

Now the one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a first installment.

2 CORINTHIANS 5: 18

FIRST PENANCE

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FIRST PENANCE

For Children Baptized Catholic and of the age of reason (7 years and older)

I. INTRODUCTION

Christ, the healer of body and soul offers healing from separation by the mystery of the sacrament of Penance. This section is offered to provide assistance for those who work with children who are preparing for First Communion.

II. ADAPTED FOR FIRST COMMUNION CANDIDATES

- FP 1. Pastors are to see that baptized children, who have reached the age of reason (usually seven years old), are prepared for the Sacrament of Penance and provided the opportunity of reception prior to First Communion (see Parish Faith Formation Policies: FF, II, “General Principles Applicable to Parishes”).**

Those who are baptized and have reached the age of reason have the right to the sacrament if they express a need or desire for it.

- FP 2. Parents/legal guardians, pastors, and catechists are to encourage baptized children to seek the Sacrament of Penance when the children reach the age of reason.**

Parents/legal guardians are to present their children for preparation, take an active part in their own children’s catechesis, and determine, with pastoral assistance, the readiness of their own children to receive the sacrament for the first time.

- FP 3. Children of a catechetical age (over seven) who are candidates for full communion (baptized in a faith other than Catholic) are to be prepared for the Sacrament of Penance in accordance with the provisions of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (see NSC, 36).**

Children of a catechetical age, who are candidates for full communion, may be integrated into Penance preparation with other parish children, with whom they form community.

- FP 4. Baptized Catholic children must be offered a genuine opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance prior to the celebration of First Holy Communion. A parish may not deny**

the Sacrament of Penance to a baptized Catholic child who has expressed a desire for the sacrament.

- 4.a. A child of catechetical age and appropriately prepared may choose not to receive First Penance.
- 4.b. In cases where readiness of the child is doubtful, the parents/legal guardians, pastor, and catechist are to be in dialogue. The child must take part in the preparation for first penance. However, the child's wishes regarding the level of participation in the sacramental encounter must be respected since the identity of those going to confession is information covered by the seal of confession.

FP 5. Parents/legal guardians who home school their children are to contact the pastor for inclusion in sacramental preparation of their children (see Parish Faith Formation Policies: FF, III, "Parental Rights and Responsibilities").

FP 6. General absolution is not to be given for First Penance.

III. CATECHETICAL PREPARATION

FP 7. The pastor is responsible for providing sacramental preparation for all the children of the parish (see Parish Faith Formation Policies: FF, II, "General Principles Applicable to Parishes").

- 7.a. Pastors are to ensure that there is adequate catechesis for the celebration of the sacraments and that children are properly prepared for their First Penance prior to First Communion (see *CIC*, c. 843 §2).

- 7.b. Pastors are also to see that adequate catechesis is provided for the parents/legal guardians of the children.

FP 8. Candidates for First Penance are not to be divided within a parish between those who attend a parish school and those who take part in parish religious education.

FP 9. Sacramental catechesis for first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is to be parish-based and primarily directed by pastoral staff especially trained for this ministry.

FP 10. Children, parents/legal guardians are to be prepared for First Penance as one community, regardless of how they receive their faith formation; whether in school, parish programs or home-schooling.

FP 11. Every parish and faith community in the Archdiocese of Seattle is to make provisions that adequate catechesis for First Penance take place. Catechetical preparation is to occur over a suitable length of time.

11.a. This would include:

- *Remote* preparation with parents/legal guardians, the child and other members of the family actively participating in Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist and the life of their parish.
- *Proximate* catechesis beginning in the first grade or the year prior to the celebration of First Penance.
- *Immediate* preparation for First Penance including at least 4-6 sessions of catechetical formation directed toward this sacrament.

11.b. Catechetical formation for Children's First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance should follow the principles incorporated in the *National Directory for Catechesis* (see *NDC*, 36 B, 2).

FP 12. Catechesis programs for First Penance shall use one of the textbooks/programs approved and recommended by the Archdiocese. (For information, contact the Office of Catholic Faith Formation.)

FP 13. Those preparing for First Penance shall be able to recite an Act of Contrition, and be familiar with the prayers in the rite.

In addition they should be formed in the practice of spontaneous personal prayer of sorrow and amendment, and acts of penance or satisfaction.

FP 14. Parishes are to provide programs for parents/legal guardians so that they can fulfill their role as primary educators of their children.

FP 15. Parents/legal guardians who home-school their children are to contact the pastor of inclusion in sacramental preparation of their children (see Parish Faith Formation Policies: FF, III, "Parental Rights and Responsibilities).

Children and parents/legal guardians are to be prepared for First Penance as one community, regardless of how they receive their faith formation: whether in school, parish programs, or home schooling.

FP 16. Catechesis is to be in keeping with the intellectual, emotional, and faith development of the individuals involved.

Children younger than the age of seven ordinarily have not attained an adequate degree of reason, experience, or sense regarding the matter of the sacrament; that is, of their capacity for sinful behavior.

IV. MINISTERS OF PENANCE

FP 17. All penitents have the right to choose their own confessor.

Parents/legal guardians may guide children to a confessor adept at celebrating this sacrament with children. Confessors need to take into account the developmental and language needs of penitents and adapt the celebration accordingly.

V. PLACE OF CELEBRATION

See Penance: PN, II “Reception of the Sacrament of Penance.”

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY

FP 18. No one is to repeat what he/she has heard in the confession of another. If one finds a list of someone’s sins, the list is protected by the seal of the confessional and those who read it are bound by the seal. Interpreters assisting penitents are also bound (see *CIC*, c. 983 §2 and c. 984 §2).

18.a. Only the penitent of his or her own confession is not bound by the seal. All penitents should exercise reason and prudence, as casual talk about one’s own confession may amount to sinful behavior, and may damage the reputation of the confessor who, nonetheless, remains bound by the sacramental seal.

18.b. Children may need to speak outside the confessional to an appropriate person, such as a parent/legal guardian or a priest, about serious matters concerning their own confession.

FP 19. Since the celebration of the sacrament is in the internal forum, no questioning, videotaping, or photographing a child’s confession by parents/legal guardian or other is allowed. Certificates mentioning the reception of the Sacrament of

Penance are not to be given out or recorded (see SR, V, “Reconciliation”).

FP 20. Specialized catechetical and liturgical assistance and resources need to be considered for any penitent who is developmentally disabled, visually impaired, hearing impaired, or has other special needs.

FP 21. Those with language needs must be assisted by catechists who can communicate with them effectively. Confidentiality must be maintained at all times (see *CIC*, c.983 §2).

VII. LITURGICAL RITES

FP 22. All penitents have the right to celebrate the sacrament face to face or anonymously, and each candidate needs to learn the ritual for both forms (see *CIC*, c. 964 §2).

22.a. Celebrations of a child’s First Penance and of First Communion are to be separated by a significant amount of time (e.g., three months). Each of the sacraments has its own dignity and integrity; one is a sacrament of healing and one is a sacrament of initiation.

22.b. A child’s first experience with the Sacrament of Penance should occur within a communal setting, including the individual confession and absolution of each child. The communal rite underlies the restoration of the community through the healing of its members.

FP 23. The Rite of Penance as outlined in the Rite is to be prepared with integrity and simplicity, utilizing adaptations when appropriate.

VIII. DOCUMENTATION

The sacrament of penance is never to be documented. See above, FP, VI, “Confidentiality.”