

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of
BALLARAT



Diocesan Liturgical Commission

GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION FOR CHILDREN

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BALLARAT

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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 Reconciliation provides an occasion for the child to appreciate more fully the gift of conversion received in Baptism.

FIRST RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT

POLICY STATEMENT

The opportunity for children to celebrate their first sacramental reconciliation precedes the first reception of Holy Communion.

A. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- 1.1 The current discipline of the Church is that a child is introduced to the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to reception of First Holy Communion¹.

¹ Canon 914

- 1.2 The first reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is 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.
- 1.3 This first celebration of Reconciliation will be low-key, celebrated with small groups of families.
- 1.4 It is also possible to celebrate First Reconciliation using the first rite, the *Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents*.

B. AGE OF RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- 1.5 According to the practice of the Western Church, children may be Confirmed and receive their First Holy Communion from the age of discretion, presumed in Church law to be around the age of seven.
- 1.6 However, readiness for the reception of First Holy Communion is not simply a matter of age. Parents/guardians, priest and catechists all have a role in ascertaining that the child has achieved appropriate faith development and that adequate faith support is assured.
- 1.7 A celebration of Sacramental Reconciliation precedes the first reception of Holy Communion.

PASTORAL NOTE

Reconciliation has both a personal and a communal/ ecclesial dimension. It involves one's relationship with God and also one's relationship with people. Hence each experience of the sacrament needs to incorporate both the personal and the communal- ecclesial dimensions. 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.

FORMATION / PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

POLICY STATEMENT

In the Diocese of Ballarat, formation of children for participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to take place in two stages:

- 1. An initial time of brief preparation prior to the first reception of the Sacrament;*
- 2. Through a formal parish program before the end of primary schooling.*

A. INITIAL PREPARATION

- 2.1 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/guardians are responsible for presenting their child for the first celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

PASTORAL COMMENT

Young children are ready to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation 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.

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

B. FORMAL PARISH FORMATION

- 2.4 The principal parish program relating to the Sacrament of Reconciliation will take place during the last two years of primary schooling.
- 2.5 The program is family based, co-ordinated by the parish and supported by the Catholic school.
- 2.6 When readiness for this form of the sacrament has been determined, parents/guardians are responsible for enrolling their child in the family-based, parish co-ordinated program of sacramental preparation.

- 2.7 This preparation will prepare children for the celebration of the first rite of Reconciliation, the *Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents*.
- 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 co-ordinated 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 Reconciliation.***
- ❖ It enables the child to understand the sacrament with a greater degree of moral maturity.***
- ❖ 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 First Holy Communion.***

The arrangements for this sacramental preparation program would be similar to the sacramental preparation for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. It will include some sessions involving parents/guardians and children, and elements of the program could take place in the parish, in clusters of families or within each family. However, this formation should not occur during the celebration of Mass as the children are now fully initiated members of the Catholic Church and should participate in the whole Mass as members of the parish community.

RESOURCES

There are resources available from the members section of the diocesan website to assist with the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in your parish www.ballarat.catholic.org.au

Junior Reconciliation Resources:

- ❖ A selection of resources for junior reconciliation are available from the diocesan website
<https://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/services-agencies-2/pastoral/liturgy-sacraments/sacraments-of-initiation/>

Senior Reconciliation Resource:

- ❖ A resource kit, "Turn Around!" for the formal parish preparation program to be offered towards the end of primary schooling, is available to purchase from:

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5 Lyons Street South
PO Box 576, Ballarat, 3353
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