



DIOCESE OF PORTLAND OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

June 1, 2015

Dear Brother Priests and Parish Catechetical Leaders,

Among the privileges of our ministry to the Church is our participation in the graced moment of Sacramental Initiation for our children. Thank you for the pastoral leadership you provide to the children and families of your parish as they prepare for the reception of the sacraments. Through the sacraments of Penance, Confirmation and First Eucharist, our children encounter Jesus who, in his mercy, desires to walk with them throughout their lives. We want this encounter to be a true experience of grace, and one which provides a foundation for a life of faith.

To that end, Maryanne Harrington, Director of the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation, has coordinated over the last year an extensive consultation on how best to provide children and their families with the formation necessary for the celebration of these sacraments. Consultation was done with priests through the Presbyteral Council and vicariate meetings and with Parish Catechetical Leaders through individual and group conversations.

Children are a part of families. The participation of parents and families makes a difference in handing on the faith. Pope Francis recently reaffirmed this teaching: *"If family education rediscovers the pride of its leadership, many things will change for the better. We hope that the Lord gives this grace to parents: to not exile themselves from the education of their children. And this can only be done with love, tenderness and patience."* (General Audience, May 20, 2015)

To form and inspire our young people in the faith, we must also focus our energies on involving parents, helping them to fulfill their responsibility as their children's first teachers in the ways of the faith. The key is to nurture the faith of the parents themselves, while helping them to develop patterns of religious practice that will sustain them for a lifetime.

Preparing to receive three sacraments is a daunting task for children. That is why I have approved the recommendation to implement a two-year preparation process for these sacraments. This will provide the children with the time necessary to learn about and develop a relationship with God as they come to know him through Jesus, to learn their prayers, to understand and desire the sacraments, and to be involved in the church, particularly through regular participation at Sunday Mass. Some parishes have already moved to a two-year process involving parents, and it is making a difference.

I am grateful to Maryanne, her committee of catechetical leaders, and the staff of the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation for producing the attached guidelines, which have been developed to assist you in your important ministry to our children and their families. The guidelines are intended to serve as a framework for planning at the parish level and to provide helpful resources. Each parish is unique, but pastoral adaptations should take place within this recommended framework.

Through these renewed efforts, may the children of our parishes and their families, whom the Lord has entrusted to our care, be welcomed with joy into the life of Jesus Christ and his Church through the sacred and mysterious moments of grace we celebrate in the sacraments.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, J.C.D.
Twelfth Bishop of Portland