

§500 THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

500.1. Policy Pastoral practice must follow Church teaching and discipline, even though it develops in a specific cultural context. Administration of the Sacrament of Penance in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois shall be in complete accord with all of the ritual components of the current typical edition of the Rite of Penance.

Procedures

Particular attention should be given to the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, to the "Instruction" introducing the Rite of Penance, and to the pertinent canons of the revised *Code of Canon Law* (Canons 956-991). This teaching and discipline provide the foundation for the development of an appropriate pastoral practice.

§501 RECONCILIATION OF INDIVIDUAL PENITENTS (FIRST FORM)

§501.1. Time and Opportunity for Celebration of the Sacrament in this Form

501.1.1. Policy Every parish shall offer ample opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance in the individual form.

Procedures

Various times other than just prior to the Saturday evening Mass should be explored.

§501.2. Physical Arrangements

501.2.1. Policy Ordinarily, the Rite for the Reconciliation of Individual Penitents shall be celebrated either in a confessional or a reconciliation room. Confessionals or other suitable arrangements which ensure anonymity of the penitent shall be provided.

Procedures

While the penitent has the option to confess anonymously or face to face, the confessor also has the right to determine he will only hear confessions behind a screen.

Procedures

A reconciliation room is, by definition, a physical setting which provides the penitent with all the options of the Rite. It should be of appropriate size and provide

a table for the scriptures and a kneeler and screen, as well as a chair for face-to-face confession. Attention should be given to proper lighting, ventilation, acoustics and liturgical symbols. It is not to be used for any purpose other than the celebration of the sacraments.

§501.3. Liturgical Prayer

501.3.1. Policy The confessional or reconciliation room shall be within the body of the church to make it clear that the Sacrament of Penance is a liturgical act of worship.

Procedures

- a) So that this form may be clearly understood as an experience of ecclesial and liturgical prayer, the Word of God should be included in the individual form of the sacrament. If the penitent has not prepared for the sacrament by selecting a scripture passage in advance, the confessor may offer a selection either prior to the telling of the sins or later in the rite.
- b) The confessor may follow the custom common in the United States of wearing a stole over a cassock or clerical suit. The ideal of alb and stole or surplice and stole, as reflected in the ritual, should not be too easily dismissed.

§501.4. Assistance in Making a Complete Confession

501.4.1. Policy Canon law requires penitents to confess all serious sins, both kind and number, of which they are aware and have not yet been confessed for individual absolution. Respecting the personal style in which the penitents choose to speak of their sins and discern the movements of the Spirit in their lives, the confessor shall assist them to make a complete confession.

Procedures

- a) The confessor, aware of his own sinfulness and the disorders in human life, may occasionally assist the penitent in identifying the Lord's call to personal growth without unnecessary probing. The confessor should strive to help the penitent in the formation of a Christian conscience and alert him or her to the interior movements of the Holy Spirit.
- b) Those with disabilities are to be included in parish celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance or in celebrations in small communities of faith that are flexible and responsive to a wide range of needs.

§501.5. Penance and Absolution

501.5.1. Policy A penance (also called "Satisfaction") shall be assigned by the priest and should be appropriate for the individual.

Procedures

Even though prayer and self-denial may be more appropriate penance on occasion, an especially appropriate penance could be an exercise of a work of mercy and service to one's neighbor. The penance should be proportionate to the gravity of the sins confessed.

501.5.2. Policy The Church's official words of absolution, as found in the Rite of Penance, must always be said.

§502 RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION (SECOND FORM)**§502.1. Time and Opportunity for Celebration of the Sacrament in this Form**

502.1.1. Policy The Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution is one of the legitimate options of the Rite of Penance which should be afforded to all the faithful on occasion.

Procedures

While penitents in the above named celebration may all express a common act of contrition together, it is not permissible for the penitents to be assigned a common penance outside of the individual celebration of sacramental confession.

502.1.2. Policy This Second Form shall not be used when the numbers present are extremely large (i.e., during Holy Week or the final week before Christmas), thus preventing its proper celebration, or when the participants are not particularly disposed to a communal celebration of this sacrament.

§502.2. Physical Arrangements

502.2.1. Policy The physical arrangements for the celebration of this Second Form shall enable individuals to approach the confessors either face-to-face or anonymously.

§502.3. Liturgical Prayer

502.3.1. Policy During the communal liturgy, there shall be the usual distribution of liturgical roles.

Procedures

- a) This form of the celebration of the sacrament demands proper and thorough liturgical planning. As with all forms, the basic format of the Rite shall be followed, however, considerable variety is possible in terms of texts, themes, visual and other specific components of the liturgical action.
- b) The Rite of Penance, with its Appendices, should be used as a resource in planning penitential celebrations
- c) Communal prayer and singing are integral components of this form.
- d) Additional confessors should be invited to assist in the communal liturgy. Retired members of the presbyterate may be available to assist in these celebrations.

§502.4. Penance and Absolution

502.4.1. Policy When using the Second Form, absolution is always to be given individually to maintain the integrity of the First Form when incorporated into this communal setting.

§503 RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND GENERAL ABSOLUTION (THIRD FORM)**§503.1. Time and Opportunity for Celebration of the Sacrament in this Form**

503.1.1. Policy In the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, at the present time, there are no generally accepted cases in which the conditions warranting the imparting of general absolution would be foreseen to exist. Should a confessor believe that such conditions exist in individual cases, he is required to obtain prior permission of the diocesan bishop. This policy was enacted by the bishops of the Province of Chicago (November 27, 1988).

Documentation

The revised Code of Canon Law specifies the conditions under which general absolution may be imparted in canon 961, §1, 1°, 2°:

§1 Absolution cannot be imparted in a general manner to a number of penitents at once without previous individual confession unless:

1° the danger of death is imminent and there is not time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;

2° a serious necessity exists, that is, when in light of the number of penitents 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 time¹ through no fault of their own; it is not considered a sufficient necessity if confessors cannot be readily available only because of the great number of penitents as can occur on the occasion of some great feast or pilgrimage.

§503.2. Liturgical Prayer

503.2.1. Policy If proper permission is obtained from the diocesan bishop, this Third Form should be celebrated as an integral liturgical action with the usual distribution of liturgical roles.

503.2.2. Policy General absolution apart from the setting of such an integral liturgical service is never permitted, except for the situation of immediate danger of death when absolution alone suffices. It must never be attached as a prelude or appendage to another liturgical service, such as the Eucharistic liturgy, a funeral or a wedding.

§503.3. Penance and Absolution

503.3.1. Policy For a penitent validly to receive general sacramental absolution, he or she must be suitably disposed and intend in due time to confess serious sins individually. Those participating in the celebration of the Third Form of the Sacrament of Penance shall be instructed about these obligations and the necessity of making an individual confession of serious sins before again having recourse to general absolution unless a just cause intervenes (cf. canon 963).

§504 SPECIAL PASTORAL SITUATIONS

§504.1. Returning Catholics

504.1.1. Policy When men and women return to the Church after a long absence, seeking to be reconciled, pastoral ministers are to be sensitive to their personal history and unique spiritual needs. They shall be warmly received and *shall be* given an opportunity to engage in a process of conversion that will culminate in the Sacrament of Penance.

¹The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has determined that the word diu ("for a long time") in Canon 961, §1,2° should be understood as "a month."

Procedures

This process may parallel the basic structure of the Rite of Christian initiation of Adults (RCIA).

504.1.2. Policy Ordinarily, these penitents should not be included in the Catechumenate with the unbaptized or with Christians seeking full communion with the Church.

§505 CHILDREN'S CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Throughout their catechetical formation, children should be helped to understand the mystery of reconciliation that is at the heart of the Church's identity and mission. Within this broader perspective, children should be led to understand and appreciate the place of the Sacrament of Penance in their lives.

§505.1. Preparation for First Reception of the Sacrament of Penance

505.1.1. Policy Formal instruction for the Sacrament of Penance shall be separate and distinct from preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation or the first reception of the Eucharist so that the integrity of each sacrament is maintained. (PCPG # 34-B.)

Procedures

This formal instruction should begin by the first grade and continue throughout the child's school years. Prior to their first experience of the Sacrament of Penance, children should communally celebrate throughout the year God's willingness to forgive. 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.

505.1.2. Policy The parent's 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.

Procedures

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. The parish is responsible for offering formation for parents and for providing resources for their role in preparing their children for the reception of Penance.

§505.2. Time and Opportunity for the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

505.2.1. Policy Children shall be offered a genuine opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before their Confirmation or first reception of the Eucharist (cf. canon 914). To facilitate this, every parish shall have a special celebration of the Sacrament of Penance before the Sacrament of Confirmation or the first reception of the Eucharist for those who have been prepared for the three sacraments.

Procedure

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) 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.

505.2.2. Policy The pastor and his staff shall, when necessary, explain to the parents the Church's discipline in regard to first confession before Confirmation and First Communion and the catechetical reasons for it.

Procedures

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.

505.2.3. Policy 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; rather, the first reception of the Holy Eucharist shall be delayed until confession has been made.

§505.3. Physical Arrangements

505.3.1. Policy 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.

Procedures

As in the case of hearing the confessions of adults, the confessor has the right to only hear confessions from behind a screen.