

Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana
Guidelines for the Reception of First Reconciliation (Youth)

Preamble

Jesus *“called the children to himself and said, ‘Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’”* (Luke 18:16, NABRE)

This document has as its goal communion among the baptized. The recommended actions are to create and strengthen communion with the believing Church. In a world of hurt, injury due to sin and evil, it presents Reconciliation as an avenue for enjoying Christ’s healing presence. In order to help our children draw ever closer to Christ, and in keeping with the spirit of the universal teaching of the Church, the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has established the following guidelines so that baptized children who have reached the use of reason (7 years old) may be prepared as early as possible to celebrate sacramental confession, prior to their reception of First Eucharist. (CIC 914)

Introduction

Jesus *“breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.’”* (John 20:22-23, NABRE)

Sacramental catechesis should be comprehensive and systematic, integrating knowledge of the faith with the living faith. Catechesis should be Trinitarian in nature, appropriate to the age level, maturity, and circumstances of those being catechized, while also presenting the Christian life as a lifelong journey to the Father in the Son and through the Holy Spirit. (NDC, 35, B)

Preparation for this sacrament of healing should involve the parents; reinforcing the primary role they have in teaching and forming their children. These guidelines are not a program in and of themselves, but they are recommendations that are meant to establish uniformity to the individual catechetical programs throughout the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana.

These guidelines for the reception of First Reconciliation are for validly baptized young people, who have reached the age of reason (7 years old), and who are being prepared outside the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

Norms

Child

“...parents and the parish catechetical leader, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Penance and Reconciliation.” (NDC, 35, B, 2)

1. The child who is a candidate for the sacrament will be baptized and present proof of baptism.

2. The child, at a minimum, will have celebrated their seventh birthday. (*CIC* 11)
3. The child will complete at least one (school) year of formal catechesis either in a parish religious education program, Catholic home school, or parish school prior to the time of the preparation of the sacrament.
4. “Readiness for reception of this sacrament includes:
 - a. Knowledge of the person of Jesus and the Gospel message of forgiveness;
 - b. Knowledge of sin and its effect; and
 - c. Understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness, and conversion [i.e. the child has a sense that they are personally responsible for doing a wrong action].” (*NDC* 35, B, 2)
5. The child will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their First Eucharist. (*NDC* 35, B, 2)
6. The child should participate at Mass each Sunday and Holy Day and participate in the Mass by being attentive to the action of the Mass and by engaging in responding with the assembly.
7. The child will attend catechetical instruction as set forth in these guidelines and as implemented by their parish.

Parents

“The Christian family is ordinarily the first experience of the Christian community and the primary environment for growth in faith. Because it is ‘the Church of the home,’ the family provides a unique *locus* [setting] for catechesis. It is a place in which the word of God is received and from which it is extended. Within the Christian family, parents are the primary educators in the faith and ‘the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.’” (*NDC* 29, D)

1. Parents are welcome to participate in the sacramental life of the Church insofar as they are able.
2. Parents (or guardians) accompany their children to Mass each Sunday and Holy Day and encourage them to participate in the Mass.
3. Parents understand the importance of helping to instruct their children in accordance with these guidelines and in cooperation with their pastor and parish catechetical leader.
4. Parents are expected to participate in the sacramental formation offered for them as set forth in these guidelines and provided by their parish.

Pastor

“Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority.” (*CIC* 890)

1. It is expected that the pastor and the parish catechetical leader work together in developing and implementing a comprehensive program for the parish.

2. A priestly presence is valued throughout the formation. It is particularly encouraged that the priest be involved in catechesis in the following areas:
 - a. The meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation; and
 - b. Understanding how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation.
3. The priest has the right to choose to hear confessions both face to face and anonymously at the same time or he may elect to hear only anonymously, not face to face since each are of equal effectiveness. (The penitent must have the option of anonymous confession at any published parish weekly confession time.)

Parish Catechetical Leader

“Only fully initiated, practicing Catholics who fully adhere to the Church’s teaching in faith and morals and who are models of Christian virtue and courageous witnesses to the Catholic faith should be designated as parish catechetical leaders. Preparation for service as a parish catechetical leader should include advanced studies in Theology, Scripture, Liturgy, catechesis and catechetical methodology, educational psychology and theory, and administration, as well as practical catechetical experience with adults, youth, and children.” (NDC 54, B, 5)

1. The parish catechetical leader shall work together with the pastor in developing and implementing a comprehensive program for the parish.
2. The parish catechetical leader will be present throughout formation so that they are recognizable to the children and parents as someone who is integral in their formation for the sacraments.
3. The parish catechetical leader collaborates with other parish staff and programs responsible for the formation of children and the celebration of liturgy.
4. The parish catechetical leader recruits, forms, and trains those who serve in the ministry of catechist.

Catechist

“The apostolic work of the catechist springs from the Sacrament of Baptism through which all believers come to share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and the evangelizing mission of the Church...Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training.” (NDC 54, B, 8)

1. Catechists will participate in the sacramental life of the Church, and attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.
2. Catechists will present the sacraments of the Church in a positive and encouraging manner, leading the children to appreciate the sacramental life for themselves.
3. Catechists will teach the basic doctrines of the sacraments in a sound and age-appropriate manner.
4. A catechist’s work takes its tone and direction from the parish catechetical leader and the pastor. The catechist will need to be aware of the parents’ special interest in

helping to prepare the children to celebrate the sacrament and in forming them in the faith.

Formation

“In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist. Since the celebration of First Confession precedes First Communion catechesis for the Sacrament precedes First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation.” (NDC 36, B, 2)

1. Catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of the child.
2. The parish “should present catechesis for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that helps children to:
 - Acknowledge God’s unconditional love for us;
 - Turn to Christ and the Church for sacramental forgiveness and reconciliation;
 - Recognize the presence of good and evil and personal capacity for both;
 - Recognize their need for forgiveness, not only from parents and others close to them, but from God [All sin weakens relationship with God, others, and the Church. Reconciliation is a healing for individuals as members of the Church, and the Church benefits from that healing. In this sense, sin is not private because its effects touch others.];
 - Explore the meaning of the symbols, gestures, prayers, and scriptures of the Rite of Reconciliation;
 - Understand how to celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation; and
 - Understand sacramental confession is a means offered children of the Church to obtain pardon for the sins and Reconcile our friendship with God.” (NDC 36, B, 2)
3. Parent sessions are an integral part of preparation for each sacrament.
4. Appropriate catechesis for parents should be provided as part of the preparation process for the reception of the sacrament. Sufficient catechesis should be provided to parents to cover the content of the sacrament. This catechesis should include: an understanding of the unconditional love of God our creator, the nature of grace, sin and forgiveness, the call to conversion, and the Rite of Penance and Reconciliation.
5. The pastor, along with the parents and catechist(s) of the child, are to determine when the child is ready to celebrate this sacrament.
6. The Catholic school, religious education, and home-schooled child must participate in a parish sacramental preparation program. The program may include parent meetings, a rehearsal, a daytime retreat, and catechetical instruction.
7. All catechetical materials and textbooks must be approved by the USCCB. These materials are found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Mystagogy

“Since the conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is ongoing and the children have a right to a fuller catechesis each year.” (NDC

36, B, 2)

1. Children are expected to continue their faith formation by participation in parish religious education programs, Catholic home schools, or Catholic schools after First Reconciliation.
2. Regular celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and participation at Sunday Mass are necessary to grow ever more deeply in the mysteries of God's love and mercy within a communal environment.

Pastoral Notes

1. The USCCB statement issued in 1995 that is “entitled *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* stresses the need to include persons with disabilities in the celebration of all sacraments and provides general catechetical guidelines for celebrating the sacraments with persons with a variety of disabilities.” (NDC, 35, C)
2. If someone else is acting in place of the parents such as non-custodial parents, grandparents, or godparents the same norms for parents apply. These persons must have the written consent of the custodial parent.
3. If the Catholic School principal is responsible for preparation for First Reconciliation, the norms for the parish catechetical leader apply.
4. If the Catholic School teacher is responsible for preparation for First Reconciliation, the norms for the catechist apply.
5. Sacramental preparation should consider the language and ethnic culture of the child's family.
6. Sacramental preparation and celebration should consider the involvement of the entire parish community.
7. At the pastor's discretion, sacramental preparation may occur at another parish or Catholic school.
8. Since it may be jarring for a child to have the second confession format bear no resemblance to the first confession, parishes are encouraged to fashion a better experience for the children that reflects the way in which the sacrament is normally celebrated in the parish.
9. Plans for child safety should be elaborated locally.
10. These *Guidelines for the Reception of First Reconciliation (Youth)* are effective August 1, 2013.

References Cited

CIC – *Code of Canon Law*

NDC – *National Directory for Catechesis*

NABRE – *New American Bible, Revised Edition*