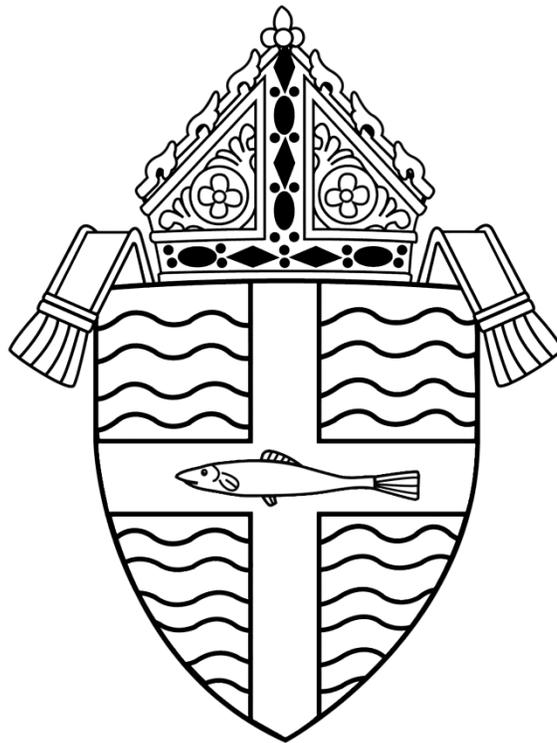


First Reconciliation

*Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation Programs
in the Diocese of Madison*



Diocese of Madison

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I. Catechetical Summary

- Sin is above 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.¹
- The sacrament of Reconciliation “is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.”²
- The sacrament of Reconciliation “is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent pardon and peace.”³
- This sacrament also goes by the titles of Penance and Confession.
- As children reach the age of reason, the Church extends to them an invitation to join with the parish community in the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation—the Gift of Peace. Initiated into the Christian community at Baptism, the children are now called to prepare for the sacrament of God’s loving mercy.
- We are all sinners, and we need the strength offered to us in the form of the sacrament of Reconciliation for our faith journey. Baptism calls us to live in relationship with God and with others. When we sin, we harm that relationship. Making use of sacramental Reconciliation helps us to turn away from sin and live ever more in the image of Christ.
- In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins, the Lord also gave them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church.⁴
- In the sacrament of Penance the faithful who confess their sins to a legitimate minister, are sorry for them, and intend to reform themselves, obtain from God through the absolution imparted by the same minister, forgiveness for the sins they

¹ CCC 1440.

² CCC 1423.

³ CCC 1424.

⁴ CCC 1444.

have committed after Baptism and, at the same, time are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sin.⁵

- “In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain.... It is the duty of the pastors to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it.”⁶

II. Cooperation between Parents and Pastors

The preparation of children for the reception of the sacraments is a work of cooperation between pastors and parents, each of whom has, in his own way, both the right and the duty of educating Christian children. The Church joyfully affirms that parents are the “principal and first educators of their children”⁷ and the “first heralds” for them of the Gospel.⁸ Yet this primary right of parents to educate their children is not absolute. In matters of faith and morals, it is subordinate to the authority of the Church. For Christian education “belongs preeminently to the Church,” both because of the authority given to her by Christ to teach all nations,⁹ and because she is the spiritual mother of all those who are born of the waters of Baptism. Just as parents have a natural right and duty to educate the children born to them by nature, so also the Church has a supernatural right and duty to educate all the children born to her by grace.¹⁰

The primary aim of sacramental preparation is to ensure that those approaching the sacraments are suitably instructed and properly disposed. Parents and pastors are called to work harmoniously together in fulfilling the evangelizing mission of the Church by taking joint responsibility for ensuring that children receive suitable instruction prior to reception of the sacraments. It is for the pastor to judge that the children are properly disposed and suitably instructed before allowing them to receive the sacraments. However, this judgment must be made in light of the minimum requirements of canon law,¹¹ for we cannot require more for the reception of the sacraments than the universal law of the Church requires.

⁵ CIC, c. 959.

⁶ Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 11.

⁷ CCC 1653.

⁸ CCC 2225.

⁹ Matt 28:18-20.

¹⁰ Pope Pius XI, *On Christian Education*, 15-17.

¹¹ See Section III: Canonical Requirements for the Reception of the Sacrament.

III. Canonical Requirements for the Reception of the Sacrament

The Christian faithful have the right to receive the sacraments.¹² Therefore, the sacraments cannot be denied to those who fulfill the basic canonical requirements for receiving them.¹³ In the case of First Reconciliation, these basic requirements are that one must:

- be a baptized Catholic,
- have attained the use of reason,
- have contrition for sin,
- have a firm resolution to sin no more,
- and be suitably instructed and properly disposed.

In order to be considered as suitably instructed and properly disposed, children must understand the evil of sin according to their capacity and they “must be disposed in such a way that, rejecting sins committed and having a purpose of amendment, the person is turned back to God.”¹⁴

If a member of the Christian faithful meets these basic canonical requirements for the reception of First Reconciliation, even if he/she has not fulfilled the requirements of a given parish catechetical program or the diocesan expectations outlined below, he/she cannot be refused the sacrament.

After having attained the use of reason, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.¹⁵

IV. Instructions for Catechetical Programs in Catholic Parishes and Schools

“Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority.”¹⁶

Sacramental preparation programs, whether in parishes or in schools, must not be content with merely fulfilling the minimum canonical requirements for reception of the sacraments, but must seek to provide vigorous and robust catechesis aimed at a deeply rooted and living faith. Sacramental preparation programs must provide doctrinally sound catechesis for sacramental formation. “The disciple of Christ has the right to receive the ‘Word of Faith’ not in mutilated, falsified or in diminished form, but whole and entire, in all

¹² CIC, c. 213.

¹³ CIC, c. 843, §1.

¹⁴ CIC, 987.

¹⁵ CIC, c. 989.

¹⁶ CIC, c. 843, §2.

its rigor and vigor.”¹⁷ Catechetical formation should be robust and reflect the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It should include personal testimony that gives witness to the Christian life. And it should adhere to diocesan curriculum standards for immediate preparation for the sacrament.¹⁸

A. Remote and Proximate Preparation

Parish faith formation programs and *Catholic schools* should offer approximately 30 hours of catechetical formation for children in the year prior to their reception of the sacrament (remote preparation), and approximately 30 hours of catechetical formation in the year concurrent with their reception of the sacrament (proximate preparation).

Parents who *homeschool* their children should be affirmed and encouraged as the primary educators of their children. They should be in yearly communication with their pastor so that he is able to ensure the religious education of every child in his parish.¹⁹

B. Immediate Preparation

The **baptismal certificate** should be requested at the beginning of immediate preparation. This is very important because the preparation for and the reception of the sacraments is different for children who have not been baptized and for children who have been baptized outside the Catholic Church.²⁰

Parish catechetical leaders should offer 8-10 hours of immediate preparation for the sacrament, in addition to and distinct from the approximately 30 hours of annual catechetical formation (and distinct from the immediate preparation for First Communion). These 8-10 hours may include a combination of time spent together at the parish and time spent on projects to be completed in the home.

All children should be invited and encouraged to participate in the immediate preparation for the sacrament--not only those enrolled in parish faith formation, but also those enrolled in Catholic schools and those who are homeschooled. This is to enable all families to come together as a parish community for the building up of the body of Christ and for the common good of the parish.

- Parish catechetical leaders should consider the possibility of offering monthly sessions, in the months immediately prior to the reception of the sacrament, to prepare students who have received catechetical formation in various venues prior to this immediate preparation.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Catechesis in our Time*, 30.

¹⁸ See attached Curriculum Guidelines.

¹⁹ Bishop Morlino, *Letter to Parents*.

²⁰ See Section VII: Pastoral Considerations.

- Pastors and parish catechetical leaders should encourage parents to participate in the immediate sacramental preparation of their children (e.g. by attending sacramental preparation sessions and/or by completing assignments prepared by the parish catechetical leader with their children at home).
- Parish catechetical leaders should consider the possibility of offering family faith formation sessions, which includes adult faith formation for parents.
- Parish catechetical leaders should communicate to the families of the parish all of the information necessary for enrollment in sacramental preparation prior to the beginning of immediate preparation. This allows families the opportunity to register for formation and be informed of all necessary expectations.
- A sacramental assessment or interview should be given by the pastor or his appointed catechetical leader to determine readiness, in accord with canonical norms, respecting the age and intellectual capability of each of the faithful.
- Parish catechetical leaders should provide a time to rehearse and practice prior to the reception of the sacrament.

V. Expectations for Participation in Parish Sacramental Preparation Programs

Parish catechetical leaders should maintain a high standard of expectations for participation in parish sacramental preparation programs. Regular attendance at parish sacramental preparation classes and/or events should be expected as well as attendance at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Those who are unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of a parish catechetical program may be denied participation in the parish sacramental preparation program, but they cannot be denied reception of the sacrament as long as they fulfill the minimum canonical requirements. Parents who are not prepared to comply with a reasonably high standard of expectations for participation in the parish program of sacramental preparation should be prepared to take on the full responsibility of preparing their children for the sacrament at home.²¹

VI. Materials for Catechetical Formation

- Diocese of Madison Catechetical Standards & Benchmarks
- Approved Texts from the Diocese of Madison, Primary Textbook List
- Curriculum Guidelines for First Reconciliation (attached)
- Approved USCCB materials for immediate preparation of the sacrament (preferably materials that include parental involvement in instruction)

²¹ See the third case discussed in Section VII: Pastoral Considerations.

- The text/materials used for immediate preparation should be distinct from the second grade text/materials.

VII. Pastoral Considerations

- ***Cases where unbaptized children seek First Reconciliation.*** If the child has attained the use of reason, he/she is to be referred to the RCIA process. He/she is to be prepared as a catechumen for full initiation into the Church through Baptism followed immediately by Confirmation and First Communion.²² First Reconciliation should then be received within the first year after Baptism or as soon as necessary.
- ***Cases where children baptized in non-Catholic ecclesial communities seek First Reconciliation.*** If the child has attained the use of reason, he/she should be referred to the RCIA process. He/she is to be prepared as a candidate for Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church of a baptized Christian adult. This includes a formal profession of faith and reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.²³ N.B., a mere private Profession of Faith isn't sufficient; a formal reception by a mandated priest is required for validity of becoming Catholic. The priest should then record this in the Baptism register or the Reception register along with baptismal information and he should keep original baptismal documentation. A baptized Christian on the path to entering into full communion with the Church, should (if conscious of grave sin) receive the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to making the profession of faith.²⁴
- ***Cases where parents desire to complete the immediate preparation for the sacrament at home.*** Parents who do not desire for their children to participate in any of the formal preparation (including the immediate preparation) that takes place in the parish catechetical program should fill out the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form and submit it to the pastor of their parish. After being signed by the pastor, a copy should be kept by all interested parties. Upon the completion of preparation and prior to the reception of the sacrament, the pastor should interview the child in order to determine his/her readiness in accord with canonical norms, respecting the age and intellectual capability of each of the faithful.

²² CIC, c. 883, §2; c. 885, §2.

²³ CIC, c. 883, §2; c. 885, §2.

²⁴ RCIA, 482.

- ***Cases where parents desire for their children to receive the sacrament in a place other than in his/her own parish church.*** If a family desires that a child receive the sacrament in a place other than his or her own parish church, they should use the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form. This form will facilitate communication between the pastor, the parents, the child, and the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament will take place. A copy of the form, signed by the parents and the pastor, should be presented to the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament is to take place. The rector of the church or oratory is to request a copy of this form.
- ***Cases where parents desire for their children to receive the sacrament in the extraordinary form of the Roman rite.*** With a large and growing community attached to the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite in the Diocese of Madison, it will not be uncommon to encounter a parish family who desires for their child to receive the sacraments in the extraordinary form. However, not every parish regularly celebrates the sacraments in the extraordinary form; thus, if a family desires that a child receive the sacrament in the extraordinary form at an alternate location (e.g., a different parish church, a shrine, etc.), they should fill out the AGREEMENT REGARDING CONFESSION AND FIRST EUCHARIST form and submit it to their pastor. This form will facilitate communication between the pastor, the parents, the child, and the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament will take place. A copy of this form should be presented to the rector of the church or oratory where the reception of the sacrament is to take place. Pastors hosting sacramental liturgies in the extraordinary form should request a signed copy of this form from those who are coming from other parishes.
- ***Cases where children with special needs seek reception of the sacrament.*** Special care should be given to those with special needs in the formation process. “Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing mortal sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with intellectual disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. Those with profound intellectual disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability.”²⁵ “In the case of individuals who are nonverbal or have

²⁵ USCCB, *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, rev. ed. (June 15, 2017), 28.

minimal verbal communication ability, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally.... Catholics with significant communication disorders may be permitted to make their confessions using the communication system with which they are most fluent.”²⁶ Helpful materials and resources are available in the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis as well as the Apostolate for Persons with Disabilities at the curial offices of the Diocese of Madison.

- ***Cases where children older than the normative age seek reception of the sacrament.*** An older child should not simply be placed into group formation with younger children, but should receive age-appropriate formation that also takes into account his/her previous catechetical formation. For example, the pastoral needs of a child who has been attending Mass regularly and has been receiving catechetical instruction will differ from the pastoral needs of a child who has not been attending Mass or receiving catechetical instruction, since special care must be given to those who are returning to the Church after being away from the practice of the faith.
- ***Cases where children younger than the normative age seek reception of the sacrament.*** Some children attain the use of reason prior to their 7th year. A child who desires to receive the sacrament earlier than usual should obtain approval from the pastor. The child must have attained the use of reason and must fulfill the basic canonical requirements outlined in section 3. The pastor’s approval should not be refused unless he has clear evidence that the child is not sufficiently disposed and/or has not been suitably instructed.
- ***Cases where children living in potentially scandalous family situations seek reception of the sacrament.*** Careful consideration and care must be given and appropriate decisions made on a case by case basis. Assistance should be sought from the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis and from the Office of the Vicar General.

VIII. Liturgical Instructions & the Rites

- The liturgical rite used in the reception of the sacrament is determined by individual pastors in accord with liturgical law and universal law.
- Parishes may use a penance service format with individual confessions following.

²⁶ Ibid., 29.

- Please note that general absolution cannot be imparted to many penitents at once unless danger of death is imminent, or the diocesan bishop has judged that it is a case of grave necessity.²⁷
- In the Latin rite, children must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation prior to making their First Holy Communion.²⁸
- Parishes should consider encouraging parents to receive the sacrament as well as their children. If necessary, materials can be provided to assist parents in reception of the sacrament.
- Parishes should consider providing additional opportunities for children to go to Confession again throughout the year (after their First Confession), especially just prior to their reception of First Holy Communion.

IN BRIEF:

- Pastors are obliged by the law of the Church “to take care that the faithful are properly instructed.”²⁹
- Parishes must offer opportunities for formation that provides suitable instruction and fosters proper disposition to receive the sacraments at the appropriate time.
- Parishes must provide 30 hours of formation/catechetical instruction in the year prior to the sacramental year, 30 hours of formation/catechetical instruction simultaneous to the sacramental year, and 8-10 hours of immediate preparation for the sacrament.
- This formation must follow diocesan curriculum standards for the respective grade levels as well as curriculum guidelines for immediate preparation for each sacrament.
- All formation must reflect the teachings of the Church found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

²⁷ CIC, c. 961.

²⁸ CIC, c. 914; CCC 1457.

²⁹ CIC, c. 890.

- Parishes must provide formation that is robust and rich in content, that includes the personal testimony of catechists, and which in turn gives witness to the Christian life.
- Parishes must provide opportunities and invite parents to engage in the sacramental preparation process in order to facilitate better instruction in the home.
- Parishes must communicate with the faithful about the expectations of the sacramental formation process prior to the proximate preparation years so that they are informed of all necessary expectations of the formation process.
- Pastors must be in yearly communication with families who do sacramental preparation at home.
- Pastors must communicate with and come to agreement with families whose situations are in need of particular pastoral consideration (see the Sacramental Agreement forms).
- Pastors must require Sacramental Agreement forms from non-parishioners who seek formation or reception of the sacrament in another parish.
- Pastors must interview all the faithful who are seeking the sacrament prior to reception of the sacrament in order to ensure that they have been suitably instructed and are properly disposed.

Curriculum Guidelines for First Reconciliation

Diocese of Madison – Office of Evangelization & Catechesis

Sacramental Economy

- The Father’s Plan (God had a plan to share his life with us).
- He created us to be in relationship with him.
- Adam and Eve...the story of salvation...God fulfilled a plan to sanctify us (save us).
 - They sinned and fell away.
 - God’s plan to save us begins in the garden of Eden and is fulfilled in Christ.
- The Seven Sacraments were instituted by Christ to give grace & sanctify us.
- Every sacrament must have FORM and MATTER
 - Form** = words that have to be said, e.g., “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
 - Matter** = something physical or material to show what is happening, e.g., in baptism we use water; in confirmation, laying on of hands.
- Names and purposes of the sacraments & the Church in the economy of Salvation
 - Teach that there are seven sacraments.
 - Teach sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist.
 - Teach sacraments of healing: Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick.
 - Teach sacraments that build the body of Christ: Marriage, Holy Orders.
- Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation.
 - Baptism gives us new life in Christ by taking away original sin.
 - We become adopted children of God.
 - We receive the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and love.
 - We can love like Christ loves.

God’s Forgiveness and Mercy

- We don’t always do what we are supposed to do: we don’t live as God wants us to.
- Jesus in response teaches us God’s mercy when we sin (a good example is Luke 15, the Prodigal Son story).
- We accept our sins are wrong and go back to God to receive his forgiveness.
- There are two types of sin: mortal and venial.
 - Three conditions for mortal sin are: grave matter; full knowledge; free consent.
- Jesus then reminds us that we must learn to forgive others as we have been forgiven.
- We must also do what we can to avoid sin the future

Sacrament Details

- Reconciliation is a repeatable sacrament of healing.
- Children should be presented with instruction on how to go face to face and behind a screen.
- Children should learn the Ten Commandments and the precepts of the Church to help them examine their consciences.
- Steps of the sacrament
 - **Examination of Conscience**: Ask God to help you think about what you have done wrong.
 - **Contrition**: Sorrow for your sins; wanting to go to confession.
 - **Confession**: Tell the priest your sins.
 - **Act of Contrition**: Tell God you are sorry for your sins and resolve not to sin again.
 - **Absolution**: the priest forgives you of your sin. He stands in the place of God.
 - **Penance**: Do the prayers or works that the priest tells you do in order to make up for your sins (at least a little bit).
- Essential elements by penitent and priest
 - We must be sorry for our sins.
 - We must confess them to a priest.
 - He must give us absolution and say “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy spirit.”
 - We cannot withhold serious sins on purpose: none of our sins would be forgiven.
 - If we forget to confess a serious sin, we must confess it next time.
 - We cannot do something wrong with the thought, “oh it’s ok, I can go to confession for it later.”
- Effects of the sacrament of reconciliation
 - All sins are wiped away.
 - We are in communion with the Church again.
 - We are given grace to overcome sin: we grow in holiness each time we go to the sacrament.
 - The priest cannot tell our sins to anyone, no matter what (even if we committed a crime).
- Penance and ongoing conversion
 - We do something to make up for the sins we have committed.

- Be sure that children know:
 - The difference between a mistake and a sin.
 - The difference between being tempted and following through on the sin.
 - The difference between mortal and venial sin.
 - The Ten Commandments

Key Words

Sacrament, Form, Matter, Baptism, Forgiveness, Mercy, Reconciliation, Ten Commandments, Penitent, Sin, Mortal Sin, Temptation, Venial Sin, Contrition, Examination of Conscience, Confess, Absolution, Act of Contrition, Penance.

Prayers

Act of Contrition, Examination of Conscience, Prayers & Prayer Postures from the Second Grade Catechetical Standards & Benchmarks.