

Diocese of Santa Rosa
Sacrament Preparation Guidelines
First Penance and First Eucharist

PREAMBLE

1. General Purpose

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The catechesis of children, young people and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on the Word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life. (CCC 2688)

GUIDELINES

All sacraments are parish centered celebrations of God's presence among us. It is essential that parents, pastors, catechists and parish communities strive to approach children's First Penance and First Eucharist preparation as unique opportunities to enhance their children's spiritual journey and to further develop their relationship with God.

Guidelines for First Penance and First Eucharist preparation for baptized children are intended to:

- a) insure effective and appropriate preparation for children,
- b) provide direction and support for parish programs,
- c) address some practical and particular concerns.

It is understood that a parish may find it necessary to adapt certain directives according to the child's, parental, pastoral, or catechetical needs. It is also understood these adaptations will be done keeping in mind the spirit and intent of sacramental preparation set forth in the National Catechetical Directory.

2. READINESS

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. It seeks first to make clear the relationships of the sacrament to the child's life. (NCD 126)

GUIDELINES

To foster the necessary understanding of faith at a child's particular age level a minimum of two full consecutive years of catechetical instruction is to precede the reception of sacraments. Appropriate sacramental readiness, not chronological age or school grade, will determine a child's preparedness to encounter Christ in a sacramental celebration.

3. PARENTAL ROLE

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. (CCC 2223)

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. (CCC 2226)

Parents have a right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Penance and First Eucharist. Catechesis aims to help parents grow in understanding and appreciation of the sacraments and participate readily in catechizing their children. (NCD 122)

GUIDELINES

Sufficient support to enable parents to fulfill this privilege and obligation should be provided by the parish in the form of parent education, encouragement of active involvement in their child's catechesis and participation in the planning, preparation and celebration of liturgies.

PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is desirable and advisable to place a child within an age peer group within a parish program while providing additional and simultaneous specific sacramental catechesis. This specific preparation can be in the form of special classes provided in the parish setting or by instructing and enabling parents to prepare their children at home in cooperation with parish directives. For either approach it is most important to provide individual faith support for every child, preferably from within the immediate family.

CATECHESIS FOR FIRST RECONCILIATION

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Catechesis for children must help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church. It should encourage the child to see that, in this sacrament, faith is expressed by being forgiven and forgiving. It should encourage the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly.

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) is to precede First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation. This is to be done 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 (Penance) normally should be celebrated prior to the reception of First Communion. Because continuing lifelong conversion is part of what it means to grow in faith, catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) is ongoing. Children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year. Lent is an especially appropriate season for this. (NCD 126/CCC 1457)

GUIDELINES

Children should be well prepared for First Penance/Reconciliation. Parents and pastors, along with the catechetical team, have the responsibility to provide catechesis that allows the child to come to know God's mercy and forgiveness, and the reality of sin.

The catechesis should genuinely provide for the child's right to go to confession. It should be very simple and in keeping with what is required for the first confession of young children, namely:

- a) an ability to distinguish between right and wrong,
- b) an awareness of the need for forgiveness,
- c) a trust in the Father's forgiving love,
- d) an ability to express both sorrow and a desire to change,
- e) an ability to describe wrongdoing in his/her own words, and
- f) an ability to understand that reconciliation is also between the penitent and the community.

PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Materials and Resources

Most publisher's textbooks have incorporated First Penance and First Eucharist preparation in their second grade books (ref. NCD 229, 264). Supplemental material for older children and/or more intense catechesis on preparing children for sacraments is provided in additional books by these same publishers. Any questions about textbooks or other appropriate material should be directed to the Office of Religious Education. Sound catechetical material enhances and promotes effective catechesis. It is always desirable to provide the best materials and resources to support catechetical preparation (ref. NCD 249).

2. Parental Role

Since parents are the primary teachers of their children in the ways of faith, they need to understand the role of Reconciliation in their own lives. Thus, parishes are to provide ongoing catechesis for parents about the role of Penance/Reconciliation in the development of faith. As parents are informed, they can form their children in the faith, and all participate in the transformation of the world. The content for this catechesis is related to ongoing conversion:

Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance. (CCC 1435)

Adult catechesis for Penance/Reconciliation may include:

- various prayer forms
- conscience formation
- Jesus as the great healer/reconciler
- Scriptural basis of the sacrament
- child development
- issues of conversion and faith development
- family experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation
- training for liturgical experiences of forgiveness
- penance in the life of the church

3. Liturgical Celebration of the Sacrament

The revised ritual (Reconciliation) offers forms and options for celebration of this sacrament. Among these are communal celebrations which more clearly show its ecclesial nature. Penitents have a choice of the customary anonymity (option 1) or face-to-face with the confessor (option 2).

A choice is also offered among various prayers and readings (NCD 124).

Two forms for the Rite of Penance/Reconciliation are appropriate for the celebrations of this sacrament with children:

1. Rite of reconciliation for an Individual
 - a) Reception of the penitent
 - b) Reading of the Word of God
 - c) Confession of Sin
 - d) Acceptance of Satisfaction
 - e) Prayer of the Penitent and Absolution
 - f) Proclamation of the Praise of God
 - g) Dismissal

2. Communal Rite of Penance/Reconciliation with Individual Confession and Absolution
 - a) Introductory rites:
 - Song
 - Greeting
 - Opening Prayer
 - b) Celebration of the Word:
 - First Reading
 - Psalm
 - Second Reading
 - Gospel
 - Homily
 - c) Examination of Conscience
 - General confession of sin
 - d) Individual Confession and Absolution
 - e) Proclamation of Praise for God's Mercy
 - f) Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving
 - g) Dismissal

The communal rite for First Penance/Reconciliation can also incorporate appropriate use of Scripture for the age level (such as role playing, dialogue readings, etc.) and appropriate music.

4. Act of Contrition

With regard to a set or memorized form of the Act of Contrition, any simple form in keeping with the child's age and understanding is to be used. An example can be found in any approved textbook.

CATECHESIS FOR FIRST EUCHARIST

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life". The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. (CCC 1324).

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify..., to build up the body of Christ and finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs, they also instruct. The not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith. (CCC 1123)

Catechesis for First Communion is conducted separately from introductory catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance), since each sacrament deserves its own concentrated preparation. Continued catechesis is given yearly in all catechetical programs for children in as much as the sacraments require lifelong study and prayer (NCD 122).

GUIDELINES

1. Preparation

Preparation of a child for Eucharist should be the cooperative effort of parents, catechists and pastor. Each has a significant and vital role to play in assisting the child's maturing concept of Eucharist. The reality that what appears to be bread and wine is actually the real body and blood of Christ must be taught in a way that helps the child develop an understanding of this mystery. From the experiences of sharing, listening, eating, conversing, giving, thanking and celebrating, children will be able to begin to grasp the abstractions of "unity" and "belonging". Understanding these concepts and becoming familiar with the main events in Jesus' life helps children to participate meaningfully in the celebration of the Eucharist.

2. Parents

Parents are vital in helping children identify feelings of belonging and unity through the living of everyday family life. Parents are also compelling models of a living faith. In their unique role parents create for the child experiences which are essential to the child's understanding (ref. NCD 122).

3. Instruction

Catechetical instruction should always address the child at his/her age level and provide what is required for First Communion of a young child, namely:

- a) an ability to understand that Eucharist is different from ordinary bread and wine,
- b) a desire to receive Jesus in communion,
- c) and an understanding of faith appropriate to age

Such instruction could also include prayers and the development of a lively affection for the reception of the sacrament.

4. Discernment of Readiness

The primary decision regarding when a particular child is ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Eucharist rests with the parents and child. The child is initiated into the ongoing sacramental life of the whole church and therefore, if adequate preparation has taken place, the parish priest and catechist are slow to pre-empt the parental right to judge an individual's readiness.

PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Liturgical Celebration of the Sacrament

Parents, in dialogue with the pastor and Coordinator/DRE have the option of having their children receive Eucharist:

- a) as one of a group of first communicants in a solemn celebration;
- b) as a member of a small group with their families at a regular parish Sunday mass; or
- c) as an individual with his/her family on a day agreeable to priest and parents.

Families who choose an individual or small family group setting may also participate in the parish solemn celebration.

2. Planning Liturgies

Readings are chosen from an accepted translation with children in mind and in accord with the liturgical season.

The homily can be addressed primarily, although not exclusively, to the children present. It is best for the presider to give the homily, but it can be given by another qualified person if there is a need (ref. CIC, Canon 766).

The Eucharistic prayer should be selected from those approved specifically for use with children.

Music is chosen with the spirit of children in mind and selected from works that are both liturgically appropriate and familiar to the children.

Gifts should normally include only bread and wine, but can occasionally include other specific items that are in keeping with the spirit of gift and the purpose of the liturgical celebration.

Planning should actively include the children and their families along with the catechist and presider. Banners, decorations and booklets may be used to enhance the liturgy.

The liturgy should represent the community present, enrich their spiritual lives and provide an opportunity for all to worship.

3. Communion

Catechesis for the reception of Communion is to be done carefully, with reverence for the teaching of the Church about what we are doing and what we are receiving. The option of receiving communion in the hand or on the tongue belongs to the communicant. The cleric,

extraordinary minister of communion, the catechist or parent does not make the decision as to the manner of reception of communion. It is the communicant's right to make the choice. (NCCB Liturgy Newsletter, August 1977).

4. Communion Under Both Species

"The meaning of communion is signified as clearly as possible when it is given under both kinds. In this form the meal-aspect of the Eucharist is more clearly manifested, and Christ's intention that the new and eternal Covenant should be ratified in his Blood is better expressed. Also the connection between the eucharistic meal and the heavenly banquet in the Father's kingdom becomes easier to see." (GIRM 240)

The full sign of Eucharistic sharing at communion is eating and drinking just as Christ did with his disciples at the Last Supper. The bread and cup are integral to the fullest signification of our celebration.

Catechists must become familiar with the dual sign of eating and drinking and use both consistently in the lessons on the Eucharist. Children are to have an understanding that they will eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine.

It must always be remembered that the fullness of Christ is received in either element if only one is distributed; that is, we receive the whole Christ in only one species. However, the ideal is to eat and drink to have the fullness of the sign from the time one receives his/her First Communion.

Parents need to be catechized, too. Pastors are encouraged to offer the cup regularly on Sundays. Thus, the reception of communion under both species will be normative for all (GIRM 241)

Source Footnotes:

NCD refers to the National Catechetical Directory, Sharing the Light of Faith. Washington, DC:United States Catholic Conference, Department of Education, 1979

CCC refers to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Liguori, MO:Liguori Publications, 1994/Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

GIRM refers to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* as found in The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource (Third Edition). Chicago, IL:Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

NCCB Liturgy Newsletter refers to McManus, Frederick R. (ed.) Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal: Statements of the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy. Washington, DC:United States Catholic Conference, Secretariat of the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, 1987

Order of Sacrament of Reconciliation from The Rites of the Catholic Church, Volume One. NY:Pueblo Publishing Company, 1990, pages 517-630.

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