

IV. CELEBRATION OF RECONCILIATION

A. Preparation for Reconciliation

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*Pastoral practice regulating the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) is to follow the teaching and discipline of the Church as articulated in the Rite of Penance and the revised **Code of Canon Law** (#956-991). The revised Rite is a collection of several rites including non-sacramental celebrations which provide an ideal way of focusing on the need for on-going conversion and of preparing individuals for sacramental reconciliation. The purpose of the sacrament is to manifest the merciful power of Christ over sin.*

A. PREPARATION FOR RECONCILIATION

1. Reception of this sacrament is to be preceded by an examination of conscience made in light of the moral catechesis of the Gospel and the Apostolic Letters.
2. Pastoral ministers have a serious responsibility to help penitents identify what is genuinely sinful in their lives.
3. Though the sacrament of Reconciliation is only strictly required for those conscious of committing mortal sin, the sacrament is to be made available on a regular basis for all those who seek this manifestation of Christ's merciful power over sin.

B. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

1. RECONCILIATION OF INDIVIDUAL PENITENTS

a. Nature

The revised rite for individual penitents is meant to be a positive experience of God's mercy and grace.

b. Time and Place of Celebration

- i. Every parish is to offer ample opportunity for the celebration of the individual form of the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- ii. The usual place for the celebration of the Rite for the Reconciliation of Individual Penitents is a confessional or a reconciliation room.
 - 1) By definition a reconciliation room is a physical setting which provides the penitent with all of the options of the Rite.
 - 2) It is equipped with a table for the scriptures and a kneeler and screen, as well as a chair for face-to-face confession to provide anonymity of the penitent.
 - 3) The confessional or reconciliation room is usually adjacent to the worship area to make it clear that the sacrament of Reconciliation is a liturgical act of worship.

c. Liturgical Prayer

- i. A sharing of the Word of God is integral to the individual form of the sacrament.

- ii. The confessor is always to wear a stole for the sacramental celebration. The ideal of alb and stole or stole is reflected in the ritual; the custom of wearing a surplice over a cassock or clerical suit is common in the United States when the sacrament is celebrated outside a formal worship area.
- d. Confession of Sin
 - i. Church law requires penitents to mention all serious sins, both number and kind, of which they are aware and from which they have not been previously absolved.
 - ii. The first form of the Rite respects the personal style in which the penitents choose to speak of their sins and to discern the movements of the Spirit in their lives.
 - iii. The confessor may assist the penitent in identifying the Lord's call to personal growth without unnecessary probing. Thus, the penitent is helped in the formation of a Christian conscience and is alerted to the interior movements of the Holy Spirit.
 - iv. Those with physical or mental disabilities may find a communal form of celebration more conducive to their needs.
- e. Penance and Absolution
 - i. An exercise in a work of mercy and service of one's neighbor often is an appropriate form of penance.
 - ii. The penance is to be proportionate to the gravity of the sins confessed.
 - iii. While reflectively praying the words of absolution, the confessor extends his hands over the penitent whenever physically possible. If the person being absolved is behind a screen or in an awkward position for a dignified imposition of hands, the confessor at least raises his hand toward the penitent.

2. RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION (Second Form)

a. Nature of Rite

The Second Form of the celebration incorporates the Individual Reconciliation of Penitents into a communal setting. To maintain the integrity of the Individual Rite, absolution is always to be given individually.

- b. Time and Opportunity for Communal Celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation
 - i. Pastoral ministers have a serious responsibility to catechize the worshipping community as to the nature and value of communal celebration.
 - ii. After the community is properly disposed, communal celebrations of the sacrament of Reconciliation are appropriate at any time during the year if there are several penitents to be absolved.
 - iii. The Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution cannot be celebrated properly when the number of penitents is extremely large.
 - 1) Communities are encouraged to schedule communal celebrations on a regular basis throughout the year.
 - 2) It may be necessary to have more than one communal celebration during Holy Week and the week prior to Christmas.
 - 3) Ensuring the presence of several priests can also help with large groups of penitents.
 - 4) Communal celebrations are to be completed prior to the celebration of the Easter Triduum.
 - iv. The physical arrangements for the celebration of this rite must make provision for the anonymity of those penitents who choose to confess in this manner.
- c. Liturgical Prayer
 - i. Liturgical planning is essential because the communal celebration of the sacrament allows for considerable variety in terms of scripture texts, music, and other specific components of the liturgical action.
 - ii. Only by way of exception may the celebration be adapted so that the communal prayer is concluded after a specified length of time while individual confessions continue to be heard. This is a significant departure from what is intended in the rite.
 - iii. The appendices in the *Rite of Penance* offer a rich resource for those planning penitential celebrations.
 - iv. The usual distribution of liturgical roles is to be respected.

3. RECONCILIATION OF SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND GENERAL ABSOLUTION

In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, there are no generally accepted cases in which the conditions warranting the imparting of general absolution are foreseen to exist.

If a confessor believes that such conditions do exist in an individual case, he is to seek the permission of the bishop.

4. NON-SACRAMENTAL PENANCE SERVICES

- a. The *Rite of Penance* recommends non-sacramental, communal penance services which can be used throughout the year to facilitate the process of on-going conversion within the worshipping community.
- b. Care is to be taken in the planning, publicizing and celebrating of non-sacramental services to clearly distinguish them from opportunities for the reception of the sacrament.
- c. Non-ordained ministers may lead such non-sacramental services, thus significantly increasing the opportunities when they may be used.
- d. The appendices of the Rite of Penance offer valuable resource material in the planning of such services.

C. RETURNING CATHOLICS

1. Pastoral ministers are to be very sensitive to the personal history and unique spiritual needs of those alienated or inactive Catholics who seek to be reconciled with the Church
2. They are to be given the opportunity to engage in a process of conversion that will culminate in sacramental absolution.
3. Such a process may parallel the basic structure of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. However, these penitents are not to be included in the catechumenate with the unbaptized or with Christians seeking full communion with the Church.

D. CHRISTIAN INITIATION

1. CATECHUMENS preparing for Baptism (both children and adults) do not celebrate the sacrament of Penance prior to Baptism. During the Purification and Enlightenment period they are to participate in the scrutinies and to understand the reality of sin and to appreciate the comforting message of God's forgiveness. They are still to be taught about the Sacrament of Penance and are encouraged to make celebrate it after they have been baptized.

2. CANDIDATES are to receive a thorough catechesis on the sacrament of Penance and are to be encouraged in the frequent celebration of the sacrament (NSC #27, 36).
 - a. Candidates are to be invited and encouraged to celebrate the sacrament of Penance prior to their reception into full communion, but not at the same liturgy.
 - b. Candidates are required to celebrate the sacrament of Penance prior to their reception into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church if they are guilty of serious sin (RCIA #482).