



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF WORSHIP

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ON THE CELEBRATION OF SACRAMENTS DURING LENT

As many parishes begin to put together their 2016/2017 Parish Calendars, given a later Easter date (April 16) and therefore a late Pentecost (June 4), many parishes have been asking whether Masses in which children receive their First Communion can be scheduled during Lent.

While the great preference is that they NOT be scheduled during Lent, there are no explicit prohibitions against this practice within the expressed liturgical law of the Church. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has stated, "It is ... appropriate that children receive their First Communion on one or another of the Sundays of Easter."ⁱ This does not prohibit the reception of First Communion at other times during the year, but it does indicate a customary preference. Additionally, the Church mandates that the faithful are obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once per year, during the Easter season if not at another time during the year,ⁱⁱ further indicating a customary association between the reception of Holy Communion and the celebration of the Easter mysteries.

The season of Lent has a distinctly penitential and baptismal character.ⁱⁱⁱ As explained in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, it is a period of purification and enlightenment as it coincides with the immediate preparations for the Church's celebrations of sacraments of initiation.^{iv} For baptized children preparing to receive their first Holy Communion, Lent is an appropriate time for them to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance for the first time in preparation for the first reception of Holy Communion during the Easter season.

The celebration and reception of the Most Holy Eucharist is the goal of the Catholic initiation sequence^v. Adults entering the Church receive all three sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil, during which the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is most fully symbolized. For our young Catholic children who have already been baptized, the paschal character of their first Holy Communion should be maximized, in part, by a celebration within the Easter season. Thus they will come to realize in a manner appropriate to their age the connection between Holy Communion and the mystery of faith we proclaim at the Eucharist: "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory."

At the chancery, we are not ignorant of the increasing demands on parish calendars that may require you to move First Communion Masses to March or early April of 2017; however, we

would ask that you give due consideration to: 1) promoting an ever greater spiritual observance of Lent in its authentic character among your people; and 2) giving priority in the parish calendar to these important sacramental celebrations taking place during the Easter season.

If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us any time.

With best regards,

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ⁱ "Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts," 20 Feb 1988, no. 103.

ⁱⁱ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 920, §§1-2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 109.

^{iv} *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 138.

^v Congregation for Divine Worship, *Christian Initiation* General Introduction, no. 2.