

FIRST PENANCE AT ST. JEROME AND ST. JAMES CHURCH

The Rite of Penance, first announced by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1973, was broadly implemented in the United States during 1976. The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation brought with it a unifying emphasis on the ministry of reconciliation. "By the hidden and loving mystery of God's design people are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others. Penance always entails reconciliation with brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins" (5, Rite of Penance). The familiar parts of the sacrament — confession, sorrow, absolution, and penance — remain the parts of the Sacrament of Penance. But these separate moments in the sacramental action all work toward reconciling person to person, person to God, and people as a whole to God.

First Penance introduces children to a more conscious, active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. A child's experience of first penance is a simple, but vital, beginning.

Although parish celebrations of reconciliation are adult celebrations, the parish community nurtures its children and calls them to grow by including them. As they mature, children will deepen their understanding of reconciliation by participating in these celebrations. Family life is foundational to all these experiences. Children first learn attitudes of forgiveness at home, in the family circle. There they establish patterns on which they build for the rest of their lives.

The NDC states, "Since the family is intimately involved with the formation of a child's moral conscience and ordinarily integrates the child into the wider ecclesial communities, parents should be involved in the preparation of their children for this sacrament so that they can affirm and reinforce frequent participation in the sacraments. They orient the child toward God and encourage continual growth in the understanding of God's mercy and love." (36.B.2.)

1. Be baptized and already practicing the Catholic faith that is age appropriate.
2. Are participating in the parish stewardship process according to age and ability.
3. Have a desire to enter into the process.
4. Have successfully completed one year of the parish faith formation programs, (PFF, Parochial School, or HFF) and be currently enrolled and participating in one of these options.

Preparation will include:

- Preparation sessions for parents.
- Periodic liturgical ritual celebrations within the Sunday Mass.
- Timely completion of the parish Reconciliation Preparation Materials.
- Experience the parish communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance with their family.

Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance prior to beginning preparation for First Eucharist.