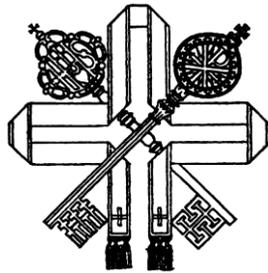




**DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR**

# **Guidelines for First Reconciliation**



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## INTRODUCTION

After Baptism, the first call to conversion, Christ calls the church to the second conversion of repentance for sin. “The new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the Grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life” (Council of Trent 1546: DS 1515).

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation one’s heart is moved to trust in God’s mercy and love. One looks upon Christ on the cross and understands God’s great love in giving his only Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sin.

This sacrament may take various names – *sacrament of conversion*, *sacrament of Penance*, *sacrament of confession*, *sacrament of forgiveness* or *sacrament of Reconciliation* (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1423-1424). For this document the term Sacrament of Reconciliation will be used unless quoted from another source.

## CATECHESIS

Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Readiness for the reception of this sacrament includes:

- knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness,
- knowledge and understanding of sin and its effect, and
- experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion (National Directory of Catechesis 135).

Canon 97 §2 states “a minor before the completion of the seventh year is called an infant and is considered not responsible for oneself (*non sui compos*). With the completion of the seventh year, however, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason.”

Children must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist (General Directory of Catechesis 5). The basis for this is not the state of sin but rather to educate the child to the true Christian spirit of penance and conversion, to growth in self-knowledge and self-control, to the just sense of sin, to the necessity of asking for pardon from God and to a loving and confident abandonment to the mercy of the Lord.

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a 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 Rite of Reconciliation and will be at ease with the reception of the Sacrament (National Directory of Catechesis 135).

Canon 914 states “it is primarily the duty of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as the duty of pastors, to take care that children who have reached the use of reason are prepared properly and, after they have made sacramental confession, are refreshed with this divine food as soon as possible. It is for the pastor to exercise vigilance so that children who have not attained the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed do not approach Holy Communion.”

Components of catechesis in preparation for First Reconciliation include:

- Learn of God’s unconditional love for us
- Learn of Sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation
- Recognize the presence of good and evil in the world and their personal capacity for both
- Recognize the need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others, but from God
- Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation
- Understand how to celebrate Rite I and II of Reconciliation.
- Learn that the faithful are “obliged to confess all serious sins committed after baptism”.
- Learn that true forgiveness comes from repentance, confession, reparation and absolution.
- Learn that a mortal sin is of grave matter committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.

- Learn that the priest is given the faculties to forgive in the name of Christ.
- Learn that a priest is bound by the seal of confession to keep absolute secrecy. (Cf. NDC 133-136)

Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year following the first reception. (Cf. NCD 126)

#### Parents Role

Canon 226 §2 states “since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave obligation and enjoy the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children according to the doctrine handed on by the Church.”

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, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacrament. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God’s mercy and love. (Cf. NDC 135-136)

#### Parent Sessions

Parishes should ensure that there is at least one parent session to introduce parents to the preparation process. Parents should be reminded of the components and process of this sacrament as well as given the opportunity to celebrate it.

#### Retreat

The retreat is a time for the parents and children to contemplate together God’s great love for them. Jesus came “that we may have life and have it more abundantly.” (John 10-10) Sin leads to a loss of this life in Christ. Jesus’ forgiveness of sinners is reviewed through Scripture stories and parables.

Components for the retreat should include:

- Understanding the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Reflecting on sorrow for sin
- Reflecting on confession of sin to the priest
- Reflecting on reparation for sin

## CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

Like all the sacraments, Reconciliation is a liturgical action which emphasizes its communal nature. The sacrament may follow one of two Rites.

Rite I – for the reconciliation of individual penitents

Rite II – for the reconciliation of several penitents

Rite II is the recommended form for First Reconciliation. The components of this Rite include:

- Liturgy of the Word
- Communal singing
- Communal examination of conscience with a public expression of sorrow
- Private confession with a personal expression of sorrow
- Individual absolution
- Public action of reconciliation
- Fellowship gathering afterwards

In addition to the catechists and catechetical team, the assembly for the Rite of Reconciliation should include the parents and other members of the children’s family who will take part in the sacrament. Other members of the parish community should also be invited to participate.

Confessors should be prepared for and be especially sensitive to the psychological, faith and moral development of the children.

## RECORDS

Any documentation for the sacrament of First Reconciliation is to be a temporary record of preparation for candidates. Permanent records are not to be maintained and certificates are not needed for First Reconciliation.

## CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Canon 777 §4 states “the catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally handicapped, insofar as their condition permits.” Pastors are responsible to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities. Parish catechetical and sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities. (Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities 5)

“Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the 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 Persons with Disabilities 23)

“Catholics 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. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice (Canon 990). The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession (Canons 983, §2 and 1388, §2). When no priest with signing skills is available, nor sign language interpreter requested, Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in writing. The written materials are to be returned to the penitent or otherwise properly destroyed.” (Guidelines for Persons with Disabilities 24)

“In the case of individuals with poor communications skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally. In posing questions and in the assignment of penances the confessor is to proceed with prudence and discretion, mindful that he is at once judge and healer, minister of justice as well as of mercy.” (Guidelines for Persons with Disabilities 25)

## OTHER PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

The diocese recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their child(ren), and that some parents choose to live out their role of primary educators by providing formal catechesis at home. The parish pastor and his delegates also have the responsibility to provide catechetical instruction for the children. The rights and responsibilities of parents and the parish call for collaboration between the two. The same prerequisites for candidacy apply to children who are home schooled for religious education as are required for children in parish programs and Catholic schools. (Diocese of Superior Guidelines for Religious Education at Home)