



Penance Policies at a Glance

General Principals

It is crucial for the implementation of the Rite of Penance that solid catechesis on the mystery of Reconciliation, the meaning of sin, and the rites themselves, as well as a deep formation in prayer, study of Scriptures, and a concern for right moral development happen.

After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.

Every parish should provide suitable, visible places in the Church for the celebration of the Sacrament, containing at least a fixed grate for anonymity of the penitent should he/she desire. The confessional may also provide the option of face-to-face confession.

Parishes must ensure that catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance is a regular part of family and adult education.

Sufficient time should be allowed for each penitent.

During Advent & Lent, parishes are encouraged to plan regular celebrations of the Rite of Reconciliation for Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution.

First Penance of Children

Candidates

Children should be encouraged to prepare for the Sacrament as they near the age of 7.

First Penance is to precede First Eucharist.

Parents

Parents are to be intimately involved in the preparation for a child's first reception of the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation.

Parents are to be clearly instructed on the meaning and theology of Reconciliation.

Parents will make the final decision concerning a child's readiness to receive the Sacrament.

Preparation

Catechesis for the Sacrament must be kept distinct from First Eucharist and must not be hurried.

Catechesis for children prior to the Sacrament must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances.

Catechesis of the Sacrament must include:

- Helping children recognize the need for forgiveness;
- Exploring the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite;
- Instruction on how to celebrate the Rite;
- Understanding the need for confession in the case of serious sin.

Children at an early age should learn about and receive this precious gift. The Sacrament should be approached as a positive instrument in developing a genuinely Christian moral sense; it helps the penitent to do good, to be kind, but also to understand that when one fails it is not the end.

Celebration

For the celebration of First Penance/Reconciliation:

- The Sacrament should be celebrated as part of a Liturgy of the Word and may include signs, symbols, music, readings, and prayers suitable to the age of those participating.
- The celebration should be planned by parish and catechetical leadership;
- Each child should have the option of anonymous or face-to-face confession;
- Each child should be fully able to participate in the liturgical celebration as completely as possible.

After the initial celebration, regular opportunities for the Sacrament should be made available to children who have celebrated their first Penance.

Parishes must provide ongoing catechesis on the Sacrament as well as ongoing opportunities for celebrating the Sacrament for children and families.