

CIC REVIEW GROUP
FINDINGS
and
RECOMMENDATIONS
2011



ARCHDIOCESE of
ST. ANDREWS & EDINBURGH

CONTEXT and REMIT of the GROUP

This review was conducted by the mandate of the Cardinal and his Episcopal Council ten years after the re-ordering of the Sacraments of Initiation for children and in response to pastoral concerns about its appropriateness. The Episcopal Council advised that any review should examine all aspects of implementation and that this be seen as an opportunity to re-examine what is best practise.

A review instrument was devised by

- Monsignor Philip Kerr: VG for Mission and Ministry,
- Patricia Carroll: Episcopal Delegate for Pastoral Resources
- Brid O' Brien: Religious Education Director and Primary School Adviser

A CIC Review group was set up with a representative body from each of the deaneries.

The remit of the group was:

- To collate the information gathered from schools and parishes in relation to current sacramental initiation of children
- To identify the current trends that are emerging
- To affirm best practice in the initiation of children
- To affirm the work of teaching staff and parish catechists
- To contribute to the development of policies relating to initiation of children
- To work together to provide appropriate age and stage level resources for schools and parishes
- To strengthen current approaches to catechesis of children in school and parish settings
- To work as a team when responding to development needs

A prerequisite of membership of the group was:

- Knowledge of current practice in their own deanery
- Experience of sacramental initiation in school and/or parish
- Openness to the responses of various groups
- Willingness to work as part of a team
- Sensitivity to the catechetical work already done

CIC REVIEW GROUP MEMBERS

Mgr. Philip Kerr – VG for Mission and Ministry

Patricia Carroll – Episcopal Delegate for Pastoral Resources

Brid O'Brien – Director of Religious Education/ Re Adviser for Primary Schools

Frances Collins – St. Margaret's Stirling: Primary Teacher and Parish Catechist

Fr. Daniel Doherty – Parish Priest Holy Cross Edinburgh

Margaret Drummond – Sacred Heart Penicuik: Parish Catechists

Sheila Hay – St. Joseph's Broomhouse: Primary Teacher

Claire Lynch - Ss. John Cantius & Nichola Broxburn: Parish Catechist

Jim McCann - St. Philip's Livingston: Former Primary Head Teacher and Parish Catechist

Catherine McHardy – Ss. Ninian and Triduana: Parish Catechist

Teresa Sharp – St. Gabriel's Prestonpans & St. Martin's Primary School Tranent: Primary Teacher

RESPONSES

Parishes and Schools were given three opportunities to take part in this review.

There are 69 Primary Schools in the Archdiocese, a total of 34 schools sent in their response.

This represents a 50% school response.

Of these 34 responses 30 Parish Priests also considered these to be their parish response

There are 104 parishes in the Archdiocese, 35 parish priests sent in a separate response whilst another 30 counted the school response as their parish response.

This represents a 62% parish response.

EMERGING PARISH TRENDS

Parish responses highlighted the following trends which need to be addressed and developed:

- There was much disparity of understanding about the place of the minor liturgical Rites around parishes in the Diocese. This was also confirmed by the school trends, where these Rites were often viewed as optional.
- There is an over reliance on the 'American' book for the celebration of the minor liturgical Rites.
- There would appear to be a need for Adult Faith Formation for parents in most parishes.
- Parents felt afraid to engage and sometimes their attitude was about getting their child 'done'.
- In a large proportion of parishes parental commitment was lacking due to parents missing a lot of foundational information about catholicity and basic practice.
- There was a real need to approach this from the perspective of evangelisation.
- There is some discomfort about P4 confirmation linked to a lack of understanding of why it is now celebrated at this stage.
- A lack of continuity between the support provided by the parish/school/home was highlighted.
- Parents and other adults identified the process of formation often as the primary responsibility of the school rather than themselves in partnership with the parish.
- There is a heavy reliance on 'Alive-O' resources.
- A need to identify and affirm what is effective and best in preparation resources.
- The diversity around the parishes as to when they start things would appear to reveal some confusion about the whole process of completion of initiation.
- A growing and worrying trend of children lapsing immediately after the completion of initiation
- A growing number of grandparents are acting as the main contact with the Church and are in effect accompanying their grandchildren in passing on faith
- A need to develop parents understanding of Christian Initiation as a whole process rather than a preparation for a one off event.
- Another parish refers more to stages of preparation rather than age as some children are older than 7 when initially presented
- Parishes are trying to put structures in place to help parents share their faith in the following ways:
 - In some parishes there are Parish Meetings spread throughout the year where the focus is about helping some parents make a conscious effort to come back
 - In one parish there are 3 whole day retreat experiences for parents which seem to work very well as a support
 - Some non-catholic parents participated in RCIA as a result of their good experience of children's sacramental preparation

CIC REVIEW GROUP RESPONSE to PARISH TRENDS

- There seems to be a great need to set up sacramental support teams in every parish with teams of catechists
- Parent support in general needs to be examined in our parishes at both pre-sacrament stages and after the completion of children's initiation
- Parishes need to more explicit with parents about the necessity of weekly Sunday participation in the eucharist
- Parishes need to be providing a Clear Parish Policy about inviting parents to the sessions, criteria for deferment and leaving the door open
- These sessions need to be presented to parents and guardians as a support for their ongoing faith journey and not a burden, but as a way of enabling them to confidently share their faith with their children.
- Parents and guardians need to be explicitly equipped with basic practical skills to hand on their faith, e.g.,
 - How and when to pray with a child
 - How to reflect on a passage of scripture
 - How to take part in Mass and respond
 - How to learn set prayers
- Parents and guardians need to be explicitly equipped with basic practical tools to hand on their faith throughout the preparation process
 - These tools include :
 - A family crucifix
 - A bible
 - Prayer books
 - Fonts for Holy Water
 - Rosary
 - Candlesthese need to be available in the parish and the school

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS for PARISHES

The Review Group recommend the following practical developments:

1. That every parish* reviews its current support for parents and formats a development plan in relation to the pre-sacramental journey
2. That parishes form Catechetical Sacramental teams to accompany parents, and that these teams are provided with initial and ongoing training
3. That parishes provide parent information leaflets to accompany each year of the journey of faith
4. That parents and guardians are offered annual retreat opportunities which are family friendly
5. That where grandparents are the main support for handing on faith, they should be encouraged to participate in all the available support.
6. That annual celebratory gatherings of parents in the parish take place
7. That parishes and schools equip parents with practical prayer tools to hand on their faith to their children, e.g. crucifix
8. That the Diocesan Pastoral Resources Department in conjunction with the RE office provide a SACRAMENTAL JOURNEY SUPPORT PACKAGE for parishes where monthly masses are mapped out and recommended minor Rites are provided
9. That a set of readymade formation power points and teaching leaflets are developed for parish catechists and at the same time sourcing helpful sacramental workbooks.
10. That parishes and schools make good use of the following resources to strengthen parental support:
 - Parishes use the WEDNESDAY WORD as a weekly way of connecting home/school/parish
 - Catechists and Priests make use of the DVD resource 'PARENTS' – 7 sessions by David Wells
 - Catechists and Priests make use of 'JOURNEY TOGETHER TOWARDS RECONCILIATION' by Paddy Rylands – 4 sessions with Parents
 - Catechists and Priests make use of 'JOURNEY TOGETHER TOWARDS FIRST COMMUNION' by Paddy Rylands – 4 sessions with Parents
 - Parishes explore the resources in 'Home Is A Holy Place' to support family life

This may be approached in a Cluster basis as some parishes may only have 2 or 3 candidates per year

EMERGING SCHOOL TRENDS

School responses highlighted the following trends which need to be addressed and developed:

- Continuous reference in the school responses to the need for more parish involvement in the preparation process
- Many schools could not understand the rationale behind celebrating 2 sacraments in one year and their timing. This identified the need for stronger liaison between Parish Priests and schools.
- Schools questioned how the sacrament of confirmation is a springboard into more mature commitment. This highlighted the general lack of understanding of why we have our current process.
- Schools are requesting a cohesive preparation booklet
- School identified a need for parish priests to be more flexible about what Sunday Mass families attend and stronger encouragement to opt into weekly celebration.
- Parents of children who do not attend Catholic schools rely on school resource material for the preparation journey. This highlights the need to provide a more comprehensive catechetical framework for those in this group.
- The preparatory liturgical Rites are generally not understood and are not being fully celebrated in the overall sacramental journey.
- There is a general lack of knowledge about the importance of the preparatory Rites
- A huge dependence on Alive-O, the Glasgow Workbooks and the Purple Book for preparation
- There is a huge and growing anxiety about parents not supporting the sacramental preparation of their children
- Teacher formation issues arose in relation to what kind of knowledge children need in order to celebrate confirmation
- On the whole schools made a very positive response, most issues are developmental

CIC REVIEW GROUP RESPONSE to SCHOOL TRENDS

Catholic schools introduce children to the totality of catholic teaching, complementing the role of parents as first teachers in the ways of faith. Some schools provide an environment where prayer with staff and pupils every morning is an essential feature of life, This is important to children's spiritual development, particularly those whose parents are not practising.

- More links need to be made starting from baptism and at various points in the child's life, not just the focus beginning at P3. The development of the child's faith formation must start much earlier.
- School is sometimes the only formal connection with the Catholic Church for the children.
- Schools could offer parents of P1 children 'spiritually' focused meetings to underline the obligation to bring their children up in the faith.
- Parish connections with schools needs to be strengthened and developed.
- The school link between parish and parents needs to be stronger in most places.
- Schools are reticent to instruct parents about their obligation to take children to mass.
- It is difficult to prepare for 3 sacraments in 1 school year. Sometimes teachers feel they are not prepared enough. Also decreasing numbers of catholic's in the class make it difficult to prepare but still engage with the rest of the class.
- Some head teachers are lacking confidence to lead in this area and their knowledge and that of all teachers needs to be strengthened.
- Confirmation for P4 pupils offers an opportunity to revisit the sacrament and the significance of the Holy Spirit in P5, 6 & 7.
- There needs to be a clearer strategy about providing reconciliation experiences in partnership with the parish. E.g., Invites could be sent to children and parents once or twice a year or during Advent, Lent and Easter to invite them to a focused reconciliation service.
- There is a need for a joint approach to sacramental preparation especially as some schools are supporting more than one parish. Coordinating dates and times can be difficult.
- Some parents and guardians attend the preparation meetings but are only interested in seating arrangements etc. They don't engage with the significance of the liturgical rites.
- Confirmation resources are weak. There is definite need for a good resource for confirmation preparation.
- Some children have to wait weeks for communion after Confirmation. There is a theological and canonical issue here and this confirms the past mindset of separation of the sacraments of Christian initiation.
- The content of sacramental meetings with parents needs to be reviewed and guidance is needed.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS for SCHOOLS

The CIC Review Group recommended that the following provision be put in place to strengthen and support the work of schools:

- We need to encourage teachers, parents and priests to view our schools as primary centres of evangelisation.
- That there is a clearer statement on the relationship between the sacraments, the completion of the sacraments of initiation and a more explicit section on confirmation.
- That there is an updated resource provided for teachers about the sacraments of initiation and teaching points for confirmation
- That there is wider theological training for teachers. R.E. is currently 1/8th of the curriculum.
- That CPD on catholic ethos for teachers is regularly provided
- That there is continuous CPD on how to plan and lead liturgies.
- That the diocese provides workshops on how to set up a 'sacred space'.
- That the diocese enables the development a deeper understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation for teachers.
- That samples of Reconciliation Services for P5 – P7 are developed
- That the possibility of formation of chaplaincy support teams in primary schools is explored, serving as the link between school, parish and parents.
- That provision is made for regular retreat opportunities for teachers.
- Children need prompts to go home with, just as they have in other subject areas this needs to be developed for RE and sacramental preparation
- Sacramental preparation should be provided by catholic members of staff. Other staff members may support the ethos of the school in other varied ways.

PREPARATORY LITURGICAL RITES - TRENDS

In the Christian Initiation of Children model adopted by the archdiocese ten years ago the celebration of minor liturgical preparation rites for children was strongly recommended.

The group identified the following trends in parishes and schools in relation to the importance of the minor liturgical Rites

- Most parishes celebrate the Rite of Enrolment but miss the opportunity to celebrate other Rites.
- There is widespread variation in the way Rites are celebrated and how they fit into the overall sacramental journey.
- There is need for a diocesan template on the format of the various stages and Rites.
- Celebrating the Rites provides a series of stepping stones towards completion of initiation
- The celebration of the Rites provides an opportunity for wider parish community participation.
- The inclusion of the celebration of Rites into the community enriches the life of the parish.
- Reconciliation is a sacrament and not a Rite this needs to be made clearer to parents and teachers
- The sacrament of Reconciliation is often looked at as a 'milestone' along the way, participants need to see it as inclusive to the process of Christian living.
- Any catechesis for the sacrament of Reconciliation needs to be connected more intentionally to baptism.
- Having a well developed programme where the celebration of the Rites are mapped out for the parents and children, gives the parents an opportunity to develop good habits of participation.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

about the Celebration of Rites

The group made the following practical recommendations:

1. It needs to be clearly stated that Sunday participation in the Eucharist is not an optional extra but mandatory and intrinsic to Christian life.
2. The preferred place for the celebrations of the preparatory Rites is the parish Sunday Eucharist.
3. There needs to be a clear guideline on how Reconciliation fits into the process since it is not a preparatory Rite but a sacrament.
4. Preparatory Rites need to be viewed as prescriptive not a descriptive or an optional extra, they are integral to the process of formation and the sacramental journey.
5. Diocesan templates need to be provided for all the prescribed Rites.
6. The Timings for the Celebration of the Rites should be suggested for across the diocese.
7. These Timings can be circulated in advance so that children can be prepared beforehand. Dates should also have a clear liturgical connection.
8. Diocesan policy should clearly name the conditions that make for a prayerful celebration of these Rites.

AGE and STAGE of COMPLETION of INITIATION

The Review documents from both parishes and school highlighted significant issues and concerns in relation to the age and stage of the completion of initiation of children.

The main issues centred around the two operative models which have been in Scotland since the Second Vatican Council:

- The Confirmation of older primary school in primary 7
- The Completion of the Sacraments of Initiation at an early stage in Primary 4

The parish review responses highlighted five key issues:

1. 75% of Parishes responses were generally satisfied with the current Primary 4 Completion of the Sacraments of Initiation
2. 15% of Parish responses expressed a preference for a return to Primary 7 Confirmation
3. 9% of Parish responses asked for a review of the age of Confirmation
4. 15% of Parish responses expressed a concern about two sacraments being celebrated in the space of one year
5. 6% of Parish responses expressed a desire for Confirmation at sixteen years of age

The school review responses highlighted five similar key issues:

1. 53% of School responses were generally satisfied with the current Primary 4 Completion of the Sacraments of Initiation
2. 35% of School responses expressed a preference for a return to Primary 7 Confirmation
3. 15% of School responses asked for a review of the age of Confirmation
4. 33% of School responses expressed a concern about two sacraments being celebrated in the space of one year
5. 3% of School responses expressed a desire for Confirmation at Secondary school stage

THE PRO'S and CON'S of the TWO MODELS of SACRAMENTAL COMPLETION

Having considered the data from the Review the CIC group considered the pro's and con's of both models of sacramental completion. These findings are mapped out below:

FOR Primary 4 Completion of Initiation

- This Model reflects early church practice and first 19 centuries
- This is the same pattern as the adult rite
- More in line with Western model
- This honours the order of baptism, confirmation and eucharist
- Gives first communion more of a context (it is not just a one off 'event)
- Parish Priest only needs to interact with one set of parents and those organising it in the church and school.
- It is convenient on several levels, parents, schools and the child
- From child's perspective it encourages an emerging interest in what it is to be a full member of the church
- Children at this age are more likely to take parents lead
- All practical issues ironed out in 1 year
- Younger they are initiated the longer their spiritual lives are & full member of the church
- For non practicing parents the process of reinsertion only takes 12 months
- Grace of the sacraments are strengthened
- Encourages younger children in the family to follow suit
- Diffuses the sense of first communion as a circus
- In some cases a class would be guaranteed a Catholic teacher
- Opportunity to move away from confirmation as an adolescent rite

AGAINST Primary 4 Completion of Initiation

- How much understanding of these sacraments do children have
- Time scale – it's all very close together
- In a different direction from most of the country
- Children lack of appreciation of the significance for each of the sacraments
- Parents see it as the end point for some it is the end of coming to church
- Preparation and celebration of confirmation suffers
- Resistance from parents to practising
- It's only a strong option when parents are practising
- Children coming from other countries cannot fathom out our system

FOR Primary 7 Confirmation

- A lot more time to prepare children
- It's can be viewed as an adolescent rite of commitment
- Children are more mature and have a better understanding
- It's a more meaningful event in children's lives
- A greater sense of membership of the church and a definite role to play in the church
- Children and parents are re-engaged with the church
- Easier for teachers to teach about confirmation separately
- More opportunities for phased, focused, purposeful systematic catechesis of parents
- An opportunity to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit
- An opportunity to connect to moral issues such as peace and justice
- New opportunities for priests to get to know people/parishioners

AGAINST Primary 7 Confirmation

- Does not honour the order of baptism, confirmation and eucharist
- This age group may lack enthusiasm unless encouraged by practising parents
- Older children might decide to opt out
- This is less conformity with current theological models and the first 19 centuries
- For some it will be like going through the motions
- There is peer pressure at this stage not to opt in
- In some families confirmation is not seen as important so it might not happen
- Conflict with parents could be reignited if there were problems in P4
- Viewing this as an adolescent rite of passage is not helpful
- The older children are the more likely they are to have conflicting reasons for not going to church and more likely to question it.

Impressions of the Pro's and Con's

- In viewing the pro's and con's the P7 and P4 issue is much more complex
- Any big decision would need to be discerned in light of all the above data.
- You're going against the methodology of centuries if we do it in P7.
- The whole concept of initiation and what it means, how it is approached needs more pondering.
- More responsibility for catechesis needs to be taken at parish level, in light of the diminishing numbers in our Catholic schools.
- Parents need to invest their energy in the preparation time.
- If the whole initiation is done at a later stage it will become a big event in the parish

- We have a growing separation of the faithful and those who are cultural Catholics.
- Most of the issues lie with – are the parents practising?
- Neither model ensures a deepening relationship with Jesus if they do not apply it to their lives
- Order is important but we shouldn't get hung up on how it was done in the past. We should be a modern church.
- It would place more pressure on the parish as there is a reluctance from the children at P7 level to stand apart from others in the class

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the feedback from our parish and school communities the CIC Review Group are making the following recommendations to the Archbishop:

1) ORDER of the SACRAMENTS of INITIATION

The data reveals a high degree of satisfaction with the current arrangements.

The CIC Review Group, therefore recommend that the order of the Completion of the Sacraments remain as it currently is, i.e., Confirmation first followed by the reception of Holy Communion for the first time.

2) STAGE of CELEBRATION and RECEPTION

The data also reveals that 75% of parishes who responded are satisfied with P4 Completion of Initiation and 53% of school responses.

The CIC Review Group, therefore recommend that the Completion of Initiation continues in P4.

However, in light of the feedback from the review which highlights the need for evangelisation, parent support, and provision of resources for parishes and schools, the CIC Review Group are also recommending that catechetical provision and support is further developed and strengthened.

3) THE SACRAMENT of RECONCILIATION

The feedback from parish and school communities raised concerns about the place of the sacrament of Reconciliation in this process and the general confusion among parents and teachers about how it fits into the Sacramental Journey. In light of this, the CIC Review Group are recommending that the celebration of First Confession remains at P3 but with a more extended process of catechesis for parents and children, where First Confession would take place near the end of P3, and that continuous catechesis for this sacrament is provided for P4 – P7 with regular opportunities to celebrate it.

PRACTICAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the feedback from parish and school communities the CIC Review Group recommends that DIOCESAN POLICY STATEMENTS are formulated to support the outstanding work of priests, parents, catechists and teachers in the following ways:

- 1) The formulation of a clear statement about the necessity of Sunday Participation in the Eucharist.
- 2) A clear statement is provided about the Sunday Parish Eucharist as the preferred place for the celebration of the Preparatory Rites.
- 3) A clear statement about the conditions that enable a prayerful celebration.
- 4) A clear statement about the relationship between each of the sacraments, the completion of initiation and the purpose of confirmation.
- 5) A clear statement about the sacrament of reconciliation and how it fits into the whole process.
- 6) A positive statement about the formation and training of Parish Sacramental Teams.
- 7) A statement about the importance of support of parents and annual parish events for parents.
- 8) A clear statement about continuous CPD for teachers.

THE FORMATION of WORKING GROUPS

Following on these recommendations and in light of the collated date from parish and **WORKING GROUPS** are to be set up to further develop and provide resources:

WORKING GROUP 1: PARENT SUPPORT:

To forward points 1- 6 of Page 6 of the CIC Review, strengthening and developing

WORKING GROUP 2:

To provide resources for **THE SACRAMENTAL JOURNEY**

WORKING GROUP 3:

To follow up the recommendations on **CPD and RETREAT OPPORTUNITIES** for teachers

WORKING GROUP 4:

To explore the formation of **CHAPLAINCY SUPPORT TEAMS**

WORKING GROUP 5:

To devise and provide **TEMPLATES** for the Preparatory Rites

WORKING GROUP 6:

To explore provision for the **Training of Parish Sacramental Teams**

WORKING GROUP 7:

To prepare formats for **Celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation** for use in P5 – P7.

These working groups would then contribute towards an archdiocesan support package. Providing a helpful set of standardised resources which are recommended for use in parishes and schools.

- The CIC Review Group recommended that these working groups should be set up by **AUGUST 2011**.
- **By APRIL 2012** – new resources from the support package should be available to schools and parishes.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

As our parishes and schools are constantly changing and developing Sacramental Provision needs to be reviewed at least every ten years.

APPENDIX

1) Essential Documents for Reference

1. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Missions. Available on the website www.vatican.va
2. The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith: Lineamenta – Chapter 3: Initiation into the Christian Experience. Available on the website www.vatican.va
3. The Catechism of the Catholic Church: Section Two The Seven Sacraments of the Church, Chapter One: The Sacraments of Initiation
4. Bishop's Conference of Scotland: This is Our Faith – Draft Guidance on the Teaching of Religious Education in Catholic Schools in Scotland, March 2011
5. YOUCAT: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church – Part Two: How We Celebrate the Christian Mysteries – Section Two: Chapter One The Sacraments of Initiation, Published by CTS 2011

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS:

- 1) Confirming the Church in our Archdiocese 2001
- 2) The Liturgical Journey for CIC August 2004

2) THE APPROPRIATE AGE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION AND ADMISSION TO HOLY COMMUNION FOR THOSE BAPTISED IN INFANCY:

A reflection paper presented to the CIC Review Group by Monsignor Philip Kerr.

The original practice of the Church lasting for several centuries in the first millennium was for baptism, confirmation and first communion to be celebrated in a single ceremony no matter what age the candidate was. The only exception was when there was danger of death – baptism would be administered by anyone (including a lay person), and then if the person recovered he/she went as soon as possible to the bishop to be confirmed and then to receive holy communion.

It was the unavailability of bishops which led to a separation of baptism and confirmation in the western church – the east allowed priests to confirm at baptism. But the bishop confirmed all who had been baptised in his absence whenever he visited an area, usually once a year.

Medieval theological developments were the cause of the change away from the practice of the first millennium. The focus on the question “How does the bread & wine become the body & blood of Jesus?” led to the common opinion that one should not receive holy communion until one had an understanding of this. The separation of baptism and confirmation led many to lose sight of confirmation’s purpose, and it was often stated at this period that its purpose was only for this life, so Confirmation could be delayed until one reached the age of reason.

What is this age? There was a certain reluctance to define it. The **4th Lateran Council** (1215) in its 21st canon spoke of all the faithful once they had reached the age of discernment being obliged to confess their sins at least once a year and then it goes on to speak of receiving the Eucharist at least at Easter. But it would seem common opinion that around the age of 7 one had reached the age of reason when one could distinguish between right and wrong, so one should be confirmed to be strengthened to do what is right and one had an obligation then to confess one’s personal sins, but it was at a later age (10 to 12) that one attained sufficient discretion to know what the Eucharist is about and to have a broader awareness of all the truths of the faith.

The **Council of Trent** in the 16th century put a big emphasis on catechising the faithful in a systematic way, and this process with young people culminated in the reception of holy communion. Prior to this period it would seem that the reception of first communion happened almost unnoticed, but now it was seen as an opportunity for rekindling faith in the whole community. A lot of the popular customs associated today with first communion have their origin at this period, but of course they were originally linked with the physical stage of adolescence.

In 1910 Pope Pius X decreed that ‘Neither for first confession nor for first holy communion is full and perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine requisite. But a child ought afterwards gradually to learn the entire Catechism according to his capacity.

The knowledge of his religion which is required in a child before he can make his first communion is such that will enable him to grasp according to his capacity those mysteries of faith which are necessary as a means of salvation, and to distinguish between the Bread of the Eucharist and ordinary material bread, so that he can come to the Holy Eucharist with a devotion proportionate to his years.’
(*Quam singulari, norms II & III*)

In reducing the age for first communion it was expected that children would have made their first confession prior to first communion, but no statement was made about confirmation. Thus practice varied depending on the availability of the bishop, some children were confirmed before first communion and some after – it did not seem to matter because the sacrament was normally administered outwith Mass.

The 2nd Vatican Council took up the fruit of much theological research undertaken in the last century (cf Dogmatic Constitution on the Church n.11). The Constitution on the Liturgy (n.71) asked for a new rite of Confirmation which would show more clearly the sacrament’s connection with whole process of Christian initiation, and said that it would be a good idea if candidates renewed their baptismal promises. This mention of renewing baptismal promises led to some post Vatican II reflection giving Confirmation the place first communion had between the Reformation and 1910. This is given a certain Magisterial authority in the following statement in the Introduction to the **Rite of Confirmation** n.11, as issued in 1971:

“With regard to children, in the Latin Church the administration of confirmation is generally postponed until about the seventh year. For pastoral reasons, however, especially to strengthen the faithful in complete obedience to Christ the Lord and in loyal testimony to him, Episcopal conferences may choose an age which seems more appropriate, so that the sacrament is given at a more mature age after appropriate formation.”

The **Code of Canon Law** (1983) states the following:

CIC 889.2 Outside the danger of death, to be licitly confirmed it is required, if the person has the use of reason, that one suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew one’s baptismal promises

CIC 891 The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age, or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

CIC 913.1 For the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Lord with faith and devotion.

CIC 913.2 The Most Holy Eucharist may be given to children who are in danger of death, however, if they are able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and to receive Communion reverentially.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (1994) does not refer to conference of bishops determining another age above the “age of discretion” (ccc.1307) and it clearly refers to Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist forming a unity and without receiving the three one’s Christian initiation is incomplete (ccc.1306). We are also taught that “baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need ‘ratification’ to become effective” (ccc.1308). It is stated that “catechesis for Confirmation should strive to *awaken* a sense of belonging to the Church” (ccc.1309). When the Catechism moves on to the Eucharist, the very first statement is “The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation” (ccc.1322). Nothing is stated about the age for first reception, so we should deduce that it should immediately follow the moment of Confirmation, because we are told “the Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily” (ccc.1389).

Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 wrote an Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* on the Eucharist. Paragraphs 17-19 speak of the Eucharist in connection with Christian initiation. “It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation.....The Holy Eucharist brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life. (SC17) Regarding the variation in practice between the East/Western practice with adults & Western practice with children, Pope Benedict states “*it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of Christian initiation*” (SC18).

I think we can understand clearly in the light of the above why some dioceses have “restored the order of Christian initiation” in relation to children. But as Peter McGrail in his fascinating book First Communion, Aldershot, 2007, points out problems remain: the post-Reformation catechetical reforms responded to a consistent need to have a solemn “adolescent rite”, and the Vatican’s continued insistence on first confession before first communion maintains a scholastic mode of thinking in the midst of this return to the model of the early centuries (p.85)