
First Reconciliation Guidelines

Diocesan Policy - 610

610.00 Parishes will follow the *First Penance Preparation Policies and Guidelines*.

611.00 **Administrative Policies**

611.10 The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be celebrated only with those who have been properly prepared, who are actively involved in the parish preparation process, and who freely choose to be reconciled.

611.20 Sacraments are celebrations of the believing community. The option for home-schooling during the preparation for this sacrament is discouraged except for serious pastoral need.

611.30 The recommended time for first Reconciliation is once the person has reached the age of discretion. (Canon 989) Children baptized before reaching the age of discretion will celebrate first Reconciliation in second grade.

611.40 The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be celebrated prior to the child's reception of first Eucharist. (Canon 914)

611.41 There will be a significant period of time between the celebration of first Reconciliation and first Eucharist. The catechesis for Reconciliation must be done separately from the catechesis for first Eucharist, and the preparation periods for these two Sacraments must not take place within the same time period nor overlap in any way. (NCD, 2005 quoted at #36, B-2, p.135)

612.00 **Parent Policies**

612.10 Parishes must provide a minimum of one meeting with parents prior to the child's celebration of first Reconciliation. Parent(s)/guardian(s), the primary educator(s) of their children, are to be intimately involved in the catechesis for first Reconciliation. This helps parent(s)/guardian(s) renew and strengthen their own faith, and enables them to serve as a positive faith example for their children.

612.11 Requirements for the preparation process leading to first Reconciliation are to be clearly communicated to parent(s)/guardian(s) in a timely manner.

613.00 **Catholic School Policies**

613.10 Children attending a Catholic school which is not in their home parish will prepare for and celebrate the sacrament in their home parish. Exceptions to

this will only be made with the express consent of the child's pastor.

614.00 Catechist Policies

- 614.10 It is essential that a parish utilize the talents of the most gifted and highly trained catechists for preparation for this sacrament. The first celebration of this sacramental encounter with God through Christ is an experience of significant and special grace and deserves the parish's best effort.

615.00 Educational/Formational Content for First Penance

- 615.10 The preparation process must follow Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines published on 1/1/95. (Available in the diocesan *Faith Formation Policy*-Section 500)
- 615.20 The preparation process must respect the natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances of the individuals.
- 615.30 The catechist for first Reconciliation will emphasize the love and mercy of a forgiving God and the importance of repentance and conversion.
- 615.31 Sin will be presented in a manner and language understood by the child.
- 615.32 Sacramental Reconciliation is required of those who are in serious sin; it is recommended for those in venial sin. (Canon 988) The catechist of seven-year-old children must strive not to blur this distinction and make venial sin into something more than it is.
- 615.33 Catechesis for first Reconciliation should "explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers and Scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation." (NDC #36, B-2, p. 136)
- 615.34 Children must "understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation." (NDC, 2005 #36, B-2, p. 136)
- 615.40 A very simple Act of Contrition is to be used: one which is easily understood by the child. See some examples recommended by the Vatican: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/act-of-contrition.html>

616.00 Liturgical Policies

- 616.10 The liturgical experience of first Reconciliation will follow the *Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution* as described in the Book of Rites.

First Reconciliation Guidelines

Diocesan Preferences

1. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults suggests that it is important for all Catholics, including our children, to reflect on the nature of sin in their lives, in the community and in the world around them. This reflection is best done within the context of the larger Catholic community. The proper liturgical season for this reflection is the season of Lent. It is, therefore, the preference of the Diocese that preparation for first Penance be completed prior to the beginning of Lent that the children be exposed to the community's reflection on the reality of sin and they be sacramentally reconciled shortly before the beginning of the Triduum.
2. The celebration of first Reconciliation should be held as a parish celebration, e.g., children in the Faith Formation program celebrate with the children in the Catholic school.
3. Celebration of First Reconciliation is parish-based and includes children from both the Faith Formation program and Catholic school if there is one. Every effort should be made to bring the group together for such events as a retreat, parent/child gatherings, etc. so that the children get to know one another as the "parish First Reconciliation group" before they are asked to celebrate the sacrament.
4. Two meetings with parents prior to the celebration of first Reconciliation are preferred. The Diocesan Guidelines give suggestions for the content of these meetings.
5. Since it would help the child to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with confidence, it is recommended that every effort be made for the priest(s) who will be the minister of the sacrament to be familiar with the children. This may be accomplished through his (their) presence at the retreat or other gatherings with the children, as well as a consistent presence in the Catholic school and Faith Formation program.
6. Since all the sacraments are celebrations of the larger faith community, it would be appropriate to ask the parish to pray for the children preparing to make their first Reconciliation. This can be done in various ways, e.g., banners with names and/or pictures of children displayed somewhere in the church, frequent bulletin announcements, etc.

One example of an appropriate Act of Contrition is the following which is adapted from the Rite of Reconciliation:

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.

Any parish which would find it necessary, for pastoral or theological reasons, to deviate from these guidelines, will submit an alternate plan to the appropriate diocesan office (Liturgy: Office for Divine Worship; Catechesis: Department of Faith Formation) for recommendations and final approval.