

Directives for First Penance and First Communion

Canon 914: It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as of the pastor to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession; it is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.

The following guidelines incorporate the pastoral norm of the universal Church and particular law of the Diocese of Sacramento:

- Children are to be prepared for First Penance and receive the Sacrament of Penance prior to receiving First Communion. Both sacraments would generally be received in grade two. First Penance would normally be received a couple of months or more before First Communion.
- In a given parish, First Communion could be postponed to third grade, if indicated by available resources, the number of children or the time needed for adequate preparation of both children and parents.
- The readiness required for the Sacrament of Penance consists in the capacity to discern between right and wrong, together with an understanding, appropriate to the child's age, of what sin is. The readiness required for First Communion is not dissimilar: the ability to recognize the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread (and wine).
- Children who are well prepared for Penance generally welcome this opportunity to experience God's mercy. Parents/guardians of a child occasionally may indicate that their child is "too young" for Penance. In such a case, after due pastoral discernment, delay of both Penance and Communion is often the most suitable resolution.
- The universal law, as reiterated by the particular law of our Diocese, does not permit the parish program to orient the class as a whole away from receiving First Penance prior to First Communion. The pastoral norm is: **First Penance prior to First Communion.**
- Delaying the preparation and reception of First Penance until sometime after First Communion is not permitted by the universal Church or by the Diocese of Sacramento.