

Diocese of Duluth

DIOCESAN POLICY MANUAL– SACRAMENTAL

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THE SACRAMENTS OF FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST

RECONCILIATION

Sin is before all else an offence against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1440

EUCHARIST

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1323

SUITABLE AGE

The suitable age for the first reception of these sacraments is deemed to be that which in documents of the Church is called the age of reason or of discretion. This age “both for Confession and for Communion is that at which the child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less.”

General Catechetical Directory, Addendum #1

CATECHESIS FOR PENANCE OR RECONCILIATION

Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. It seeks, first, to make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life; second, to help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church; third, to encourage the child to see that in this sacrament faith is expressed by being forgiven and forgiving; fourth, to encourage the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly.

National Catechetical Directory, 126

The goal of formation is that children develop proper understanding and motivation in order to offer the prayer honestly. Like other penitents, children always have the freedom to speak this prayer in their own words. Models of traditional prayers may be presented even for memorization.

Rite of Penance, 19

CATECHESIS FOR FIRST COMMUNION

Catechesis for children seeks to strengthen their awareness of the Father's love, of the call to participate in Christ's sacrifice, and of the gift of the Spirit. Children should be taught that the Holy Eucharist is the real body and blood of Christ, and what appear to be bread and wine are actually His living body. Children around the age of seven tend to think concretely; they grasp concepts like "unity" and "belonging" from experiences, such as sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking, and celebrating. Such experiences, coupled with explanations of the Eucharist adapted to their intellectual capacity and with further efforts to familiarize them with the main events of Jesus' life, help them to participate more meaningfully in the action of the Mass and to receive Christ's body and blood in communion in an informed and reverent manner.

National Catechetical Directory, 122

SEPARATION OF CATECHESIS

Catechesis for First Communion is conducted separately from introductory catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, since each sacrament deserves its own concentrated preparation.

National Catechetical Directory, 122

THE ORDER OF FIRST RECONCILIATION AND FIRST COMMUNION

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by 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.

The sacrament of Reconciliation normally should be celebrated prior to the reception of First Communion.

National Catechetical Directory, 126

Having weighed all these points, and keeping in mind the common and general practice which, *per se* cannot be derogated without the approval of the Apostolic See, and also having heard the Conferences of Bishops, the Holy See judges it fitting that the practice now in force in the Church of putting Confession ahead of First Communion should be retained. This in no way prevents this custom from being carried out in various ways, as, for instance, by having a communal penitential celebration precede or follow the reception of the sacrament of Penance.

General Catechetical Directory, Addendum #5

One should also keep in mind the usefulness of Confession, which retains its efficacy even when only venial sins are in question, and which gives an increase of grace and charity, increases the child's good disposition for receiving the Eucharist, and also helps to perfect the Christian life.

General Catechetical Directory, Addendum #5

DETERMINATION OF READINESS

As for children, their parents, catechists, and pastors are responsible for determining when they are ready to receive First Communion.

National Catechetical Directory, 122

No very deep or scientific knowledge can be expected of children whose mental powers are still comparatively undeveloped. Hence, if a child in its own simple manner knows that God exists, that he will reward the good, that there are three persons in One God; that Christ the second person of the Blessed Trinity, became man to redeem the world, and that he is really present in the Eucharist, its intellectual equipment is sufficient for warranting its admission to First Holy Communion.

Rev. Matthew M. Crotty, J.C.D.

The Catholic University of America Canon Law Studies, 247

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the first heralds for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2225

“Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your

God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

“Fathers do not anger your children but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4

Parents should be involved in varying degrees according to the needs of the local situation in the preparation for the First Penance and First Communion celebration. The means chosen might include:

- a series of meetings of parents with priests and catechists
- a small study group of parents organized and moderated by priests and catechists
- parental interviews with priests and catechists to determine the child’s readiness
- a preparatory series of lectures for parents with paraliturgies included
- a distribution of helpful literature enabling parents to cooperate in certain forms of catechesis with their child
- in small parishes home visits by priests or catechists

There should be two to four parent meetings in preparation for the sacraments of First Penance and First Eucharist. The themes can be treated through presentation, discussions and AV materials. Suggestions for the format of the meetings can be found in sacramental textbooks and manuals. Other resources are available through the diocesan office.

Themes for parent meetings are as follows:

The sacrament of Penance past and present/sacramental forgiveness
Christian sense of sin/conscience formation
Celebration of the sacrament (confession)
Conversion /response to God’s love
Sacraments/signs of God’s love
The sacrament of Eucharist past and present
Source and expression of community
Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

First Penance and Communion preparation should be provided within the Parish Religious Education Program.

If possible, children should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation several times before First Eucharist to develop the habit of receiving the sacrament.

In both teaching and actual celebration, care should be taken to integrate in every way possible the children attending Catholic school and those attending public school.

Children who are mentally retarded are to be admitted to the eucharist when they express a desire for the sacrament and in some way manifest their reverence for it. In cases of profound retardation, the eucharist may be shared without further requirements, as long as the child is able to consume the sacred elements.

Children with physical or learning disabilities and those who are behaviorally disturbed are to be presented for eucharistic communion along with their age peers, seeking a degree of understanding appropriate to their individual condition.