

The Sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and Confirmation for People with Developmental Disabilities: A brief discussion of determining readiness ^{1,2}

For readiness for First Eucharist, Canon Law simply requires the ability to differentiate between the Host and regular food. This can be nonverbally as well, by demonstrating reverence or pointing when asked where Jesus is, for example. In the USCCB Guidelines to Celebration of the Sacraments for People with Disabilities, it says we should err on the side of inclusion.³

For readiness for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in general it is asked if there is the ability to communicate remorse or sadness for his/her actions, verbally or some other way. It is also possible for the child to be ready to celebrate Eucharist, but not Reconciliation. The Commentary acknowledges that parents, who have the primary responsibility for a child's catechesis, may feel their child is not ready for the Sacrament of Reconciliation but is ready to celebrate First Eucharist. The important thing to note here is the deference to a parent's determination of readiness.

Relative to the Sacrament of Confirmation, Guidelines to Celebration of the Sacraments for People with Disabilities specifically says, "Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian to receive the sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time."⁴ The Commentary's discussion allows that preparation is not necessary for a person who does not have the use of reason.⁵ See below for more on this.

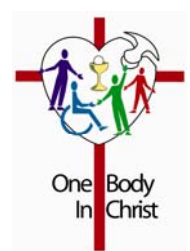
The above specifically addresses the question of readiness. Relative to preparation and celebration of the Sacraments, it is good to be as inclusive as possible. There is significant value for all when there is at least some shared experiences for the person with a developmental disability and his/her peers preparing for the sacrament, as well as with connections with the worship community. However, as in all questions of parish life, pastoral implications should be considered. The preference of the person (if able to be determined) and the family are very important.

Please feel free to contact the office for Pastoral Ministry with Persons with Disabilities regarding any questions or particular details.

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¹ *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law, Study Edition*, John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, ed. (New York, NY, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000). Specifically the discussion of Canon 913 and 914, 1108-1110.

² *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB, 1995, 2002. ISBN: 1574554255.

<http://ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/bishops/sacraments>

³ *Guidelines*, 20.

⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

⁵ Commentary, Canon 889, p. 1086.