

Diocesan Norms
for
Sacraments
of
Initiation and Healing



The Catholic Diocese of Memphis

In Tennessee

Living and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Priests in the Diocese of Memphis
Catholic School Principals
Directors of Religious Education

FROM: Judy Gray
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And
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SUBJECT: Sacramental Preparation of Children

We have received some inquiries regarding preparation of children for the sacraments of First Eucharist, First Penance and Confirmation. The 1985 Diocesan Norms for Sacraments of Initiation and Healing, and the clarification/update dated November 11, 1993 are the present norms. Because there are items in these norms which are outdated, they are currently being reviewed, but until new norms are issued by Bishop Steib, the 1985 and 1993 norms are in effect in the Diocese of Memphis. For your convenience, the 1993 clarification/update follows.

1. The Sacrament of Confirmation should usually be celebrated in the 8th grade.
2. The Sacraments of First Eucharist and First Penance should usually be celebrated in the second grade.
3. The Sacraments of First Eucharist, and First Penance should be celebrated in the Parish in which the parents are registered or consider themselves to be parishioners.
4. Confirmation should be celebrated in the Parish in which the parents or individual is registered or consider themselves as a parishioner. When parishes celebrate this Sacrament as a member of a cluster, they should be confirmed in the cluster in which

their parish is a participant. The Sacrament of Confirmation should not be celebrated in schools, or outside the parochial setting, except in cases of illness. (Hospitals, or in exceptional circumstances, homes.)

5. Sacraments preparation should take place in the Catholic Schools for all students attending. Preparation for Confirmation takes place in the Eighth Grade. Preparation for First Eucharist and First Penance takes place in Second Grade.
6. For students who do not attend a Catholic School, Sacramental Preparation should take place at the Parish Level (PRE, etc.)
7. Both the Catholic Schools and Parish Religious Education Programs should provide at least two sessions for parents regarding the Sacraments to be celebrated.
8. Parishes should provide two sessions at which both Catholic School Students and Parish Religious Students will come together as a group for reflection, fellowship and discuss of practical matters.
9. Parishes would provide a Retreat Experience for all candidates for Confirmation, who are their responsibility, regardless of whether they attend Catholic or public schools. This will allow all members of one parish to come together before the celebration of the Sacraments in the Parish.

Diocesan Norms
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SACRAMENT of CONFIRMATION

In the first centuries of the Church, the rites of Christian initiation were well integrated. After the baptismal washing, there was an anointing of the body with chrism. The completion of the ceremony was the anointing of the forehead by the bishop, followed by the kiss of peace as the official welcome to the community. The neophytes were then taken by the bishop to the Christian assembly for their first participation in the Eucharistic Celebration. This sequence is still practiced in the Eastern Church today, even in the case of infants. This sequence was disrupted in the Western Church because conferring of Confirmation was reserved to the bishop. It was thus that Confirmation became pastorally separated from Baptism and Eucharist in the Western Church. The Second Vatican Council (of Constitution on Sacred Liturgy #71; Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults #34), re-emphasized the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation, affirming that:

1. The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist constitute the Rite of Christian Initiation
2. There is an organic unity among these sacraments
3. For adults and children in the RCIA process, the normal order of the Sacraments of Initiation is Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

The primary goal of the revised rite of Confirmation is to clarify the relation of Confirmation to initiation into a Eucharistic community. Confirmation furthers the process of initiation begun with the initial anointing of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. It is a sacrament of maturity not in the chronological sense but in the sense of spiritual fullness, since through Confirmation one is fully initiated into the Christian community.

The primary effects of Confirmation are the completion of Baptism and the sealing of the covenant of God with the gift of his Spirit to witness Christ to the ends of the earth. The Rite of Confirmation emphasizes and dramatizes that we are marked by God as his daughters and son and now have a continuing claim to his Spirit who continues in us the process of conversion.

Having celebrated Baptism and Confirmation, the candidates enter fully into the mystery of the Body of Christ at the Eucharist. All three sacraments inset the neophytes into the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising with Christ and nourish them by means of an ever-increasing relationship of love with the Father, through an ever-increasing responsiveness to the Spirit.

The theology of Confirmation is summarized in The Rite of Confirmation #1 and #2.

1. Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian Initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation. In this sacrament, they receive the Holy Spirit, who was sent upon the apostles by the Lord on Pentecost.
2. This giving of the Holy Spirit conforms believers more perfectly to Christ and strengthens them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his

body in faith and love. They are so marked with the character or seal of the Lord that the Sacrament of Confirmation cannot be repeated.

Ideally then, the sacraments of Christian initiation should be celebrated in this sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. For those baptized in infancy, the Roman Catholic Church continues the custom of postponing Confirmation for several years after First Eucharist.

I. CONFIRMATION OF ADULTS

Adults should be initiated into the Church through the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Baptized Catholics, not yet confirmed, should be suitably prepared for the celebration of the sacrament.

II. CONFIRMATION OF CHILDREN

A. Essential Roles

1. Candidates for Confirmation are living signs of the mission of the Church and witness to its continuing new life.
 - Candidates must express explicit desire for the Sacrament of Confirmation to the pastor or his delegate.
 - Candidates must participate in the total preparation for Confirmation provided by the parish.
2. Parents have a serious responsibility to be models of faith and Christian witness for their children.
 - Parents must give explicit permission for their child to pursue full initiation into the Church through Confirmation.
 - Parents are expected to participate in all parent sessions and to share in the total preparation of those to be confirmed.
 - Family prayer and the reading of Scripture should be encouraged during this period of preparation.
3. A catechist is a person of faith commissioned to share in the ministry of the Word.
 - The catechist should be an active member of the parish community who has been fully initiated into the Church.
 - The catechists should have the ability to share faith and to help the candidate further develop a prayer life.
4. The sponsor understands and accepts the responsibility to support and encourage the developing faith of the candidate.
 - Since the sponsor shares in the primary ministry of the parents and the candidate, familiarity with the candidate's family, including its relationship with the Church, is essential.
 - The sponsor participates in parent sessions, all preparatory rites and the liturgy of Confirmation.
 - The sponsor should be an active member of a parish community who has been fully initiated into the Church and is at least 16 years of age (Code of Canon Law, Canon 874-1.2).

- It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at Baptism (Code of Canon Law, Canon 893-1.2).
 - The sponsor, if unable to be present at the Confirmation liturgy, may be represented by a proxy.
 - Neither parent can be the sponsor (Code of Canon Law, Canon 874-1.5). If, however, a sponsor is not available, parents may present their child for Confirmation.
5. The bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation (cf Code of Canon Law, Canons 882-883).
 - The priest who baptizes an adult or a child of catechetical age or admits a baptized Christian into full communion with the Catholic Church may administer Confirmation.
 - Any priest may administer Confirmation to be baptized Christians in danger of death.
 6. The Christian assembly inspires and encourages the faith and conversion of the candidates through prayer and example and participation in the liturgical rites.

B. Process of Preparation

The process of preparation for Confirmation is modeled on the RCIA. Through the three major periods of invitation and decision-making, formation, and intensive spiritual growth, the process reflects the biblical concept of conversion as journey while respecting psychological insights into human development. Ideally, the Sacrament of Confirmation should be celebrated during the Easter Season. It is for this reason that the period of intensive spiritual preparation should begin within the season of Lent. The period of invitation and decision-making and the period of formation should occur prior to the Lenten season. If Confirmation is celebrated in Ordinary Time, the time frame can be adjusted accordingly. Efforts should be made to integrate the process for candidates enrolled in Catholic schools and those in Parish Religious Education Programs.

1. The first period in the preparation process is the time of invitation and decision-making.
 - Potential candidates and their parents are expected to attend a meeting which will include explanations of the following.
 - a. Requirements for entrance into the process
 - i. A candidate must be in the eighth grade or high school and express a desire for Confirmation.
 - ii. A candidate must provide a certificate of Baptism or evidence of profession of faith in the Catholic Church
 - iii. A candidate must have been enrolled in a Catholic school or a Parish Religious Education program for at least one year before beginning this process
 - iv. A candidate must be attending the Sunday liturgy on a regular basis
 - b. Essential roles in the process
 - c. Periods in the process of preparation
 - Within a stated period of time (to be determined by the parish), the potential candidates, with their parents, decide if they are ready to begin the immediate preparation for Confirmation.

2. The second period in the preparation process is the time of formation.
 - Parents and sponsors are expected to attend catechetical sessions.
 - Those desiring to begin the immediate preparation for Confirmation making a public declaration of this intention at a liturgy attended by candidates, their parents and sponsors.
 - The formation of those involved in the process includes the following:
 - a. Catechesis for candidates which enables them to:
 - Catechetical content essentially the same as for that of the candidates
 - Special emphasis on the psychological and spiritual development of adolescents.
 - b. Catechesis for candidates which enables them to:
 - Develop a personal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - Recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the individual lives of Christians
 - Understand the nature of the Church and the participation of all the baptized in its mission
 - Grow in the use and understanding of all Scriptures, especially the Gospels
 - Understand the sacramental life of the Church
 - Understand the Sacrament of Confirmation within the total process of Christian initiation.
 - c. Experiences in personal and liturgical prayer for the candidates with special emphasis on the Lord's Prayer.
 - d. Service projects undertaken by the candidates.
 - e. Interviews of the candidates by the pastor or his delegate to determine readiness based on:
 - Desire to belong to the Church community and to share its mission
 - Developing relationship with Jesus expressed through a desire for the Eucharist
 - Willingness to live a Christian life based on Gospel values
 - Understanding of Confirmation and a growing awareness of the work of the Spirit in one's life.
3. The third period in the preparation process, the time of intensive spiritual growth, should begin with the season of Lent. If Confirmation is celebrated in Ordinary Time, the time frame for the third period can be adjusted accordingly.
 - Those who have demonstrated a readiness for Confirmation are publicly accepted as candidates at a Sunday liturgy.
 - Catechesis having been completed, the candidates are invited to enter more deeply into the Paschal Mystery through:
 - o Daily personal prayer
 - o A retreat experience provided by the Parish
 - o Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
 - Candidates should continue to be faithful to service projects.
 - Candidates are encouraged to keep their baptismal name but may choose another.

C. Celebration of the Sacrament

The chief guide for planning and celebrating the liturgy of Confirmation will be the Rite of Confirmation itself.

1. The Sacrament of Confirmation should be celebrated with the Eucharistic Liturgy in the parish church (Code of Canon Law, Canon 881)
2. Planning of the liturgy should be done jointly by the parish liturgical committee and those involved in preparation of the candidates in accord with liturgical guidelines provided by the diocese.
3. The customs of candidates wearing stoles or using candles are not significant to the rite and so are not appropriate.
4. The Confirmation is recorded in the parish register and notification is sent to the Church of Baptism (Code of Canon Law, Canon 895.)

D. Post-Confirmation Period

Celebration of Confirmation is an initiation into life in the community, rather than the end of a process. The period immediately following Confirmation is an important time for those confirmed to become involved in the life of the parish. Opportunities are to be provided for development of each person's capacity to witness Christ in every endeavor of life, such as:

1. Participation in parish youth activities
2. Participation in parish religious education
3. Taking part in ministry in the parish and the diocese.

SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

Christian Initiation reaches fulfillment in the Eucharist (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #36) for Eucharist is the sacrament which continually calls us into the Paschal Event of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the sacrament of the New Covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus.

The people of Israel recalled the great Exodus event, when God has set them free from slavery to the Egyptians – each time they celebrated the Passover Meal (Ex. 12:1-28).

This is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt; when he struck down the Egyptians, he spared our houses (Ex 12:27). This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution. (Ex 12:14).

Moses ratified the covenant between God and the people of Israel when he sacrificed young bulls and cast half their blood on the altar.

Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do." They he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of His" (Ex 24:7-8).

It was through the blood of Jesus that the new and definitive covenant was ratified between God and His people. Jesus' passage from death to life, the new paschal sacrifice, became the source of our salvation; and it was at the Last Supper that Jesus revealed to His disciples that through sharing a meal together that would remember His sacrifice. St. Paul wrote:

I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes! (1 Cor 11:23-26).

Soon after the resurrection, Christians began to break bread and share the cup in the conviction that the Risen Christ continued to be present in their midst and to feed them with his Body and Blood. This meal came to be known as Eucharist from a Greek word meaning to praise and to give thanks.

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ?
And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ?
Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for all we partake on the one loaf (1 Cor 10:16-17).

The Gospel of John (Jn 6:35-39) relates that Jesus called Himself "the bread of life." Jesus fed the multitudes (Mt 14:13-21; Mt 15:32-38; Mk 8:1-10) and often ate with sinners. After the resurrection, he was recognized in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:30-35). In his teaching, he depicted the heavenly kingdom as a great banquet. Thus the proper understanding of the Eucharist cannot be approached apart from the simple, familiar action of dining in the company of friends.

The early Church is our model for the celebration of the Eucharist. People received Holy Communion under both forms, bread and wine, taking the break and then the cup into their own hands when it was given to them to the minister.

Eucharist, the bread of Christians, is the central liturgical mystery of the Church. Each celebration of the Eucharist deepens the initiation which was celebrated in Baptism and Confirmation. Through the Eucharist, Christians are united more closely to one another and to the Lord, and thus more fully become the Church. Clearly, then.

“...the Eucharist is also a Sacrament of Reconciliation, completing and fulfilling the Sacraments of Initiation. In each Eucharist, we affirm our conversion from sin, a conversion already real but not yet complete. The Eucharist proclaims and effects our reconciliation with the Father.”
(National Catechetical Directory. #120)

I. GENERAL NORMS

A. Canonical Discipline

1. Baptized Catholics admitted to Eucharist must sufficiently understand the Eucharistic mystery and have the right intention.
2. One who is to receive Eucharist is to abstain from food or drink, with the exception of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before reception. Those who are advanced in age or who suffer from any infirmity and those who take care of them can receive Eucharist without a period of fasting.
3. One who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive Eucharist without celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation except for serious reason. In this case, the person should make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible.

B. Frequency of Reception

1. Communion is integral to every Eucharistic celebration.

2. A person who has received the Eucharist may receive again on the same day if he/she attends and participates in distinct Masses provided:
 - The two celebrations are not in immediate succession
 - The two celebrations are distinct from one another because of different rites (e.g. funeral Mass), differences of congregations or time (e.g. morning and even Mass.)
3. All persons initiated into the Eucharist are bound by the obligation of receiving communion at least once a year, ordinarily during the Easter season.

C. Manner of Reception

1. Holy Communion may be distributed under the form of bread and from the cup on Sundays and holydays of obligation as well as on weekdays when this can occur in an orderly and reverent manner. (Letter to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States from the Congregation for Divine Worship, October 13, 1984.)
2. One share in the whole person of Christ when receiving Eucharist only in the form of bread or only in the form of wine. However, to show more fully the sign of the sacrament, the faithful are encouraged to receive communion under both forms.
3. The communicant has the option of receiving the Eucharist in the hand or on the tongue. The ritual action (receiving on the tongue or in the hand) should express and foster reverence from the Real Presence and an interior spirit of worship.

D. Admission of Other Christians to the Eucharist

Persons baptized in a Christian church other than the Catholic Church may be admitted to the Eucharist on special occasions.

This situation is to be considered extraordinary and the following conditions must prevail:

1. The person must manifest a belief in the Eucharist in conformity with Catholic Eucharistic doctrine.
2. The person must experience a need to be incorporated into Christ and united with his members through this Eucharist.
3. The person is unable to have recourse to a minister of his/her own community.
4. The person must request reception of Eucharist.

E. Elements Used for the Eucharist

1. Unleavened bread, made only of wheat flour and water, is to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist.
2. Natural wine made from grapes is to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist.

F. Viaticum

The celebration of the Eucharist as viaticum, food for the passage through death to eternal life, is received when death is close. It is the completion and crown of the Christian life which signifies that the Christian follows the Lord to eternal glory in the banquet of the heavenly kingdom. Rites for the celebration of viaticum within Mass and outside Mass are found in *The Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

II. First Eucharist

A. Essential Roles

1. Candidates for First Eucharist are reminders to the community of the Church's call to be nourished by and formed into the Body of Christ.

- Candidates must be baptized Catholics or baptized Christians who have made a profession of faith in the Catholic Church.
- Candidates must express a desire for the Eucharist to the pastor of his delegate.
- Candidates must participate in the total preparation program for First Eucharist provided by the parish.

2. Parents, as models of faith and Christian witness for their children, have a serious responsibility to grow in their devotion to the Eucharist.

- Catholic parents should participate in the parish Eucharistic celebration on Sunday on a regular basis.
- Parents must give explicit permission for their child to continue the process of initiation into the Church through the Eucharist.
- Parents are expected to participate in all parent sessions and to share in the total preparation of their child for First Eucharist.

3. A catechist is a person of faith commissioned to share in the ministry of the Word (cf Confirmation, II, A. 3.)

4. The Christian assembly encourages and gives example to the candidates through active participation in the Eucharistic celebration.

B. Process of Preparation

1. Parents of candidates for First Eucharist will be advised of the following initial requirements:

- a. a candidate must be at least in the second grade
- b. a candidate must provide a certificate of Baptism or evidence of profession of faith in the Catholic Church

c. a candidate must have been enrolled in a Catholic school or a Parish Religious Education program for at least one year before beginning this process.

d. a candidate must be attending the Sunday liturgy on a regular basis.

2. It is recommended that those desiring to begin preparation for First Eucharist be recognized in the parish in some way.

3. Both parents and candidates are involved in the process of formation.

- Parents are expected to attend catechetical sessions which include:

a. content essentially the same as that presented to the candidates

b. special emphasis on the psychological and spiritual development of children.

c. explanation of the diocesan norms for Eucharist.

d. explanation of essential roles of all involved in the process of preparation.

- Catechesis for candidates enables them to:

a. develop a relationship with God who is Father of all, with Jesus who loves and saves us and with the Holy Spirit who has been sent for the forgiveness of sin.

b. recognize Baptism and Confirmation as signs of belonging to the Church, the family of God.

c. develop an initial understanding of sin and the place of repentance and forgiveness in one's life.

d. develop an initial understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

e. understand Eucharist as celebrating God's word, sharing in the Eucharistic meal and sacrifice, and going forth to share the gift of Jesus' life with others.

4. After completion of catechetical formation, each candidate should be interviewed by the pastor or his delegate to determine readiness using the following criteria:

- desire to belong to the Church, the family of God.
- developing relationship with Jesus, expressed through prayer and a desire for receiving the Eucharist.
- an ability to understand the sacramental signs of bread and wine as the body and blood of the Lord.
- a willingness to share faith with others.

C. Celebration of the Sacrament

1. Ideally, First Eucharist should be celebrated during the Easter season.

2. First Eucharist should be celebrated in a candidate's own parish. If for any reason it is celebrated outside that parish, permission from the pastor should be obtained.

3. First Eucharist is a family event; the candidate should celebrate with his/her family at a Sunday liturgy chosen by the parents.

4. Children are to be encouraged to receive the Eucharist in the hand and from the cup after appropriate catechesis.

5. Since First Eucharist is a faith-filled and joyous experience, any further parish celebration should be kept simple as so not to diminish the significance of First Eucharist.

6. The celebration First Eucharist to be properly recorded in the parish register.

D. Period Following Celebration of First Eucharist

Children should be encouraged to celebrate Eucharist weekly, preferably with their parents. Both within their families and through the religion classes in which they are enrolled they should be guided in:

- Developing a personal relationship with Jesus
- Developing their understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist
- Understanding the importance of each of the sacraments to Christian living
- Exploring the rich tradition of the Catholic Church
- Participating in the mission of the Church.

Sacraments of Healing

SACRAMENT of RECONCILIATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF SIN AND THE WORLD'S YEARNING FOR GRACE

"Although made by God in a state of holiness, from the very dawn of history, [we] abused [our] liberty at the urging of personified evil. [We] set [ourselves] against God and sought to find fulfillments apart from God...At the same time, [we] became out of harmony with [ourselves], others, and all created things" (cf Pastoral and Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #13).

From the beginning of the history of salvation, humanity has chosen to turn away from its God-given destiny of grace. Sin entered the world and was characterized by alienation, bondage, and disharmony with self, others and God. The alienating effect of sin has misshaped the self and deformed the image of God within the individual. Human freedom has been replaced by a degrading and a destructive bondage. The original relationship of grace has been broken and replaced by infidelity and separation.

In the present age, the experience of sin continues to permeate human life. In harmony with the tradition of the Scriptures, the world continues to acknowledge the fundamental illness of evil and its desperate need for salvation. Unable to free itself from the bondage of sin, humankind cries out for reconciliation to the Creator and to one another.

THE INITIATIVE OF GOD'S LOVE TO RECONCILE THE WORLD IN CHRIST

"The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross. The Son of God made man lived among [us] in order to free [us] from the slavery of sin and to call [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (Rite of Penance, Introduction #1).

Out of love for his good creation, God chose not to abandon the world to its freely chosen sinfulness. Rather, he sent his own Son to be the light in the midst of darkness. Through his birth, Jesus of Nazareth joined the life of the Father to the flesh of humanity, reconciling the human face of God to the divine life of creation. Through his death, Christ effected a total and lasting reconciliation between God and humanity.

In the Paschal Mystery, sin and death are transformed into grace and life. From what was once fragmentation, a new integration has been born.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH AS A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The primary and fundamental task of the Church in the prophetic announcement of reconciliation is to make resound in all times and in all places to all, believers and non-

believers...almost a living and permanent echo of the voice of Christ: "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Lineamenta#24 – Statement from the 1983 International Synod of Bishops.)

Sacramental reconciliation takes place initially through faith and baptism. A radical conversion occurs in baptism as the neophyte becomes a "new creation," reborn in Christ. In the Eucharist, the Church encounters the Real Presence of Christ and shares his body and his blood which has been broken and poured out for the forgiveness of sin. This sacrifice has made our peace and advances the unity and salvation of all the world. As such, it is the summit of reconciliation.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Church calls sinners to encounter Christ and to celebrate his unconditional love and forgiveness. The penitent is invited by the priest to confess his/her sinfulness, to express sorrow for sin and to accept some act of penance as a sign of openness to conversion. The priest then extends absolution in the name of Christ and his Church.

The Church, as healer and reconciler, exists to carry on the saving mission of Jesus in time and space. Living in the midst of an unreconciled world, the Christian is challenged to be a living sign of reconciliation, working with all people toward true justice and everlasting peace.

I. GENERAL NORMS

A. Canonical Discipline

1. Celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism must precede celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. Any baptized Catholic who has reached the age of discretion may celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

B. Frequency of Celebration

1. Since sin affects our relationship with God, the sacrament should be celebrated regularly because of its value in fostering the Christian life.
2. The sacrament is most appropriately celebrated during the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent, at times of significant events in the life of a particular Christian, and on occasions of realized need for reconciliation.
3. One who is conscious of mortal sin must celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to celebrating the Sacrament of Eucharist unless a grave reason is present. In this case, the person should make an act of perfect contrition including the intention of confessing as soon as possible.
4. After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is obliged to confess mortal sins at least once a year (Code of Canon Law, Canon 989).

C. Manner of Celebration

1. Three forms are approved for celebration:

- Rite for Reconciliation of individual penitents
- Rite for Reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution
- Rite for Reconciliation of several penitents with general confession and absolution according to the Discipline of General Absolution (Rite of Penance #31-35).

2. The Rite includes:

- welcome or greeting
- prayer
- celebration of the Word of God
- examination of conscience (individually or communally)
- Lord's Prayer
 - * confession of sin
 - * imposition and acceptance of act of penance or satisfaction
 - * penitent's prayer of contrition
 - * prayer of absolution
- prayer of praise and thanksgiving
 - dismissal
 - * always included in shortened form

3. Celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation may be adapted to the needs of the community in accordance with the guideline contained in the Rite of Penance.

4. The proper place for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the church or oratory where confessionals are provided according to the norms issued by the episcopal conference (Code of Canon Law, Canon 964). The bishops of the United States, following the recommendation contained in the new Rite of Penance, have approved the use of small chapels or rooms of reconciliation in which penitents may choose to celebrate the Rite of Penance through a face-to-face exchange with the priest.

II. FIRST CELEBRATION of RECONCILIATION FOR ADULTS

A. Catechumens do not celebrate reconciliation until after celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation. It is recommended that the neophyte be prepared for and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the Easter season (period of Mystagogia.)

B. Candidates (baptized non-Catholics seeking full communion with the Church) should be prepared for and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before reception into the Catholic Church.

III. FIRST CELEBRATION of RECONCILIATION FOR CHILDREN

A. Essential Roles.

1. Candidates for First Reconciliation are reminders to the community of the reconciling mission of the Church and are expected to participate in the total preparation for First Reconciliation provided by the parish.

2. Parents, as models of faith and Christian witness for their children, have a serious responsibility to grow in their understanding and appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Catholic parents should take advantage of the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as part of their own Christian life.

- Parents are expected to participate in all parent sessions and to share in the total preparation of their child for First Reconciliation.

3. A catechist is a person of faith commissioned to share in the ministry of the Word.

- The catechist should be an active member of the parish community who has been fully initiated into the Church.

- The catechist must be sensitive to the psychological and spiritual development of children and be able to share with them the meaning of this sacrament.

4. The Christian assembly encourages and gives example to the candidates through active participation in reconciliation services.

B. Process of Preparation

1. Parents of candidates for First Reconciliation will be advised of the following initial requirements:

a. a candidate must be at least in the second grade

b. a candidate must provide a certificate of Baptism or evidence of profession of faith in the Catholic Church

c. a candidate must have been enrolled in a Catholic school or Parish Religious Education program for at least one year before beginning this process

d. a candidate should be attending the Sunday liturgy on a regular basis.

2. Both parents and candidates take part in the preparation for celebration of the sacrament.

- Parents are expected to attend catechetical sessions which include:

- a. content essentially the same as that presented to the candidates
- b. special emphasis on the psychological and spiritual development of children
- c. explanation of the diocesan norms for Reconciliation
- d. explanation of essential roles of all involved in the process of preparation.

- Catechesis for candidates enables them to:

- a. develop a relationship with God who is Father of all, with Jesus who loves and saves us and with the Holy Spirit who has been sent for the forgiveness of sins
- b. recognize Baptism and Confirmation as signs of belonging to the Church, the Family of God
- c. recognize Eucharist as a sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ which has been broken and poured out for the forgiveness of sin
- d. understand sin and the need for repentance and forgiveness of sin
- e. understand the Sacrament of Reconciliation as celebrating God's healing presence
- f. participate in the celebration of the sacrament

C. Celebration of the Sacrament

1. First celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be distinct from the first celebration of the Sacrament of Eucharist in the life of a child.
2. Ordinarily, celebration of Reconciliation precedes celebration of First Eucharist. However, the child is not to be coerced in any manner into celebrating the sacrament. Only a child who is able, ready and willing should celebrate the sacrament at the end of the period of catechesis.
3. The candidate is encouraged to celebrate reconciliation with his or her family at a communal celebration.
4. Children should be acquainted with the reconciliation room and be encouraged to make use of it.

D. Period following First Celebration of Reconciliation

Children should be encouraged to celebrate Reconciliation regularly, preferably with their families, especially during the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent. Both within their families and through the religion classes in which they are enrolled they should be guided in:

- Developing a personal relationship with Jesus
- Developing their understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- Understanding the important of Eucharist and all the sacraments to Christian living
- Exploring the rich tradition of the Catholic Church
- Participating in the mission of the Church.