

# FIRST PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION



## POLICIES AND GUIDELINES For SACRAMENT OF FIRST PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

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# THE SACRAMENT OF FIRST PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

## INTRODUCTION

### *Prayer of Sorrow*

*“My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.  
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,  
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.  
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more,  
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”*

### **Overview**

The sacrament of Penance has undergone many changes over the centuries, but it has always contained two equally essential elements: conversion for the penitent and forgiveness through the Church. These two realities of spiritual life are always celebrated in the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

This sacrament has many names.

- *Sacrament of conversion* - because, for one who has sinned, it is the first step in returning to the Father.
- *Sacrament of Penance* – because it dedicates the sinner’s personal steps of conversion and satisfaction to a sacred purpose.
- *Sacrament of confession* – because an essential element of the sacrament is to disclose or confess one’s sins to a priest. Also it is an acknowledgment or “confession” of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.
- *Sacrament of forgiveness* – God grants the penitent pardon and peace through the sacramental absolution given by the priest.
- *Sacrament of Reconciliation* – because it signifies the restoration of harmony between the sinner and God...and also between the sinner and the reconciling community, the Church.

The policies and guidelines in this book will refer to the sacrament as the sacrament of *Penance and Reconciliation* in order to be in agreement with the terminology used in the 2005 National Directory for Catechesis.

### **Information About Layout and Sources**

The policies and guidelines for this sacrament are listed under four topics:

- Responsibilities of Those Involved
- Sacramental Formation
- Celebration of the Sacrament
- Guidelines for Special Situations

Documents are sometimes quoted using the following abbreviations:

- National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)
- Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)
- Code of Canon Law (Canon)
- General Catechetical Directory (GCD)

**NOTE:** In the villages, certain adaptations may have to be made to the guidelines that are presented here. The regional leaders and their catechists should work together to determine any adaptations.

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THOSE INVOLVED

## THE CANDIDATE

### **POLICY**

The candidate must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion for the first time. (see CCC 1457; NDC 36,B2; Canon 914)

The candidate must meet the following requirements:

- Must have attained the age of discretion, usually around seven years of age or above. (The parents and the catechetical director, together with the pastor or pastoral administrator, must determine the child's readiness to receive the sacrament.)
- Be baptized
- Be Catholic (children and adults baptized in another denomination must make a Profession of Faith)
- Be able to recognize the difference between right and wrong
- Have the capacity for sincere sorrow
- Be properly instructed

### **GUIDELINES**

A candidate is ready to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation when the parents of minors, the pastor or pastoral administrator and the catechist have discerned that the candidate:

- Is aware that God loves us unconditionally
- Understands that Jesus died for our sins
- Recognizes good and evil, our capacity for both, and the importance of right choices
- Understands and can express sorrow for sin and forgiveness of others

*...Parents and the parish catechetical director, together with the pastor are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation. Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion (NDC 36, B2).*

## PARENTS OF MINORS (Children under age 18)

### **POLICY**

Parents have the right and responsibility to:

- Be involved in the preparation of their child
- Be models for their child in their faith life
- Discern (with the pastor or pastoral administrator and the catechetical director) their child's readiness to prepare and receive the sacrament
- In extraordinary circumstances (discerned with the pastor or pastoral administrator) designate another adult to fulfill this responsibility.

*Catechesis for children, prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love (NDC 36 B2).*

## **GUIDELINES**

Parents are the first educators of their children. Every family is different and their participation in the life of the Church can vary according to their circumstances. Pastoral consideration of their faith life is important.

Parents should be encouraged to:

- Share their faith story with their child
- Participate in Sunday Eucharist or Sunday Celebrations (in the Absence of a Priest), with their child
- Model a Christian commitment of prayer, community worship, and service
- Be committed to help their child meet the attendance and formation requirements for the sacrament
- Pray for, and with, their child

## **CATECHISTS, PASTORS, PASTORAL ADMINISTRATORS, COMMUNITY**

### **POLICY**

The responsibility of the catechist is as follows:

- Work with the parents and the pastor or pastoral administrator to determine the child's readiness to prepare for and receive the sacrament
- Work toward fulfilling the ongoing requirements of the diocese for certified catechists

Pastors and Pastoral Administrators are responsible as follows:

- Work with the parents and catechist to determine the child's readiness to be prepared and to receive the sacrament
- Ensure that those who ask for the sacrament are prepared through proper evangelization and catechetical instruction
- Determine that the Diocesan Guidelines are observed

The parish community has a responsibility to strive to:

- Witness to Christ and demonstrate forgiveness
- Live sacramental and prayerful lives

### **GUIDELINES**

Sacramental religious educators are responsible to:

- Provide catechesis to help the parents carry out their responsibility as first educators of their children
- Provide adequate instruction and preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation appropriate to the level of the child
- Provide sufficient opportunities for the children to receive the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation before the reception of First Communion.
- Make every effort to involve the community in the sacramental preparation process, including support and prayer for the candidates.

*Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority (Canon 843§2).*

# SACRAMENTAL FORMATION

## CURRICULUM

### **POLICY**

The textbook used must be on the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) list of textbooks in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and approved for use in the Diocese of Fairbanks.

- The Y-K Delta Curriculum is approved for use in that region

### **GUIDELINES**

Consult the Diocesan Office of Religious Education about textbooks that are not on the Fairbanks Diocese Approved Texts and Series List..

- Additional books and materials must be approved for use by the Diocesan Office of Religious Education.
- The curriculum must be appropriate to the age and ability of the child.

*“Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances.” (NDC 36, B2)*

*Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year (NDC 36, B2).*

## PLACE OF SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

### **POLICY**

Preparation for the Sacrament of First Penance and Reconciliation is to take place in the parish.

- First Penance and Reconciliation will be celebrated in the parish.
- There must be a preparation process for parents and children in the parish in addition to any ongoing catechetical preparation that takes place in the home and/or the Catholic School.

## CATECHESIS

### **POLICY**

Catechesis for First Penance and Reconciliation is to be kept separate from catechesis for First Communion and, when circumstances allow, it is recommended that it be separate from a religious education program. (*e.g. First Reconciliation in the Fall and First Communion in the Spring during the Easter Season*)

*...catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to be done so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent and so that, before receiving First Communion, the child will be familiar with the revised Rite of Reconciliation and will be at ease with the reception of the sacrament (NDC 36, B2).*

### **GUIDELINES**

Essential Teachings

*“Parishes should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to:*

- *Acknowledge God’s unconditional love for us*
- *Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation*

- *Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both*
- *Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them, but from God*
- *Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and Sacred Scriptures of the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation*
- *Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation*
- *Understand that sacramental Confession is a means offered to children of the Church to obtain pardon for sin, and furthermore that it is even necessary per se if one has fallen into serious sin”* (all above from NDC 36, B2)
- Memorize an Act of Sorrow for private confessions such as:
  - ❖ The Act of Contrition (found in any Catholic book of prayers)
  - ❖ Prayer of Sorrow (found at top of page 2 of these guidelines)

Children and parents need to understand that conversion is a lifelong process, and that catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is to be ongoing.

## **FAMILY COMPONENT**

### **POLICY**

There is to be a component to help parents grow in their understanding and appreciation of their right and responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for the Sacrament of First Penance and Reconciliation.

- Enable them to participate readily in catechizing their children.
- A time for retreat shall be planned for parents and their children before the celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation.

### **GUIDELINES**

The role and importance of the family should be highlighted and affirmed while, at the same time, reinforcing the parents understanding of this sacrament as an opportunity to acknowledge their sinfulness, their times of estrangement from God and their need for ongoing conversion and forgiveness.

- The rites and symbols of the sacraments are ideal sources for catechesis
- Consider adding rituals or celebrations to the preparation period for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.
- Such celebrations will enhance the family understanding of the effect of sin, the Gospel message of forgiveness, the importance of sorrow, and the need for ongoing conversion.
- A time for retreat should be set apart for the parents and children to reflect on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The presentations and prayers should be suited to the children’s age level and should include:
  - ❖ Prayer, listening and discussion
  - ❖ Time to practice for the sacramental experience

### **IMPORTANT PASTORAL CONSIDERATION**

Prior to and separate from the celebration of the sacrament of First Penance and Reconciliation, pastors or pastoral administrators are to arrange to meet with the parents and the child preparing for the sacrament. The pastor, pastoral administrator, or other competent person who has been delegated for this purpose may conduct this interview.

- Get acquainted with the child and the parents as a beginning step for the child’s sacramental formation

# **CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT**

*The basis for this observance (confession) for children, is not as much the state of sin in which they may be, as the formative and pastoral aim: that is, to educate them, from a tender age, to the true Christian spirit of penance, and conversion, to growth in self-knowledge and self-control, to the just sense of sin, even of venial sin, to the necessity of asking for pardon of God and above all to a loving and confident abandonment to the mercy of the Lord.*

*Such an education is mainly the task of parents, educators and priests: they have to inculcate in the children, more than a sense of sin, the serene joy over encounter with the Father who forgives, as it is signified in the form of the absolution recited by the priest (Congregation for the Sacraments, April 15, 1986).*

## **FIRST PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

### **POLICY**

The way sacraments are celebrated should offer welcome and hospitality to all. Whenever possible communal celebration of the Rite of Reconciliation should be provided for children as preparation for receiving the sacrament. private confession.

- Includes the parents and others who wish to attend

### **GUIDELINES**

Rite II is preferred whenever possible, but not required.

Basic outline of Rite II:

- Opening song
- Greeting
- Opening prayer
- Scripture reading
- Short homily
- General examination of conscience
- Community confession of sorrow (possibly use the Act of Sorrow they memorized)
- Individual confession and absolution
- Personal or communal penance (according to circumstances)
- Thanksgiving and dismissal

Encourage the parents to receive the sacrament at this time also and welcome others. If there are several people, consider inviting extra priests.

The parish is to provide an appropriate opportunity following the celebration of the sacrament for the faith community to express their joy and solidarity with the child/children and their families.

## **REGISTRATION OF SACRAMENTAL INFORMATION**

### **POLICY**

Permanent records are not required to be maintained for the Sacrament of First Penance and Reconciliation.

### **GUIDELINES**

The parish may want to keep a record for their own purposes of who has completed preparation for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, but it is not required.

- Certificates are not required to be given

# **POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL SITUATIONS**

## **CHILDREN WHO ARE HOME SCHOOLED**

*Whether their children attend a parish religious education program, a Catholic school, or are instructed at home, parents are required to participate actively in preparing their children to receive the sacraments, especially First Confession, Confirmation, and First Eucharist. This includes participation in the parish sacramental preparation programs and sacramental celebrations. In light of the entire process for catechesis to include the four components of knowledge, community, service and worship, home schooling alone cannot replace catechesis or sacramental preparation in the parish church (see NCD 32; GCD 17; Catechesi tradendae, 1979, 202-26).*

### **POLICY**

Keeping in mind that parents are the first educators of their children in the ways of faith, we also recognize that the sacraments are most properly celebrated within the parish community. The rights and responsibilities of all concerned, parents, pastors and parish, calls for everyone to work together in this endeavor.

### **GUIDELINES**

Materials must be on the approved list provided by the Office of Religious Education.

- The preferred text will be the one used in the parish religious education program.
- The pastor or pastoral administrator will approve the home program and texts
- The home schoolers will follow the Religion Education Guidelines for the Diocese
- The pastor, pastoral administrator or delegate will meet periodically with the home schoolers to review the progress of the program.

Reception of the sacraments will be celebrated in the family's parish of registration.

*In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision:*

*1° that suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments;*

*2° that children are properly prepared for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and Most Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time;*

*3° children are more fruitfully and deeply instructed through catechetical formation after the reception of First Communion (Canon 777.1.2.3.).*

## **PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

*Persons with developmental disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community (see Canon 213). Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them (see Canon 843, §1)*

### **POLICY**

Persons with developmental or mental disabilities are to be encouraged either directly or through their parents or guardian to receive the Sacraments at the appropriate time.

### **GUIDELINES**

Parents, guardians, pastors and pastoral administrators have the responsibility to see that persons with disabilities are welcomed by the community, are appropriately prepared, and are properly disposed to receive the sacrament for which they are being prepared.

- Fullness of initiation, and the grace received from it, is of greater value than program preparation
- Suitable instruction, directly related to the celebration of the sacrament and appropriate to the developmental need of the individual, is to take place.
- Pastors, pastoral administrators or their delegates are to consult with the Diocesan Office regarding decisions that will make exemptions to the stated diocesan policy.