



GUIDANCE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVISED *ORDER OF PENANCE* IN EDUCATION SETTINGS

ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP

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The *Order of Penance* (2023) serves as a primary resource for catechists for teaching the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The *Order of Penance* provides the forms for the liturgical celebration of the Sacrament for individual and communal circumstances. Each education setting should have a copy of the *Order of Penance* for these purposes.

Chapter One, *The Order for Reconciling Individual Penitents*, is the form to be used for individual confessions. The Sacrament is typically celebrated in a Confessional.

The 2023 introduction of the revised *Order of Penance* restates the particular law in the United States that a preference for anonymity on the part of the priest and the penitent is to be protected and preserved even in communal celebrations, especially when there are insufficient confessionals. This can be done in a variety of ways with the confessor seated in a pew in front of the penitent or with a kneeler behind the chair of the confessor or with a chair behind the confessor. What is most important is that the possibility for anonymity for the priest and the penitent not be routinely dismissed as a practice.

Penitents should have available an outline of the form for individual confession to easily follow and make the responses during the celebration of the Sacrament.

The United States adaptation for The Prayer of the Penitent (Act of Contrition), *O my God*, is recommended for use for school age children throughout the Archdiocese. Children should memorize this prayer and be encouraged to pray it as part of their daily prayers, especially at night. The recommended Act of Contrition follows:

**O my God,
I am heartily sorry for having offended you,
and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments,
but most of all because they offend you, my God,
who are all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace,**

**to sin no more
and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.**

The Prayer of the Penitent (Act of Contrition) is one of the essential elements of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and cannot be separated from the individual celebration of the Sacrament. In other words, it cannot be prayed in advance of the confessing of sins in the individual celebration.

Penitents should have guides for a complete examination of conscience prior to the celebration of the Sacrament. This examination of conscience can be conducted in a group setting, beginning with a prayer for enlightenment to God, the Holy Spirit. Guides that follow the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church are most helpful. The genuine sorrow for sin that arrives from an examination of conscience is an essential element of the Sacrament. Penitents should be reminded to carry out their penance immediately following the celebration of the Sacrament.

The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation should be scheduled throughout the year and not only during Advent and Lent. Regular access to the Sacrament is formative with its message that confession of sins is a staple of the Christian life. Candidates for Confirmation and First Holy Communion should receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in advance of these Sacraments.

From time to time, it is recommended that Chapter II, *The Order for Reconciling Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution*, be used with larger groups of penitents. The use of this form would require careful instructions ahead of time on how to follow the order.

Some Particular Points for First Penance and Reconciliation

Everything about the preparation of candidates for First Penance and Reconciliation should as much as possible involve the family. This type of preparation engages the parents/guardians and family in preparing and celebrating the Sacrament together. Parents and guardians should be included in helping the candidate make an examination of conscience, memorizing the form for individual confession and the Act of Contrition. On the day of First Penance and Reconciliation, parents/guardians and family members should be encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament as well, especially if they have been a part of the formation of their family member for the Sacrament.

All of the points mentioned above apply to the celebration of First Penance and Reconciliation. A candidate can celebrate the Sacrament more than once, if circumstances suggest, prior to First Holy Communion.

The privacy that surrounds this Sacrament, especially with regard to the seal of Confession, does not permit others to encounter the confessor or penitent at the same time nor film the occasion in anyway.

Church Law requires that a candidate be prepared for and receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation before the reception of First Holy Communion. Since this is a canonical requirement, a record of it is to be maintained in some form. The nature of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as an intimate encounter between Christ and the penitent is not a public event and so the first occasion is not recorded in any sacramental register. There is no need or requirement to commemorate the first occasion of the Sacrament with a certificate of any kind.