglesia ni Kristo (Philippines), Independent Church of Filipino Christians, Church of the Universal Brotherhood (Doukhobors), Jehovah's Witnesses, Masons (no baptism), Metropolitan Church Association, National David Spiritual Temple of Christ Church Union, National Spiritualist Association, New Jerusalem Church (Swedenborg or "New Age" Church), People's Church of Chicago, some communities of the Plymouth Brethren, Reunification Church ("Moonies"), Salvation Army, Shakers (no baptism), Society of Friends (Quakers, no baptism), Spiritualist Church, Unitarians, United Society of Believers (Shakers), Universal Emancipation Church.

*Cf: The Pastoral Companion: A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry, pages 380-381.*

### **NOTE: Baptism in another Rite**

Where you are approached by the family of a child baptized in an unfamiliar rite or of uncertain rite, please, having gathered any and all available documentation, contact the Chancellor's Office for direction.

**PASTORAL REFERENCE**

---

[Name Church]

---

[Address of Church]

Re: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Monsignor/Father:

The bearer of this letter is a Baptized Roman Catholic who:

Comments

- resides in

\_\_\_\_\_, (Parish)

\_\_\_\_\_(City).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- is a registered member of

\_\_\_\_\_, (Parish)

\_\_\_\_\_(City).

Comments

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- regularly participates in the Sunday Eucharist at

\_\_\_\_\_, (Parish)

\_\_\_\_\_(City).

Comments

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

He/She:

- wishes to celebrate the baptism of his/her child(ren) in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to celebrate First Communion in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to celebrate Confirmation in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- wishes to be married in your parish. Permission is hereby granted.
- fulfills the canonical requirements to be a godparent for Baptism.
- fulfills the canonical requirements to be a sponsor for Confirmation.

Thank you for your kindness to the bearer of this letter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

---

Pastor

Date this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_\_



**PARENTAL DECLARATION OF FAITH FOR RECEIVING CHILDREN INTO FULL  
COMMUNION**

DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES IN ONTARIO

DECLARATION OF FAITH IN PREPARATION FOR THE PRESENTATION  
OF A BAPTIZED CHILD FOR RECEPTION INTO THE FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

I, \_\_\_\_\_ reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ.  
name of parent or guardian

I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God. I further promise to continue living this faith and to support my child in this faith.

I acknowledge that in my child's reception of First Communion in the Catholic Church, he/she is being received into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church and is therefore no longer a member of another Christian church.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witnessing priest

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Place

This declaration is to be kept on file in the parish church.



Diocese of St. Catharines

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