

307 Children's Celebration Of The Sacrament Of Penance

307 CHILDREN'S CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Those who plan for celebrations of Reconciliation involving children need to be aware of and sensitive to the particular stages of moral and psychological development of these age groups. Emphasizing the mercy of God while enabling people to assess their lifestyles, relationships, attitudes, values, and behavior is always a delicate responsibility. It is especially important when dealing with children. God's loving mercy and forgiveness need to be clearly demonstrated. (Signs of God's Love, Regulations and Guidelines for Sacramental Catechesis, Part One, Archdiocese of Baltimore, [2004; hereinafter SOGL-1], Section III-B-3)

"Catechesis for children prior to their first reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must always respect their natural disposition, ability, age, and circumstances. Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continue growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love." (National Directory for Catechesis, 135)

307.1 Preparation for First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance by Children:

307.1.1 Separate Instruction:

Formal instruction for the Sacrament of Penance must be separate and distinct from preparation for the first reception of Eucharist so that the integrity of each sacrament is maintained. (SOGL-1 III-A-2.)

307.1.2 Parental Involvement:

The parents' right and responsibility to direct the religious formation of their children must be safeguarded and enhanced. For this reason, preparation for first reception of the sacrament shall involve the parents and provide guidance to them in helping prepare their children. (SOGL-1 and Canon 793)

307.1.3 Age of Reason:

Typically when children reach the "age of reason", they and their parents are invited to participate in catechesis for Reconciliation. (SOGL-1 III-A-1-2)

307.1.4 Parental Formation:

Parental formation in the Church's understanding of the Sacrament of Penance is a

prerequisite for their ability to assist in the preparation of their children for the sacrament and in order to make an informed decision regarding their children's readiness for reception of the sacrament.

307.1.5 Role of the Parish:

The parish is responsible for offering formation and resources for children and their parents for the first reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

307.1.6 Children with Disabilities:

It is important to invite children with disabilities and their parents into this process and provide appropriate accommodations for them. (SOGL-1 III-A-1) (See also Policy §302.5 herein)

307.2 *Opportunity and Time for Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance by Children:*

Children shall be offered a genuine opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before their first reception of the Eucharist. (Canon 914 and SOGL-1 III-A-2) To facilitate this, every parish shall have a special celebration of the Sacrament of Penance before the first reception of the Eucharist for those who have been prepared for the two sacraments. (Canon 914 and SOGL-1 III-A-3)

307.2.1 First Experience:

It would be well if the child's first experience with the Sacrament of Penance occurred within a communal setting. All celebrations of reconciliation with children should be well planned and respect the liturgical integrity of the rite. (SOGL-1 III-3)

307.2.2 Collaborative Instruction:

In order to provide suitable catechesis for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Penance before the reception of the Eucharist, parishes in collaboration with parents should provide instruction for the Sacrament of Penance prior to first Eucharist. (cf. c.777)

307.2.3 Appropriate and Ongoing Instruction:

It is understood that such instruction will be commensurate with the ability of the child to understand. The catechesis for these two sacraments, as well as all others, is to be ongoing so that there will be development in the person's knowledge and understanding as he or she matures.

307.3 *Outreach to Parents:*

The pastor and his staff shall, when necessary, explain to the parents the Church's discipline in regard to first confession before first Communion and the catechetical reasons for it. (SOGL-1 III-A1-2) Such an explanation should help the parents understand the values underlying the norm. It is important that both parents and children correctly understand the nature of sin and forgiveness. The sacrament is not intended to be an experience of judgment that condemns but of a love that pardons. (SOGL-1 III-A1-2)

307.4 *Choosing not to Receive Sacrament of Penance:*

In those cases in which a child, because of exceptional reasons and under the guidance of his or her parents, chooses not to receive the Sacrament of Penance, he or she shall not be deprived of the right to receive his or her First Holy Communion. The child shall be encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance later so that he or she will not be deprived of it altogether. (SOGL-1 III-A-2)

307.5 *Physical Arrangements:*

As with adults, children have the right to celebrate the sacrament face-to-face or from behind a screen. Children shall always be free to choose their own confessor.