

Preparation for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities:

Course Syllabus

Course Objective: This online course is designed as a resource for persons who are preparing children or adults with disabilities to receive the sacraments of initiation (with an additional module devoted to the Sacrament of Reconciliation). Each module will provide written, audio, and video resources to explore the topic, as well as an opportunity for reflection.

Each module will focus on the topic from three perspectives. First, we will consider the sacrament or teaching from the perspective of scripture. Second, we will look at the doctrine and the liturgical practice of the sacrament in the life of the Church. Finally, we will consider practical considerations for preparing someone with a developmental disability to receive the sacrament.

The final assessment will be an opportunity to synthesize everything learned and apply it to a practical, real-world situation.

Books Needed for this Course:

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *Theologia Prima – What is Liturgical Theology?* by Dr. David Fagerberg
- *National Directory for Catechesis*
- *Handbook for Adaptive Catechesis – Serving Those with Special Needs* by Michele Chronister
- *Taking the Lift to Heaven – The Pocket Guide to Adaptive Ministry in Your Catholic Parish* by Michele Chronister
- *The Adaptive Teacher – Faith-Based Strategies to Reach and Teach Learners with Disabilities* by Charleen Katra and John Barone

Note: All encyclicals and documents from the Vatican and USCCB can be found online.

Pre-Assessment

Module 1 – An Overview of Sacramental Theology

Objective: *to examine what sacramental theology is, why a strong understanding of it is essential to catechesis and sacramental preparation, and how it applies to this particular ministry.*

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: Luke 12:22-32 *This passage is an exhortation from Jesus to trust that the Father will give us all that we need. At the heart of both sacramental theology and our ministry is the awareness that the sacraments are the means by which God sustains and provides for his people.*
2. Mini-lecture: “What is Sacramental Theology?” *A basic definition of sacramental theology is presented, offering context for why it is so important to understand this theological background for work in this ministry. Mini-lectures are presented by Michele Chronister, author of **Handbook for Adaptive Catechesis**.*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast, episode 1: “Why Does Sacramental Theology matter to Catechists?” *A discussion with Dr. Timothy O’Malley, Academic Director of the Center for Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame* <https://mcgrath.nd.edu/about/faculty-staff/timothy-omalley-ph-d/> .)

Reading assignments:

- “Chapter 5 – Introducing Mrs. Murphy” *Theologia Prima – What is Liturgical Theology?* Fagerberg, David W. Hillenbrand Books. p. 133-159 (In this chapter, Dr. David Fagerberg breaks down the idea that liturgical theology is a combination of knowledge and praxis. Those who participate in the liturgy are, in a sense, liturgical theologians. “Mrs. Murphy represents the person who speaks the natural language of theology, even though she doesn’t know the formalized language of theology...she knows more than she can say.” (Fagerberg 134-135) This applies to our work, as many persons with disabilities are liturgical theologians in this sense – their praxis matter, even when they cannot verbalize what they know.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 6 (establishing the foundational role of the sacraments in catechesis), paragraphs 1122-1124 (on the essential role of the sacraments in evangelization and the Christian life), and paragraphs 1127-1130 (affirms the necessity of reception of the sacraments for eternal life)
- “Why It Matters”, chapter 2, *Taking the Lift to Heaven – The Pocket Guide to Adaptive Ministry in Your Catholic Parish*. Chronister, Michele. p. 15-18
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 2 – The Mystical Body of Christ

Objective: *to present the doctrine of the mystical Body of Christ, exploring how the mystical Body of Christ is lived out in the sacraments, and to consider the importance of this adaptive ministry in light of this doctrine.*

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 *This is St. Paul's famous passage about the one Body of Christ, of which we are all members. In it, he not only acknowledges the reality of that deep unity but also the essential nature of each member of the Body of Christ.*
2. Mini-lecture: "What is the Mystical Body of Christ?" *A brief overview of this theological term, and its significance to sacramental preparation.*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: "How Does the Mystical Body of Christ Relate to the Sacramental Life?" *A discussion with Dr. David Fagerberg, liturgical theology professor at the University of Notre Dame.* <https://theology.nd.edu/people/david-fagerberg/>

Reading assignments:

- "*Mystici Corporis Christi – The Mystical Body of Christ*," encyclical by St. Pius XII, in particular paragraphs 26-29 (the theological basis for the doctrine), paragraph 46 (the role of the mystical body in the work of Christ), and paragraphs 81-83 (the importance of love of neighbor, as members of Christ's mystical body)
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 787-795 (This passage is a beautiful overview of the doctrine of the mystical Body of Christ.)
- "Pastoral Statement of US Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities". USCCB (This document does a good job of placing persons with disabilities centrally in the life of the Church, clearly explaining that they are each a necessary part of the Body of Christ.)
- "We Are All Reflections of God's Love," chapter 1, *The Adaptive Teacher – Faith-Based Strategies to Reach and Teach Learners with Disabilities*. Katra, Charleen; Barone, John. p. 1-10 (This chapter both gives a thorough and succinct introduction to the role of persons with disabilities in the Church, but also gives the sort of foundational introduction to the ministry and to the challenges that these learners face that people without a background in special education may not have.)
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 3 – Overview of Church Teaching on Sacraments and Disabilities

Objective: *Here we will establish the obligation of all parishes and dioceses to provide sacramental preparation and access to those with disabilities. We will also consider why this ministry is important.*

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: Matthew 19: 13-14 *In this passage, Jesus exhorts the Apostles to not hinder the children from coming to him, because the Kingdom of Heaven belong to “such as these.” Many of those who need sacramental prep are children (with and without disabilities), and some are adults with disabilities (who are not children, but who are often forgotten and undervalued in our society, as children were in Jesus’s society), and the scripture reminds us that Jesus desires us not only to welcome them but also to follow the example of their faith.*
2. Mini-lecture: “Do I need to offer sacramental preparation for persons with disabilities in my parish?” *This lecture establishes why we are obligated to provide access to the sacraments for those with disabilities, as well why the Church needs us to do so – because we need all of the members of the baptized.*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “What Families of those with Disabilities Want you to Know about Sacramental Prep” *This interview with Kelly Mantoan, mother of two boys with SMA and founder of the Catholic ministry “Accepting the Gift”, explores how the Church can best serve the needs of these children and families.*
<https://www.acceptingthegift.org/>)

Assigned Reading:

- “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities” <https://www.usccb.org/committees/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities> (an indispensable overview of what the Church teaches about sacramental access for those with disabilities)
- “Chapter 7 – Sacramental Preparation.” Chronister, Michele. *Handbook for Adaptive Catechesis – Serving Those With Special Needs.*
- “Paragraph 19 – Nature and Purpose of Catechesis: Initiatory and Ongoing”. *National Directory for Catechesis.* p. 54-59
- “Paragraph 49 – Catechesis for Persons With Disabilities.” *National Directory for Catechesis.* p. 206-209
- “Creating a Warm and Welcoming Learning Environment.” Chapter 2, *The Adaptive Teacher.* Katra, Charleen and Barone, John. p. 11-22 (This chapter gives both a vision for and concrete ways to implement creating a peaceful, life-giving space for persons with disabilities in the catechetical setting.)

- Multiple choice quiz

Module 4 – The Sacrament of Baptism

Objective: to provide an overview of the Sacrament of Baptism - its scriptural, theological, and liturgical roots – and to offer practical guidance on preparing children and adults with disabilities to receive this Sacrament.

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: Matthew 28: 19-20 *In this passage, Jesus exhorts the Apostles to go to all the nations, baptizing in the name of the Trinity. He promises to be with them always in this ministry. This commission (and promise!) does not apply just them, but to the Church today, too.*
2. Mini-lecture: “Baptism – Gateway to the Sacraments” *This lesson will give a brief overview of not only the theology for this sacrament, but also the necessity (as a means to open the door to every other sacrament and an abundance of grace).*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “Baptism – Welcoming with Joy the Children of God.” *This conversation with Meghan Concagh, student of religious studies at Fontbonne University (with a special focus on catechesis for children with disabilities). Meghan will share about the importance of welcoming children and their families into the Church through Baptism, the significance of Baptism in the sacramental journey, and how priests and lay ministers can better minister to these families.*

Assigned Reading:

- “Article 1 – The Sacrament of Baptism.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* paragraphs 1213-1284
- “Paragraph 36, part A – Sacraments of Initiation.” *National Directory for Catechesis.* (specifically p. 118-122)
- “Baptism.” *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities.* paragraphs 9-14.
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 5 – The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Objective: to provide an overview of the Sacrament of the Eucharist - its scriptural, theological, and liturgical roots – and to offer practical guidance on preparing children and adults with disabilities to receive this sacrament.

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: John 6: 29-58 *This is the heart of the “Bread of Life” discourse. In this, Jesus makes it clear that the Eucharist gives life, in*

particular life to our souls. As we enter into this ministry, it is essential to remember how central to the Catholic faith reception of the Eucharist is.

2. Mini-lecture: “The Eucharist – the Means of God’s Provision” *This lesson will give a brief overview of the theology and significance of the Eucharist – as the “bread from heaven” with which God sustains his people.*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “Uniting Our Sacrifice to His – On our Active and Hidden Participation in the Eucharist” *This interview with Dr. Lawrence Feingold, professor of theology and philosophy at Kenrick Glennon Seminary, and author of The Eucharist – Mystery of Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion, will explore the value not only of access to the Eucharist but also the value of having all members of the Body of Christ uniting their own sacrifice of their lives to his.*
<https://edvance360.com/eportfolio/kenrick/feingold/>

Assigned Reading:

- “Article 3 – The Sacrament of the Eucharist.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. paragraphs 1322-1421
- “Paragraph 36, Section A, part 3 – Catechesis for Eucharist” *National Directory for Catechesis*. (p.123-131, with special attention paid to final paragraph on persons with disabilities)
- “Eucharist.” *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. paragraphs 21-26
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 6 – The Sacrament of Confirmation

Objective: to provide an overview of the Sacrament of Confirmation - its scriptural, theological, and liturgical roots – and to offer practical guidance on preparing children and adults with disabilities to receive this sacrament.

1. Starting with Scripture: Acts 2: 1-4 *This is the story of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (the scriptural basis for Confirmation). The story also demonstrates the results of reception of the Holy Spirit – a deep strengthening and courage, allowing someone the grace with which to evangelize. Persons with disabilities, baptized and called to be saints, benefit greatly from this sealing of the gift of Holy Spirit.*
2. Mini-lecture: “Confirmation – Not Catholic Graduation” *This lesson provides an overview of the scriptural and theological roots of this sacrament, as well delving into its role as one of the sacraments of initiation.*

3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “The Importance of the Sealing of the Gift of the Spirit – How Confirmation Enables Us to Live out the Life of Faith.” *This interview with Brett Perkins, Assistant Director of Evangelization and Religious Education in Campus Ministry at the University of Notre Dame, will look at the importance and impact on the Sacrament of Confirmation in the life of the Christian. Perkins is the long-time director of the RCIA program at the University of Notre Dame and has experienced firsthand the impact of this sacrament on confirmandi.* <https://campusministry.nd.edu/people/brett-perkins/>

Assigned Reading:

- “Article 2 – The Sacrament of Confirmation.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. paragraphs 1285-1321
- “Paragraph 36, Section A, part 2 – Catechesis for Confirmation/Chrismation” *National Directory for Catechesis*. p. 122-123
- “Confirmation.” *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. paragraphs 15-20
- “Chapter 4 (Sacraments of Initiation) and Chapter 6 (RCIA and Adaptive Ministry).” Chronister, Michele. *Taking the Lift to Heaven – The Pocket Guide to Adaptive Ministry in Your Parish*.
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 7 – The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Objective: *to provide an overview of the Sacrament of Baptism - its scriptural, theological, and liturgical roots – and to offer practical guidance on preparing children and adults with disabilities to receive this sacrament.*

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: Luke 15:20 *This verse is from the story of the Prodigal Son. We are focusing on this particular verse because of what it illustrates – the embrace of God. There are persons with more significant disabilities, whose cognitive abilities are not such that they are capable of intentional sin. However, there are many persons with disabilities who are able to understand the idea of sin, and to choose between right and wrong. If someone is unable to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they are **not** required to receive it prior to receiving the Eucharist. However, for those who can receive this sacrament, this verse demonstrates the value of it – in Reconciliation, the penitent experiences the embrace of the Father in a unique and beautiful way. If someone we are preparing for the sacraments is able to and desires to receive this sacrament, then we need to offer them the opportunity to do so!*

2. Mini-lecture: “Reconciliation – Is it Necessary?” *This lesson will summarize what the Sacrament of Reconciliation is, and also explain that it is not always possible or necessary prior to reception of the Eucharist. However, this lesson will also reframe the question from, “Do we have to prepare someone for Confession?” to “Is this an opportunity for grace that we are able to offer/adapt for this individual, so that he/she can experience the embrace of God in this unique way?”*
3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “Not Withholding the Father’s Embrace – Making Necessary Accommodations” *This interview with Christy Wilkens, Catholic author, speaker, and mom of children with disabilities, will consider the importance of making necessary accommodations so that everyone who is able can receive the sacraments.* (<https://christywilkens.com/>)

Assigned Reading:

- “Article 4 – The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* paragraphs 1422-1498
- “Paragraph 36, Section B, part 1- Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.” *National Directory for Catechesis.* p. 132-136
- “Reconciliation.” *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities.* paragraphs 27-31
- “Chapter 5 - Sacraments of Healing.” Chronister, Michele. *Taking the Lift to Heaven – The Pocket Guide to Adaptive Ministry in Your Catholic Parish.*
- Multiple choice quiz

Module 8 – Sacramental Preparation and Vocation

Objective: *to place the role of the vocation of the baptized in the context of sacramental preparation. How does this apply, specifically, to the persons with disabilities who we are preparing for the sacraments?*

1. Starting with Scripture with Fr. Charles Samson: John 20: 11-18 *This passage depicts the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the resurrected Christ. What is striking about this encounter is that Mary enters into it weeping and confused, but after encountering Christ, she is strengthened to proclaim the good news of his resurrection. The sacraments are necessary for the living out of vocations (in the general and specific sense) because it is through that encounter with Christ that we are able to become saints, just as this “Apostle to the Apostles” did.*
2. Mini-lecture: “Sacraments and Vocation – How Do They Go Together?” *In this lesson, we will talk about the importance of sacramental preparation from the perspective of*

vocation. Every person is called to sainthood, by virtue of their baptism. The sacraments strengthen the individual and make them grow exponentially in holiness. In our ministry, we are not just trying to “check the boxes” of what is required – we are trying to offer every opportunity to encounter Christ and the life of grace that we can. We don’t want to come between Christ and those who he is calling – access to the sacraments allows him to do the work that he longs to do, in uniting the people he is calling to himself.

3. Workers in the Vineyard podcast: “A Daughter’s Vocation- A Conversation with Mary Lenaburg.” *This discussion with Mary Lenaburg – Catholic writer, speaker, and mother of a daughter with disabilities (who passed away several years ago, but continues to impact others), will give a concrete example of everything we have discussed in this course. Mary will tell us about Courtney, in particular about Courtney’s experience with the sacraments and her faith life.* <https://marylenaburg.com/>

Assigned Reading:

- “Message of the Holy Father Francis for International Day of Persons with Disabilities.” Pope Francis. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191203_messaggio-disabilita.html
- “Chapter 1 – A Matter of Vocation.” Chronister, Michele. *Taking the Lift to Heaven – A Pocket Guide to Adaptive Ministry in Your Catholic Parish.*
- “Addressing Vocation (part 1 of Chapter 7).” Chronister, Michele. *Handbook for Adaptive Catechesis – Serving Those with Special Needs.*
- Multiple choice quiz

Final Assessment