



**ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS**  
**CLERGY BULLETIN**

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**THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY  
COMMUNION**

Reverend and dear Fathers,

In 1987, my predecessor, the Most Reverend John R. Roach, issued Guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation. This document has been a helpful tool for many of our parishes, schools, and consolidated faith formation programs since that time. However, changes in canon law and pastoral practice led me to conclude that the time had come for these Guidelines to be revised.

What follows are regulations for the sacrament of penance and the celebration of First Holy Communion in the parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. These regulations were developed in consultation with the Office of Worship, the Office of Catholic Schools, and the Presbyteral Council. In presenting these regulations, I acknowledge that there may be a need for pastoral adaptation. However, there are also pastoral norms that need to be honored to reflect the vision of this Archdiocese and the theology of the Catholic Church. It is my hope that these regulations will encourage a consistent practice reflective of true *communio*. Therefore, no adaptation at the parish level is permitted without first referring the matter to the Archbishop or his delegate.

Parishes and institutions are encouraged to follow these regulations as soon as they are able, but in order to give parishes and institutions sufficient time to prepare, the effective date of this policy will be August 1, 2012. Following that date, all previous policies and guidelines are abrogated.

Given at Saint Paul, Minnesota, this 10<sup>th</sup> day of November, in the year of Our Lord 2011.  
All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John C. Nienstedt".

The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt  
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Haselberger".

Jennifer Haselberger  
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1. The sacrament of penance is to be celebrated prior to the reception of First Holy Communion, with the exception of catechumens.
2. A parish or institution-based sacramental preparation program for the first reception of the sacrament of penance must demonstrate the distinctiveness of this sacrament through the use of a separate, catechetical program on the sacrament of penance that follows a text that is currently listed on the conformity list approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
3. In order for an individual to receive the sacrament of penance, the following initial requirements are to be met:
  - a) A child must be at least seven years of age;
  - b) Those preparing the child for the sacrament must receive a certificate of baptism or of profession of faith in the Catholic Church, issued within six months of the scheduled reception of the sacrament; and,
  - c) The child must have completed the approved sacramental preparation program in use at the parish or institution where the sacrament will be received.
  - d) All candidates for the sacrament of penance, even those who are home-schooled, must be enrolled in a parish process of preparation for the reception of the sacrament of penance. They must participate in all of its communal dimensions (ritual, prayer services, etc.) and any other requirements determined by the parish.
4. Every effort should be made to encourage all parents to take an active role in preparing their children for the sacrament.
5. Children, like adults, must have the option of confessing anonymously behind a fixed grille. Provision should also be made for penitents who wish to confess face-to-face, noting the requirement that provision must be made in each church or oratory for a sufficient number of places for sacramental confessions which are clearly visible and truly accessible. Under no circumstances should the confessions of children be heard outside of the properly designated locations within a church, chapel, oratory or other space regularly used for liturgy.
6. After proper catechesis, an adult coming into full communion with the Church may request the sacrament any time prior to their full reception into the Church. Such individuals are to be encouraged in frequent celebration of the sacrament after their full reception.

7. Under no circumstances should the reception of the sacrament of penance be recorded in a sacramental register or by means of a certificate.

### THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

1. In order for a child to be considered as a candidate for the reception of First Holy Communion, the following requirements are to be met:
  - a. The child and at least one parent or guardian are expected to be attending Sunday Mass each week.
  - b. The child must be at least seven years of age, and the child should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between the consecrated bread and wine (the Body and Blood of Christ) and ordinary bread and wine.
  - c. The child must be currently participating in a program of systematic, approved catechesis either in a Catholic school or through a parish sacramental preparation program. A child who is receiving religious education as part of an overall home school program must follow a text that is currently listed on the conformity list approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
  - d. While parents are the primary educators of their children, it is incumbent on the pastor to ensure the sacramental preparation of the child. Therefore, all candidates for reception of First Holy Communion, even those who are home-schooled, must be enrolled in a parish process of preparation for the reception of First Holy Communion. They must participate in all of its communal dimensions (ritual, prayer services, etc.) and any other requirements determined by the pastor.
2. Parishes are encouraged, but not required, to enter the names of those children who celebrated First Holy Communion, the minister, and place and date of the ceremony in the parish First Holy Communion register, and to send the same information to the child's parish of baptism.