

**Guidelines**  
**for the**  
**Preparation and Celebration**  
**of the**  
**Sacrament of Penance**  
**for the**  
**Diocese of Fort Worth**

# The Sacrament of Penance

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<p style="text-align:center"><b>GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE</b></p>
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## **I. Doctrinal Overview**

Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that the sacrament of Penance has undergone over the centuries, the sacrament has always contained two equally essential elements: the process of conversion for the penitent and the process of forgiveness and homecoming through the intervention of the Church. (cf. CCC 1448) These two realities of spiritual life are celebrated in the Sacrament of Penance.

*“What is this sacrament called?”*

*It is called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father (cf. Mk 1:15; Lk 15:18) from whom one has strayed by sin.*

*It is called the sacrament of Penance, since it consecrates the Christian sinner’s personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction. (CCC 1423)*

*It is called the sacrament of confession, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a “confession” - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.*

*It is called the sacrament of forgiveness, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent ‘pardon and peace’ [Order of Penance 46: formula of absolution].*

*It is called the sacrament of Reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: ‘Be reconciled to God’ [2 Cor. 5:20]. He who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call: ‘Go; first be reconciled to your brother’ [Mt. 5:24].”  
(CCC 1424)*

*These Guidelines will refer to the sacrament as the sacrament of Penance in order to be in agreement with the terminology used in the 1991 publication, “The Rites of the Catholic Church,” approved for use in the dioceses of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See.*

## **A. HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**

1. The First 250 Years
  - a. Baptism forgives former sin.
  - b. Little indication of public confession after Baptism.
  - c. In some areas, no absolution for serious sins.
  - d. Hope for forgiveness rests with the judgment of God.
2. From the Year 300 On
  - a. Penance becomes public and communal
  - b. Penance is once in a life time
  - c. Penance is necessary for these three sins:
    - giving up the faith;
    - committing murder;
    - breaking the marriage vow.
3. From the Fourth to Tenth Century
  - a. Private penance is developed by Irish monks
  - b. Penances are contained in Penitential Books
  - c. Penance can be given many times in life
  - d. Should penance be private or public?
4. Tenth Century to the Second Vatican Council
  - a. In 1200, Pope Gregory initiates reforms. Penance is to be known as confession.
  - b. In 1215 a Council at Lateran decrees that confession from now on is to be private.
  - c. The sacrament must be received once a year if one has committed grave sin.
  - d. There are different ways of confessing sins that are valid:\*
    - 1) a communal penance service
    - 2) individual celebration of the sacrament

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\*The Ritual gives a third form of the sacrament called ‘The Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution’; this form is allowed under certain, unusual situations. The bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist.

## **B. THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE, CORRELATION WITH *THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FIRST PENANCE PREPARATION**

### **1. Penance and reconciliation are an integral part of the sacramental life of the Church.**

- In Baptism one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins.
- The practice of penance strengthens Christians as they struggle against the frailty and weakness of human nature and the inclination to sin.
- The Eucharist is the source and nourishment of daily conversion and a remedy from daily faults.
- The Anointing of the Sick provides forgiveness of sins.
- Just as the sacraments of initiation form a unity, so too Penance, Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum are the sacraments that complete the earthly pilgrimage.

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*CCC 1427: Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.’ (Mk. 1:15) In the Church’s preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism (Cf. Acts 2:38) that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.*

*CCC 1426: Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us ‘holy and without blemish,’ just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is ‘holy and without blemish.’ [Eph 1:4; Eph 5:27.] Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. [Cf. Council of Trent (1546): DS 1515.] This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us. [Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1545; LG 40.]*

*CCC 1436: Eucharist and Penance. Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of*

*Christ, which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. 'It is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins.' [Council of Trent (1551): DS 1638.]*

**CCC 1532:** *The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects: the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church; the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age; the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance; the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul; the preparation for passing over to eternal life.*

**CCC 1524:** *In addition to the Anointing of the Sick, the Church offers those who are about to leave this life the Eucharist as viaticum. Communion in the body and blood of Christ, received at this moment of 'passing over' to the Father, has a particular significance and importance. It is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection, according to the words of the Lord: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.' [Jn. 6:54] The sacrament of Christ once dead and now risen, the Eucharist is here the sacrament of passing over from death to life, from this world to the Father. [Cf. Jn 13:1.]*

### **Implications:**

In the sacrament of Penance, the Church calls its members to continuous renewal of their love of God and of all their brothers and sisters. Penance impacts everything the Church does. While preparing for this sacrament penitents should be reminded that conversion is accomplished in daily life and forgiveness of sins is accomplished by living sacramentally. Care should be taken to balance the sanctifying aspects of all the sacraments. Penitents should be taught that Eucharist, which is a memorial of our Lord's death and resurrection, is the root sacrament of reconciliation and conversion. The separate nature of the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance should be respected while noting their interrelationship. The faithful should trust the reconciliation that is inherent in the fruitful celebration of the Eucharist.

## **2. Christ continuously calls all to conversion.**

- Conversion is first of all a work of the greatness of God's love through the Holy Spirit
- Conversion is both personal and social.
- Conversion is of the heart and implies a change in attitude and behavior.
- Conversion and repentance are accomplished in daily life.

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

**CCC 1428:** *Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, 'clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.'* [LG 8 # 3.] *This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a 'contrite heart,' drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.* [Ps 51:17 ; cf. Jn 6:44 ; Jn 12:32 ; 1 Jn 4:10 .]

**CCC 1434:** *The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, [Cf. Tob 12:8 ; Mt 6:1-18 .] which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity 'which covers a multitude of sins.'* [1 Pet 4:8 ; Cf. Jas 5:20 .]

**CCC 1435:** *Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, [Cf. Am 5:24 ; Isa 1:17 .] 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.* [Cf. Lk 9:23 .]

**CCC 1438:** *The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. [Cf. SC 109-110; CIC, Cann. 1249-1253; CCEO, Cann. 880-883.] These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).*

### **Implications:**

Through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, Penance and renewal offer a continual challenge to the community of faith. Penance and renewal are the faith community's response to God's great gift of love revealed through Jesus. Through Christ's paschal mystery the Holy Spirit makes the Church aware that it is holy and yet always in need of purification. The Church engages in the roles of both teacher and disciple. The task of all Christians is to learn to say "yes" ever more fully to God and to transform their lives in accordance with the personal and social values of the Gospel.

### **3. Sin is an offense against God and damages relationship with the Church and the world.**

- Only God forgives sin.
- The sacrament of Penance entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church.
- The priest, on behalf of Christ, reconciles the sinner to God and the Church.
- Confession to a priest is essential to the sacrament of Penance; enumeration of sins by name and number is required only in the case of mortal sin.
- Confession of everyday faults is recommended by the Church.

#### Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

**CCC 1441:** *Only God forgives sins .(Cf. Mk. 2:7.) Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, 'The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins' and exercises this divine power: 'Your sins are forgiven.' ( Mk. 2:5, 10; Lk 7:48.) Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name. (Cf. Jn 20:21-23.)*

**CCC 1440:** *Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (Cf. LG 11).*

**CCC 1456:** *Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly." (Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. Ex 20:17; Mt 5:28)*

**CCC 1457:** *According to the Church's command, "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" (Cf. CIC, can 989; Council of Trent (1551): DS 1683; DS 1708). Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession (Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1647; 1661; CIC, can 916; CCEO, can. 711). Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time (Cf. CIC, can. 914).*

**CCC 1458:** *Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.[Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988 # 2.] Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed*



*by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful: [Cf. Lk 6:36.] Whoever confesses his sins . . . is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear 'man' - this is what God has made; when you hear 'sinner' - this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made .... When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light. [St. Augustine, In Jo. ev. 12, 13: PL 35, 1491.]*

#### **Implications:**

The sacrament of Penance renews and strengthens charity among the members of the Body of Christ. Since the sacrament strengthens awareness of the greatness of God's love and encourages the practice of charity, it is both a fitting preparation for First Holy Communion and a renewal of the soul's baptismal state. In the case of mortal sin, individual confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church. Parents and catechists entrusted with the faith formation of children should use ongoing age appropriate catechesis in explaining the importance of this sacrament and its relationship to sin.

#### **4. Penance is the sacrament of forgiveness**

- It is for all those who have fallen into sin after Baptism.
- Contrition is a basic component of celebrating the sacrament.
- Confession of sins facilitates reconciliation.
- Justice requires satisfaction/penance for sins
- The priest is a sign of God's merciful love for the sinner
- The sacrament of Penance brings about a true restoration of the dignity and blessings of a child and friend of God.

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

**CCC 1446:** *Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church; above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck, which is the loss of grace" (Tertullian, De Paenit. 4, 2: PL 1, 1343; cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1542).*

**CCC 1451:** *Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again" (Council of Trent (1551): DS 1676).*

**CCC 1468:** *"The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship" (Cf. Roman Catechism, II, V, 18). Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation" (Council of Trent (1551): DS 1674). Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God (Cf. Lk 15:32).*

**CCC 1460:** *The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, 'provided we suffer with him.' [Rom 8:17; Rom 3:25; 1Jn 2:1-2; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1690.] The satisfaction that we make for our sins, however, is not so much ours as though it were not done through Jesus Christ. We who can do nothing ourselves, as if just by ourselves, can do all things with the cooperation of 'him who strengthens' us. Thus man has nothing of which to boast, but all our boasting is in Christ . . . in whom we make satisfaction by bringing forth 'fruits that befit repentance.' These fruits have their efficacy from him, by him they are offered to the Father, and through him they are accepted by the Father. [Council of Trent (1551): DS 1691; cf. Phil 4:13; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Gal 6:14; Lk 3:8.]"*

**CCC 1465:** *When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.*

### **Implications:**

The sacrament of Penance should always be taught and celebrated in such a way that it will be perceived not as a burden, but as a welcomed opportunity. The sacrament is God's gift of healing when people, both individually and socially, have ruptured or seriously hurt their relationship with God and the community. Reconciliation presupposes conversion and a determination to avoid that sin,

either personal or social, for which one is forgiven. Because it pleases God to reconcile others to himself through the Church, the penitent confesses to a priest who is representative of the Church. As a sign of conversion, the penitent accepts the penance given by the priest.

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## **II. Pastoral and Catechetical Principles**

### **A. GENERAL PASTORAL AND CATECHETICAL PRINCIPLES**

#### **Effective sacramental preparation:**

1. Raises as few obstacles as possible to the reception of the sacraments. It seeks to balance the value of adequate preparation and proper disposition, with the recognition of sacraments as free gifts from God.
2. Includes candidates, their families, and the larger parish community.
3. Adapts to the needs, ages and circumstances of the candidates.
4. Focuses on the meaning of the sacrament, including scripture, historical development, and the sacramental rite itself.
5. Fosters discipleship and mission.
6. Promotes lifelong learning and participation in the sacramental life.

### **B. PRINCIPLES FOR THE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**

1. The Church's desire is for the candidate to celebrate the sacrament of Penance as early as possible after reaching the age of discretion. Normally this should be in the second grade (cf. CIC, can. 204; CCC 1457).
2. Sacramental catechesis for Penance enables the child to celebrate the sacrament and to understand why the sacrament is beneficial.
3. Early appreciation for Penance begins in the life of the family. Parents play a primary role of support and instruction through family experiences, parental attitudes and participation in the sacrament of Penance.
4. Formal catechesis for Penance is provided by parishes for adults, as well as for children and their parents. The catechesis includes:
  - the meaning of sin,
  - conscience formation,
  - the meaning of the sacrament and the various forms of celebrating the sacrament,
  - and, a recognition of the love and mercy of God and His people which is extended through the sacrament (cf. CCC 1074, 1075, 1657).
5. Catechesis for Penance is an ongoing process.

6. Catechists and parents should be aware of the principles and stages of psychological and moral development.
7. By being sensitive to and analyzing the local multi-cultural and religious situations, each parish will discover the needs proper to its situation and will realistically foster appropriate catechesis.

Taking into account the universal criteria as stated in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the sacramental catechetical preparation process and materials should respond to the diversity present in the parish community:

- learning styles, interests, experiences, and abilities of the candidates and their families (cf. *GDC* 148, 149, 170),
  - language, cultures, and cultural religious practices (cf. *GDC* 146, 232),
  - variety of family structures,
  - candidates who are physically, educationally, and/or psychologically challenged (cf. *GDC* 189),
  - the stage of the candidates' psychological and moral development.
8. "The sacraments are 'of the Church' in the double sense that they are 'by her' and 'for her.'" (*CCC* 1118) Therefore, the actual and immediate preparation for the sacramental celebration of First Penance must be within the context of the parish sacramental program (cf. *CCC* 2179, 2226). Knowledge about the sacrament can be obtained in various contexts.
  9. Through the RCIA process catechumens and candidates will be prepared for the time when they will first celebrate the sacrament of Penance. The preparation for and celebration of the sacrament of Penance will be made available to all uncatechized Catholics or those baptized in another faith tradition before they are brought into full communion with the Church. (cf. *RCIA* sacramental guidelines)

### **III. Policies**

#### **A. THE CANDIDATE**

1. It is essential to have received Baptism in order to celebrate the sacrament of Penance. (*cf. CIC, can. 204, 988*)
2. A level of moral development has been reached whereby the individual is able to recognize that actions or attitudes can harm relationships and that these damaged relationships necessitate the celebration of reconciliation.
3. Any parishioner, who has reached the age of discretion, normally seven years of age, is eligible and should be invited to participate in sacramental catechesis for Penance.
4. The choice of confessors is to be left to the discretion of the individual penitent.

#### **B. THE PARISH**

1. The parish is responsible for developing and implementing a preparation process for all parishioners desiring to receive the sacrament of Penance.
2. The parish is responsible for providing opportunities to involve all its members in the sacramental preparation process, including support and prayer for the candidates.
3. The written permission of the candidate's pastor is required before the candidate prepares for First Penance in another parish.
4. When circumstances allow, a sacrament preparation program that is separate from a religious education/school program is recommended.
5. It is the teaching of the Church that the sacrament of Penance continues Baptism's work of reconciliation and forgiveness (*cf. CIC, can. 989; CCC 2042*). Therefore, it is appropriate that the candidate celebrate the sacrament of Penance as early as possible after reaching the age of discretion, which is about the seventh year of age. (*cf. CIC, can. 914; CCC 1457*)
6. Once candidates have reached the age of discretion and have either individually requested or have been presented by their parents/ legal guardians for the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, sacramental catechesis and the celebration of each of these sacraments shall occur within a year. (For candidates in the RCIA, please refer to the Diocesan RCIA Guidelines.)
7. Catechists who provide the formation of candidates and parents are to be trained in contemporary methodology, moral development, and theology of the sacrament. (*cf. GDC 234, 235*)

8. Catechesis concerning the sacrament of Penance must be provided for the parents so they can better help their children understand and celebrate the sacrament.
9. Parents have not only the right but also the responsibility to be intimately involved in preparing their children for First Penance. Therefore, they should participate in the parish adult pre-sacramental catechesis. (*cf. CCC 2223, 2225*)
10. Content for parent pre-sacramental catechesis meetings is rooted in the Paschal Mystery and should include the following:
  - a. History and Development of the Sacrament
  - b. Forgiveness in Scripture
  - c. Sin and Morality: How to Make Good Choices
  - d. Reconciliation in Daily Life
  - e. How to Celebrate the Rite
  - f. Importance of Participation in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy
11. Catechesis for the sacrament of Penance is to precede First Holy Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation.
12. Pastoral care should be taken to develop an understanding in the faithful, that in subsequent celebrations of the sacrament, one does not need to celebrate the sacrament of Penance before receiving communion, except in the case of serious sin.
13. Before sacramental preparation for First Communion begins, candidates must be *prepared for, encouraged to celebrate* the sacrament of Penance, and be given the *opportunity* to do so. (*cf. CIC, cann. 914, 988, 989; CCC 1457*)
14. Parish leadership has the responsibility to provide suitable opportunities for family involvement and celebration of the sacrament of Penance. Formation on the sacrament of Penance must be ongoing throughout all levels of faith formation in the parish

#### **IV. Norms For Readiness**

1. It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents, as well as of the pastor, to see that children who have reached the use of reason have celebrated the sacrament of Penance before sacramental preparation for First Communion begins. (cf. *CIC*, can. 914)
2. The norms for a candidate's readiness are:
  - a. The candidate demonstrates a desire to celebrate the sacrament of Penance.
  - b. The candidate understands the roles of the various participants (penitent, priest, and community) in the Rite of Reconciliation, knows how to celebrate the Rite and can follow the procedure for doing so.
  - c. The candidate demonstrates an age-appropriate understanding of the sacrament.
  - d. The candidate is participating in the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy on a regular basis; catechesis concerning the participation at Sunday Eucharist may be necessary and should be welcoming and inviting.



## V. The Rite of Penance

### A. GENERAL LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Liturgical celebrations, especially those involving first reception of sacraments, should be undertaken with special care and preparation:
  - a. All the sacraments engage the whole community of faith, even though particular sacraments may be celebrated individually.
  - b. The symbols --- words, gestures, objects, movements, etc. --- of the sacraments should always be lavish.
  - c. Candidates should be involved in the celebration as actively as possible.
2. Liturgical celebrations catechize through the experience.
3. The way sacraments are celebrated should offer welcome and hospitality to all, including those who are not members of the faith community.

### B. LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CELEBRATING THE RITE OF PENANCE

1. At any penance celebration the penitent must always have the choice of confessing anonymously or face-to-face.
2. The Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents (Rite I)
  - a. Reception of the penitent
  - b. Greeting
  - c. Sign of the Cross
  - d. Invitation to trust in God
  - e. Reading of the Word of God (optional)
  - f. Confession of sins and acceptance of satisfaction

This should be done in conversational, comfortable manner.  
The penance may be directly related to sins confessed or prayer may also be appropriate.
  - g. Prayer of the penitent (Act of Contrition)
  - h. Absolution
  - i. Proclamation of praise of God and dismissal
3. The Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution (Rite II)

This is the form of the sacrament experienced by many Catholics during recent years. In actual practice, however, the rite has often not been successful in

leading the penitent through all the various stages of the sacrament. It often functions as a communal preparation for the individual celebration, since because of the large crowds it is not always opportune to ask people to wait for the communal celebration of thanksgiving and dismissal.

The basic outline is:

- a. Opening song
- b. Celebrant greets people
- c. Opening prayer
- d. Sacred Scripture
- e. Homily
- f. General examination of conscience and a confession of sorrow (the Confiteor or some other similar prayer) by the community
- g. Individual confession and absolution
- h. Personal or communal penance, as appropriate
- i. Communal thanksgiving and dismissal

The use of Scripture is sometimes developed into a full liturgy of the Word using three Scripture passages with responsorial Psalm and Gospel verse. However, this full celebration may place a burden on people and clergy when there are large numbers of penitents. A single, well-chosen passage of Sacred Scripture (with preference given to the Gospels) followed by a homily can be a sufficient preparation with personal examination of conscience. This is not to suggest that additional scripture readings may not sometimes be appropriate.

Care must be given as well, when possible, to include the final element of praise and thanksgiving. This has been managed well in some parishes by having groups of penitents gather at a given place after they have completed their penance; there they may pray in thanksgiving together and be dismissed in small groups during the course of the evening.

#### 4. The Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution (Rite III)

[The diocesan bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist. (*cf. CIC, can 961; CCC 1483*)

### C. COMMENTARY ON IMPORTANT ELEMENTS

1. *The Communal Celebration of the Sacrament.* At times, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent, parishes should offer the opportunity for the faithful to receive the sacrament of Penance in the context of a communal penance celebration. Such celebrations express fully that as Christians we approach God as a family, asking forgiveness of our brothers and sisters even as we ask forgiveness of our Father pledging our support of one another in our common effort to grow toward the Kingdom of God.

Such celebrations highlight the fact that the Sacrament of Penance is not merely a means of ‘getting rid of sins,’ it is a joyful celebration, a welcoming of God’s forgiveness.

2. *Listening to the Word of God.* Listening to the Word of God to experience the Divine call to each of us plays an indispensable role in the Sacrament of Penance. The Word of God reminds us of our calling to live a Christian life. We hear God’s Word primarily in its proclamation of the Church. We can also recognize God’s call in the experiences of daily life. The Word of God helps us open our hearts to the divine healing love.
3. *Confession.* Confession, or the actual recognition of sin, is not simply an enumeration of sins. It is an expression of our desire to live the life to which our Baptism calls us. When we confess our sins, we open ourselves to the grace of conversion. We try to rebuild or renew our relationship with God. We seek to become reconciled with our neighbor. We look to being renewed within ourselves.
4. *Role of the Priest.* In the sacrament of Penance, the priest is not a judge whose role is to condemn sinners. The priest is one who is called to preach the Gospel of forgiveness. He is to pray with and on behalf of sinners. Especially, he is to accept and understand the sinner. The priest leads the penitent to the healing presence of the merciful God.

#### **D. SELECTION OF MUSIC**

Music appropriate for the celebration of the sacrament should be drawn from the parish repertoire.