



Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.41

Reconciliation

Approved By: Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, DD

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Revised:

A. Individual Confession and Absolution

Reconciliation between God and us was brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of his death and resurrection.

Homilies and catechetical instruction as also private counseling should regularly address the need and value of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This instruction should stress the importance of frequent and fruitful reception of the Sacrament. Such catechesis is to be given especially during the season of Lent.¹

The 1972 Rite of Penance should be periodically reviewed by the clergy and laity for spiritual growth. It offers three different celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

- Rite I: rite for reconciliation with individual penitents;
- Rite II: rite for reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution;
- Rite III: rite for reconciliation of several penitents with general confession and absolution.

In the three different rites, there are necessary elements common to all of them: contrition, confession of sins, the act of penance or satisfaction and absolution

Individual Penitents ~ Rite I

- After the penitent has first been welcomed, the priest and penitent begin by praying to the Holy Spirit. The confessor should manifest the compassion of Christ as he welcomes the penitent.
- The Word of God should be included in the individual form of the sacrament. The power of God's Word in this sacramental setting helps the confessor and penitent to focus on the presence of the Lord and moves the human spirit to prayer, conversion and healing peace.
- The penitent, unless physically unable, then confesses his or her sins in person to the priest. Only in special cases, may interpreters be used.²
- Penitents are bound to mention all serious sins, both number and kind, of which they are

aware and which have not yet been submitted for individual absolution. In devotional confession, that is, when no serious sins are to be confessed, a variety of confessional styles is possible, often such a penitent prefers to focus upon the areas of his or her life which especially need the Lord's healing and forgiveness.

- The priest should always be prepared to offer some words of encouragement, counsel or instruction. In this way, he can help the penitent in the formation of a Christian conscience and call attention to the interior movements of the Holy Spirit. The dialogue should focus on the saving acts of Christ in the life of the penitent.
- If counseling or instruction outside of sacramental confession is required, the priest should offer the penitent the opportunity to do this either with him or another appropriate person at another time.
- The penance assigned by the priest should be suited to the individual in terms of age, vocation in life and the gravity of the sins confessed. The penance should be understood as a practical, concrete way in which the penitent begins to translate into external behavior the insights and forgiveness derived from the sacrament. This is a way in which the penitent nourishes the conversion process which the Lord has already begun. Prayer and self-denial are appropriate penances, as also works of mercy and service to one's neighbor.
- The act of contrition by the penitent allows many possibilities. It should be a genuine expression of the penitent's sorrow and desire for Christ's healing and a resolution to sin no more. A card or sheet with various formulations of these prayers should be made available.
- After the penitent manifests contrition, the priest extends his hands over the penitent, absolving the sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Church's official words of absolution as found in the Rite must always be said. As he says the second part of the prayer ("I absolve you..."), he should make the sign of the cross over the penitent.
- The confessor prayerfully concludes the celebration by a brief proclamation of praise in which the penitent may join. One of the formulas found in the Rite may be used or it may be in the confessor's or penitent's own words.

Several Penitents with Individual Confession (Penance Service) ~ Rite II

Rite II of the Sacrament of Penance is an integral liturgical service for use with several penitents which provides an opportunity for individual auricular confession and absolution. The occasional use of this second Rite should not replace opportunities scheduled, at least weekly, for individual confessions.

The Rite of Penance states that communal celebrations of the sacrament "show more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance."³ It should call forth the mutual support of others in the assembly united in the common prayer of the assembly.

This Rite is particularly fitting during the seasons of Advent and Lent. Also it can be used effectively with small groups of people; it may be used with adult members of the parish community as well as with children -- for example, in retreat situations, for staff days in parishes, groups of teachers and/or children in schools.

The second Rite requires proper liturgical preparation.

- Its use requires the presence of a sufficient number of confessors, so that individual, private and auricular confession and individual absolution are always employed.⁴
- In parishes which are multi-lingual, confessors who are multi-lingual should also be avail-

able and this service should be made known to the parish in advance. The Rite of Penance, with its appendices, should be used as the source book. A proclamation of the Word of God is integral to the rite, and therefore always to be included. Hymns and psalms as offered by the rite ought to be sung.

- A communal celebration of penance appropriately provides the penitents with an examination of conscience led by a priest, lector, or other liturgical minister. This may be helpful in enabling the penitents to expand their awareness of potential areas of sinfulness, and thus assist them in making a more complete and sincere confession.
- The physical arrangements should permit the individuals to approach the confessors with some assurance of privacy. In setting up temporary stations attention is to be given to acoustics, so as to maintain privacy. Soft instrumental music is an appropriate way of maintaining a prayerful atmosphere. It is desirable that at least one station afford penitents the opportunity for anonymity. When using this second Rite, absolution is always to be given individually.

B. General Absolution

Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution Rite III

Rite III is, by its very nature, extraordinary. While the liturgical structure is similar to Rite II there are two significant differences:

- there is no private confession of sins;
- the penitents receive absolution not individually but as a group.

The penitents may say an act of contrition together or they may say it privately. All are given a penance to fulfill. When using this form, the priest is obliged to clearly inform those for whom grave sins are to be forgiven that they must intend to make an individual confession of those serious sins as soon as there is an opportunity to do so, at least within a one year period.⁵ Unless a just cause intervenes,⁶ this individual confession of serious sins must be made before a person can again avail him/herself of general absolution.

General absolution can be used only when "a supply of confessors is not readily available rightly to hear the confessions of individuals within a suitable time so that the penitents are forced to be deprived of sacramental grace or holy communion for a long time through no fault of their own."⁷ The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has determined, with the consent of the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, that the "suitable time" is to be understood as one month.⁸

In view of the many opportunities to approach confessors in the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph, the bishop does not envision any use of General Absolution here and does not grant permission for its use. This rite cannot be used, for example, when the Rite II (a communal penance service) is prepared but an insufficient number of confessors is present.

C. Schedules and Liturgical Arrangements

Changes in work or leisure schedules necessitate a re-examination of traditional times for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Parishes should make the sacrament available on a regular basis each week, on days and times befitting the needs of the faithful.

- A schedule which indicates only that individual confessions are available "upon request" is not acceptable in the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph.
- The priest should provide sufficient time for confessions on a regular weekly basis.
- If the Sacrament of Penance takes place immediately prior to a either a Saturday or Sunday Mass, it is recommended that, if possible, the celebrant of the Mass be someone other than the confessor. Use of the second Rite (Penance Service) during the seasons of Advent and Lent are most appropriate. The faithful should always be encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance during Lent.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation may also be offered during the Sacred Triduum.

In each parish Church there must be a small chapel in which penitents may confess their sins anonymously, i.e. through a screen, or in a face-to-face exchange with the priest.

- The freedom of the penitent for either format should be respected.
- It is very helpful to have a welcoming atmosphere in the reconciliation rooms or chapels.
- These rooms should be furnished with: a table or stand for the Sacred Scriptures; a crucifix; a kneeler; a grill or screen, and a chair for those penitents who prefer to confess "face-to-face."
- The room should be arranged so that a penitent who chooses to confess behind a screen may enter the room without being seen by the priest.
- Rooms should also be constructed to permit speaking at normal voice levels without being overheard outside the room.

D. Reconciliation for Children

Although First Confession must precede First Eucharist,9 formal instruction for Reconciliation is to be separate and distinct from preparation for the reception of First Eucharist. The distinctiveness of each sacrament should be maintained. Because children are used to learning separate and distinct subjects on a daily basis, the formal instruction for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should begin in the first grade and continue through all the child's school years.

Planning for the celebration of First Reconciliation should take place well in advance, especially so as to insure an adequate number of confessors.

- The pastor or his delegate is responsible for coordination the work of the catechists, liturgical personnel, and, if feasible, some parents in preparing for the celebration.
- Every effort should be made to encourage parents to take an active role at home in preparing their children for the sacrament.
- Care should be taken to instruct the children thoroughly in the First Rite, i.e., individual, auricular, private confession. Regular opportunities and encouragement for all children to confess privately must be given. Special help should be provided for the first few private confessions according to Rite I.
- The decision about a child's readiness for First Reconciliation is made by the pastor/pastoral administrator, religious educators and parents. If it is determined that a child is not ready, no coercion should be made to keep the child with his/her "group" or "class". This decision is a personal one for the family. If the decision is made to delay the sacrament of Reconciliation then the celebration of First Communion is to be delayed until after first Reconciliation is sacramentally celebrated.
- Catholic schools both elementary and secondary, and parish religious education programs

should provide a Penance Service (Rite II) for their students at least once a semester.

It has become quite common within the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph for children to receive First Reconciliation within the context of a communal celebration (Rite II). Such a celebration involves the parents of the children and may well provide them an opportunity to avail themselves of the sacrament as well.

- If First Reconciliation is celebrated as a communal celebration, care must be taken that there are enough confessors so that the children and parents have no reason to make an abbreviated confession.
- It is helpful to the children if they are familiar with the confessors. The children should be encouraged to choose their own confessor.
- Children, like adults, should have the option of confession anonymously behind a screen or face-to-face with the priest.
- The children will be much more at ease if they are seated with their parents and families. No distinction should be made in the seating arrangement either on the basis of gender or school attended by the students.
- Music used should be familiar to both children and parents. Songs known only to children leave out the adults and relegate them to the role of spectators rather than participants.
- A parish lector, or a capable parent or older brother or sister of one of the children proclaims the Word of God.

1 Rite of Penance, 13; for catechetical background, see CCC, 1422-1498.

2 Canon 990.

3 Introduction, 22.

4 Canon 961, §1, 2^o.

5 Rite of Penance, 33.

6 Canon 963.

7 Canon 961, §1, 2^o.

8 Implementation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Complementary Norms (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991), 12.

9 Canon 914.