

GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST RECONCILIATION

I. THOSE ELIGIBLE TO CELEBRATE FIRST RECONCILIATION

1. Who is eligible to celebrate First Reconciliation?

A child who has been baptized and has reached the age of reason (normally considered to be seven years of age), and has been properly catechized may celebrate First Reconciliation.

2. Must a person be baptized to celebrate First Reconciliation?

- a. One must be a baptized Catholic to celebrate First Reconciliation. Children who have not been baptized and are participating in the RCIA process do not celebrate First Reconciliation prior to being baptized.
- b. Children, who have been baptized in another Christian faith and are preparing for reception into the Church, having expressed a faith commitment, may celebrate First Reconciliation. Children baptized in another faith who are not entering the Church may not celebrate First Reconciliation.

3. What should happen in the case of a child who is older than the age in which the sacrament is usually first celebrated?

- a. If the child has already celebrated First Eucharist, the child may celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation after assuring appropriate preparation of both child and parent has taken place.
- b. The opportunity for communal celebration of the sacrament should be provided.
- c. Children who are older than seven years of age and have been baptized into the Catholic Church, but not catechized should:
 - Enter the catechetical program appropriate to their age level and be prepared separately for the celebration of Reconciliation.
- d. Children who are older than seven years of age and who have not been baptized should normally participate in the RCIA process adapted for children.

4. What is the minimum age for a child to celebrate First Reconciliation?

The minimum age required for a person to celebrate First Reconciliation is generally seven. (This is the accepted to be the age of reason).

5. What are the general considerations for preparing persons with special needs?

- a. The pastor is to particular provisions so that:
 - suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacrament (canon 777.1)
 - children are properly prepared for the first reception of the sacraments by means of catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time (canon 777.2), and
 - children with disabilities be included in the parish sacramental celebrations according to their capacity. (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, General Principle #3)
- b. As long as an individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability. (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, Reconciliation #23)

II. THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS (GUARDIANS)

1. What role do parents (guardians) have in choosing the sacrament for their child?

Parents (guardians) express a desire for their child to celebrate First Reconciliation by enrolling their child in the parish or school second grade program. In some parishes, under certain circumstances, parents (guardians) may be responsible for the preparation of their child at home.

2. Does the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child need to be a practicing Catholic?

- a. According to canon 843 “the sacred ministers can not refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them”, therefore if the child’s parents are not practicing Catholics but wish to have their child celebrate the sacrament, the child should not be kept from experiencing reconciliation providing the child is practicing the faith, and has been properly catechized.
- b. Parents (guardians) should be encouraged to participate in the sacramental preparation process with their child. Pastoral ministers should explore other

avenues to strengthen the relationship of the entire family to the church community.

3. Who gives permission for the child to celebrate the sacrament if the child is not living with his/her parents?

- a. If the child is living with someone other than the parent(s) or legal guardian, the parent(s) or legal guardian must be asked to grant permission, in writing, before the child prepares to celebrate First Reconciliation.
- b. In the case of joint custody, both parents must be asked to grant permission, in writing.

4. How is the readiness of a child to celebrate First Reconciliation determined?

The parents (guardians) should determine if their child is ready, with the assistance and advice of the pastor and/or Catechetical leader. One way of determining the readiness of the child is to require an interview with the child and pastor, or his delegate, after preparation is completed, but before the sacrament is celebrated. If the determination is made, by the pastor or his delegate, that the child is not ready, the celebration of Reconciliation may be delayed to some future time.

5. How frequently should the child be participating at Sunday Mass?

In their role as primary educators, parents have the responsibility of celebrating Sunday Mass with their child. A child preparing to celebrate First Reconciliation should attend Mass each Sunday and participate as fully as possible.

III. THE CATECHETICAL PROGRAM

1. Who determines the resources to be used in the catechesis for First Reconciliation?

The pastor, DRE/CRE, school principal, and catechists should determine the resources to be used in the sacramental program. A list of recommended resources is available through the Diocesan Office of Religious Education.

2. What resources do parents who home school their child use?

Parents who home school their children are required to use the same or equivalent resources used in the parish catechetical program. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child participates in any additional activities provided by the program such as: a retreat, an interview, practice for the celebration, etc. Parents may also be required to attend parent meetings as determined by the pastor.

Home School Guidelines for Religious Education are available through the Diocesan Office of Religious Education and can also be found in the Catechetical Leaders Handbook.

3. What kind of catechesis is needed for the child?

For the child, catechesis for First Reconciliation should:

- make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life and to the church community,
- help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church,
- enable the child to experience the expression of faith in forgiving and being forgiven, and
- encourage the child to approach the sacrament regularly (NCD 126).

4. What kind of catechesis is needed for the parent (guardian)?

a. Classes for parents (guardians) enable them to assess their own understanding and appreciation for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Sessions for parents (guardians) should focus on:

- the Rite of Reconciliation,
- ways to help their child recognize right and wrong behavior,
- ways of expressing forgiveness at home, and
- the importance of their example as a role model by their reception of the sacrament.

b. If possible, godparents should be invited to participate.

5. How long should the preparation period last?

Preliminary preparation for First Reconciliation begins in first grade. Any child preparing for First Reconciliation should have participated in parish or school classes for the year prior to the celebration of the sacrament. The actual preparation for First Reconciliation takes place in second grade. There should be at least three months between the celebration of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent (NCD 126).

6. Where should immediate preparation for celebration of the sacrament take place?

- Pastors/parishes are responsible for providing sacramental preparation for all children of the parish.
- Preliminary preparation for the celebration of the sacrament may be provided in either the parish catechetical program and/or in the Catholic school.

- It is highly recommended that the families' home parish provide immediate preparation for the sacrament.
- Sensitivity should be exercised within school settings when students from other parishes are being prepared for the celebration of the sacrament.

7. Does the child have to option of choosing between the confessional and the reconciliation room?

If available, the child should be allowed to choose the format which best suits his/her needs, however in some parishes this is not possible.

8. May the child see the confessional or reconciliation room prior to the celebration?

It is a good idea to take "a tour" with the child to see where the sacrament will be celebrated. This will certainly help to put the child at ease prior to the celebration.

9. Is ongoing catechesis recommended?

Since young people develop gradually their ability to understand the ongoing nature of sin and conversion, continual formation is required. Children as well as teenagers should be provided with catechesis each year as they mature in the practice of their faith. Lent is an especially appropriate season for this continuing catechesis on the sacrament of Reconciliation (NCD 126).

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

1. Who is responsible for providing the sacramental preparation program?

The pastor is responsible for providing sacramental preparation for all the children of the parish. Operation of the parish program is usually delegated to the DRE/CRE. The catechist is responsible for catechetical sessions with the child. The parents (guardians) are responsible for participating as required, and supporting the efforts made by the catechetical staff.

As with all things, flexibility and pastoral sensitivity to differing family circumstances should be built into the preparation process.

2. To what extent should the parish and school programs work together?

The programs should be coordinated and conducted in conjunction with each other to the maximum extent possible. There are many opportunities for collaboration such as: retreats, ceremonies, parent meetings, etc. Although students may be in separate programs for preparation, they are all part of the same parish and should celebrate the sacraments together. Community spirit and unity should, at all times, be evident.

3. Where and when should the sacrament be celebrated?

- a. First Reconciliation should be celebrated in the parish where the child worships on Sunday. The pastor, DRE/CRE, and principal should determine the date and time for the celebration. The unique characteristics of a particular parish, and consultation with a parent group, will help determine the best time.
- b. A communal celebration of First Reconciliation is desirable. At times the parents may present their child for the sacrament. This is also a good opportunity for parents, grandparents and other family members to celebrate the sacrament as well. It is important to have a sufficient number of priests available so that all can be accommodated in a reasonable amount of time.

4. What if a child misses the group celebration?

If a child misses the group celebration with his/her class some alternative communal celebration should be provided whenever possible. If a child makes their First Reconciliation at a weekly reconciliation service great effort should be taken to make this celebration a special one.

5. Is a baptismal certificate necessary?

While a baptismal certificate is not necessary to celebrate First Reconciliation, there needs to be some assurance from the parent (guardian) that the child has received the sacrament of Baptism.

6. What kind of record is kept of First Reconciliation? Where? By whom?

- a. No formal record is required for First Reconciliation. It is recommended, however, that the date of the celebration be noted in the child's catechetical file and on the permanent family record card. This is usually the responsibility of the religious education staff.
- b. It is recommended that a certificate for First Reconciliation be given to each child at the end of the celebration.

V. PLANNING THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

1. Who participates in planning the celebration?

The local parish determines those selected to help prepare the celebration of First Reconciliation. The team preparing the celebration might include the pastor, DRE/CRE, principal, catechists, and interested parents.

2. May the celebration be adapted to meet cultural needs?

The structure of the celebration should be sensitive to different cultural needs. Cultural adaptations may be made as circumstances require and after pastoral consultation.

3. What provision is made in the celebration for children with special needs?

It is recommended that the child celebrate the sacrament with the priest he/she is most familiar with rather than a visiting priest. If there is a child with specific physical or mental needs, these needs should be made known to those planning the celebration.

Children who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. If a priest who signs is not available they may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice. The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession. When no one is available who signs, the child is permitted to confess in writing. Written materials should be given back to the child or properly destroyed. (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, Reconciliation 24)

In the case of children with poor communication skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally. (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, Reconciliation 25)

4. What is appropriate attire for First Reconciliation?

There is no specific attire required, however, the pastor and/or DRE/CRE may establish guidelines for attire. Local parish traditions may be considered, but should, at all times, show sensitivity to the circumstances of the children and their parents (guardians)

5. Should music be used for the celebration? Who is responsible for choosing the music?

- a. Whenever rites like the sacrament of penance are celebrated communally, music is important. The general structure is introductory rite, liturgy of the word, sacrament and dismissal. The introductory rite and liturgy of the word follow the pattern of the Mass. At the time of the sacrament an acclamation or song by all people is desirable. (*The Liturgy Documents*, Volume One pg 281, #81)
- b. Music expresses the child's faith in a way that words alone cannot do. It promotes a sense of unity, fosters an awareness of the mystery of the feast, season or celebration, and lifts up the hearts of the children. (*The Liturgy Documents*, Volume One pg 232)
- c. The responsibility for effective pastoral celebration in the parish community falls upon all those who exercise major roles in the liturgy. "The practical preparation for each liturgical celebration should be done in a spirit of cooperation by all parties concerned, under the guidance of the rector of the church, whether it be ritual, pastoral, or musical matters." In practice this ordinarily means an organized "planning team" or "committee." (*The Liturgy Documents*, Volume One pg 287, #10)