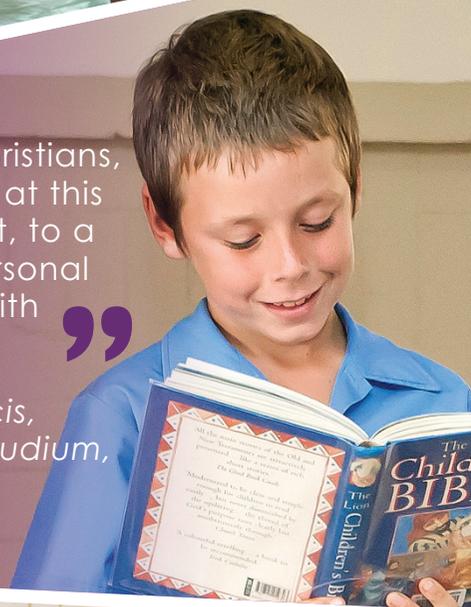




“Invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.”

– Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013



BECOMING DISCIPLES DIOCESAN POLICY

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THE DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE



SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION
FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The sacraments of initiation — baptism, confirmation and eucharist — are the three primary sacraments, on which the rest of our lives as Christians depend. (CCC 1212)

The ideal within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is for a family-centred, parish-based and school-supported program which recognises the primary role of parents/guardians in the faith formation of the child. This faith formation has joyful discipleship as its goal. The community looks forward to welcoming an emerging disciple of Jesus, who seeks to engage in the mission of the Church to evangelise.

FAMILIES AS PRIMARY EDUCATORS IN FAITH

1. Parents/guardians as primary educators in faith have the right and responsibility to present their children for the sacraments of initiation. The Church seeks to aid families by:
 - Providing them with opportunities to grow in their own understanding of the meaning and implications of these sacraments;
 - Helping them to discern the readiness of their children to receive each sacrament.
2. Once enrolled in the process, parents/guardians may present their child as a candidate for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist, at the appropriate times. It is the parents/guardians who request from the Church reception of the sacraments for their children.



PARISH PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

3. The parish seeks out and encourages all parents/guardians and their children to become fully initiated and active members of the Church of God. The normal way children are initiated into the Catholic Church is through the parish-based process of initiation.
4. If, at any time in the process, a decision is made to delay reception of a sacrament, the family and the child remain in the process and receive support, encouragement and an open invitation to complete the initiation from the parish.
5. Each parish has as its first concern the offering of a family-centred process that begins before Baptism and cares for the family and child until after he/she is fully initiated. This may be achieved by setting up a Sacraments of Initiation Team (the Team), supported by diocesan personnel or online resources and/or through programs of instruction.
6. The parish community provides prayerful support for the children and the families of children who are unable to participate, for whatever reason, in the parish initiation process.
7. The parish community takes special care to support the families of children with disabilities and additional needs throughout the initiation process.
8. The implementation of this family-centred process for sacramental initiation requires the active involvement of the parents/guardians, catechists, teachers and the parish community, all performing their role in a spirit of discipleship which focuses upon the person of Jesus, first and foremost.

Approved by Bishop William Wright, 2015.

SACRAMENTAL LIFE & FAMILY FAITH JOURNEY

9. The focus of the Initiation process is to:
 - Enable parents/guardians to provide an environment within their homes that promotes the growth of faith within all members of the family;
 - Lead families into discipleship, celebrating the faith life of the parish community, especially Sunday eucharist.
10. The Church companions families' faith journeys by providing resources, training and support for all aspects of an individual's or family's sacramental life.
11. The Church provides experiences of belonging to the parish community and opportunities for catechesis and discipleship, not just immediately before and after the reception of the sacraments, but during the period from baptism until the completion of initiation and throughout the life-long journey of faith.
12. This initiation phase sits within the context of the entire sacramental life of the individual, family and parish community. It is one of the unique features of the Catholic Church.

CHURCH TEACHINGS

13. Ideally, the completion of sacramental initiation occurs after the child has reached the age of reason. (Canon 9:14)
14. The order of sacraments is baptism, confirmation and eucharist. (Sacraments of Initiation for Children, 2003.)
15. The completion of sacramental initiation is ideally celebrated during the Easter season, which is from the Easter Vigil to Pentecost Sunday.
16. The bishop, being the ordinary minister, administers the sacrament of confirmation unless he delegates.
17. "Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others," (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, para 127).