

IV. GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The sacrament of reconciliation is a mystery which can be characterized by three expressions: “abandoning oneself to Love”; the second ‘letting oneself be transformed by Love’; and the third: ‘corresponding to Love.’”

(From Paul VI Hall in the Vatican, Audience of Pope Francis with the Participants of the Course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary; Vatican City, Mar 12, 2021.)

- A. Every baptized child is to be prepared for and encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The preparation for the Sacrament must adapt to the needs, ages and circumstances of the candidates. The family is the first witness of the faith and living the Gospel. By their example within daily life, parents have the capacity to hand on the faith to their children and so become the primary source of the formation of a child’s moral conscience. The parents or guardians should be included in the catechetical preparation of the sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacrament and orient the child towards God and encourage continual growth in understanding of God’s mercy and love. (NDC, 135; DC, 124 and 231).
“Persons with disabilities are called to the fullness of sacramental life, even in the presence of severe disorders. The sacraments are gifts from God, and the liturgy, even before being rationally understood, needs to be lived: therefore no one can refuse the sacraments to persons with disabilities” (DC, 272). As the Catholic community embraces people with disabilities and their families, involving everyone in the liturgical actions of *sacramental life, prayer, and the proclamation of the Word*, all grow in evangelization” (DC, 269-272).
- B. Adults [Parents/Guardians] faith formation lays the foundation for the role all age groups play in bringing the faith of the parish to life. Adults carry a serious responsibility to witness and share the Gospel. Parents/guardians have a critically important role in preparing their children for reconciliation by playing a primary role of support and instruction through family experiences, parental attitudes and participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Therefore, they are to be assisted in adult pre-sacramental catechesis (CCC, 2223, 2225) through a minimum of three formation sessions: one on the sacraments in general, and two on the sacrament of reconciliation in particular, “which for some of them is a moment to deepen their faith and for others is an authentic space for its first proclamation” (DC, 232d). However, the sacrament may not be denied if such participation is not achieved, as parish leaders should raise as few obstacles as possible to the reception of the sacraments.
- C. Children must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time before their first reception of the Eucharist. Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is ongoing to promote the pursuit of a sacramental life. “Catechesis, aware that conversion is never fully accomplished but lasts a whole lifetime, teaches believers to discover that they are pardoned sinners and, drawing upon the rich patrimony of the Church, also provides specific penitential and formative paths that foster the conversion of heart and mind in a new way of life that should also be apparent from the outside” (DC, 64e). Hence,

formation on the sacrament of Reconciliation is to occur throughout all levels of faith formation in the parish. It is particularly encouraged for parishes to have periodic celebrations of the rite of Reconciliation for various age levels (primary children, intermediate, junior high, senior high) at appropriate seasons of the liturgical year.

- D. Before entering into the immediate preparation for Reconciliation, a child is to have completed one full year in a catechetical program and be currently enrolled in the second year of the regular catechetical program.
- E. Since the celebration of Reconciliation precedes First Communion, catechesis for the sacrament must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation so that the specific identity of each sacrament is apparent. (NDC, p. 135)
- F. The immediate preparation for First Reconciliation is to be a parish program of at least **eight** hours apart from and in addition to the regular ongoing parish or school catechetical program. 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, the parents/guardians are to be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacrament. The parents/guardians are active agents in orienting the child towards God and encouraging continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love. (DC, 124)
"The family proclaims the Gospel. As a domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage that also has a missionary dimension, the Christian family takes part in the Church's mission of evangelization and is therefore an agent of catechesis" (DC, 231).
 - 1. The immediate preparation program enriches the catechesis given in the regular classes by offering a deeper understanding of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of **God's loving** forgiveness, knowledge of sin and its effect, and an understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion.
 - 2. "Catechesis is oriented to the liturgical celebration. It is necessary that there be both a catechesis that prepares for the sacraments and a mystagogical catechesis that fosters an understanding and a deeper experience of the liturgy" (DC, 74b). "Catechesis therefore cannot be thought of merely as preparation for the sacraments, but must be understood in relationship to liturgical experience" (DC, 96).
 - 3. The penitent and their parents/guardians are to be instructed in the following before the child's First Reconciliation:
 - i. History and Development of the Sacrament
 - ii. Forgiveness in Scripture (i.e., The Prodigal Son Parable (Lk. 15:11-24), (CCC 1439).
 - iii. Sin and Morality: How to Make Good Choices
 - iv. Reconciliation in Daily Life
 - v. How to Celebrate the Rite
 - vi. Importance of Participation in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy

- vii. Concept of “virtues,” or good habits, including theological ones (faith, hope, and charity), (CCC 1803-1829).
 - viii. God made us “in His image and likeness,” from which fact we draw our dignity; He calls us to beatitude or holiness (CCC 1700).
 - ix. Sin is an offense against God, neighbor, and self, a violation of the duty of love, (CCC 1846-1876).
 - x. Only God forgives sin, though He uses a priest as His agent – *in persona Christi* (CCC 1441; 1548).
 - xi. Individual confession is the sole means by which a Catholic may obtain pardon and reconciliation from his or her sins, absent very rare and unusual circumstances (CCC 1456, 1480-1484; 1983 CIC c. 960-964).
- G.** The preparation and celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation for first time recipients is to take place in the candidate’s own parish and is to include children who have prepared together whether attending parochial, private or public schools.
- H.** Curriculum for the reception of the sacrament must adhere to the curriculum guidelines of the NDC, 2005 and the Diocese of Bridgeport [Grade 2 Religion Curriculum Standards \(2019\)](#).
- I.** Parents or guardian and the parish catechetical leader together with the pastor are responsible for determining when children [have reached the use of reason](#) and are ready to receive First Reconciliation. [The indicators for a candidate’s readiness are:](#)
1. The candidate demonstrates a desire to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation.
 2. The candidate understands the roles of the various participants (penitent, priest, and community) in the Rite of Reconciliation,
 3. The candidate knows how to celebrate the Rite and can follow the procedure for doing so.
 4. The candidate demonstrates an age-appropriate understanding of the sacrament.
 5. The candidate is participating in the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy on a regular basis. Catechesis concerning the participation at Sunday Eucharist may still be necessary and should be welcoming and inviting.
- “The penitential celebration should be prepared with the children so that they will understand its meaning and purpose, be familiar with the songs, have at least an elementary knowledge of the biblical text to be read, and know what they are to say and in what order” (The Rites: Rite of Penance, Appendix II #44).
- J.** The child’s first experience of sacramental Reconciliation and its celebration should be as meaningful and positive as possible. The celebration is to be pastoral, focusing on the beauty of our symbols, rituals, and prayers contained in the rite for each sacrament.
- K.** It is often pastorally opportune to offer the sacrament of Reconciliation to

parents/guardians at the time of their children's First Reconciliation. This both creates an opportunity for parents/guardians and to offer a good example to their children and provide an opportunity for those who perhaps have been away from the sacrament to reconnect with the sacramental life of the Church.

- L. "The Christian community is a family of families and is itself the family of God. Community and family are, each for the other, a constant and reciprocal point of reference" (DC, 229). Ideally, a parish celebration would include the candidates, their families, and the larger parish community as a whole through the offering of the Communal Celebration of the Sacrament. At times, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent, parishes could offer the opportunity for the faithful to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation in the context of a communal penance celebration. Such celebrations express fully that as Christians we approach God as a family, asking forgiveness of our brothers and sisters even as we ask forgiveness of our Father pledging our support of one another in our common effort to grow toward the Kingdom of God. Such celebrations highlight the fact that the sacrament of Reconciliation is not merely a means of "getting rid of sins;" it is a joyful celebration, a welcoming of God's forgiveness. ~~"The penitential celebration should be prepared with the children so that they will understand its meaning and purpose, be familiar with the songs, have at least an elementary knowledge of the biblical text to be read, and know what they are to say and in what order"~~ (The Rites: Rite of Penance, Appendix II #44).
- M. Children have the right to celebrate Reconciliation face to face or anonymously and are free to choose their own confessor whenever this is possible.
- N. A child sufficiently prepared is to be invited, not coerced, to celebrate the sacrament.
- O. Most importantly, Reconciliation is the sacrament of forgiveness: The sacrament of Reconciliation should always be taught and celebrated in such a way that it will be perceived not as a burden, but as a welcomed opportunity. The sacrament is God's *gift of healing* when people, both individually and socially, have ruptured or seriously hurt their relationship with God and the community. Reconciliation as a post-baptismal or second "conversion," (CCC, 1428). Conversion is of the heart and implies a change in attitude and behavior, which is both personal and social. As a sign of conversion, the penitent accepts the penance given by the priest.

May be
used in a
different
section.

The Lord is merciful. He makes us clean of heart and leads us out of darkness into his freedom when we acknowledge our guilt. Let us ask him to forgive us and bind up the wounds inflicted by our sins.

Give us the grace of true repentance.

Pardon your servants and release them from the debt of sin.

Forgive your children who confess their sins, and restore them to full communion with your Church.

Renew the glory of baptism in those who have lost it by sin.

Welcome them to your altar, and renew their spirit with the hope of eternal glory. Keep them faithful to your sacraments and loyal in your service.

Renew your love in their hearts, and make them bear witness to it in their daily lives.

Keep them always obedient to your commandments and protect within them your gift of eternal life.

(The Rites of the Catholic Church, Volume I, pp 517-629, "The Rite of Penance," 54)

Pastoral Best Practices ...

Parishes are especially encouraged to offer the children the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturday afternoons.