

Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Children, young people and adults should be able to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a way that is both in accordance with the nature of Sacramental Confession and offers protection to both them and the confessor. It must afford both protection and privacy.

Adults

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with an adult should be carried out in the following way:

- use of the traditional confessional box where there is a fixed grill or a separate entrance for the Priest and penitent. This is the preferred, and recommended method of the Greyfriars. If this is not possible, a clear rationale must be noted and an alternative way agreed with the penitent.

Children

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with children can be carried out in the following ways:

- use of the traditional confessional box where there is a fixed grill or a separate entrance for the Priest and penitent. This is the preferred, and recommended method of the Greyfriars. If this is not possible, a clear rationale must be noted.
- an area where either the penitent or the Priest is within sight, although not within hearing of others.
- behind a "frosted" screen. It should be in a location where other adults are present, although these adults should not be behind the screen with the penitent and the Priest. This will be required when a deaf child is celebrating the Sacrament so that their conversation cannot be observed.

Preparing a child for the Sacrament of Reconciliation

When deciding which approach is adopted, consideration should be given to the child's age, needs, wishes and feelings, e.g. older children may wish to use a traditional confessional box as opposed to celebrating the sacrament face-to-face.

The penitent is free to exercise their personal choice. Whatever the choice, it must be in accordance with the principle of taking all reasonable steps to create a safe environment, e.g. for younger children who present for the Sacrament with their Parents/Carers/Guardians, it is best practice to also consider the views of the child's Parents/Carers/Guardians on how they would like the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be facilitated.

In preparation for the Sacrament, parents/carers/guardians may be reminded not to enquire into the nature of the child's confession for the sake of the child's own freedom of spiritual expression. However, a child may freely disclose to their parent what occurred in the confessional should they wish to do so. No child should be told to, or encouraged to, keep anything secret with any adult, even with a Priest in the confessional.

Safeguarding during the Sacrament of Reconciliation

When children attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation, all efforts should be made to provide a safe environment, which maintains the sacramental seal.

A Priest hearing a Confession must take care that he does not exacerbate the sense of shame in an individual who has experienced abuse or the sense of complicity that abuse victims experience. The advice given in canon 979 should be kept in mind, namely that the confessor should act with prudence and discretion when asking questions. He must consider the age, stage of development and the condition of the penitent.

Definition of Confession

Canon law provides a clear definition of what is deemed to be appropriate with regards to the hearing of Confession. This should be used as the definition to clarify when Confession has taken place. The Sacrament begins when the penitent starts conversation with the confessor and ends when the confessor has granted absolution and made the sign of the cross.

The Sacramental Seal

All suspicions, concerns and allegations of child abuse must be reported to the statutory authorities through the designated procedures of the Religious entity.

There is one exception to this rule, which is of abuse which is disclosed during the Sacrament of Confession (also known as Reconciliation or Penance). The maintenance of trust in the Sacrament of Reconciliation requires the guarantee of absolute confidentiality, allowing no exceptions. This is known as the Seal of Confession and guarantees to the penitent that anything revealed to the confessor will not be divulged to anyone else. This is outlined in Canon 983 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law: "The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason".

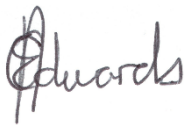
The Priest should also be aware that the disclosure of maltreatment and or abuse during the Sacrament of Reconciliation raises safeguarding issues and the child or young person should be encouraged to speak outside of the confessional so that appropriate help can be sought.

Disclosures of child abuse made by children during Confession

If a child or young penitent discloses an experience of child abuse during the hearing of Confession, the Priest should:

- ◇ Sensitively reassure the child or young person that they were right to tell you
- ◇ Remind them that whatever is disclosed in Confession will not be repeated outside the Sacrament of Confession by the confessor.
- ◇ The confessor should encourage the child or young person to disclose the abuse to an adult they trust (e.g., a relative, teacher, friend) and to have that person report the abuse. If the penitent expresses a wish to discuss the issue outside the Sacrament, make it clear to them that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed regarding issues of child abuse once outside the Sacrament.

Signed:



Safeguarding Lead

Date: March 2026

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