

Policy Regarding Children's First Reconciliation

"I am also asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation"

St. John Paul II, Novo millennio ineunte (n.37)

"I would like to reassert this appeal, in the awareness that the New Evangelization must acquaint the people of our time with the face of Christ "as mysterium pietatis, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance." "The New Evangelization begins...in the confessional!"

Pope Benedict XVI, Address 9 March 2011

Whereas, "it is the responsibility...of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as the pastor to see that the children who have reached the age of reason are correctly prepared are nourished by the divine food and preceded by Sacramental Confession;" (Can. 914) and...

Whereas, the Church has now clarified that children are to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the Reception of First Holy Communion. [cf. Letter of Congregation for the Sacraments and Worship, 31 March 1977; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1457, 1994]...

Therefore, it is the policy of the Diocese of Crookston that the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation precede the reception of First Holy Communion.

A. Essential Roles

1. **Parents.** "Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of the child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved with 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 continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love."
[National Directory for Catechesis, p.135]
2. **Children.** Readiness for reception of this Sacrament includes:
 - a. Knowledge of the person of Jesus and his Gospel message of forgiveness;
 - b. Knowledge of sin and its effect;
 - c. And an understanding and experience of sorrow, forgiveness and conversion.
 - d. All the above assumes the child has reached the age of reason and has been baptized.
[cf. NDC, p.135]

3. **Pastor & Catechist.** Aware that the church asks that children who have reached the age of reason be nourished by the Eucharist, preceded by the Reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as early as possible, the parents of a child along with the catechist together with the pastor are responsible for determining when children are ready to receive First Reconciliation. In catechizing the children for this Sacrament, they must always respect the child's natural disposition, ability, age and circumstance of life.

Since conversion is a lifelong process, catechesis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is ongoing, children have a right to a fuller catechesis on this Sacrament each year. [cf. NDC, p. 136]

B. Process of Preparation and Celebration

1. It is the goal within the Diocese of Crookston to have parent(s)/guardians/grandparents of children as deeply involved – if not also the primary catechists – in the formation of children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Pastors and, when available, faith formation directors should assist in the preparation of parents in as much of the evangelizing process as it is the occasion of the formation of the children. An integrative approach should be strongly considered when developing the preparation process for each parish.
2. Taking into account the needs and circumstances of each situation, it is hoped that the moment of First Reconciliation can be prepared so as to lead entire families to a celebration of the merciful love of God the Father in Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
3. If the number of confessors permits, it would be ideal to prepare and invite members of family who have already celebrated the Sacrament to come to Reconciliation again.
4. Creative ways, (e.g., frequent intercessions for them at parish masses, prayer partners assigned for the parish to each child, etc.) to involve the parish at large to participation in the joy of the event, as well as journeying with the children in the process of preparation.
5. The celebration should include an awareness that this Sacrament is now part of the journey to fuller discipleship. Bring to awareness among all those present the parish schedule for Reconciliation opportunities and encourage them all to make it a part of their spiritual life and discipline. For as Pope Francis encouraged: *“Only one who has been caressed by the tenderness of mercy truly knows the Lord. The privileged place of encounter is the caress of Jesus’ mercy regarding sin.”* Address 7 March 2015.