REVISED NORMS
GOVERNING THE FIRST SACRAMENTS
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Penance
Eucharist
Confirmation

Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn
New York
DECREES

In keeping with our commitment to engage fully in the New Evangelization, which has been the central focus of my ministry as Bishop of Brooklyn, I am happy to promulgate the Revised Norms Governing the First Sacraments for Children and Youth. This revision, which seeks to address many of the issues that have arisen throughout the strategic planning processes known as Preserving the Vision, has as its primary objective the strengthening of our families as a place for evangelization, as well as providing much needed assistance to our academies and schools in their important mission of Catholic education.

These revised norms govern the preparation and celebration of the Sacraments of Penances, Eucharist and Confirmation. In addition, they concern the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation for our youth in Catholic High Schools, as well as the preparation of our youth for the RCIA in Catholic High Schools. In order to ensure a fruitful and successful implementation of these norms, I encourage all those responsible for the faith formation of our youth in the Diocese to study and follow carefully these revisions.

As we continue to “put out into the deep,” and work to make the presence of our risen Lord known to the world, particularly to our youth whose formation is vital to our future, it is my hope that these revised norms will be an excellent tool for the vibrant celebration of the Sacraments. Therefore, I, the undersigned Bishop of Brooklyn declare that these revised norms shall have the force of particular law beginning on August 15, 2011, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn

Given at Brooklyn, the 1st day of August, 2011
Contents

First Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist
Introduction.................................................................1

Diocesan Norms Governing the Celebration of Penance and Eucharist.................................2

Procedures Regarding Parish Affiliation........................................................................3

Guidelines Regarding Proximate Preparation for Penance and Eucharist..........................4

Questions and Answers for Parents and Parish Leaders....................................................5-8

Sacrament of Confirmation
Introduction.................................................................9

Diocesan Norms Governing the Celebration of Confirmation.............................................10

Procedures Regarding Parish Affiliation........................................................................11

Guidelines Regarding Proximate Preparation for Confirmation........................................12

Confirmation for Youth in Catholic High Schools
Introduction.................................................................13

Diocesan Norms for Preparation and Celebration of Sacrament.....................................13

Procedures..............................................................................13

Preparing Youth for RCIA in Catholic High Schools
Introduction.................................................................14

Diocesan Norms for Preparation for RCIA..................................................................14

Procedures..............................................................................14

Appendix
A. Parish Affiliation Statement..................................................................................15
Introduction

The New Evangelization invites us to catechize those who are part of our Church and all persons of good will. Our Diocesan Vision Statement for Lifelong Faith Formation echoes this invitation by asking us to “celebrate and share the loving presence of Jesus” in “all aspects of our daily lives,” most especially in the celebration of the sacraments.

The manner by which we are prepared for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and how we continue to receive them over a lifetime is critical to our life of faith. This is especially true for our children, both those who attend our Catholic schools and academies and those who are enrolled in our religious education programs.

It is a long standing diocesan policy that all children must receive at least two full years of catechesis, including academic instruction in the faith, before they are permitted to receive First Eucharist. However, we know that the faith formation of our children involves more than academic instruction. Each child must be gradually formed into the full image of the Lord Jesus by developing a mature life of prayer, culminating in full, conscious and active participation with the parish community at Sunday Eucharist. Since such participation is usually not possible without the cooperation of their parents and guardians, faith formation must also involve every child’s family, school community and the entire parish community in prayer, witness and celebration. For this reason, parish catechetical leaders are called to assist parents in their efforts to bring their children to know and love Jesus Christ.

As a family of families, the parish remains the ideal home for Catholic families to join together not only at the spiritual birth of their children at Baptism, but also to be nourished by the Eucharist each Sunday. It is our diocesan policy that each family’s home parish remains the privileged place for celebrating a child’s First Penance and First Eucharist. These norms reflect this policy by directing families to celebrate the sacraments of First Penance and First Eucharist in the parish where they usually celebrate their Catholic faith every Sunday.

In light of the gradual introduction of elementary school academies through Preserving the Vision, the original norms issued in 2007 were judged in need of revision. These revised norms have been adapted to reflect our lived experience over the last three years.

The purpose of these revised norms remains twofold. First, they seek to ensure that families throughout the Diocese are actively and continuously evangelized and encouraged to worship the Lord in a parish community that they can call their spiritual home. Second, the norms seek to assist academies and schools to identify the worshipping community of their students so that these students may receive the Sacraments of initiation in their home parish. Their successful implementation will depend on true cooperation among catechetical and school leaders in neighboring schools and parishes.
In the Diocese of Brooklyn, the following norms will guide the reception of the Sacraments of First Penance and First Eucharist for children:

- The preparation and celebration of the First Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist will take place in the second grade.

- The celebration of First Sacraments will take place in the parish where the child’s family is affiliated and where they usually worship.

- Every parish will provide a “proximate preparation program” for all children receiving First Sacraments and for their parents/guardians.

- Each child will continue to receive a comprehensive formation in the faith in the parish religious education program or in the Catholic elementary school/academy which he/she attends.

If pastoral need makes it impossible for a family to fulfill the norms regarding the celebration of First Sacraments, the parents will speak with the Pastor or Director of Religious Education of the parish where they worship. Together they will arrange an alternative procedure for the reception of the child’s First Sacraments.

Implementation Date: September 2011
PROCEDURES REGARDING PARISH AFFILIATION

Every Catholic family registering a child in a Catholic elementary school, academy or religious education program in Brooklyn or Queens must identify their parish of worship at the time of registration by completing or confirming a previously completed Parish Affiliation Statement provided by the Office of the Superintendent and the Office of Faith Formation. The purpose of the Parish Affiliation Statement is to identify the parish in which the family has demonstrated regular worship. Every Catholic family is expected to be a worshipping member of some parish.

A copy of the Parish Affiliation Statement is included in the Appendix.

Children Attending a Catholic School/Academy
Once a child’s registration is completed and the parent/guardian has completed the Statement of Parish Affiliation, the respective school or academy administrator will compile a list of students and their affiliated parishes and send this information to the respective Pastor and Director of Religious Education. In this way, each parish is aware of its children who attend a given school or academy.

Children Attending a Religious Education Program Other Than the Home Parish
The Director of Religious Education will inform the child’s home parish that the child has registered for catechetical formation in another parish.

Non-Affiliated Families
Should a Catholic family not be a registered/affiliated member of some parish at the time they apply for school or religious education, they are strongly encouraged to register in the parish where they usually worship. If a family does not worship in any parish, special effort should be made on the part of the school, academy or religious education program to catechize them regarding the need to actively participate in the worship of the local parish.

Families of Other Religious Traditions
Those families who are not of the Catholic faith and wish to register children in our Catholic elementary schools or academies should be encouraged to seek the Lord in their respective faiths. An ongoing invitation should also be extended to them to explore the Catholic faith by both the school and parish communities.
GUIDELINES REGARDING PROXIMATE PREPARATION FOR FIRST PENANCE AND EUCHARIST

It is the clear expectation that all children will return to the parish where they regularly worship with their families for the celebration of the First Sacraments.

To this end, every parish must sponsor a “proximate” preparation program (between four to six sessions that can be arranged throughout the year) for all children who will receive the sacraments of First Penance and First Eucharist.

Each parish is free to design its own “proximate” preparation program or follow the suggested model provided by the Office of Faith Formation. In either case, every program must be marked by three characteristics.

First, it must be family-centered, involving both the children and their parents in some experience of intergenerational faith formation. While the majority of the planned sessions should involve the parents with their children, some may be planned only for parents or only for children. As such, if at all possible, this preparation should not be a classroom experience of instruction.

Second, the program must be connected in a meaningful way to the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The program should invite the families whose children are receiving the First Sacraments to join together as a community at Sunday Mass for prayer.

Third, this preparation program will bring together children who are attending religious instruction in Catholic schools/academies and religious education programs as a sign of the unity that marks every parish family.

Such “proximate” preparation is meant to complement the catechetical formation that each child is receiving in religion classes in either Catholic school or in the parish’s religious education program.

This proximate preparation catechetical experience is not meant to add an undue burden, financial or otherwise, to families or parishes and therefore should be planned in such a way that it is both effective and uncomplicated. Fees should not normally be required for these preparatory activities.
The norms for the reception of the First Sacraments by school-aged children, originally promulgated in 2007, were the result of extensive consultation and collaboration that took place among various members of the Church of Brooklyn and Queens. In light of the various changes we have experienced together in the last four years, particularly the Preserving the Vision Process, the ongoing Christ our Hope Process, and the emergence of academies, it has been deemed necessary to reword and rework these Norms. While the substance of the norms has not changed, they have been altered in order to reflect the pastoral reality of our Diocese and thereby offer communities a more effective tool.

This newly revised pastoral guide is intended to help clarify and apply the norms to specific situations that may be encountered on the parish level.

1. What is the purpose of these norms?

Given the many structural changes facing our Catholic schools and academies, as well as the ongoing reconfiguration of parishes throughout the Diocese, the norms were promulgated to clarify the proper place where children of the diocese should receive First Penance and First Holy Communion. Their purpose is to reinforce the following two principles:

(a) Everyone seeking initiation into the Church must do so as part of a worshiping community of faith that is their parish. The center of sacramental life and catechesis is first and foremost the parish, the primary local community through which we encounter Jesus Christ. Therefore, children, along with their parents, should actively worship in their parish community and be normally initiated into that same parish community. This fact is particularly significant for schools/academies that are connected to multiple parishes.

(b) Families not affiliated with any parish at the time they present their children for sacraments must be welcomed and evangelized to become worshipping members of the parish. It is hoped, therefore, that an adequate understanding of the significance of the parish community and the centrality of the sacraments, both foundational to these norms, will help families to accept the ongoing invitation to nurture their spiritual lives and join their local parish as active members of the Catholic Church.

2. What is the pastoral and theological rationale on which these norms are based?

As Catholics we believe that each celebration of the sacraments is a privileged moment during which Christ enters our lives in a transformative way. While we are initiated into the universal Church, we also become members of a given parish family. Therefore, every child attending a Catholic school or a religious education program should worship each Sunday as a member of his/her parish, preferably with other members of his family. This worship is essential to the
child’s ongoing faith formation. It is through the parish family that our children are nurtured in the faith of the Church in an ongoing way for the rest of their lives. The instructional aspects of Religious Education constitute only one essential element of the overall formation of the person.

3. What are the essential points that underlie such ongoing faith formation?

Faith formation is much more than simply providing or receiving religious instruction. It is an essential ministry that seeks to lead each Christian to build and sustain a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ throughout life. This ministry is shared in a special way by parents and guardians who serve as the primary educators and witnesses to their children of the Catholic faith. In light of this, it is necessary that we envision faith formation to both include and transcend the borders of the classroom and permeate every aspect of a Christian’s life. Embracing this vision of faith formation will help us to see that every Religious Education program should lead our children toward active participation in the life of the Church as realized in a given parish community.

4. If children pray and learn about the faith in their Catholic schools, why can’t we consider the school a faith community?

Catholic schools and academies certainly do form and sustain Christian community. Our schools, centered on Christ, are often wonderful examples of prayerful Christian communities in which our young people, under the guidance of their teachers, learn about the faith, experience prayer, and worship the Lord Jesus. However, there is an important distinction between the school community and the Eucharistic community of the parish. The parish is the primary worshiping community, centered on the celebration of Sunday Eucharist and sustained by the celebration of all the sacraments. It is into this Eucharistic community that our young people are initiated and hopefully nurtured throughout their lives, never “graduating” and leaving as one does in a school setting. Therefore, as suggested above, the Catholic school forms and prepares each young Christian to be an active member of the parish community. The school can never replace the parish in this essential ministry. While they certainly do become communities of faith, neither the school nor the academy can become parish.

5. What about families who would rather not worship in their territorial parish, but choose to be affiliated with another parish?

The norms speak of the term “home parish.” This is defined as the parish in which the family regularly worships. The primary concern of the norms is that every Catholic family has a parish in which they are active, worshipping members. As there are a number of parishes that do not sponsor a school, the parish associated with the child’s school is not necessarily that child’s (and his/her family’s) home parish. The children should normally receive their First Sacraments in the parish where they regularly worship. This is consistent with the fundamental theological insight that we are initiated into the church made manifest in the local parish.
6. How do we address the reception of First Sacraments in an academy?

The emergence of academies, in which more than one parish works together, is one of the factors that necessitated the revision of these norms. In a number of cases throughout the Diocese, several parishes support one school and where the pastors of the parishes are involved in the spiritual formation of the students. While the religious education that takes place in these schools certainly includes learning about the sacraments, including the sacraments of First Penance and First Communion, it cannot complete the formation of our children for the reception of these sacraments that ongoing Sunday worship alone can provide. For this reason, because our schools are not the place for Sunday worship, each parish of the Diocese, whether it supports a school or not, must provide some form of “proximate preparation” for its children who will receive further initiation into the Church through the reception of the First Sacraments.

All those involved in any Catholic academy (i.e. members, directors, principals and directors of religious education) should meet on a periodic basis to determine the procedures needed to enact the norms that govern the reception of First Sacraments for the children attending their regional school. In this way, these children and their families will have a clear understanding of the vision and rationale of the norms.

7. What is meant by “Parish Based Proximate Preparation” for First Sacraments?

Any parish based “proximate preparation” program for the First Sacraments is not to be “more classroom instruction.” In fact, as the norms state, this preparation should flow from and lead to Sunday worship, providing prayerful and liturgical experiences that assist in building Christian community by bringing families together and emphasizing that all children receiving the sacraments do so as equal members of a parish family. In preparing a plan for proximate preparation, the parish is free to use the model offered by the Office of Faith Formation or to create its own program, provided such a program respects the specific criteria and spirit of the norms.

8. What if a family does not worship together in one parish but in separate parishes?

In light of the various situations in which contemporary families find themselves, there may be circumstances in which a family whose child is preparing to receive First Penance and First Communion may not worship together. While this is not the ideal situation, such separation is often due to divorce, differences in the preferred language of worship, or other issues. Many children, for example, may worship regularly in two or more parishes depending upon the parent or guardian with whom they are residing on a given weekend. Such cases are certainly significant and should be dealt with by the pastor and other catechetical leaders with pastoral sensitivity. Such cases will often constitute a genuine pastoral need and therefore justify flexibility in regard to where the child receives First Sacraments. However, genuine pastoral need does not include simple matters of convenience. In all cases, families and parishes are expected to respect the procedures and spirit of the norms.
9. What happens if parishes in the cluster have very different ways of upholding these norms? Won’t some parishes suffer as a result?

As promulgated by our Diocesan Bishop, these norms should be treated and respected as particular diocesan law. Additionally, it is important that these norms be followed in a spirit of Christian communion. Ideally, parishes within a cluster or region, under the leadership of their pastors, should agree upon a unified pastoral practice so that the norms can be implemented fairly and completely.

It is important to recall that these norms seek to ensure that children and their families are actively invited to become a part of a worshipping community where they come to know and love the Lord. Second, they are meant to ensure that no parish unfairly loses their families because said parish does not have a school on its own property. The norms should be respectfully and carefully enforced in such a way that they unify the sacramental practices of our parishes and actively evangelize the families we serve.
DIOCESAN NORMS GOVERNING THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

Introduction

The New Evangelization invites us to catechize those who are part of our Church and all persons of good will. Our Diocesan Vision Statement for Lifelong Faith Formation echoes this invitation by asking us to “celebrate and share the loving presence of Jesus” in “all aspects of our daily lives,” most especially in the celebration of the sacraments. As the family of the Diocese of Brooklyn has already issued norms for the reception of First Sacraments, these norms governing Confirmation seek to reflect and enhance that same vision.

The manner by which we are prepared for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and how we continue to receive them over a lifetime is critical to our life of faith. This is especially true for our children, both those who attend our Catholic schools and academies and those who are enrolled in our religious education programs.

The faith formation of our children and youth involves more than academic instruction. Each person must be gradually formed into the full image of the Lord Jesus by developing a mature life of prayer, culminating in full, conscious and active participation with the parish community at Sunday Eucharist. Since such participation is usually not possible without the cooperation of their parents and guardians, faith formation must also involve every child’s family, school community and the entire parish community in prayer, witness and celebration. For this reason, parish catechetical leaders are called to assist parents in their efforts to bring their children to know and love Jesus Christ. It is not our goal to provide children or adults with mere information, but rather to form mature and active disciples of Jesus Christ.

As a family of families, the parish remains the ideal home for Catholic families to join together not only at the spiritual birth of their children at Baptism, but also to be nourished by the Eucharist each Sunday. It is our diocesan policy that each family’s home parish remains the privileged place for celebrating the Sacraments. These norms reflect this policy by directing families to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in the parish where they usually celebrate their Catholic faith every Sunday. Furthermore, these norms express other expectations of the diocesan Church that seek to ensure that Confirmation is a significant step on the journey of Christian discipleship, rather than misperceived as a sort of graduation from the need for instruction or worship.

These norms therefore, complementing the vision expressed in our Diocesan Norms for the First Sacraments Penance and Eucharist, offer similar guidelines for the parish communities celebrating the gift of Confirmation with the young people of their communities.

In keeping with the original sacramental norms for First Sacraments, these norms for Confirmation seek to ensure that families throughout the Diocese are actively and continuously evangelized and encouraged to worship the Lord in a parish community that they can call their spiritual home.
NORMS REGARDING THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

In the Diocese of Brooklyn, the following norms will guide the preparation and reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation for students in grammar school:

- The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will take place no earlier than the 8th Grade. This will take effect in the 2012-2013 academic/pastoral year.

- Preparation for Confirmation assumes the child has been involved in ongoing catechesis since First Sacraments.

- Ordinarily, the celebration of Confirmation will take place in the parish where the child’s family is affiliated and where they usually worship. All celebrations of the sacrament will normally consist of 35 or more confirmandi. If there are not 35 confirmandi in one parish, it may be necessary to combine with another parish.

- Proximate Preparation for Confirmation will take place on the parish level with all students.

- Each child will receive a comprehensive ongoing formation in the faith in the parish religious education program or in the Catholic elementary school/academy which he/she attends.

If pastoral need makes it impossible for a family to fulfill the norms regarding the celebration of Confirmation, the parents will speak with the Pastor or Director of Religious Education of the parish where they worship. Together they will arrange an alternative procedure for the reception of Confirmation.
Every Catholic family registering a child in a Catholic elementary school, academy or religious education program in Brooklyn or Queens must identify their parish of worship at the time of registration by completing or confirming a previously completed Parish Affiliation Statement provided by the Office of the Superintendent and the Office of Faith Formation. The purpose of this document is to identify the parish in which the family has demonstrated regular worship. Every Catholic family is expected to be a worshipping member of some parish.

Children Attending a Catholic School/Academy
Once a child’s registration is completed and the parent/guardian has completed the Statement of Parish Affiliation, the respective school or academy administrator will compile a list of students and their affiliated parishes and send this information to the respective Director of Religious Education. In this way, each parish is aware of its children who attend a given school or academy.

Children Attending a Religious Education Program Other Than the Home Parish
The Director of Religious Education will inform the child’s home parish that the child has registered for catechetical formation in another parish.

Non-Affiliated Families
Should a Catholic family not be a registered/ affiliated member of some parish at the time they apply for school or religious education, they are strongly encouraged to register in the parish where they usually worship. If a family does not worship in any parish, special effort should be made on the part of the school, academy or religious education program to catechize them regarding the need to actively participate in the worship of the local parish.

Families of Other Religious Traditions
Those families who are not of the Catholic faith and wish to register children in our Catholic elementary schools or academies should be encouraged to seek the Lord in their respective faiths. An ongoing invitation should also be extended to them to explore the Catholic faith by both the school and parish communities.
GUIDELINES REGARDING PROXIMATE PREPARATION FOR CONFIRMATION

It is the clear expectation that all children will return to the home parish where they regularly worship with their families for the celebration of the Sacraments.

To this end, every parish must sponsor a “proximate” preparation program (between four to six sessions that can be arranged throughout the year) for all those young people who will receive Confirmation in the parish.

Each parish is free to design its own “proximate” preparation program or follow the suggested resources provided by the Office of Faith Formation. In either case, every program must be marked by three characteristics.

First, it must be family-centered, involving when possible both the children and their parents in some experience of intergenerational faith formation. While the majority of the planned sessions should involve the parents with their children, some may be planned only for parents or only for children.

Second, the program must be connected in a meaningful way to the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The multi-faceted Christian vocation should be emphasized, encouraging the development of authentic Catholic spirituality, Christian service rooted in the Gospel and active discipleship in the parish community.

Third, this preparation program will bring together children who are attending religious instruction in Catholic schools/academies and religious education programs as a sign of the unity that marks every parish family.

Such “proximate” preparation is meant to complement the catechetical formation that each child is receiving in religion classes in either Catholic school or in the parish’s religious education program.

This proximate preparation catechetical experience is not meant to add an undue burden, financial or otherwise, to families or parishes and therefore should be planned in such a way that it is both effective and uncomplicated. Fees should not normally be required for these preparatory activities.
**PREPARATION OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH FOR CONFIRMATION**

**Introduction**
The Catholic High Schools in our diocese include students who come from Catholic elementary schools, public and charter schools, private non-denominationa l schools, and in some few instances from home-tutoring. Given the diversity of the student population, one often finds Catholic students who have not completed their sacramental initiation after Baptism or First Communion.

For the greater number of teen-agers in our Diocese, there is a general lack of affiliation with their parish. Our Catholic High School students are no different. They have, however, found a faith community in their school – attending religion classes, participating in Eucharistic liturgies, service programs of every nature, retreats, days of prayer and reflection, etc.

**Diocesan Norms**
If a student in a Catholic High School has not been confirmed and if he/she is affiliated with a worshipping parish community celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will take place in that community. Proximate preparation for Confirmation could take place in the parish if there is a program that prepares teenagers for this sacrament. As an alternative, the preparation could take place in the Catholic High School.

Catholic High School students who present themselves for the sacrament of Confirmation and who have no affiliation with their home parish may receive preparation for the sacrament and celebrate it with their peers within the school community.

**Procedures**
- Preparation for Confirmation will be done in the individual High School under the coordination of the Chaplain or Campus Minister and in collaboration with faculty members.

- Each student who enrolls in the preparation program will provide a Parent Permission Form and a Pastor’s Permission Form.

- The preparation will include both catechetical and service components. Resources will be provided by the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation.

- The Pastor, or his representative, will be invited to one or more catechetical sessions in order to provide a relationship with the parish.

- A diocesan celebration(s) of the Sacrament of Confirmation will be scheduled for students in Catholic High Schools.

In all instances, the student is always free to receive Confirmation in a parish worshipping community if he/she so chooses.
Preparation of Catholic High School Students for Full Initiation

Introduction

In more recent times, our Catholic High Schools have experienced an increase in the enrollment of non-Catholic/non-Christian students. As these young women and men participate in religion classes, celebrations of Eucharist, retreats, service programs, and days of reflection, several of them have been drawn to become members of the Catholic communion.

These students fall into several categories:
- Baptized in the Catholic Church; never received Communion or Confirmation
- Baptized in a Christian Church
- Non-baptized

Because these students are not affiliated with a Catholic worshipping community, their first contact with the Catholic Church is often through their high school. It is here that the desire to be received into the Church is discovered and nurtured.

So that these students will not graduate without having the opportunity to become full members of our Roman Catholic community, we encourage the High Schools to collaborate with our parishes in assisting with their reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

Procedures

- Preparation will be done in the individual High School under the coordination of the Chaplain or Campus Minister and in collaboration with other faculty members.

- Each student who enrolls in the preparation program will provide a Parent Permission Form and a Pastor’s Permission Form.

- The Pastor, or his representative, will be invited to one or more catechetical sessions in order to provide a relationship with the parish.

- Ordinarily, the student will receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil in his/her home parish.

- During the time of mystagogia the student will be encouraged to become involved in his/her own parish.
**Parish Affiliation Statement**

Dear Parent/Guardian:
This document is intended to identify your child’s Eucharistic Community which is not necessarily the site of his or her school community. For the purposes of this form, parish affiliation is defined as the person’s home parish. This is the parish church in which your child and family worship regularly on Sundays. Children will receive the First Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist in the parish identified as their home parish. Please refer to *Questions and Answers for Parents and Parish Leaders* for additional information. According to diocesan policy, Catholics will register in the parish where they worship and offer their presence and support, financial and otherwise, in said parish.

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Address __________________________________________________________

Telephone ______________ Email _________________________________

Our family participates in Sunday worship (Mass) and takes part in the life of __________________________ Catholic Church.

Parent/Guardian Signature _______________________________________

Date ______________

Parents/ Guardians are asked to complete this form and return it to the school/ academy *no later than September 30* of each academic year. The Principal will then send this information to your parish.