

3.3 DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR FIRST PENANCE AND FIRST EUCHARIST

3.3.1 GENERAL PROGRAM

Catechetical programs for the first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist are to be provided by the parish for both children and their parents.

1. It is understood that children preparing for Penance and Eucharist have begun their religious education in the first grade.
2. The program of catechesis for children for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist should be separate and distinct from each other and be separated by a period of at least two months.
3. Catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance is to precede that of catechesis for the first reception of Eucharist.
4. Individual readiness for the first reception of each of the sacraments should be determined by the pastor, parents, child and catechist. The best method offered for this is an informal interview.
5. Parochial schools and parish schools of religion are to provide the same program of catechesis for all children of the parish, using approved texts; one program of catechesis for all parents who have not participated in such a program within the last three years; and, one celebration of each of the sacraments.
6. Provisions should be made to adapt the catechesis to the particular needs of mentally and physically impaired children. Ordinarily, the person requiring special education will be able to understand the meaning of the Eucharist more readily than the complexities involved in the Sacrament of Penance and should be catechized for first Eucharist prior to the Sacrament of Penance.

3.3.2 SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Basic catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance must be provided for every child in the second grade.

1. Catechesis and criteria for deciding a child's readiness to receive the Sacrament should include:
 - a. An elementary notion of sacrament and sacramentality
 - b. An awareness of God's love and readiness to forgive
 - c. An appropriate awareness of selfishness and guilt
 - d. The need for forgiveness and trust in God's forgiving love
 - e. The Sacrament of Penance as a sign of God's love and forgiveness
 - f. An understanding of how to make an examination of conscience and express sorrow.
2. It is not advisable to present a very young child with a "list of sins" which he/she has not committed and does not even understand. The child should be aided toward an understanding of right, wrong and sin, according to his/her age and psychological development.
3. In preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance:
 - a. The children should be shown the Penance room, and told why there are special places for the Sacrament.
 - b. The children should meet the priests who will be ministers of the Sacrament. This will help the children be a little more comfortable during the rite itself.
 - c. The children should learn how to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Face-to-face celebrations of the Sacrament are preferred over those behind a screen. Of course, children should not be forced into either form, but permitted to choose. The choice is not the form the parents and/or priests prefer.
 - d. The first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is to be communal. In this way, the children will have the support of their families and friends.
4. The preparation program for the parents should include the following:
 - a. Rights and responsibilities of the parents in the child's preparation
 - b. Theological and Scriptural understanding of the Sacrament in the light of Vatican II, including the concept of sin, redemption, healing, reconciliation, moral development
 - c. History of the Sacrament

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- d. Explanation of diocesan policies
 - e. Explanation and demonstration of the Rite in its various forms.
5. Most handicapped persons are able to distinguish what is pleasing or displeasing to others. Time should be spent in helping them form Christian attitudes and behaviors. Simple non-sacramental Penance services can be a way for them to express sorrow and ask forgiveness. For those who are able to be responsible for their attitudes and behaviors, the Sacrament of Penance can be helpful and meaningful in their lives.

3.3.3 SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

Basic catechesis for the Sacrament of Eucharist must be provided for every child in the second grade.

1. Catechesis and criteria for determining a child's readiness to receive the Sacrament should include:
 - a. Knowledge of Jesus and some main events in his life
 - b. Awareness of Jesus's love and that He is someone very special in the child's life
 - c. Awareness of the Eucharist as Jesus's special presence, differing from ordinary bread
 - d. Basic understanding of the Liturgy in keeping with the child's mental maturity
 - e. Formation of a desire to receive the Eucharist
 - f. An understanding of the manner of receiving Christ's body and blood:
 - 1) Children should be instructed in both manners of receiving the body of Christ--in the hand and on the tongue--with the choice left to them
 - 2) Children should be shown how to drink from the cup.
2. The preparation for the parents should include the following:
 - a. Rights and responsibilities of the parents in their children's preparation
 - b. History of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Mass
 - c. Theological and Scriptural understanding of the Eucharist in the light of Vatican II
 - d. Explanation of diocesan policies
 - e. Prayer in the life of the child and the family.
3. The regulation of recording the names of those children who have received First Eucharist has been abrogated. However, a copy of each child's baptismal certificate as proof of Catholic baptism **must** be produced prior to sacramental reception.
4. The mentally or physically handicapped person should:
 - a. Have some understanding of who Jesus is
 - b. Know the difference between ordinary bread and the Eucharist
 - c. Want to receive Jesus in the Eucharist.The degree of handicap must be considered. Handicapped persons who are capable of understanding the Eucharist to some degree should not be refused the Sacrament.