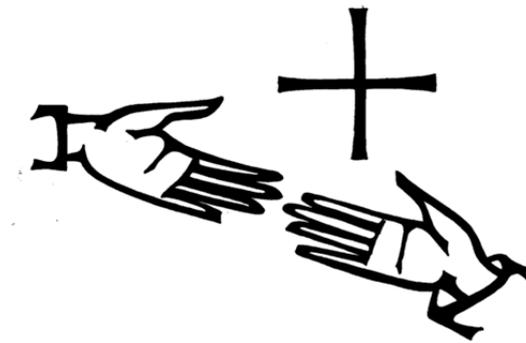


GUIDELINES FOR
THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE FOR
CHILDREN

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat

GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE FOR CHILDREN



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Foreword *Bishop Peter Connors*

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FOREWORD



I present these Guidelines to you in the hope that they will be of assistance to all involved in the pastoral preparation and catechesis of children for the Sacrament of Penance. Since the implementation of the Diocesan policy and the provision of catechetical materials regarding the Sacraments of Initiation for Children, there have been many requests for similar direction and materials in regard to the Sacrament of Penance.

At my request, these guidelines have been developed by the staff of the Religious Education Centre, in consultation with the priests of the Diocese. They are accompanied by material to assist those who prepare the children for the reception of the Sacrament. I commend them to you and encourage full use of all that they offer. In this way, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in the lives of our children will be a positive and meaningful experience.

+ Peter J. Linnane

Bishop of Ballarat

February 1, 2000

GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE FOR CHILDREN

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Reconciliation is a celebration of God's love and forgiveness, which is always available to us. The first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance provides an occasion for the child to appropriate more fully the gift of conversion received in Baptism.

1. FIRST RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT

POLICY STATEMENT: The opportunity for children to celebrate their first sacramental reconciliation precedes the first reception of Eucharist.

A. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

- 1.1 The current discipline of the Church is that a child is introduced to the Sacrament of Penance prior to reception of First Eucharist.¹ However, the Code of Canon Law is clear that Catholics are only bound to confess in the Sacrament of Penance any grave sin they are aware of having committed.
- 1.2 In the Diocese of Ballarat the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance is considered to be most appropriately celebrated using the second rite, the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with individual Confession and Absolution. It is recommended that a simplified form be used.

¹ Canon 914

- 1.3 This first celebration of Penance will be low-key, celebrated with small groups of families.
- 1.4 The right of the child, the parents and the parish priest to use the first rite, the Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, is not abrogated by the above statements.

B. AGE OF RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT

- 1.5 Since first reception of Communion usually takes place around the age of discretion (approximately 7-8 years old), children may be introduced to sacramental reconciliation at a very young age.

Pastoral comment

Reconciliation has both a personal and a communal/ecclesial dimension. It involves one's relationship with God, one's relationship with creation, and also one's relationship with people. Hence each experience of the sacrament needs to incorporate both the personal and the communal-ecclesial dimensions explicitly. The second rite provides for this admirably. Regular experience of the sacrament in this form will provide children with a sound grasp of the elements of the sacrament. It will gradually prepare them for the celebration of individual reconciliation when they are more capable of accepting personal responsibility for sin and of appreciating its social consequences even in a non-communal setting. Simplifying the rite and celebrating the rite with small groups will mean that the liturgy is not too long for younger children who are capable only of limited attention spans.

Our theological and liturgical expectations should be appropriate to the age and development of the children. At this stage the child is able to understand what it is to forgive and be forgiven. It must be remembered that at a young age a child's understanding of sin and personal culpability differs from that of an adult. Because the conceptual level of young children is quite concrete, the actual experience of the sacrament, regularly repeated, is the most significant education they can receive in its meaning.

2. FORMATION/PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

POLICY STATEMENT: In the Diocese of Ballarat, formation of children for the reception of penance is to take place in two stages:

- a) an initial time of brief preparation prior to the first reception of the sacrament;
- b) through a formal parish program before the end of primary schooling.

A. INITIAL PREPARATION

- 2.1 Formal preparation for the reception of the sacrament for the first time will take place in the family.
- 2.2 Resources and support for the first reception of the sacrament will be available from the parish.
- 2.3 When readiness for this form of the sacrament has been determined, parents are responsible for presenting their child for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.

Pastoral comment

Young children are ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance when they appreciate what it is to be forgiven, and it is primarily in the context of family life that the concept of forgiveness is experienced.

Church documents insist on a distinct catechesis for the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance that are to be separated from each other by a suitable period of time. There are sound educational and pastoral reasons for this. If too closely linked, penance will be seen simply as a necessary preparation for First Communion and the value of the sacrament in its own right is lost.

B. FORMAL PARISH FORMATION

- 2.4 The principal parish program relating to the Sacrament of Penance will take place during the last two years of primary schooling.
- 2.5 This preparation will prepare children for the celebration of the first rite of Penance, the Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents.
- 2.6 The program is family based, coordinated by the parish and supported by the Catholic school.
- 2.7 When readiness for this form of the sacrament has been determined, parents are responsible for enrolling their child in the family-based, parish coordinated program of sacramental preparation.
- 2.8 The Catholic school, which is part of the parish community, has an essential role to play in offering systematic instruction in the Catholic faith that complements and supports the parish coordinated sacramental program.

Pastoral comment

Locating the parish preparation at this point in the child's religious journey has several advantages.

- *It ensures that the child is actually introduced to the individual Rite of Penance.*
- *It enables the child to understand the sacrament with a greater degree of moral maturity.*
- *It makes it clear that Penance is not a sacrament of Christian Initiation and keeps it separate from Confirmation and First Communion.*
- *It gives the parish community an opportunity to engage with the family – for evangelisation if necessary – some two or three years after the parish preparation program for Confirmation and Eucharist.*

The arrangements for this sacramental preparation program would be similar to the sacramental preparation for Confirmation and First Communion. It will include some sessions involving parents and children, and elements of the program could take place in the parish, in clusters of families, or within each family.

3. RESOURCES FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE BY CHILDREN

1. An adaptation of the **Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with individual Confession and Absolution.**
This is included with these Guidelines (*see pp.6 - 10*). Use of this simplified rite will assist in making the celebration more suitable for children of a young age and their parents.
2. A parish kit to assist those responsible for the coordination of the preparation in the parish. (*Available from the Religious Education Centre, Ballarat.*)
3. A "Getting Ready for the Sacrament of Penance" packet to assist parents in preparing their children for the first reception of the Sacrament. (*Parishes may obtain these kits from the Religious Education Centre, Ballarat.*)
4. A resource for the formal parish preparation program to be offered towards the end of primary schooling. (*Available from the Religious Education Centre, Ballarat - June 2000.*)

Resources are available from:

Religious Education Centre
5 Lyons Street South
PO Box 576
Ballarat 3353

ph: 5337 7135 fax: 5333 5048
E-mail: rec@ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au

RITE FOR RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Adapted for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance

PASTORAL NOTES.

Introduction

This adaptation of the second form of the Rite of Penance has been developed around the theme of "Jesus, the Light of the World." Establishing a theme enables the rite to be adapted in a way that enables the participation of both the young children and their parents. When making adaptations, it is important that the various segments of the rite remain, but that the language and concepts are such that can be understood and taken part in by the children.

Children should be taken through the rite as part of their preparation, and this may involve assisting the parents to whom this form of the Rite may be unfamiliar.

Role of the parish in the celebration

The parish sacramental team/representatives with the priest will:

- coordinate the time, place and details of the celebration;
- involve the parents in the planning of the sacramental celebration
- provide the printed materials needed for good preparation and participation in the Rite.

Parent involvement

Parish sacramental teams should involve parents in the preparation and planning for the celebration. Ways in which this could take place would be:

- ask for suggestions regarding songs and readings
- provide copies of the Prayer of Sorrow for children and parents to learn.
- involve parents in as much of the liturgy as possible
- encourage the parents to take their children through the different parts of the celebration

Venue

The location for the celebration should be one which is not threatening or overpowering for the children and their families. Ideally it will take place in the church, but a hall or meeting room may be better suited to providing an environment which is welcoming, comfortable and prayerful.

Environment

Lighting should be somewhat subdued, to create a prayerful atmosphere. Children and their families should be invited to gather in a circle or semi-circle around a focus table/stand containing a candle, cross, the Word of God some paper and textas and a 'symbol' to involve the child (*see below*). The celebrant is seated as part of the circle. A separate area, apart, but not out of sight of the group, should be designated for the time of individual confession.

Part of the environment could be the inclusion of the activity charts used by the children during their time of preparation for the reception of the Sacrament. As families arrive and gather for the ceremony they could be invited to pin the charts around the space. Alternatively the charts could be brought forward by each child during the Introduction and placed in an appropriate place. Children could tell the group which part of the chart is the most important part.

Music/Activities

Because of the age of the children it is important that the celebration is not too wordy and that it contains activities to engage them. Inclusion of several songs able to be sung by the children and their parents should be part of the preparation and celebration. Something visual and interactive should also be incorporated into the Rite at appropriate times but care must be taken that whatever is used has meaning for the child and is not simply a gimmick. This adaptation of the Rite focuses on the importance of being 'a light to the world'. So the visual element is light/candles and the activity is as follows:

- The large candle for the focus place is in a container of sand with room around for individual candles. A container of water is beside it. As they arrive, children are given a candle which is lit during the opening song. After the opening prayer, the candles are extinguished and relit after the time of individual confession. (*See Rite for details*)

Two further suggestions:

- Use of paper flags with words "sorry" and "happy" on either side. The words are outlined shapes able to be coloured in. At the beginning of the celebration they are in the focus area in a sand-filled container. After the examination of conscience, each child collects one and, moving to a space of their own, they colour in the word "sorry". and the celebrant invites them to think of one way they can show they are sorry in the next day or two. At the end of that time they return to their parents. They carry the flag to their time of individual confession and on their return, colour in the word " happy" and write their name on the flag. The container can then be taken to the supper place and the flags can be placed there while supper is on, then taken home.
- Balloons (helium-filled) could form part of the focus stand, but anchored/pressed down on the floor. As the individual confessions take place, the balloons are allowed to rise above the table. After the closing prayer, the children come forward to receive a balloon for the final song and procession to the place of supper.

Hospitality

As the children and their families arrive for the celebration they should be greeted by the priest and members of the parish sacramental team or parish representatives. Some form of handout should be provided to encourage the fullest possible participation. The celebration should conclude with supper.

AN ADAPTATION OF THE RITE FOR RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS

PREPARATION AND INTRODUCTION

As children and parents enter the room, they are all given an unlit candle each. The focus for this celebration is "Jesus, light of the world".

When all have gathered in a group, the celebrant puts on alb and stole and takes his place in the group. A member of the sacramental team or parish representative welcomes everyone and invites all to join in the opening song. During the opening song the candles are lit.

SONG

GREETING

The celebrant says a few words of welcome and the reason for gathering. [If the children have brought their activity charts with them, they could now be invited to show them to the group and say what is the best part of the chart, then place it somewhere appropriate] The celebrant then continues:

Celebrant: We all know that our families and friends are very important in our lives. And Jesus asks us to be friends with each other, with him and with God. Tonight we are here to ask forgiveness of our friend Jesus for any thing that we might have done to hurt others. Jesus once told his friends that they were like lights, making the world bright for everyone. But when we say or do something that hurts someone else, we can't be those lights. Tonight we are going to think about and say sorry for the times we have not been kind or good and as a sign of that I ask you now to come and dip your light into the water.

All come forward and extinguish their candle and place it in the sand around the large candle. When all have returned to their places, the celebrant continues:

Let us now pray to Jesus:
Lord, we have come together because we are your friends.
Help us to learn how to say sorry to you and to each other
and to grow more and more like you.

All: Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Celebrant: Let us now listen to the words of Jesus as he tells us about being a light in the world.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 13-16 *(Use a translation for children)*

Reader: A reading from the gospel written by Saint Matthew.

Homily

The homily should refer to Jesus as the light of the world and the expectation that we will be light to others. Reference should be made to the fact that we can put out the light by our actions, but that no matter what we do the light of Jesus will always give us new light.

At the conclusion of the homily, all are invited to take a position which expresses sorrow (e.g. head down, head on arms, kneeling, etc.) and to close their eyes. The celebrant then leads all through the examination of conscience.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Celebrant: Before we go to confession, let us think over very carefully some of the things we have done that we need to say sorry for.
The following should be read slowly with silence in between.

- Were there times when I did not show love to my family and friends?
- Have I been unkind to other people, at home, at school and to others I meet?
- Have I offered to help people or have I been selfish?
- Have I made people unhappy by:
 - stealing from them?
 - telling lies to them or about them?
 - causing fights with them?

At the conclusion of the examination of conscience the celebrant invites the children to collect a piece of paper and a texta and draw the thing they are most sorry for. They will take this with them for their individual confession as a talking point. While the children are drawing, the priest could address the adults regarding the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in their lives and inviting them to also come to individual confession.

RITE OF RECONCILIATION

Prayer of Sorrow

This prayer should have been learnt prior to this celebration as part of the children's preparation. If it is not known, it can be repeated after the leader.

All: Loving God, we are sorry for all the times we have offended you because you are so good and want what is best for us. We are sorry for all the things we have failed to do and the hurt we have caused the people you love by our actions. We know you always love us. Help us to grow more like Jesus in all we do. Amen

One of the parish representatives invites all to kneel or bow, and to join in saying this general Prayer of Sorrow. At the conclusion of the prayer the celebrant continues:

Celebrant: Let us now pray to God our Father in the words Jesus gave us, and ask for forgiveness and protection from all evil.

All say together: Our Father .

Celebrant: Loving God, draw near to your servants who in the presence of your Church confess that they are sinners. Through the ministry of the Church free them from all sin so that renewed in spirit they may give you thanks and praise through lives worthy of you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *R. Amen.* *All sit*

Individual Confession and Absolution

The celebrant now offers the invitation to individual confession.

The drawing that the child has done can provide a starting point for the confession.

Those who wish to receive the sacrament go to the priest/s designated for individual confession, and confess their sins. Each one receives and accepts a fitting act of satisfaction and is absolved. After hearing the confession and offering suitable words of advice, the priest extends his hands over the penitent's head (or at least extends his right hand) and gives him absolution. Everything else which is customary in individual confession is omitted.

As each one returns from confession, they take a candle from the sand container, light it from the large candle and return to their seat holding the lit candle.

THANKSGIVING

Sign of Peace

The celebrant now invites all to stand and as a sign of the peace of Christ received in the Sacrament, to exchange their candle with others and wish them the peace of the Lord.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

After the sign of peace, the celebrant concludes:

Celebrant: Lord,
help these children and their parents gathered here in your presence. Help them to always know your forgiving love in their lives. Bless their efforts to know and serve you and bless all present in the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit. *(All make the Sign of the Cross)*

All: Amen

CLOSING SONG

After the closing all move, carrying lighted candles, to supper. A sand-filled container should be in a central place for the candles to continue burning through supper. They can then be taken home.