

POLICY ON FIRST PENANCE

(A policy concerning the preparation of Catholic children of catechetical age for the sacrament of Penance.)

POLICY:

Each parish of the Diocese of Spokane must provide children of catechetical age with preparation for the sacrament of Penance so that they might fruitfully approach this sacrament at the proper time as instructed by the law of the Church (see Canons 988 - 989) and the following guidelines:

GUIDELINES FOR FIRST PENANCE

1. It is first of all the responsibility of parents to see to the preparation and presentation of their children for the sacrament of penance. Preparation for this sacrament is a joint effort of the parents with their children together with their pastor, catechists and the entire parish.
2. The decision concerning the readiness of the child to prepare for and celebrate the sacrament of penance is the responsibility of the parents. Readiness to celebrate this sacrament involves a desire to receive the sacrament, an understanding of the sacrament and its implications for one's life compatible with the child's age and a commitment by the parents and the child to prepare for the celebration of the sacrament.
3. Preparation classes for the first celebration of Penance are a separate formational experience from preparation for First Communion and to be offered as such. The sacramental formation classes are to be distinct from a particular grade of school or of the religious education program. The children may be grouped according to age levels. Children and parents from the parochial school and from the religious education program should participate in classes together. These classes are supplementary to the preparation done at home. Under extraordinary circumstances, and with the pastor's approval, parents may do all the preparation at home. Preparation must always be faithful to the doctrine, tradition and discipline of the universal Church.
4. Without prejudice to the responsibility of the parents to determine the readiness of their child to prepare for the sacraments (Guidelines 1 and 2), the preparation program for First Penance is to be offered apart from and prior to the program for First Communion.

RECEPTION OF PENANCE BY CHILDREN CANONICAL REFERENCES

Canon 988, #1: A member of the Christian faithful is obligated to confess in kind and number all serious sins committed after baptism and not yet directly remitted through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which one is conscious after diligent examination of conscience.

Canon 988, #2: It is to be recommended to the Christian faithful that venial sins also be confessed.

Canon 989: After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.

(Policy adopted by Bishop William Skylstad October 9, 1992)