

§300 THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE¹

Introduction

The people of God accomplishes and perfects this continual repentance in many different ways. It shares in the sufferings of Christ by enduring its own difficulties, carries out works of mercy and charity, and adopts ever more fully the outlook of the Gospel message. Thus the people of God becomes in the world a sign of conversion to God. All this the Church expresses in its life and celebrates in the liturgy when the faithful confess that they are sinners and ask pardon of God and of their brothers and sisters. This happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, and in the penitential aspects of the eucharistic celebration.

In the sacrament of penance the faithful "obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins against him; at the same time they are reconciled with the Church which they wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example and prayer.

[From the Rite of Penance, Introduction, No. 4]

300.1. 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 Archdiocese of Chicago shall be in complete accord with all of the ritual components of the Rite of Penance as promulgated the First Sunday of Advent, 1973.

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.

¹For celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in conjunction with the process of initiation see §107, herein.

§301 RECONCILIATION OF INDIVIDUAL PENITENTS (FIRST FORM)

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

301.1.1. 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.

301.1.2. Policy The Sacrament of Penance shall not be celebrated while a Mass is being celebrated in the same place. (See also Policy 202.12.1., herein.)

§301.2. Physical Arrangements

301.2.1. 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.

301.2.2. Policy Every parish church and place of worship must make provision for at least one reconciliation room.

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.

§301.3. Liturgical Prayer

301.3.1. Policy The confessional or reconciliation room shall be adjacent to the worship area 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 or surplice and stole, as reflected in the ritual, should not be too easily dismissed.

§301.4. Assistance in Making a Complete Confession

301.4.1. Policy Church law requires penitents to mention all serious sins, both number and kind, of which they are aware and which have not yet been submitted 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. Those with severe limitations can still sense alienation from others and struggle with relationships, love being the first commandment. Unless the celebrant knows the person very well, individual confession may be difficult when there are language problems, affective difficulties, disorientation relation to time and space

§301.5. Penance and Absolution

301.5.1. Policy A penance (also called "Satisfaction") shall be assigned by the priest or mutually agreed upon by confessor and penitent 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 in a work of mercy and service to one's neighbor. The penance should be proportionate to the gravity of the sins confessed.

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

Procedures

As or after he reflectively prays the words of absolution, the confessor should extend his hands over the penitent whenever physically feasible; if the penitent is behind a screen or in an awkward position for a dignified imposition of hands, the confessor should at least raise his hand toward the penitent.

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.

Those with severe limitations can still sense alienation from others and struggle with relationships, love being the first commandment. Unless the celebrant knows the person very well, individual confession may be difficult when there are language problems, affective difficulties, disorientation relating to time and space.

§302 RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION (SECOND FORM)

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

302.1.1. 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.

302.1.2. 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.

§302.2. Physical Arrangements

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

§302.3. Liturgical Prayer

302.3.1. 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) By way of exception, pastoral prudence might occasionally suggest adapting the sacrament so that the service is left open-ended once the individual confessions have begun, i.e., someone concludes the communal prayer after a specified length of time while individual confessions continue to be heard. However, this is a significant departure from what is intended in the Second Form.

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- c) The Rite of Penance, with its Appendices should be used as a resource book in planning penitential celebrations
- d) Communal prayer and singing are integral components of this form.
- e) Additional confessors should be invited to assist in the communal liturgy. Retired members of the presbyterate may be available to assist in these celebrations.

§302.4. Penance and Absolution

302.4.1. *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.

§303 RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND GENERAL ABSOLUTION (THIRD FORM)

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

303.1.1. Policy In the Archdiocese of Chicago 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 time² 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.

§303.2. Liturgical Prayer

303.2.1. 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.

303.2.2. 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.

²The 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."

§303.3. Penance and Absolution

303.3.1. 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. (c. 963)

§304 NON-SACRAMENTAL PENANCE SERVICES

304.1. Policy In addition to three sacramental forms of reconciliation, the Rite of Penance also recommends non-sacramental, communal penance services. These are further options which should be afforded to the faithful several times during the year, but particularly during the seasons of Advent and Lent.

Procedures

The appendices of the Rite of Penance should be used as a resource book in planning such penance services. In planning, publicizing and celebrating such non-sacramental services, the faithful should never be misled into expecting or understanding them as an opportunity for reception of the sacrament.

304.2. Policy If an ordained minister is not present, a non-ordained minister may preside at such non-sacramental services, thus significantly increasing the opportunities when they may be used.

§305 SPECIAL PASTORAL SITUATIONS

§305.1. Returning Catholics

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

Procedures

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

305.1.2. Policy Ordinarily, these penitents should not be included in the Catechumenate with the unbaptized or with Christians seeking full communion with the Church. (See also §107 *The Sacrament of Penance and Christian Initiation*, herein)

§306 CHILDREN'S CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE³

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. (See Province of Chicago, The Sacrament of Penance: Guidelines for the Dioceses of Illinois [November 27, 1988; hereinafter PCPG], #33) "Catechesis for children must always respect the natural disposition, ability, age and circumstances of individuals. It seeks, first, to make clear the relationship of the sacrament to the child's life; second, to help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing and turn to forgiveness to Christ and the Church; third, to encourage the child to see that in this sacrament faith is expressed by being forgiven and forgiving; and fourth, to encourage the child to approach the sacrament freely and regularly." (Sharing the Light of Faith, National Catechetical Directory for Catholics in the United States, 126)

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

306.1.1. Policy 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. (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. (PCPG #34-B) 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. (PCPG #34-C)

³See also Policy 107.3.1. concerning the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance for non-Catholic children seeking formal reception into the Catholic Church.

306.1.2. 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. (PCPG #34-D)

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 and in order to make an informed decision regarding their children's readiness for reception of 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.

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

306.2.1. Policy Children shall be offered a genuine opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before their first reception of the Eucharist. (Canon 914 and PCPG #34-E) 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 PCPG #34-A)

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.

306.2.2. Policy The pastor and his staff shall, when necessary, explain to the parents the Church's discipline in regard to first confession before first Communion and the catechetical reasons for it. (PCPG #34-E)

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. (PCPG #34-E)

306.2.3. 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. The child shall be encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance later so that he or she will not be deprived of it altogether. (PCPG #34-F)

§306.3. Physical Arrangements

306.3.1. 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. (PCPG #34-C)

RESOURCES

Penance

Rev. Joseph M. Champlin, "Second Thoughts on First Penance," *Church Magazine*, Spring, 1996, pp. 39-40.

Andrew Cuschieri, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation, A Theological and Canonical Treatise*. New York: University Press of America, 1992.

James Dallen, *The Reconciling Community: The Rite of Penance*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986. Currently published by Liturgical Press.

James Dallen & Joseph Favazza, Eds. *Removing the Barriers: The Practice of Reconciliation*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

Martin Doodle & Geoffrey Rowell, Eds. *Confession and Absolution*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990.

Robert J. Kennedy, Ed. *Reconciliation: The Continuing Agenda*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987.

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